

NIGERIAN DRAMATISTS AS CHANGE AGENTS: THE TRAJECTORIES IN THREE NIGERIAN PLAYWRIGHTS

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Abstract

*The Nigerian dramatist from the days of colonial invasion has always led in the vanguard for change. Change is one phenomenon whose constancy is as sure as the morning dew. Drama on the other hand is one veritable art form that has championed change for the socio-cultural, economic and political development and good governance of nations. This study sets out to critically evaluate the trajectories of political change in Nigeria vis-à-vis the works of select Nigerian dramatists. Historical and textual analysis are methods of research employed on the works of the three Nigerian dramatists: Wole Soyinka's **Kongi's Harvest**, Femi Osofisan's **Once Upon Four Robbers** and Emeka Nwabueze's **A Parliament of Vultures**. This paper concludes with the view that against all odds, Nigerian dramatists leveraging on their artistic medium have chronicled political change in anticipation for good governance over the years in Nigeria. This has not abated even in the present democratic dispensation as they have continued to influence change especially serving as voices to the downtrodden in the society, thereby entrenching the functions of drama, which are not only to entertain, educate, enlighten, but also to mobilize the masses against undemocratic policies. The paper concludes that change, whether attitudinal or psychological, must first be politically induced for every other change to fall in place.*

Introduction

Art is necessary in order that man should be able to recognize and change the world. But art is also necessary by virtue of the magic inherent in it. (Fischer 14)

It is imperative to establish the fact that the arts (through all its forms and in particular drama) especially in Africa are largely socio-functional in focus,

meaning that the notion of “Art for Art's Sake” does not hold in Africa, rather, it is “Art for Life’s Sake”. This explains why topical issues of national importance have been succinctly x-rayed through this unique artistic medium. As such, the dramatist is consciously and unconsciously committed to the welfare of its citizenry who in all cases are the recipients of the change, positive or negative, from the socio-political and economic ends of the government.

Though the level of commitment varies considerably amongst writers in Africa, what we cannot deny is the fact that drama in Africa as it is deployed is largely functional. The functionality of the dramatic art in Africa transcends the notion of entertainment but it largely borders on its use to correct, judge or measure, and restore a generally acceptable social order. This informs Chinua Achebe’s assertion in his paper entitled “Commitment and the African Writer” where he conceives the commitment of an artist, the creative writer in this sense: “when we speak of a writer's commitment we mean attachment to particular social aims and the use of his writing to advance those social aims. This of course, implies a belief that literature can be and should be used as a force for social change, and a writer has a responsibility to do so” (177). Achebe’s assertion is rooted in the Marxist dialectic convention that suggests radical revolution to involve the artist in the process of enlightening the masses and mobilizing them to collectively pull down the stronghold of oppressive structures in the society. It is within this premise that Fischer acknowledges the commitment of art as it is engaged by the artist to mobilize the people. He affirms that, “true as it is that the essential function of art for a class destiny to change the world is not that of *making magic* but of *enlightening* and *stimulating* action” (14). Fischer goes further to describe the level of commitment of the artist to his society. *Art is itself* a social reality – society needs the artist, that supreme sorcerer, and it has a right to demand of him that he should be conscious of his social function (47).

The social function (s) revolves round education, enlightenment, and mobilization of the mass of voiceless and subjugated members of the society. That is why Fischer concludes that; “In a decaying society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect decay. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it” (48). The socialist commitment of dramatists and/or artists in Nigeria aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s proposition in, *Writers in Politics* where he notes that:

...literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or

more aspects of intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one of the sides in the battlefield. The side of the people or the side of the social force and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics? (2)

When we examine the artistic vision of some towering figures in the performing arts in Nigeria; Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Saint Gbilekaa, and so on, the logical conclusion is that their commitment is people-centred because they summon the courage to rise up in the face of subjugation and suppression; and also serve as watchdogs to government to ensure good governance.

The dramatist has always been an active member of the Nigerian society, as his or her art has always guided, conscientized, stirred, revolted, pointed as well as led the way in the political development and good governance of his/her society. To the Greek celebrated comic poet, Aristophanes, “the dramatist should not only offer pleasure but should, besides that, be a teacher of morality and a political adviser” (Gbilekaa, 54). The dramatist has variously used his art as forms of social commentary and criticism.

