

ONE TREE A FOREST:

STUDIES IN NIGERIAN THEATRE POETICS,
TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL AESTHETICS

A Book in Honour of Sunday Enessi Ododo (SEO)

Edited by
Osakue S. Omoera
'Bode Ojoniyi
Victor O. Ihidero



‘One Tree A Forest: Studies in Nigerian Theatre Poetics, Technology and Cultural Aesthetics’

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First published in 2023 by

National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos, Nigeria

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Cover Design & Formatting by Tokunbo Esho

ISBN: (Paperback) - 978-978-795-341-9

ISBN: (Hardcover) - 978-978-795-342-6

Printed by Etchwise Consulting Ltd.

E-mail: info@etchwiseonline.com

Tel: +234 803 805 9815, +1 647 450 3353

10987654321

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CHAPTER EIGHT

SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITIES IN THE STAGE PERFORMANCE OF SUNDAY ODODO'S TO RETURN FROM THE VOID



Oluwatosin John IBITOYE

Department of Performing Arts,

Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria

Email: oluwatosin.ibitoye@kwasu.edu.ng

Abstract

Theatre in its protean nature mirrors the society through its multifarious manifestations and performances. Over time, artists have used the performative arts to document, replicate, and criticise issues in the society. Musical performances are one of such mediums in the hands of creative artists used in showing the society to the society while equally entertaining them. This study reflects on socio-political realities in the Nigerian society as presented in Sunnie Ododo's musical drama, *To Return from the Void*. The study adopts the qualitative deductive method and participant observation as instruments for collecting data. References and inferences were drawn from the libretto and performance directed by this author in 2014 at the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The performance in its musicality reveals socio-political cum economic issues such as power as tool for mass oppression, exploitation, greed, and corruption in the multi-ethnic nation, Nigeria; fictionally represented as the 'Denterean' country in the libretto. The aforementioned factors have been the bane for the development of the country over time. They are also the bases for the prevalence of poverty, ethno-religious crises and other issues like banditry as evident in the country today. Ododo proposes systemic overhaul of the nation through conscious adoption of 'common sense' to bring the country back from social, political and economic void. This study concludes that opera performances and other theatrical

performances are effective tools for communicating and evoking the need for socio-political change in any society.

Keywords: SEO, Theatre, *To Return from the Void*, Libretto, Socio-political realities.

Introduction

Over the years, theatre as a professional and social art has contributed immensely to the growth and the development of the society within which it is made. Nasiru (2013, p. 1) emphasises the focus of theatre with the claim that “it is the desire of every discipline or profession to be relevant to its society and contribute to its growth and development, and theatre is not an exception to this lofty concern”. Hence, any discipline, practice, profession, or vocation that is not socially conscious is simply irrelevant to its society. But, theatre in itself is “a very important aspect of the life of any society” (Nasiru, 2013, p. 1). Theatre transcends mere societal entertainment form to address issues of the human life. This is evident in the emergence of popular forms such as 'Theatre for Development,' 'Invisible theatre' and other popular community theatre forms. It naturally follows, therefore, that theatre and performing arts functions as agents of societal change.

Obafemi (2003, p. ix) avers that theatre has proven to be very instrumental across many 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”. And, still on the importance of theatre, in retrospect, Nasiru (2013, p. 3) recalls that: 'When Wole Soyinka was invited to write and stage a play as part of Nigeria's independence celebrations in 1960, the gesture was an acknowledgement of the fact that drama and literature in general had an important role to play in the life of the emerging nation.' A clear deduction from the foregoing is simply that theatre is a voice and social force to be reckoned with in any progressive society. It is for this reason that theatre, performing, creative and literary artists have always served as communal social crusaders overtime towards the building of a just, fair and effective society, a society where the people are neither exploited nor marginalised. It is against this background that, this study examines and reflects Ododo's call for social and political positive change in Nigeria in *To Return from the Void*.

