

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

The theatre is known to have been alive to the socio-political realities of its time; a kind of court where the economic, social, religious and political issues of the society are outlined, evaluated and judged to bring about a better society, the theatre, its practitioners, and in fact, all the fine artists, are all vanguards of social change in their respective capacities – keeping watchful eyes and attentive ears on the happenings in the society.

In Nigeria, for instance, virtually all the new generation playwrights are committed to issues of social and political concerns of our time. The relevance of any play is dependent upon how well it is able to address the pressing issues of the playwright's society. Hence, the radical dramatist is merely a respondent to such issues of social essence.

It will only amount to man's inhumanity to man, a sin against oneself and the nation, should a Nigerian playwright, writing for a Nigerian audience today, choose to merely play to the gallery in the face

of the numerous perceivable injustices in our immediate society. This, perhaps, is why Achebe posits that “any writer who tries to avoid the big social and political questions of his time will end up being completely, irrelevant to his society” (3). He likens such a writer to the absurdist man in an Igbo proverb, who leaves his burning house to pursue the rodents fleeing from the flames (13).

The radical playwright believes that the level of injustice, corruption and other forms of malpractices and moral decadence in contemporary society have got to where the art of speaking with the ‘tongue in the cheek’ on the stage alone is no longer enough, but rather demands an urgent and more direct representation for an immediate social reform. Femi Osofisan, one of the pioneer proponents of radical theatre movement in Nigeria believes that “if we warned ourselves often and painfully enough with reality, with the reality around us, if we refused to bandage our sensitive spots way from the hurts of truth, then we can attain a new and positive awareness” (4).

The radical theatre in Nigeria, just like its prototypes around the world should, as a matter of necessity, be committed to issues that will provide direct, matter-of-fact evaluation on the stage and bring them to

the consciousness of the audience who would then begin to do something to sensitize the entire society and initiate an attitudinal change.

A review of the developmental trends in Nigerian theatre practice shows that from the post independent era to the present day, there has been a noticeable change in the tone of Nigerian plays both in content and form. This, no doubt, is a result of the influence of radicalism in the practice. From the seventies, for instance, Nigerian playwrights no longer write to entertain alone, but also to express certain ideological positions or to condemn certain societal ills. To Saint Gbilekaa:

The contemporary Nigerian playwright bears a mark of ideological commitment and patriotism. The text of his play will invariably reflect the socio political situation under which he writes. His themes and subject matters naturally emerge from issues of topical within his domain (3).

The radical playwright either writes in favour or against existing political system, especially, when it is anti-social and dictatorial. Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero*, for instance, mirrors the misappropriation of the Christian religion by dubious Nigerians as morally opposed to the original intention of the early missionaries who brought it into the country. In the same manner, Ola Rotimi's *Our*

*Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, satirizes the never-do-well Nigerian politicians of the second Republic in their political antics.

In face of the resurgence of ethnic and religious bigotry leading to untold violence, at the least provocation, which in turn is occasioned by the very harsh economic atmosphere in the country, the theatre is one of the tools with the capacity to assist in the restoration of sane, enduring democratic culture in our national polity. In any developing democracy such as in Nigeria, the theatre can really make a lot of difference in reworking, reinventing and re-branding the physical, metaphysical and even the mythical vacuum in our democratic process. Besides the instrumentation of the theatre as a tool for cultural renaissance and as an arm of the Black-African Consciousness Movement, Olu Obafemi observes that:

The theatre has equally proved to be very instrumental in other struggling nations of the world, where theatrical productions, companies and dramatists have openly confronted the ruling class, challenging them and sometimes dialoguing with the powers-that-be on the economic, social and political rejuvenation ... (ix).

Instances abound in other nations of the world, where the governments have responded to the unflattering cautions of the theatre, by way of promulgating banning decrees, harassment, censorship,

intimidation and in some extreme cases, total elimination ,as in the cases of Robert Semanga of Uganda, Athol Fugard of South Africa and Ken Saro Wiwa.

Wole Soyinka also demonstrated the radical powers of the theatre when he produced his Jamaican version of *The Beautification of Area Boys* which unarguably impacted so much on the people's level of identification and commitment in the struggle for a reformed Jamaica.

The theatre can, and does make a difference in the context of the society and culture in which it operates. The theatre can mediate in our young and fragile democracy, especially now that the country is at cross-roads of political history and nationhood.

We therefore ought to proactively employ the theatre to interrogate and demystify the totalitarian ideologies of neo-scramble for geographical and territorial aggrandizement which constitute a major threat to our unity. In a country where all the political parties have selfishly grounded themselves in all practical purposes, where the legislators have become pathetic jokers and the National Assembly has been turned into a mere circus show, the theatre becomes a lone voice providing a glimpse of hope for redemption at the end of the dark tunnel.

The theatre needs to take the lead in the search for an alternative social economic status quo. It should share in the burden of national healing and recuperation. In playing the role of an interventionist, the theatre should attempt to draw a broad line between the good and the evil sides of the societal life for as Sam Ukala puts it:

The good is only recognized in relation to the bad courage in relation to cowardice, the holy against the unholy ... it is only through these relationship that the theatre is able to imitate both sides and present them on stage for the people's judgment (23).

In Nigeria, as in most other African countries the theatre imitates for the purpose of causing not only change in the moods of the people through entertainment, but also a change in their mindsets for the betterment of the socio-political and economic structure of the nation. In a more radical sense, theatre practitioners do not only advocate for change but also spur the people to do so. This is exemplified in the popular theatre process in which the practitioner only acts as a facilitator while the people do the actual advocacy. Hence, Domba Asomba observes that "as a society changes, its political arrangement, theatrical performances and function also continue to change along the line of the new dictate or reality" (49).

In essence, as the theatre impacts on the society, the society in turn impacts on it. As there are ethnic and socio cultural institutions calling for the restructuring or dismemberment of the Nigerian nation, so are there others that can be employed to promote and advance the ideals of federalism and true democracy in the country. The theatre is one such institution. Here, the dramatist, as the lead – drummer, has a lot of responsibilities in this business of reformation. As Femi Osofisan puts it:

We must use the weapon we have – our pen, our zeal and our people, the song of liberation... with our writing we would wash away the stigma of inferiority, rouse our dominant energy, and unmask the pest and traitors among us... our work would be a weapon in the struggle to bring our country to the foremost rank of modern nation (6).

Our theatre needs to be a positive interventionist, since no other cultural activity has such power of engagement, of arrest, of mobilization and of conscientization like the theatre. Hegel notes that “the new theatre of raising consciousness is aimed at liberating the masses from the clutches of oppressive elite, which made them to lose hope in its ability to stand on its feet” (20).

However, the theatre can achieve this if only it is able to surmount the attendant problems embedded in the struggle.

This research work is therefore designed to present the theatre as a veritable instrument in the quest for a transformed society, while outlining the challenges and promises therein.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The radical dramatist has always been a front-line soldier in the fight for a transformed society. This he does by rejecting in totality, all unacceptable standards. The political class therefore perceives the radical dramatist as a ‘thorn-in-the-flesh’.