To Soyinka, “drama should expose, reflect, and indeed magnify the decadent, rotted under belly of a society that has lost its direction to use drama in reflecting and exposing societal ills” (Orji 23). It becomes the preoccupation of the dramatists and critics alike to note that such an exposition thus becomes the backbone of any work of art towards the political development and good governance of his society. In his inaugural lecture titled “Beyond entertainment: A reflection on drama and theatre, Adedeji opines that:

Beginning from the creation aspect of culture – the literary, the visual and the performing arts which when materialized express the essence of cultures this is the basis of progressive living. There is the philosophical aspect of culture which embraces the realm of ideas, beliefs, concepts and values of a people which come into full view either for reflection or provocation or both... it exists when the theatre is used for social and political action; when it is used as a weapon of change. (qtd. in Enekwe 17)

Practically, usefulness to the society is the purpose of drama and theatre – traditional, modern, post-modern, however defined or conceptualized, in consonance with nature, says Kalu Uka. According to Gbilekaa, beginning from the nineteen seventies, “plays were not written for entertainment only” (qtd. in Enekwe 21). It became functional and people oriented, involving the masses through theatre for development (TFD) to ask questions about themselves and what governance meant and should mean at least for the poor and dejected in society.

In Nigeria, particularly the word politics carries a lot of weight because everyone wants to know why certain developmental opportunities enjoyed by some set of people are yet to be extended to them (him/her), people fight for the sustenance or displacement of a particular regime based on the information they have for or against such government. Olu Obafemi in *Politics and Aesthetics*, draws a symmetrical line between politics and the world of theatre as and notes that “politics and theatre derive from the same source. People, the community playing roles and finding expressions and solutions to life-threatening problems... politicians want to make us believe them, against the fact, while theatre begins essentially in make-believe” (113). Obafemi’s sound comparison between theatre and politics serves as an eye “opener” for us to conclude that the dramatists are in a good position to contribute to the field of politics and governance. Especially since he knows what it takes to re-direct the self-driven nature of the politicians towards commonly driving goals, giving him praise when due and criticizing him when due. So the theatre artist can be described as an evaluator for the behaviour of the politicians. Farah quoted in Obafemi once declared, that the African politician is “a blind man: who moves only in one direction – towards himself” (1). It is against this backdrop this paper wishes to establish the functional roles of the platform of drama and how dramatists use their works to reflect on change; political, economic, socio-cultural in their various societies.

Drama and its Thematic Thrust on Societal Change

Drama and society have close-knitted affinity or in the words of Lindfors, “have a close and inseparable relationship” (27). In every age of dramatic activities, society influences drama and vice versa. This is so because the materials, with which drama is composed, are drawn from the society and subsequently affects people's lives in society. In contemporary Nigerian society, playwrights have always studied their immediate environment in order to use their drama to make political statements. He or She observes the

behavioural patterns, and using this, he develops a play with which these patterns of behaviour will be portrayed or represented. This accounts for the changes in drama forms; the form must change as the society and perception of the world changes. The reason for this position is borne out of the fact that since society is the source of the playwright's inspiration, a change in society should ordinarily meet a corresponding change in drama form, in other words, our world being in constant change, that which imitates it must keep pace with the object of its imitation: mimesis of humanity in drama.

Drama from its inception has served as a mirror through which we look at the world. Like a mirror which reflects the images that appear before it, so does drama reflect the behavioural patterns of the people in the society, making it possible for the people to examine the level of their moral value. It shows the polarity of human nature -- the futility and the necessity, the vulnerability and invincibility of human nature; it also shows man as capable of abject defeat and transcendental greatness, in other words, drama shows human fallibility and instructs how such errors can be overcome. Quoting Vanbrugh in *The Provoked Wife*, Bamidele reveals that, "it is the business of the stage, to copy out the follies of the age, to hold to everyman a faithful glass and show man of what species he is, an ass." (7). Although drama reflects the positive and negative tendency of human nature, this paper is concerned with the negative side since the subject of discussion here, is dramatists and how they have championed change (societal ills) in their works over the years.