The Arts, Social Consciousness and the quest for Social Justice

Theatre, performing, creative, literary and visual artists, across all genres, have always approached their commitment to the society through various means. Nasiru (2013) in his inaugural lecture posits that social consciousness in the arts can be through confrontational, expository or radical (revolutionary) approach. Artists have used their arts via these approaches to publicly ridicule, confront and criticise the ills, failings and frailties of their societies. The obnoxious culture of exploitation, oppression and impoverishment of the society by the rich ruling and wealthy political class should be “reversed via a radical approach aimed at unseating the oppressive wealthy class so as to enthrone equality and justice in the social realm” (Ebekue, 2018, p. 74). Nasiru (2013, p. 4) explains further that the concerns of the artist for his society:

Takes the form of a confrontation with those things perceived to be threatening to the well-being of the society; corruption, an unjust social and political order, selfishness and greed on the part of leaders, resulting in inordinate and undeserved wealth by a few on one hand, and the impoverishment of the majority of the people on the other.

The approaches are a conscious effort to mirror ourselves to ourselves. Ebekue (2018, p. 75) submits that the relevance of drama as a social art “stems from the imitation and the mimicry of the society around it...through the imitation and dramatization of the world around it, drama raises questions and teaches lessons pertinent for the survival of humanity”. Dramatists over time have tried to put the society on the path of true order through their creative consciousness. This is perhaps the reason Okeke sees the dramatist as “the gadfly of his society” (2020, p. 112). And, as Nasiru (2013, p. 8) rightly asserts; “the playwrights’ goal is to conscientize the overwhelming majority of the people to the fundamental causes of their sorry plight”. Ogude (1991, p. 1) observes that “what constitutes the mainstream of African writing to date derives ultimately from definite historical event or social conditions”. This is because the playwright bears a mark of ideological commitment, patriotism, and social responsibility towards his nation. Thus, “the text of his play will invariably reflect the socio-political situation under which he writes; his themes and subject matters naturally emerge from topical issues within his domain” (Gbileka, 1997, p. 3).

Several African dramatists and writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Athol Fugard, Hubert Ogunde, J.P. Clark, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Bode Sowande, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Ola Rotimi, Ahmed Yerima, Esiaba Irobi and Sunnie Ododo, who is the crux of this study, have written in the interest of the masses; to advocate for the common man, the downtrodden and the

voiceless in the society. Ben Binebai (2016, p. 104) holds that “Sunnie Ododo's dramaturgy reflects national consciousness in a multi-cultural Nigeria, and affirms him as a nationalistic playwright”. This assertion is based on the fact that “his plays harness Nigerian ethnic diversities that assist national development in light of the crucial need for stability and equity in Nigeria” (Binebai, 2016, p. 104). Similarly, Osofisan noted that his commitment is to speak on behalf of the downtrodden of the society. I try to speak on behalf of those whom I consider marginalised, those who are oppressed through no fault of theirs, and who are the victims of our parasitic ruling class...My target is the mind and the conscience of my audience; and the aim is to disturb, and to provoke questioning (Osakwe, 2018, p. 1).

Osakwe claims that the commitment of Osofisan's theatre is “to uproot the tree that yields the bitter fruit of social inequality, injustice, tyranny, intimidation, oppression, ignorance, illiteracy, poverty and degradation”. Owonibi (2014, p. 290) submits that “literature as a reflection or refraction of society confers on the creative writer the roles of a chronicler, a social critic, and visioner”. Earlier on, Achebe (1988, p. 17) has asserted that “Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print gives us a second handle on reality”. On their part, Affiah and Elekwachi (2018, p. 11) see literature as “a reflection of life; it is a mirror, held up by the literary artist for society to see its reflection; for society to see itself in”. The argument is that: for years, social consciousness resonates in the works of artists in Nigeria. This is because:

The preponderance of social injustice in Nigeria and Africa has remained a topical issue for playwrights. Various forms and shades of social injustice are prevalent, including but not limited to: appropriating and exploiting natural resources by the privileged, misappropriation of public funds, denial of quality education, denial of basic health care and the non-availability of basic amenities like water and power, and sundry others. (Affiah & Elekwachi, 2018, p. 11)