The dramatist, who writes about the dark sides of the socio political life of the society, has often met stiff opposition from the ruling class. This is because the radical playwright is never in the same camp with the ruling class; especially under an undemocratic atmosphere. Here, the radical dramatist is considered a threat- an impending time bomb ready to explode any time with a very dangerous outcome. This is why any government with an authoritarian poise would fight theatre radicalism to extinction.



Unfortunately, theatre and politics have proved to be an inseparable pair, since politics is part of the social life of every society, and the theatre mirrors life. The radical dramatist therefore sticks out his neck to play his role as a social commentator; else, he would not be doing his part as the watch-dog of the society.

The unending war of ideology between the radical dramatist and the ruling class has resulted in several sad tales on the part of the dramatist. Many of them have resorted to self exiles, while very many others have at one time or the other, been condemned to varying jail terms. Nikolai Gogol of Russia, Ngugi Wa Thiongo of Kenya and Wole Soyinka of Nigeria are some examples of playwrights who have suffered one form of persecution or the other from the government, for attempting to correct the ills of the society, using drama as a tool.

It will not be out of place to say that any radical dramatist, who operates in an autocratic atmosphere, unarguably constitutes himself into 'endangered specie'. This does not however suggest that radicalism in theatre practice should give in to political intimidation; that would be more dangerous because it will open a flood-gate of political excesses, which in turn is very unhealthy to social existence.

On the other hand, some of the radicalists take their criticisms to the extreme, so much so that they also constitute themselves into problems without knowing it. Any critic, who does not exercise restraints and objectivity, would ultimately become part of the problem he otherwise ought to solve.

There is therefore, an urgent need for a point of convergence between the dramatist and the ruling class; wherein the ruling class should begin to see the dramatist, not as a rival, but as a social commentator, whose comments should be analyzed and put to good use. On the other hand, the dramatist should play his role with utmost objectivity, eschewing all forms of personal sentiments. Only then can there be peaceful coexistence between theatre and politics.

### **1.3 SCOPE OF STUDY**

Drama and theatre speak universal language which is understood by all tribes and races. Theatre practice is therefore a universal art. In order to avoid the fugitiveness of arts, however, this work shall be limited to the Nigerian situation, but not without some quick references to the socio political possibilities in some other parts of the world, especially in Africa.

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This research work shall serve as a reference document, providing a kind of guide for upcoming dramatists and theatre practitioners who may wish to focus their arts on the constructive reformation of a society yearning for a total metanoya.

It shall provide a step-by-step approach to a logical and critical evaluation of the social and political malfunctioning of the society while at the same time suggesting the way forward to solving the society's problem. The research work shall serve to expose the ills of the society, especially those emanating from bad leadership and political insincerity; opening the worm cans of the oppressors and giving the oppressed the courage to stand up to the challenge of fighting oppression to a standstill in a class conscious society such as ours. It will also serve as a research material for student and other researchers who may wish to carry out research in similar areas.

#### **1.5 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

This research was executed with the effort of a single individual whose financial means is limited. The researcher therefore encountered the problem of inadequate finance, especially in the search for materials.

Time constraint is also another factor that will militate against this research, as the researcher had to work against time in order to complete the work as and when due

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research shall employ both the primary and secondary sources of data collection. The MLA parenthetical style is adopted to provide written acknowledgement for the sources of information.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

One cannot successfully discuss the concept of radicalism in the Nigerian theatre without mentioning the antecedents that gave rise to it. The concept of drama and theatre in Nigeria, in Africa and indeed in the rest of the world, for instance, derives from the rituals and ceremonies, festivals and such other types of indigenous forms of entertainment usually brought together in an ensemble performance. The advent of the colonial masters brought in Western civilization and formal education which helped groom some Africans in acquiring the art of writing. Performances which were hitherto in oral forms began to be documented in script form. The Alarinjo Traveling Theatre Championed by J.A. Adedeji and Hubert Ogunde and the Yoruba Traveling Theatre pioneered by Duro Ladipo among others were some of the immediate outcomes of this interplay between the indigenous art forms and those of the colonial masters. The thematic contents in their performance were based on love, fantasy, clash of culture, traditions and values, dramatic biographies of their favourite heroes as well as some straight-forward didactic pieces. Yemi Ogunbiyi rightly said that “the Nigerian theatre

and drama originated with the Nigerian, embodying his first preoccupations, his first struggles, successes, set backs and all” (3).

The emergence of the contemporary radical theatre movement in Nigeria dates back to the early 70’s. This period witnessed the arrival of such literary icons as James Eneh Henshaw, John Pepper Clark Bekederemo, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Obi Egbuna, among others. These breed of Nigerian dramatists were born into a much tensed political atmosphere, into an era when the social and economic value suffered a total breakdown. Their works seemed to be a kind of revolt against the colonial imports which they saw as unacceptable. Their major preoccupation was to redirect the minds of the people towards Nigeria’s lost cultural values.

In the words of Udentia O. Udentia the period immediately after the flag off of Nigeria’s independence in the early 60’s up to the present day has witnessed:

An intense social and political contradiction between the black comprador political and commercial leaders and the mass ordinary people, between the imperialist nations and their neo-colonial dependency (56).

Ever since the exodus of the colonial masters from Nigeria in the early 60's, Nigeria and Nigerians have had their fair shares of the avoidable and the unavoidable woes orchestrated by wars and political instability. According to Rasheed Abiodun "Some of these (woes) were inevitable because there has always been this grand battle between forces struggling to control the Nigeria governance at all costs" (43).

From the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorates into what is now called Nigeria, in 1914, to the Aba Women Riot of 1929, up to the Nigeria – Biafra War of 1967 – 1970 and then, the present day-to-day crisis still rocking the so-called democratic Nigeria, critics have continued to wonder if Nigeria will ever know peace. The various interactive mechanisms put in place by government to promote national unity, such as Unity Schools, National Youth Service Scheme, the National Theatre and sports fiestas have not really paid off, because only very little attention has been given to the voice of theatre practitioners who try to bring these misfortunes to the consciousness of the new generation.

The Nigerian nation has not been able to surmount its socio-political challenges because of a number of reasons, which include the

religious and ethnic differences of the citizenry. Hence Soyinka opines that “the country is better described as a geographical definition made up of diverse religious and ethnic groups and lacking the qualities of nationhood” (11).

The theatre is one of the institutions capable of inspiring the much needed change in the society by probing and intruding into the main stem of the societal problems. The theatre recognizes the need to heal and restore life to a sick and battered Nigeria. It seeks to create a new vision for growth, renewal, regeneration and edification of man for a wholesome life and a better community. And to mobilize a collective conscience for a particular desired objective – a transformed society.

The theatre is one of the socio-cultural institutions capable of strengthening the Nigerian nation by way of developing and advancing the ideals of true democracy and good governance. Over the last four decades, Nigeria has been pursuing with little or no success, the goal of enthroned practical stable democracy and good governance which is devoid of violence, suspicion, bitterness and which is based on the principle of freedom, openness and collective participation in government as well as equitable distribution of responsibilities and



rewards amongst citizens. All of these are enshrined in the works of Nigerian dramatists, especially those written and produced in the last few decades, a period which according to Gbemisola Adeoti:

Marks a major cross-road in the history of Nigerian politics, when the urge to democratize became enormously pressing. It witnessed the country's desperate attempt at reconstructing those unifying values that could avert further political crisis, stem the military incursion into the nation's politics and prevent yet another civil war (53).