That drama has a lot to do with societal ills is a truism that has been confirmed by the realist dramatists since the period of Greek new comedy. Comedy reflects the ills of society by satirizing them. The absurdist drama which basically is comic in nature, try to show the absurdity of human nature. In the words of Edwin Wilson, the absurdist plays; "... are dramatization of the author's inner sense of the absurdity and futility of human existence" (328). When this absurdity is revealed to the audience, they realize the need to assess them individually and when they discover that they are lacking in moral value, will try to mend their ways for the better. Change has therefore, taken place. On this note Baranger enthuses, "the writers of comedy call for sanity, reason and moderation in human behaviour so that the society can function for the wellbeing and happiness of its members" (291). Our position is that no matter the perspective from which one looks at it, drama and its allied activities try to exert a positive influence on the people in the society and where this is done, the ills in that society is

eradicated. A typical example being the plays selected for analysis in the course of this paper.

Wole Soyinka: *Kongi's Harvest*

Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* as an imitation of its society reveals the die-hard political nature of African leaders and the need for change in Africa's political space. The analysis of this play first published in 1967 will illustrate how drama continues to be timely and topical by serving as a tool with which the society is sanitized. It also offers us an opportunity to assess the extent to which Soyinka's message has continued to influence the lives of African people and ultimately, its society and serve as a bridge upon which other playwrights have stepped to cross and assert their claim to political ideologies for the good of all mankind. The position of this essay against the backdrop of *Kongi's Harvest* is that Soyinka revealed early enough in his writing career what African political leaders are, will be, and will continue to be. In the present, the play has become a reference point hence it was chosen in this paper to lead in the vanguard for plays on political change in Nigeria and in the larger African societies.

The study of the play *Kongi's Harvest* has revealed that of all the possible thematic preoccupations of the play, power tussle ranks tops as the most dominant theme of the play. This conflict of power tussle is among the three camps: Oba Danlola, Kongi and Daodu/Segi coalition. These three groups represent spiritual, political and economic power blocs respectively. However, each faction craves for absolute power. Kongi is not satisfied with just political power; he also wants the spiritual power that will accord him the recognition of Isma people. Oba Danlola is not willing to give up his traditional authority as the ruler while Daodu/Segi pact tries to unseat the others. Daodu is interested in the struggle because he is the heir to Daodu's throne while Segi is interested because her father awaits execution. Neither Oba Danlola nor Kongi feels comfortable with Daodu and Segi coalition. The harvest of a prize-winning yam marks Daodu out as the controller of agricultural life of Isma people while Segi is the controller of the commercial livewire of the people. The amalgam of these two sectors of Isma economy is a matter of great concern to both Kongi and Oba Danlola. Expressing fear for such 'unholy alliance' Oba Danlola discourages Daodu from their relationship in these words:

Danlola: ... Tell me, do you know that woman's history? I have myself wandered round some dens of Esu, once, and clambered over sweet hillocks in the dark, and not missed

my way. But Daodu, that woman of yours, she scares the pepper right up the nostrils of your old man here. She has left victims on her path like sugar cane pulp squeezed dry (*Kongi's Harvest*, 51-52).

In his defense of the relationship, Daodu explains that people say what they do not know about Segi. In his words: **Daodu:** Men know nothing of Segi. They only sing songs about her. But Danlola is adamant about that and still argues against the possible influence of Segi over Daodu. Hear him:

Danlola: Much better not to know, believe your father. Oh you have chosen to be swallowed whole down the oyster throat of the witch of nightclubs. Segi! son, she'll shave your skull and lubricate it in oil (*Kongi's Harvest*, 52).

Kongi's camp is also dissonant about any association with Segi and disapproves of her. The secretary allays such fear of discontent when he asks rhetorically thus: **Secretary:** But tell me, is she really as dangerous as they say? Some men I know have burns to show for their venture in that direction. The types too you'd think would know their way around (*Kongi's Harvest* 67).