In like manner, the African continent offers a huge tapestry of socially conscious musicians who have used their musical acts as a rallying point for the masses. Arguably, Africa's most controversial musician, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, and the others like Miriam Makeba, Bob Marley, Bisade Ologunde (Lagbaja), Segun Akinlolu, Folarin Falana are known for their revolutionary songs towards a classless society. Ebekue (2018, p. 76) notes that “the political atmosphere in Nigeria has motivated many artistes. Since independence, the political arena in Nigeria has been rocky and dirty. The gap between the rich and the poor keeps widening due to bad and corrupt political leadership”. Nigerian economy has

dwindled drastically and the survival of the feeble, downtrodden and voiceless seems like an illusion. Amiriheobu, George & Eleberi (2020, p. 51) lament that “Nigerian state, once known as the largest economy on the African continent is today besieged with suffering, pain, death, and underdevelopment”. In the light of such pathetic situations as these, artists have the mandate of social commitment and responsibility to come to the rescue of the nation to salvage the situations through their arts.

Opera as a Music Genre

Opera is simply a drama set to music or a music drama. That is, a form of drama in which characters' lines and dialogue are delivered through songs and musical accompaniment. Glennon (1980, p. 124) opines that “opera means a drama, whether serious or comic, set to music, with acting and scenery, and sung throughout by soloists and chorus, supported by orchestra”. Estrella (2019, p. 1) emphasises that an opera is generally referred to as, “a stage presentation or work that combines music, costumes, and scenery to relay a story. Most operas are sung, with no spoken lines”. Kennedy (1980) cited in Oyesoro (2000) claims that an opera is “a drama set to music, to be sung by singers usually in costumes”.

The word 'opera' originated from the Latin word 'opus' which literally means work. Thus, an opera simply means combination of different works. The word 'opera' is a shortened word for 'opera in musica' meaning 'work in music', 'a musical work'. In 1573, a group of musicians and intellectuals came together to discuss various subjects, especially the desire to revive Greek drama. This group of individuals is known as the Florentine Camerata. They wanted lines to be sung instead of simply being spoken. Towards this end, they developed recitative, a type of sung speech featuring the solo voice and an unadorned vocal line expressive of the text. From this came the opera which existed in Italy around 1600. At first, the opera was only for the upper class or aristocrats, but soon even the general public patronised it. Plays that were sung grew in popularity and spread from Italy to all areas of Europe and eventually the world.

Evolution and Development of Opera Performances in Nigeria

Possibly, the very first set of operatic productions evolved in the Nigerian theatre performance culture in the mid-thirties when a new kind of drama, called 'Native Air Opera' became popular, due largely to the efforts of church movement; but more specifically, due largely to the effort of A.K. Ajisafe who started to relate church hymns to 'Native Airs' at the United African Methodist

Church (Ogunbiyi, 1981, p.22). This was the situation when Hubert Ogunde arrived in 1944, when he produced his first opera: *The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God*, produced for a Lagos based Cherubim and Seraphim sect to aid the church building fund (Clark, 1981, p.291). The performances were built on biblical themes. Ogunde thus started writing more operas, however, “freeing the so called 'Native Air Operas' from the strict confines of the church and monotonous Church rhythms, Ogunde imbued the “opera with a sprinkling of Yoruba music and dances'(Ogunbiyi, 1981.p.22).

By doing so, Ogunde was different from his contemporaries in the church setting then and this sets the stage for his turning professional. Clark (1981, p. 295) notes that “by this act, Ogunde began the rise of modern professional theatre in Nigeria, a movement in which he remains the supreme artist and the father-figure”. Notably, in the evolution and development of opera in Nigeria, three figures have remained constant in history. These are Hubert Ogunde (The father figure), Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola. Obafemi (2001.p. 13) emphasises that: the Yoruba operatic theatre ranges widely between the serious historical-mythological dramas of the late Duro Ladipo, through Hubert Ogunde's political satires and morality plays, the late Kola Ogunmola's comic features, and the comedy theatre of Moses Olaiya (Alias Baba Sala) and his Alawada group. However, their works bear the imprints of elements of traditional culture and the colonial experience through Western education and Christian religion. Thus, there was a synthesis of colonial culture and the traditional culture in their dramatic works.