The art of drama and theatre is well disposed to achieve all the above. The focus and locus of drama is man and his universe. The theatre is therefore an apt forum through which ideas can be exchanged and social awareness disseminated.

It has the ability to stimulate national discuss on crucial political issues. Indeed, some issues which may not find expression in conventional political fora can always be articulated in theatre. The theatre is a social art that thrives on collaboration, interest harmonization and collective participation between the playwright, the actor and the audience. It is a veritable tool for reforming the society. The Nigerian theatre of these later years can be said to be interventionist. The Nigerian dramatist has adequately documented the travails of the nation's political

system. For instance, a close look at Soyinka's numerous satirical sketches of the sixties and early seventies clearly shows a demonstration of the mindless assaults on the democratic norms by the first Republic politicians. In his *Kongi's Harvest*, *Opera Woyosi*, and *Jero's Metamorphosis*, for instance, he demonstrates unreservedly, the contraction of opportunities for popular participation in governance as against the backdrop of protracted military rules. Again Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin* tries to expose the attenuation of the democratic prospects through greed and other social ills. It is worthy of note that most of the Nigerian plays produced from 1980 to the present day contains more radical approaches to revive and rejuvenate the Nigerian society and save it from imminent total collapse. Adeoti posits that "such plays apart from displaying social flaccidity in an artistically permissible forms, also strive to generate new insight and perceptions that can ensure the success of the dramatic agenda" (56).

Some of the radical plays which attempted to question, subvert and show the way forward in dismantling the existing political structure and replacing same with more acceptable one include: Wole Soyinka's *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985), *From Zia with Love* (1992), and *The*

*Beatification of Area Boy* (1999), Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* (1982), *Aringindin and the Night Watchman* (1992), Ola Rotimi's *If... a tragedy of the Ruled* (1983), Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi* (1991), Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* (1992), Ahmed Yerima's *The Silent Gods* (1996) and Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* (2001) among others.

The phenomenon of radicalism in the Nigerian theatre is traceable to the after effect of the civil war and the consequence of socio economic factors which affected almost every strata of the Nigerian society since the early 70s. The Nigerian radical theatre movement was further sharpened by the awareness of Nigerian intellectuals to agitate for a socialist order in preference to the neo-colonial capitalism chiefly occasioned by the post war recklessness and squandermania of the oil boom period under the gross (mis)rule of the intervening military government.

The radical theatre movement in Nigeria is comparable to the experiment of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as they are both theaters of consciousness. It is founded on the Marxist – Leninist doctrines of socialism which is a natural

consequence of the dissatisfaction, exploitation and degradation of the society.

This theatre therefore aims at arousing political and social consciousness of the larger society, with a view to creating revolutionary alternatives to the socio political and economic maladies. The main pre-occupation of the radical theatre movement, according to Dauda Musa “is to protest against corruption, sycophancy and mismanagement of resources and abuse of power, which characterized the first Republic and military governance” (81).

Hence, the radical theatre became an ideological weapon employed by some Nigerian dramatists in fighting for a just and egalitarian society. The term ‘radicalism’ which is a common terminology in disciplines such as politics, sociology and literature denotes the demand to effect fundamental changes in the society.

William Raymond posits that:

...radicalism has to do with the revolutionary relationship of someone with his society, which is of declared opposition and struggle but which is characteristic of him that opposes the society in terms of the struggle for a different order. He fights the existing order because to him, it is wrong, but the new reality his proposing is more than personal. He is offering it as a new way of life... (39).

This new way of life is the alternative to passive and defeatist acceptance of oppression, marginalization and subjugation by the capitalist ruling class. Saint Gbilekaa further observed that:

The term radical should be seen not only from the perspective of favouring rapid and sweeping changes but also from the fundamental Marxist sense of going to the roots of the matter- The basic and primary causes underlying the situation (15).

In this sense, the radical theatre is aimed at uplifting the living standard of the ordinary people by arousing in them the struggling consciousness. During its initial stage, radical theatre in Nigeria aimed at interacting with the people. It became a theatre of pedagogy, of liberation and of revolution, which is underlined by the Marxist aesthetics. Plays were no longer written for mere entertainment, as majority of the radical plays were written to express certain ideological positions and condemn the decadent socio political and economic malpractices. Perhaps, Gbilekaa therefore thinks that,

The Nigerian radical theatre movement bears a mark of ideological commitment and patriotism. It transcends mere protests as it abandons the esoteric banalities of glorifying tradition. Even where it makes use of them, It is from the subversive perspective, squeezing it to make meaning for the contemporary exercise, which is change (ix).

The Nigerian theatre practitioners of this milieu confront the problems by going to the hearts of the socio political issues. The new radical dramatist started a synthesizing process to transform this compost mixture of cultural renaissance, disillusionment and protesting the question of his own existence. This is the major driving force behind the radical theatre movement in Nigeria. It de-emphasizes the force of fate and predestination and places the myth-making history of the individuals into the hands of the masses of the society. E. Anugwom and E. Igbo in agreement observed that... “To argue that social problems are natural and inevitable is to shy away from such problems and any attempts to solve them” (83).

The post-war era is very significant to the emergence of radicalism in the Nigerian theatre. This period witnessed a geometrical increase in the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. This consequently created a class-conscious society and brought about a gradual paradigm shift from the individual to the mass action of the society. The single-hero plays and their individual willing carriers as represented by the characters of Elesin Oba in Soyinka’s *Death and the Kings Horseman*, Ozidi in J.P Clark’s *Ozidi* and the Boy in Soyinka’s

*The Strong Breed*, gave way for the mass hero plays such as we see in Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Osofisan's *Aringindin and the Night Watchman* in which the masses are called upon to fight their own causes. Gbilekaa states that "the playwrights did not only highlight the problem of the society by way of satire, but also provided ways of avoiding or solving them" (51).

Their concern was to recover man's lost humanity in an unjust world. The radical theatre movement holds that dehumanization and man's inhumanity to man is not a product of destiny or fate, but man made. The radical dramatist therefore believes that the result of oppression is violence.

The radical ideologues are political writers in some sense because they write on politics as it concerns the people, their needs and aspirations. Their viewpoints and creative comments became the encapsulation of their proposed solutions for setting man free from oppression, bad governance and wicked polices. Ngugi Wa Thiong' O rightly posits that:

Literature cannot escape from the class-power structure that shapes 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 the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggle in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side of the battle field the side of the people or the side of those social forces and bourgeoisie class that try to keep the people down. What he cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The question is what and whose politics (204).

The above assertion by Ngugi further lends credence to the fact that playwrights as creative artists write out of the abundance of the experiences inherent in his immediate society. Born in a class-conscious society, the radical dramatist appears bottled up, between two extremes, forced to choose to identify with either the oppressed or the oppressor.

However, being the facilitator of the masses, the radical dramatist has always identified with the oppressed. His works objectively poised to conscientize and give them the much needed hope of rejuvenation.