Among the three power factions, the spiritual tends to reign supreme. A close examination has revealed that though Oba Danlola and Kongi's factions were afraid of Daodu/Segi pact, the actual contest is between Oba Danlola and Kongi. Within the Oba's camp, there is unity and harmony. In spite of his detention, his subjects are still loyal to him. In detention camp when the Superintendent wants Sarumi to warn the Oba against desecration of the national anthem, Sarumi simply says: **Sarumi:** We do not know the jackal's call; we do not hear the bonded overseer when the father speaks (*Kongi's Harvest*, 54). Again the supremacy of tradition is held when the Oba pretends he wants to prostrate before the superintendent, but the police officer stops such sacrilege by first throwing himself to the ground in reverence of the pre-eminence of the Oba. In the words of the Superintendent: "Only a foolish child lets a father prostrate to him. I don't ask to become a leper or a lunatic. I have no wish to live on sour berries. He continued when Oba Danlola made more remarks about his continued desire to prostrate" (*Kongi's Harvest* 6). This time the Officer alerts passers-by and:

[**Forestalls him (the Oba) by throwing himself down.**]: I call you all to witness. Kabiyesi, I am only a fowl droppings that stuck to your slippers when you strolled in

the back yard. The child is nothing; it is only the glory of his forebears that the world sees and tolerates in him (*Kongi's Harvest*, 6).

The play is a dramatization of the despotic tendency of African leaders and the misunderstanding that existed, or exists between the traditional rulers in Africa and the supposed despotic nature of African rulers. According to *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama*, the play was written for the festival of Negro Arts at Dakar and was intended to satirize the despotic government of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah. Scholars are of the opinion that the play has a universal theme and appeal: "though the specific political references may be lost on foreign audience, the antics of despots are universal." It will be recalled that the setting of the play is Ghana and being a British colony ran an indirect rule system whereby the British officials ruled Africa with the native chiefs. As a result, the traditional rulers wielded enormous powers over their people that it became difficult to strip them of such powers even after the colonies attained independence. Even this has not abated in present times. Gambia, for example, is embroiled in political conflict resulting in the same sit-tight syndrome from Yahya Jammeh who had to accept defeat and stepped down for Adama Barrow albeit grudgingly after 22 years. Other sit-tight leaders in Africa include; Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Burundi's Pierre Nkurunziza, Paul Biya of Cameroon, Jose Eduardo dos Santos of Angola, Nguema Obiang Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea and so many others. *Kongi's Harvest* therefore, portrays the conflicts that ensued between the traditional rulers and the newly constituted authorities on the assumption of independence. Kongi represents the new leadership, specifically Kwame Nkrumah who became despotic. Kongi, like Nkrumah, is a prophet of a political creed, which he dictates to his advisers from his high mountain retreat. Segi/Daodu coalition represents the new order or rather the rebel group. Like the dissidents we know, their concern is the opposition of the government. Daodu has successfully opposed the state by forming farmers' community against the state's established Farm Cooperatives. His efforts pay off and he produces the prize-winning yam and enough food for Isma population. This success serves as a yardstick for adjudging him an ingenuous administrator. With this character, Soyinka suggests that in spite of the gloomy political situation in Africa, there is a glimmer of hope in that there will rise a man who will combine the good aspects of tradition with modernity for the betterment of Africa and humanity.

However, activities of African leaders over the years have proved it is not yet *uhuru* in this black continent. It is against this background that the generation that followed Wole Soyinka led by Femi Osofisan believed that Soyinka's ideologies put forward in his plays showed man as helpless in the face of daunting challenges. Osofisan in his radical Marxist posture captured the situation thus:

The first generation of writers created our modern literature in English, laid out its architecture, its diction and its language, then they used it to re-establish our past for us, to show us its dignity and its splendour. We of the second generation seized that literature, cleansed it of its cobwebs and ambiguities, and made it more accessible, and more pliable. Then we employed it to fight social injustice, conscientize our people, and compel the military dictatorship to surrender its usurped power, and return us to a free, civilian society. But there is a new war out there, and it is not one for us to throw up our arms and join the exile train. It is a war to ensure that our hard-won democracy is not aborted or truncated once again by greedy, irresponsible politicians (*The City as Muse* 80).