Seen as a facilitator of the masses, Obadiogwu Chiduo tells us that:

The dramatist is a writer of the oppressed, who confronts the ruling class creatively and bravely, combining their dealings with the ruled. His plays bear revolutionary and transforming impetus which can lead the masses to perceive that they could actually shape their own future (81).



The radical theatre tries to fill in the yawning gap between the rich and the poor with such a combative mien that could confront the ruling class bravely and unmask their knave and collaborative stance with capitalism.

The radical ideology, according to Augusto Boal aims at:

Diminishing, placating, satisfying and ultimately eliminating all that can break the “balance-all”, indicating the revolutionary transforming impetus which can lead men and women to perceive that the power to change the world rests in their very hands (42).

This will invariably equip them (the people) psychologically to stand as rebels against the tyrannical situations and find solution to oppose the force of dehumanization. The radical theatre movement therefore aims at re-awakening the wretched of the earth and making them realize the need to reshape their future and fate.

Drama as an art form is itself a criticism of life. Through fictionality, it addresses itself to life and responds to a specific set of political conditions. Drama ultimately holds up a mirror to life. Ngugi observes that “literature and politics present a dialectical relationship; they are reflected in one another and can, and in fact do act on one another” (71).

Even though the theatre entertains, it is also a serious business. Hence, the entertainment side to it is not an end in itself, but a means through which the dramatist explores the realities of the human conditions and according to Simon Umuokoro "...speculates not only on what is, but also what ought to be or what might be in time to come" (10).

Lending support to the above assertion, Bertolt Brecht opines that "drama should be an affair for philosophers, but then only for such philosophers who wish not just to explain the world but to change it as well" (46).

The political undertones in any form of theatrical performance are like a pistol fired into a market crowd, which sometimes results in an unpredictable outcome. There is always something too loud and vulgar about the radical theatre, which makes it difficult to elude the attention of the audience, but which very often goes for offensive on the bourgeoisie class, whose oxen are often gored by the dramatic impetus of the radical Marxist. This is what distinguishes the radical dramatist from his free-lance counterpart; while the freelancer writes for the sake of arts (purely for entertainment) the radical dramatist sees the art of

drama as embodying more responsibilities than mere entertainment. To him, the practicality and social responsibility of the theatre must always be stressed; hence, politics should be treated not as just any other subject in the arts, but should in fact be seen as a honey well for writers to draw from. Achebe observes that:

Any African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issue of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant. Just like the absurd man in an Igbo adage who leaves his burning house to pursue the rodents fleeing from the flames (177).

The radical dramatist is a reformer who is obsessed with the zeal to transform his society for the better. Politics is the most obvious subject available for him to demonstrate that the attack on inhumanity is a permanent aim of his arts. There is therefore an inevitable criticism of the Nigerian political system and leadership in the works of every average Nigerian dramatist of this contemporary milieu. The socio political crisis ravaging the Nigerian nation is according to the radical ideologue, a product of an evil civil rule of the capitalist bourgeoisie, a kind of regime in which the numerically insignificant matter more than the vast majority of the population and prevail over them by exploiting the masses and misappropriating the common wealth of the Nigerian

nation. The only way out of this crisis according to the radical perspective is for the masses to rise against and surmount the oppressors so as to establish a true democracy. This informs the creative representation of both sides (the oppressor and the oppressed) in such works which are inevitably class-based. The characters are designed to belong to either of the two classes: The bourgeoisie or the dominated proletariats. In Kole Omotoso's *Shadows in the Horizon*, for instance, the battle was between the masters and owners of landed properties and the impoverished labourers. In Bode Sowande's *The Night Before*, it was between the Managing Directors, Vice Chancellors on one hand and the subordinate staff and students activists on the other. In Femi Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers*, it was the unemployed youths against the non-challant government. The characters in these plays are not individualized but are representative, possessing a group personage, hence, people who belong to the same class manifest similar characteristics. The characters are usually polarized into the good and the bad ends along class lines. The dominating capitalists are often assumed to dwell at the bad end, where the characters are crude symbols of degradation. They are ostentations, corrupt, unproductive, exploitative and repressive. The

oppressed class on the other hand is assumed to dwell on the good end and their characters are stereotypes of regeneration. They are unassuming, honest, upright and productive, but ultimately aggressive and united in their struggle for liberation. The characters in radical plays are designed to show that all the proletariats are good while all capitalists are bad. Soyinka rightly posits that:

The radical dramatist is a redeeming artist with a clear vision, who recognizes that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing completely to the position of a post –mortem surgeon (78).

The modern day radical dramatist therefore brings out the big socio political issues of his time and lays them bare to the consciousness of the people. Brecht contemplating this position says that:

Any popular artist who wants to influence his society must turn away from the down-town stage to the neighbour-hood where he can meet people who share the same interest in changing the society. Once there, the artist should transform his image of social life in a graphic vivid form before the proletariats who are amenable to change for the purpose of conscientization (46).

Having been born and living amidst deprivation, oppression and victimization, only the masses themselves can be the true agents of change. This is the radicalist aesthetics of dramatic literature. To the

radical playwright, literature has to be committed. It has to be outspoken. Writers should not be contented with registering their protests and discontentment with the inequalities in the society, but should also strive to demythologize the various myths that hoodwink man in the capitalist society. Lending his unreserved support to the above argument, Achebe says that:

The writer has a sense of obligation, a strong attachment to a cause...when we speak of a writer's commitment; we mean his identification with a particular social aim and use of his writing to advance those aims. This of course implies a belief that literature can and should be used as a force for social transformation, and the writer should be responsible enough to do just that (182).

A responsible playwright cannot afford to close his eyes and ears against the problems of his immediate society while writing about other frivolous abstractions. In any class conscious society such as Nigeria, the radical dramatist belongs to the struggling class, whose disposition is highly influenced by the Marxist philosopher. According to Ngugi "the writer himself is a product of history of time and place... a member of the society, he belongs to a certain class and he is inevitably a participant in the class struggle..." (76).

The radical theatre has the responsibility of passing objective comments on issues of contemporary concerns. The playwright through the powers of his pen predicts the future of the society. Reinforcing this position, Domba Asomba, citing Pope John Paul VI's 1967 Pontifical address to practitioners of social communication and theatre in particular, in which he eulogizes and encourages them thus:

...when you writers and artists are able to reveal in human condition, however lowly or sad it may be, a spark of goodness, at that very instant, a glow of beauty prevails your whole work. We are not asking you that you play the part of moralists. We are only asking you to have confidence in your mysterious power of opening up the glorious regions of light that lie behind the mystery of man's life (319).

The radical dramatist plays the role of a watchman in his society. He is the people's secret police; a keen observer of the society. It is therefore his duty to dish out information and bring the social and political culprits to the people's court – in this instance the open theatre, where the hidden, the concealed and the guarded are freely exposed not only for the pleasure of the people but also for their awareness and necessary actions.

Literature (and drama in particular) is a science of humanity because it exposes, extols and exemplifies the deepest manifestation of man's character and actions. The radical dramatist reads the minds of the political gladiators for a predictive analysis of the ensuing political system. Drama is one of the greatest sources for understanding our contemporary politics. It can criticize constructively and without molestation. For the playwright to remain relevant in his society, he must have to portray and interpret the historical, social, religious and economic issues around his world. In the words of Yetunde Akorede:

The playwright's sense of responsibility and commitment will condition his presentation of the prevailing situations... Through his works, he betrays his own stance; especially in the position he takes on how the society should be organized (54).

In his *Hangmen Also Die*, for instance, Esiaba Irobi tells us that even the compulsory execution of robbers by hanging is not the answer to the menace of armed robbery. He rather attempts to draw the attention of the government to the fact that the remote causes, which include unemployment, social inequalities and financial hopelessness of the youths, should be tackled if the situation is to be arrested. This is also seen in Femi Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robber*, where he condemns



the bar-beach execution of robbers. Here, Osofisan points out the inefficiency of this primitive measure in combating the activities of men of the underworld. He equally thinks that the government should rather understudy the disparity in the social make up so as to discover the actual causes of this social problem. This way, a lasting solution would naturally emerge. The relevance of radical theatre is determined by the usefulness of the role it plays in the portrayal of the socio political realities of his time. The committed dramatist is the conscious of his people and it is his duty to make the people aware of their problems. Bode Osayin asserts that “a writer fights with his pen and his writing communicates his ideas – his temperament” (72). As a Marxist, the radical playwright is a social reformer. His emphasis is on the class relationship. He focuses on the predicaments of the ordinary masses, the underprivileged and the “have not’s” in a class-structured society such as Nigeria. He uses the theatre as a place for the examination and discussion of social and political ills of the society. The prevalent social problems such as mismanagement, unemployment, hunger, inequality among others are dramatized in his works. In her comparative analysis, Tracie Utoh observes that:

As the politicians dialogued and held conferences for democracy and as journalists fought assiduously for press freedom, so did the radical theatre movement in Nigeria follow in critiquing, Lampooning and condemning the oppressive and repressive hands of the rulers (218).

The Nigerian society is undoubtedly ripe for social change and this has greatly encouraged playwrights to channel their artistic impetus towards reorganizing the society. The radical playwright takes up the re-occurring themes in the body polity of the nation and gives its ample exposition in the world of drama. Utoh earlier cited notes “having been freed from the limitations of non-fiction, playwrights are not able to employ the tool of drama as a weapon to address the political social and economic problems” (220).

Achebe reminds us that “an elder does not sit back and watch the mother-goat deliver in tethers”. The dissatisfied dramatist therefore has to initiate the move to reverse the trends which he finds unhealthy to the society. This he does by creating plays which raise national questions and instigate debate about the state of the nation. The aim of the radical theatre is to initiate change through awareness creation. It is no coincidence that contemporary plays are created in line with the

happenings in the society, alongside its problems, so as to attain a lasting solution.

The theatre does not operate in a vacuum; it simply holds a mirror up to the society. Hence, Soyinka believes that “the relevance of the theatre in this milieu is measured by how accurately it mirrors the realities of its immediate society and points the way towards a higher ideals and more humane society” (102).

Drama has been known to initiate change. The impact of drama is direct and more immediate than any other form of artistic expression. The society cannot but heed the burning issues of social concerns as raised in contemporary plays. The radical plays have direct relationships with the dynamics of social change. Drama through the process of social change or conscientization involves mystification. It is a process whereby men are made to see their problems as a consequence of a particular social order. It seeks to instill in the mind of the masses the great need for change. Radical playwrights as Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze, and Bakare Ojo Rasaki among others have tried in their individual approaches to indict the powers that be on their high-handedness. To this crop of playwrights, there is no justification for the

abject poverty and physical degradation suffered by the masses of the population amidst the plenty and gross luxury enjoyed by the favoured few. They therefore tend to tender their protests through their plays which often serve to sensor the activities of these political overlords. Plays such as Tracie Utoh's *The Night of a Thousand Truth*, Ola Rotimi's *Holdings Talks*, Bode Sowande are *The Night Before*, Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Tess Onwueme's *The Desert Encroachers* are good examples of plays with social reformation as their backbone. Through their radical exposition of the ills of the society, they strive not for a state of utopia, but to achieve some social, political, cultural and moral purification which appear to have eluded the Nigerian nation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.1 LIMITATIONS TO RADICALISM IN THE NIGERIAN THEATRE PRACTICE**

Since its inception in the early 70's, the radical theatre movement has had to haggle with a number of challenges threatening its very existence. The theoretical framework that informed the emergence of the Nigerian radical theatre is such that visualizes the artistic projections of the dramatist from the perspective of his relevance to the struggle for a more democratically dynamic society. According to Draisen Magaden:

The approach adopted by the radical theatre movement of this era is such that identifies a direct relationship between the theatre and social struggle, and relates the artistic concept of radicalism to the realization of an egalitarian society devoid of acrimonious class struggle(2).

The radical theatre preaches revolution and social reformation, but it has achieved little or nothing practical in its quest for a transformed society.

Although Dauda Musa and Victor Anyagu hold that:

The radical theatre has contributed to the development of radical thoughts in the literary and academic lives of Nigerians. The hitherto marginalized ethnic minorities are now conscious of their rights and are therefore agitating for recognition (due to the influence of the theatre) (86).

Yet, the radical theatre movement has not been able to achieve a wholesome success as expected. This is due to some challenges confronting its practice in Nigeria.

Most Nigerian dramatists with the radical mien find it difficult to draw a line of divergence and (or) convergence between their constituencies and their audience. Ideally, the constituency of the radical ideologue should be the oppressed masses, the voiceless, labourers, the studentry, the peasants, craftsmen, the unemployed graduates, the destitute and other such groups whose socio economic positions are pitiable- a situation which informs the major thematic focus of the radical theatre. By way of definition also, his audience are those who watch his productions. It would be more productive if the audience and the constituency of the radical dramatist are one and the same.

Unfortunately in the Nigerian situation, the audience happens to be the bourgeois theatre patrons, the academic theatre goers and the paying audience who can afford the cost. The audience and the constituency of the radical dramatist which ought to be one and the same now turn out being two radically different groups in terms of their ideologies and socio economic status.

Language medium is one factor that poses a great barrier to the success of the radical theatre movement in Nigeria. Plays are written and presented mostly in English and other foreign languages. Unfortunately, the percentage population of Nigerians who are literate enough in those languages and who can access theatre productions is only about 30% (UNESCO 2007).

Again, play reading and theatre going “are habits which still have a great room for improvement among Nigerians” (Gbemisola Adeoti: 60). Live stage orientation, to the average Nigerian, is still very poor because of the advent of the electronic media. This is why Andre Robson holds that “it has been observed that films, television and home video entertainment cultures whose primary motivations are purely commercial rather than political, social or economical, now enjoy much more performances and drama texts” (6).

The radical theatre as practiced in Nigeria is elitist in structure and form. Most of the dramatists themselves are bourgeois and as such, are mere theorists as they are largely university teachers who are very much rooted within the four walls of the university, and who just write without the corresponding follow-ups. They write, publish and even produce

their plays in English and other foreign languages. Therefore, even when their works bear the desired revolutionary stings, their messages are lost in transit since they never get to the actual target audience who should put them into practice.