Osofisan's position above captures the thrust of this paper, one that has set out to trace the trajectories of change in the three dramatists under study. *Kongi's Harvest* recently analysed left much to be desired in its bid to confront the social issues of the period. For example, the play suggests that with the knowledge of despotism as practiced by African leaders, a time shall come when they'll change or an opposing force will rise to supplant it for the better. But this position is like a bone (muscle) massager who pities a fractured bone only for it to heal and be deformed in the process. With Osofisan and his contemporaries of the second generation; Biodun Jeyifo, Bode Osanyin, Olu Obafemi, Odia Ofeimun, Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze, the stage was set to use their radical Marxist ideologies to lead in the vanguard for more egalitarian society. A drama of purposeful confrontation, and a drama that will look the state squarely in the face and demand good governance. This group, already disheartened by the type of drama of disillusionment of the first generation and they could not wait to challenge their destinies and those of the general public whom they felt deserved better bargains.

Femi Osofisan: *Once Upon Four Robbers*

Femi Osofisan is one playwright that has used his works as revolutionary tool to question the traditional passivity and forlorn hope of first generation playwrights; Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark. Olu Obafemi, Osofisan's contemporary captures this mood rather succinctly:

The development of a revolutionary approach to art and theatre manifests itself in the young playwright's commitment to the employment of the revolutionary potential of the theatre to sharpen social awareness, adapt a socialist alternative approach to the obsolescence they find in the body politics of the present recipes for social change. This generation of writers include; Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kola Omotosho, James Isoha, and so on. They have a conviction that social change could come by playwrights' ability to raise mass awareness to a positive revolutionary alternative to social decadence. (118-119)

Osofisan has with his revolutionary style of theatre continued to question established orders and confront urgent contemporary social problems in Nigeria. He rejects the tragic vision in the works of his predecessors – Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark – which he attributes to the latter's harping upon animist metaphysics. He rejects such a vision, which opts for individual heroism. His ideology is concerned with a mass revolution of people doing things together. Osofisan believes that an artist is faced with a task of pointing out social ills, uncovering the harsh realities of life such as exploitation and oppression, and class differentiation where a particular class invariably enjoys the best things of life (the bourgeois) at the expense of other class (the proletariat and hoi-polloi). He suggests in his works possible means of eliminating these maladies, and therefore, urges writers not to shut their eyes to these problems and realities and stresses commitment to them against all odds. His aesthetic preoccupation is to create art that is close to the popular mode in terms of clarity of language and directness of purpose. He reveals this as:

A story that will be simple in instruction, direct in message, but geared towards positive human value in the context of our society. We should seize the form and structure of Western literature but change the context to meet the needs of our society. (7)

In his brief citation on Osofisan, who was the 2016 winner of the IATC's prestigious Thalia Prize, Don Rubin, Former President, Canadian Centre of the IATC had this to say:

Osofisan is of the generation that followed two theatrical giants and his footprint is almost as large as theirs on the continent of Africa and it is growing in other parts of the world as well. Probably his most well-known play is *Once Upon Four Robbers*, which is already taught in numerous universities around the world and has been widely anthologized. But it is only one of some 50 plays by this major artist and activist. These plays – like his critical writings – are cries for personal freedom and political action and include many adaptations of Greek and Shakespearean originals, tailored for whatever political situation might exist (<http://aict-iatc.org/en/awards/thalia-prize-awarded-to-femi-osofisan/> par. 5)

It is against this background that this paper chooses to analyze *Once Upon Four Robbers*, which is described by Arongbe Afolabi as "a certified indictment of an establishment, a government that could not fulfill one of its major roles of providing gainful employment" (12). The play narrates the escapade of four robbers (Major, Angola, Hassan and Alhaja) who go about maiming, killing and robbing people of their belongings because of the harsh and unfriendly economic situation caused by bad government in power. The same government had set up a firing squad as penalty for armed robbery. In order to evade in their acts, they meet an Alfa (another character) an accomplice of religious fanaticism who promises to give them charm to use in their game on the condition of stealing only from the rich and not their fellow poor. The charm is a song in links and is shared among the four robbers to be reproduced to effect its efficacy. They succeed in their operations, but immediately, Major feels the boss and plans to abscond with their booty, but for the timely intervention of the Soldiers who came after them for arrest. Hassan, Angola and Alhaja flew but Major was not so lucky as he was arrested and conversely charged to be executed on the firing squad. On the day of execution, there is a revelation that Angola is Sergeant's brother, and that everybody has been part of this gross corruptive tendencies; from the Market Women, Soldiers, Policemen, to even the religious fanatics exemplified by Alfa. Osofisan asks: Is it only the armed robbers that are guilty as charged? The play is thrown open to the audience to decide its end.