Adeoti puts it clearer when he opines that “such encoded messages in this genre are made inaccessible to majority of Nigerians...” (66).

Interestingly too, the scripting and production of radical plays which are supposed to be geared towards societal reform is now transformed into money-making venture. The radical dramatist unconsciously takes his arts away from the reach of the ordinary people (who are his ideal audience) because of his hyper-commercial motives. His plays are published to be sold, and are sold to have a huge turn-over from the box office. These commercial undertones further remove the ordinary people from accessing such plays because they cannot afford the gate fees. Most often, the so-called radical plays are staged in big theatres and cultural centres which are owned by the government; the same government whose frivolous activities, the dramatist is set to attack.



One then wonders how radical the dramatist can be on issues affecting his immediate 'boss'. The implication is that the dramatist is left with no choice than to 'censor' his works before presentation. Imagine where Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* (2000) is staged in the National Assembly Complex in a bid to 'entertain' the legislators during a plenary session or where Wole Soyinka's *King Babbu* (1996) is taken to the Eagle Square to serve as an 'interlude' during the one-million youth rally of the Abacha regime in 1998 in his quest to perpetrate his rulership by returning to power as a civilian. The producers of such plays may not live to tell their stories. It will readily be termed a 'security threat'.

The vocal stance of the radical dramatist has turned him into 'endangered specie'. He is always under the watchful eyes of the government of the day whose oxen are constantly gored by the revolutionary impetus of the radical ideologue. This has brought about the regular altercation between the government and the dramatists most of who prefer to attack from their places of exile. The government has constantly intimidated the dramatist to submission.

This is why most playwrights are forced to either conform to the trend set by the government of the day or escape and seek safety outside the shores of the country, or worse still stand the risk of losing their lives. Narrating his own experience, Esiaba Irobi puts it thus:

It is safer out here. Soyinka stayed and tried to be pragmatic (in his quest for a better society), what happened to him? His house was vandalized ... he had to cross the borders ON FOOT by night to escape into the West. He would have been dead by now... (14).

Plays are taken to the big cities for staging, where the poverty – stricken masses of the hinterlands are not able to travel to. Even when they manage to get into the city theatres, the production techniques which are often westernized also create a yawning gulf between the message of the play and its ‘crude audience’. For instance, if for any reason, Ola Rotimi’s *If ... a tragedy of the ruled* (1983) is staged in the Aso Rock Villa, the context of the play is most likely to be alien to the ‘Abuja people’ who are far removed from the suffering of the people as portrayed in the play. The same is likely to happen if Ojo Rasaki’s *Once Upon A Tower* (2001) is taken to a locality where the people are illiterates. The jaw-breaking grammatical gymnastics between the characters as well as the context of the play can only throw such illiterate

audience off the balance. Furthermore in the midst of the obvious lack confronting the Nigerian masses, it may be considered inappropriate to present them with the theatre, instead of providing them with the basic necessities of life-good food, water and shelter. This why Femi Osofisan argues that:

The relevance of a dramatist as a cultural specialist and producer to the economic and political life of our problem-besieged nation is void... what has a masque got to do with SAP except perhaps to temporarily take our minds off our sufferings and then returns us abjectly to it afterwards (27).

Nigeria is as ethnically heterogeneous as it is religiously fanatic. The Nigerian situation is such that our individual religious beliefs have come to be part of our culture and our everyday existence. Hence the different religious groups in the country have long lost the original substances (faith) sustaining their individual beliefs. The following dialogue between two of the pioneer pilots of the nation's affairs (Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Sir Ahmadu Bello) as quoted in John Paden, puts it clearer thus:

Zik: Let us forget our differences...

Bello: No. Let us understand our differences instead. I am a Muslim and a Northerner you are a Christian and an Easterner. Only by understanding our differences can we build unity in our country (6).

Perhaps, Sir Ahmadu Bello was right because one cannot take away the role of the religious sector in the existence of our nationhood.

Williams Arthur Lewis rightly posits that “the idea that one can make different people into one nation by suppressing the tribal or regional or other affiliations which the people themselves attach the highest political significance is simply non-plausible” (45).

On the part of the theatre itself, it sometimes grows too critical of the society that it eventually fuels the fire of discord without knowing. The recent campaign by the Federal Ministry of Information on the rebranding Nigeria project could hit the rocks due to the activities of the hyper- critical radical theatre practitioners. The Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, who is widely acclaimed as the voice of vision, has on regular basis called for sanctions against Nigeria – his immediate society. The recommendations he made in his *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Play of the Giants* are a clear indication that he would rather have the heads of the nation's political pilots roll, instead of applying a more diplomatic approach to change them for the better. This is capable of fueling a negative image of the country in the outside world. One could then say that Soyinka in this respect is a voice of doom that is not

patriotic enough to his fatherland. Ahmed Yerima puts it better when he said that “ironically, Soyinka is also autocratic because in his view, the Nigerian society has failed, the leadership has failed, the youths have failed, and everyone has failed! So who is worthy under Soyinka’s scrutiny” (18).

At this point, the radical playwright who is too vocal and too critical of the society has also failed because his numerous critical comments can only create tension and disharmony in an already polarized society. Most of the venomous dramatists of this age are very ethnocentric in their treatment of characters in their plays. It is very common to find a Yoruba playwright representing the Hausa man as a simpleton and the Igbo man as an unrepentant rogue, just as the sentimental Igbo writer would present the Yoruba man as an empty vessel and the Calabar as born-to-serve in his plays. All these are derogatory. It spells hatred among the different ethnic groups in the country.

Security is yet another issue of great concern militating against the theatre and the quest for an improved society. Even in the Western countries, security has always been an issue affecting theatre going. It

was once said that a Danish president was shut on the leg as he was coming out of a theatre after watching a live performance. Thus, it is not enough to cultivate a theatre culture amongst Nigerian's without adequate security scheme to go with it. If a president can be shut in a country as developed and as security conscious as Denmark, then one can only imagine how dangerous it can be in Nigeria where the security situation is in shambles. This perhaps, is why Nigerians are so apathetic in going to the theatre.

Finally, the economic situation in Nigeria is so pathetic that it does not encourage people to embrace the arts of playwrighting and drama production. The cost of publishing or producing a play is overtly high that a lot of creative minds are rendered inert. No wonder there are hardly new titles from budding dramatists other than the usual Soyinkas ,the Osofisans, the Clarks, the Obi Egbunas, the Henshaws, the Rotimis, the Ukalas, the Yerimas, the Rasakis, the Ukas, the Nzewis and their contemporaries.

### **3.2 THE PROSPECTS OF THE NIGERIAN THEATRE IN SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION**

In the midst of the prevailing atmosphere of bitterness and ranchor, poverty and disease, illiteracy, lawlessness, political bigotry, sectarian violence, unemployment, youth's restiveness, criminal tendencies and the likes ravaging the Nigerian nation, the theatre is one avenue of mending the broken walls of national unity. In its entertainment posture the theatre provides the much-needed emotional purgation to its audience. In the words of Sytan Brightamton "the theatre is one venue where the down-trodden are comforted, even if it has to be on temporary basis" (1).

Theatrical activities evoke laughter and amusement it relegates the worries of the spectators to the background while giving them some soothing relief. Away from its entertainment roles, the theatre also provides an enabling environment for the mobilization of human potentials towards social, economic and political advancement of the nation. The theatre plays a lead role in the promotion of the democratic tenets in a growing democracy such as Nigeria. This according to Christopher Akachukwu is because "it facilitates effective flow of

accurate and adequate information across the social strata. Such unimpaired exchange of information increases the chances of success of democracy” (54).

The practical significance of the theatre in enhancing an enduring democratic culture has secured a considerable reference in many scholarly studies on the democratization of Nigeria. In his opinion, Ingrid Bjorkman attributes this to the fact that:

The theatre sharpens the discriminatory capacities of man and this brought to bear on the processes of democratic participation and choice it empowers the citizens to understand the conclusion of his being, question it and seek to exchange it when the need be (38).

The theatre is therefore a potential check against tyranny, social ills and underdevelopment. This it does in a manner that promotes objective appreciation of genuine national political interests especially in a plural, multi ethnic and multi cultural nation such as Nigeria. The arts of the theatre is well disposed to target both the literates and the illiterates alike. This, as Olamide Johnson puts it, is because “drama communicates orally, aurally and visually. If the audience does not understand the language due to illiteracy, they can at least appreciate its visual and aural appeals” (13).



The focus, locus and essence of drama is man and his universe. The theatre is an apt forum through which ideas can be exchanged and social awareness disseminated. It can stimulate national discourse on crucial political issues which may not find expedient expression through the conventional political fora. Because it is a social art that thrives on collaboration, interest harmonization and collective participation between the playwright, actor and the spectator, drama itself is a projector of democratic change. The theatre employs the use of satire to lampoon detestable governance, and as Tunde Awosanmi puts it:

Curse, poison and damnation are the weapons of the arts of satire. The first is the saliva on the satirist; the second is the arrow in his quiver while the third is his paradigm of the essence of dualism. The satirist is an inverted demon, puncturing the balloon of pomposity – the over bloated intestine of the predating elephants... (1).

In Wole Soyinka's *From Zia with Love* (1992) for instance, the Nobel Laureate confronts the audience with the caricature of a personalist military dictatorship, inviting the people to detect the familiar idea of attaining political positions not by consensus but by force. The satire in the play helps the people to recover their democratic wills.

Similarly, Osofisan's *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993) also reflects the democratic aspirations of Nigerians through the anti-illusionistic appeals of the Brechtian epic theatre and the participatory aesthetics of indigenous art forms-songs, dance, music and story telling. The theatre is very useful in breaking the strongholds of the political overlords. It is capable of demystifying the totalitarian ideologies of the neo-scrambles for geopolitical and territorial aggrandizement which constitute a major threat to our nationhood. The theatre can be used positively to fashion a new social and political ideology to dislodge and replace those of partisanship and ethnic nationalism. It is Olu Obafemi's opinion that:

As a public communal and thus a democratic art is aesthetically most suited to mediate in the arts of redressing, reshaping and reconstructing the democratic environment of our nascent democratizing state (7).

Drama is equally capable of stirring and sustaining interest in the learning process among children in schools, colleges and other levels of informal education. Role playing as an instruction method in the learning process enhances knowledge acquisition. Hence, when injected into the teaching of content areas of different subjects including reading and

writing the arts of the theatre can improve learners' understanding of the concerned subjects and also kindle their interests in the art of drama.

With a considerable improved rate of literacy and enhanced interest in the theatre, democratic values and ideas expressed through drama will be made available to a broader spectrum of the populace. The consequent awareness will definitely contribute to the emergence and development of a genuinely democratic Nigeria. In its "popular" form, the theatre is able to reach the unreachable – the dwellers of the rural areas. The popular theatre tradition takes the theatre to the original owners of political power and educates them to participate in their own affairs, urging them to challenge the status quo. The process of taking the theatre to the grassroots will go a long way in bridging the wide gulf between the audience and the constituency of the radical dramatist. The popular theatre is the theatre of conscientization and renewed consciousness that awakens the rural folks to understand their societal configurations as well as build faith in them as vectors of change. The awareness campaign championed by the theatre can lead the Nigerian masses into asking themselves why the Poverty Alleviation Programme of the Federal Government is only "alleviating the poverty" on the

Television screens,, the radios and the pages of the newspapers, why the nation's schools and colleges are not big enough to accommodate the children of those who belong to the political class, why Nigerian graduates are not getting jobs, why Nigerian banks can no longer contain the savings of our politicians, why the queues in our filling stations will never end and why the global economic melt –down is only ‘melting down’ in the pockets of the ordinary Nigerians while it is “melting up” in those of the politicians. The theatre is sometimes as diplomatic as it can be rebellious in addressing issues of national concern. A look at a play such as Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi* (1987) reveals the rebellious nature of the theatre in the struggle against unacceptable standards. Here, Esiaba recommends outright rebellion as the only remedy there is to tyranny and exploitative rulership. Hence, he writes:

... this is our moment, when we must gather our strength and energies into the demands of a revolution... this is the moment of revolt, of rebellion. We must revolt against those disembodied godheads (politicians) those spotted scavengers of *Sahel Savannah* ... (28).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 4.1 SUMMARY/ CONCLUSION

In summary, this work has attempted to explore the advent of the radical theatre movement in Nigeria in the light of the problems it has encountered over time and the promises it holds as a functional tool for socio political transformation. The radical theatre in Nigeria has had to haggle with quite a myriad of limiting factors, including lack of theatre orientation, poverty, illiteracy, ethnic and religious fanaticism as well as excessive government influence. However, despite all these limitations, the Theatre has undoubtedly proved to be a dynamic art form whose developmental trend is dependent upon the dictates of the society.

The society sets certain standards by which the individuals expected to abide, but when such standards are not acceptable, there is need for a resistant measure. The theatre is therefore duty bound to react to the situation at such times of need. The Theatre has an enviable potential for creating awareness amongst the people by inculcating in them the spirit of responsibility of nationalism, of patriotism and of oneness. It exposes the individual to self examination. The individual is a constituent part of

the larger society. A change in the attitude of the individual will invariably result in a change in the overall attitude of the larger society. Here the relevance of the radical. Theatre in bringing about this much needed change cannot be over-emphasized. No wonder Domba Asomba opines that “the theatre has the persuasive power to evoke, to rejuvenate, reconstruct and redirect the mind for positive thinking” (318).

A trip down the history lane shows that the theatre has been successfully employed as a tool for social transformation both in Nigeria and in the diaspora. Radical dramatists such as Ngugi Wa Thiong’O of Kenya, Athol Fugard of South Africa, Kweku Wattenberg of Ghana, Robert Crouze of Zimbabwe, Esiaba Irobi of Nigeria amongst very many others have written and produced plays with biting criticisms on the questionable values of their various societies. Writing on the potency of the theatre in bringing about change Diana Delvin observed that “at various times in history, groups with particular messages to teach, sermons to preach.... have used the theatre as an immediate, effective and entertaining medium of communication ...” (29).