The concern to recover man's lost humanity in an unjust world has assumed the central theme in Osofisan's drama. Dehumanization though a concrete historical fact is not a product of destiny, it is created by man. The end result of oppression or dehumanization is violence. *Once Upon Four Robbers* therefore, is a radical sociology of crime, an exposition of the struggle of the oppressed masses to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the wealthy class. In highlighting the causes of violence, particularly armed robbery, Osofisan gives it a dialectical treatment. He juxtaposes the arguments of the robbers with those of the hunters -- the oppressor in order to provide insight into socio-economic conditions that drive men into unpremeditated crimes. With this device he expects his audience to judge for themselves in the referendum at the end of the play.

As noted in the play, crime does not start and end with the poor masses but also from the leaders of the state who pay deaf ears to the yearnings and aspirations of the masses. In a thematic and ideological twist, Osofisan believes like Paulo Freire that:

Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons -- not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves. It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent with their power to create the concrete situation which begets the "rejects of life." It is not the tyrannized who initiate despotism, but the tyrants. (qtd. in Gbilekaa 72).

Osofisan's message, as satirical and critical as it is, is double-edged, for while exposing the outrageous crimes of the robbers, he is also more specifically indicting the leaders for being the cause of hardship of the masses thereby inciting them to action. Yet, in spite of the gloomy picture of the oppressed presented in this play, the vision for the future is not a fatalistic one. There is hope for change and betterment. Even at the point of death, Major (one of the characters) sees this hope in the destruction of the unjust capitalist and corruptive system that creates his likes. In his words, Major:

...Serg, today that law is on the side of those who have, and in abundance, who are fed and bulging, who can afford several concubines. ...tomorrow, that law will change, the poor will seize it and twist its neck. The starving will smash

the gates of the supermarkets, the homeless will no longer yield in fear to your bulldozers. And your children, yes, your dainty little children will be here where I stand now, on firing block... (*Once Upon Four Robbers* 84).

It is against this pronouncement that this paper finds it expedient to bring up Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, our next select play for analysis. It is a play that is more revolutionary and confrontational and which accomplishes Major's prophecy in *Once Upon Four Robbers* in his statement above.

Emeka Nwabueze: *A Parliament of Vultures*

It seems playwrights are God's gift to humanity, people who dedicate themselves through their works to redirect and conscientize mankind as against the abyss of damnation and perpetual suffering created by Satan (political leaders) in human form. *A Parliament of Vultures* is the playwright's response to the gloom that gathers and has kept gathering in the political firmament of Nigeria. Nwabueze like every other committed dramatist has set out in this play to achieve results, in deploying characters and situations that are revolutionary and confrontational. This is revolution, and there is no revolution without bloodshed or violence. The staging or even reading of *Nwokedi* by Esiaba Irobi will send shivers down one's spine with the way he deploys violence and bloodshed in the play, if only to send warning signals to bad leadership. Osofisan, whose ideological disposition in print is revolutionary, condemns violence in works of art, especially drama. According to him:

I do not believe in violence. Violence: that is not what Marx means; that is not what Mao meant. Violence is not the end, it is only a means, and we must never forget that end. What is the end? The end is to produce a happy prosperous society. A happy satisfying Government in defence of fairness, justice where people are disciplined and have what they need....but people in power do not have compassion, a necessary ingredient of revolution. Once you forget compassion, forget humanity, once you believe in violence as a means to an end rather than the last resort, what we have is a dangerous perversion of justice. And I do not believe that is in favour of humanity; that is very un-African. (22)

Osofisan believes that as an artist one should reflect on the agonies of the time, reflect the hopes of the time and show a possible way out of all the problems, and condemn negative forces, and instruct while entertaining, and entertain while instructing. But for how long can we keep up with this passivity or paper revolutionary ideologies without a bite? For how long can we throw up a referendum to the audience to decide their fate and the fate of the rest of mankind? This may be responsible for the creation of the kind of situations one finds in his play, *A Parliament of Vultures*.

In their synopsis of the play, Nwosu and Onwuasonya capture it in these lines:

A Parliament of Vultures is a play wrought around the heart-rending malfeasance of Nigerian Parliamentarians. The play is a poignant political satyr, projecting an incompetent, boisterous and licentious Madam Omeaku as the protagonist. Though illiterate, Madam Omeaku in connivance with her criminal and morally decadent accomplice - Mr. Brown wriggles her way into the highest levels in parliament and relegates the more intelligent and articulate Dr. Parkers and Otoobo to mere bench warmers and toothless bulldogs in the affairs of the parliament. (202)

With a divided house of parliament, Speaker Habamero, Rev. Hon. Jossy and the Chief of Protocol align together against the moral and prudent voices of Dr. Parkers and Hon. Otoobo and eventually orchestrate their unlawful incarceration all in a bid to ensure that no single opposition remains in the House. The president is also portrayed as grossly incompetent, arrogant and completely detached from the masses. The president's excesses are helped in no small way by the acquiescence of the parliamentarians in playing the game. Nwabueze reveals the high level of corruption, favouritism and ineptitude that are the hallmarks of Nigerian lawmakers till date. The people's collective wealth is appropriated in billions of naira on frivolities and insignificant projects like church invitations and wardrobe allowances. The last straw, however, that breaks the camel's back is the unlawful arrest and detention of the duo of Dr. Parker and Hon Otoobo and plans to revoke an already awarded contract because Madam Omeaku supports the obnoxious plan. This stirs the general public to action and the student body revolts as has never happened in the country. In fact, when Chief of Protocol tells members of Parliament about the students' plan of action (revolt), Habamero is quick to ask: "Have students ever brought down any government?" With a

wave of the left hand, they continue on approval of revoked contracts. And before they are able to understand what is going on: “sounds of war songs are heard from a distance. They are harsh and penetrating” Chief of Protocol is dispatched to ascertain what is going on. He comes back frantically and frenetically fidgeting and calls out to the rest of the parliamentarians:

“Hell! Abomination! Hell on earth! Hell has descended on us... *They try to rush out through the door, but it is too late. A group of militant youths rush into the House, singing war songs. They arrest the honourable members and proceed to tie them up with ropes.* (112)

This singular action is revolutionary theatre as demonstrated in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*.

Conclusion and Observations

This paper establishes the trajectories of change and approaches adopted by the different playwrights over the years to bring to limelight the issue of bad leadership in the society. For instance, Soyinka, Nigeria's foremost literary giant had set the ball rolling revealing and conscientizing his African audience about the despotic nature of their leaders in his *Kongi's Harvest*, while Femi Osofisan took the challenge further by indicting the authorities, thereby inciting the masses to decide on what to do with the situation through a plebiscite at the end of his play, *Once Upon Four Robbers*. However, it was Emeka Nwabueze, in his *A Parliament of Vultures*, who really demonstrated what revolutionary theatre is and what can be achieved with it, as the paper revealed in the end of the play.

Dramatic ideology of the African examples has undergone varied changes in form and content, at least from the time of Soyinka's first generation dramatists. Among the second-generation playwrights represented by Femi Osofisan and many others, there is a seething anger and disillusionment with the past, present and even the future. This anger is hinged on the fact that people like Osofisan being aware of the revolutionary fervour of the theatre, do despair largely because such efforts have done little or nothing to positively alter the predicament of the people. It is against this backdrop that Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* took up this challenge and presented a play filled with violence, gloom and despondence as a true reflection of the realities of the Nigerian state and indeed Africa as a whole and what theatre as an art form can achieve if properly channelled.

This position above resonates in Federico Garcia Lorca's theatrical ideology articulated in Asigbo's Inaugural:

... a nation which does not help and does not encourage its theatre is if not dead, dying, just as the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine colour of its landscape and its spirit, with laughter or with tears, has no right to call itself theatre...(8).

As guardians of the conscience and sacred spirit of the state, dramatists and indeed all writers must not only write to condemn, but must in all honesty lead in the vanguard for a just and egalitarian society with their works. Only within this premise will art, drama and their artists champion change we noticed in Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and many others like that.

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