The theatre imitates for the sake of initiating change. Arts cannot be divorced from politics, as both are about life. Theatrical performances

entertain. They develop and keep the minds of the people at rest. Drama does not only educate, it also enlightens, informs and entertains.

The theatre creates an enabling environment for mutual understanding. However, the theatre is not the change in itself but serves as a catalyst for achieving the desired change. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O supports this assertion when he said that "the theatre is not the revolution, but a rehearsal for the actual revolution" (64).

The society creates the materials for its arts and arts are for the service of man. For the arts of the theatre to succeed, the dramatist has the responsibility of making his works relevant in the society and its concerns. This is what the radical theatre movement in Nigeria strive to achieve through a marriage of the theatre aesthetics and the genre of popular and community theatre, which takes the theatre to the people Alfonso Gumucio argues that:

The only strategy possible for reaching the poorest of the poor and the most isolated communities is interpersonal communication activities and one communication activity that could contribute to social mobilization efforts at the grassroots level is the popular theatre (97).

The radical dramatist therefore uses this platform to address the multi-dimensional problems threatening the very existence of the Nigerian nation. The radical theatre movement leads the present crusade for national rebirth. The Theatre may not be the only (or) the most important factor in the conduct of a successful cultural diplomacy in Nigeria, but it is an important contributor and can do a lot of positive things to enhance and improve the cultural dialogue between Nigeria and other countries. Segun Oyeleke puts it better when he said that:

The theatre cannot provide a stable policy by fiat, cannot serve as alternative to good governance, cannot eradicate war... cannot catapult Nigeria to the league of developed nations overnight ... but can at least reduce ignorance among the people, minimize wars and can assist in getting rid of prejudices of all types (112).

It is the belief of the radical Marxist that man should not resign to fate and accept oppression as his lot, but that he should realize that the ability to liberate himself from the strong grips of his oppressor rests on him. The radical dramatist rejects the unacceptable standards. Here, rejection goes beyond open rebellion. It does not necessarily demand much of the physical strength, but the will power to say 'No'. Even the physically weak, the poor and the helpless have his own way of



opposing unacceptable authorities. This according to Stanford Lyman “could be by way of holding the society to ransom by a single word ‘No’. The weak and poor could dare the society operating in a bad order, no matter how weak; he would have registered his protest” (31).

Theatre practice is not an undertaking that brings material benefits alone. Drama for instance, does not only appeal to our senses of humour but also serves to organize, incite and influence the audience. The dramatist is therefore not only a teacher of morality, but also a political adviser.

Drama unlike most other art forms is not just arts for arts sake. Bertolt Brecht therefore advised that “Drama should be an affair for the philosopher, not for all philosophers though, but for such philosophers who wish not only to explain the world but also to change it” (46).

#### **4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROJECTIONS**

In order to succeed in this enormous task of transforming the society, the Nigerian radical dramatist needs to understand and appreciate the points of convergence and divergence between Nigerian indigenous cultural values and those of the colonial masters. This will obviously help achieve an enduring international relation and a

functional interdependence between Nigeria and the western World. Cultural imbibitions and eclecticism should be done objectively, such that the natives can only import certain aspects of the Western culture that will improve the indigenous ones, instead of perceiving the former as superior over the later.

Theatre and drama have been integral parts of the Nigerian indigenous cultures. Theatre practitioners should therefore strive to project all the elements of this art form in line with its indigenous values.

The dramatist should employ the people's familiar cultures and traditions in their works. The use of the people's own arena theatre, market places, village squares etc. in theatrical performances will not be out of place. Dramatic performances should draw heavily from the people's myths, legendary stories, histories of the people's collective fight against colonialism, neocolonialism and the struggle to enthrone a lasting democracy.

There is also an urgent need for a review of the language medium used in dramatic performances given the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of Nigeria, and the fact that not very many of the citizens are literate in the English language (which has come to be the lingua franca).

Domba Asomba contends that “it would be inappropriate to use the English language or any other foreign one for that matter in addressing the peculiar societal ills entrenched in the socio cultural propensities of the Nigerian society” (323).

The messages of theatrical performances are better perceived when presented in the local dialects. This gives the playwright the extra duty of translating his scripts into as many local dialects as possible for maximum impacts. Better still, plays could be produced in pidgin English which is a more generalized language medium understood by a wider range of the people in our culturally heterogeneous country. The usefulness of any work of arts lies on its ability to communicate. When the artist unconsciously creates a lacuna between his idea and his audience by the use of alien language, the message in his work would be lost in transit. Musa and Anyagu therefore suggests that:

If plays like *Hopes of the Living Dead*, *If ....A tragedy of the Ruled*, *Morontondum* etc. are translated into different Nigerian languages with the people’s own myths and legends the result will be tremendous and will therefore satisfy the author’s need to have their works received in the best way intended, creating the required impact on the people (92).

Nigerian Theatre practitioners should begin to appreciate their roles as interventionists in a corruption-battered society. As such, they must strive to maximize the potentials of the theatre in repositioning the nation. There should be a radical shift from ethnic to national identity which is an antidote for national unity. In his works, the playwright must discourage unequivocally, the activities of some ethnic organizations such as the Odua People's Congress (OPC), The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), The Arewa People's Congress (APC), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) etc, all of which try to lay claims to one form of marginalization or the other, as this could spring up disunity among the people.

Again, the dramatist does not operate in a vacuum. His works are meant for people's consumption. Unfortunately, theatre orientation among Nigerians is still very pathetic. There is an urgent need for the governments to intervene by providing the dramatist with the financial muscle needed to take the theatre to the poverty stricken inhabitants of the hinterlands.

Policy makers in the education sector should consider making drama an integral part of the school curriculum. According to Adeoti “the emphasis should be on the perception of drama as a social praxis and a mode of discourse that should stimulate critical thinking and problem solving attitude among the teachers and learners alike” (61).

Drama should be presented to students not as a spiritless mechanical enterprise, but as a vivacious communal activity which promotes cooperation and touches all issues affecting man and his society.

As a partner in the quest for a progressive society, the playwright should identify fully with other human rights activists to release the masses from the clutches of bad governance. The era of political intimidation is over. The up-coming playwright should borrow a leaf from the radical writers in handling certain political issues aimed at achieving a progressive and politically stable society. The dramatist must understand that the fight for an oppression free society is a noble cause. They should therefore entertain no fears in baring their minds and bringing the political malpractices onto the stage. To achieve this, the dramatist should see the arts of drama from the realist’s view point as a truthful depiction of life. The playwrights should do away with those

idealized pictures of life as that will amount to the elevation of falsehood over truth. The time is overdue for the dramatist to put up a fearless exposition of the corruption- battered Nigerian political system, tear off the masks from the faces of the corrupt political gladiators for the masses to see the real persons behind them.

In doing this however, the artist must strive to be as objective and democratic as possible. Excessive destructive criticism is not very healthy for the arts, and as Asomba puts it, “it is clear that autocratic and magisterial ideas and approaches tend to work against the set goals” (322).

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