In Ogunde's theatre, Obafemi (2001, p.14) avers that “culture conflict supplies the themes of some of his operas as in *God and Africa*”. At first, his operas were accompanied solely by native musical instruments, without dialogue. Later, he combines foreign instruments and includes dialogue. Ogunde mixes Jazz, African Rhumba and the Yoruba gangan (talking drum) in the same dramatic experience. Notably, the Yoruba operas are strikingly arranged in relation to that of the earlier Alarinjo from which they build their performances with *ijuba* as opening or entrance song. Beier (1981, p. 322) submits that music in Ogunmola's operas were derived from highlife with a certain influence of Church hymns. The Yoruba folk opera as noted by Obafemi (2001, p.16) “is rarely in a scripted form. They dwell more on improvisation and the enthusiastic audience are actively involved in the performance processes”. In Beier's account of Kola Ogunmola's operas, he recounts that no two performances were ever alike as his performances varied because he left much to improvisation on stage. Beier (1981, p. 326) states that “he never wrote down his

plays in any detail until he was asked by others to do so; and even then, he never wrote down a very full version". Obafemi (2001, p. 20) notes further that "Yoruba opera strives to project community sense and spirit, the folk-will, show the people's search for physical and psychological fulfillment."

Ogunde dominated the Yoruba theatrical scene in the forties, fifties and sixties. After *Garden of Eden* and *Throne of God*, his operas amidst others include: *Black Forest* (1945), *Strike and Hunger* (1946), *Towards Liberty* (1947), *Bread and Bullet* (1950), *Worse than Crime* (1956) and the most popular for its uncanny prophecy, and sensitivity of all his plays is *Yoruba Ronu* (1964). His theatre was deeply committed to the nationalist's cause'. Duro Ladipo's theatre which dates from the early sixties began his opera performances with *Oba Moro*. Ogunbiyi (1981, p. 336) writes that "on March 17, 1962, the centre (the Mbari Mbayo club) of Duro Ladipo opened with a performance of his first musical drama, *Oba Moro*..." From that point, he went on to compose some twenty full length plays, which is, not counting some fifty or more other sketches which he composed for Nigerian television.

Duro Ladipo's opera performances do not follow the conventional ornament of the opening glee in the Alarinjo which Ogunde also employed. According to Obafemi (2001, p. 15) "Ladipo builds his opening glee into the body of his plays and as an integral part of the play not a separate entity". Perhaps his reduced popularity among Yoruba audiences was as a result of his refusal to use the opening glee. Starting out first with *Oba Moro*, Ladipo went on to write a trilogy on the Oyo Empire, with the other plays being *Oba Koso* and *Oba Waja*. Evidently, Ladipo sought to liberate Yoruba musical drama from the influence of a combination of Yoruba church music and monotonous highlife tunes. His opening and closing glees, the slap-stick comedy, the ludicrous humour, the bongo drums, the European musical instruments, the preponderance of morality plays and fairy tales; all gave room to new, original and free directions. Ogunbiyi (1981, p.344) states that "Duro Ladipo forged a broad spectrum of traditional Yoruba dance and music, a uniquely strident musical dance, linked together with solo and choral song highly accentuated by the precision of the dance steps at different stages of the performance."

Ladipo reproduced Hugo Von Hofmansthal's *Everyman* as *Eda*. *Eda* became a very popular opera in his repertory of plays then. Another artist that contributed to the development of Opera in Nigeria but in a different approach is Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala). Moses Olaiya came into limelight in 1967: Moses Olaiya's theatre belongs with the theatrical genre of farce; his theatre shares a lot of attributes with the earlier folk theatre of Ogunde and Ladipo. Like the earlier

theatre practitioners, Olaiya's theatre is improvisational and communal. He provides a popular theatre of dialogue, music and dance which continues to attract Nigerians in their thousands all over the country (Obafemi, 2001, p. 56). From the evolution of operatic productions during the time of Ogunde, opera productions have developed with varieties of changes in time, space and technology. Opera performances have been produced in various forms in town and in gown by the academic theatres and various professional theatre troupes.

Ododo's To Return from the Void

The opera, in its satiric and didactic appeal, mirrors the socio-political background of the country right from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade experience to the colonial exploitation of the country's treasures by the British Colonial masters. The three leaders of the fictional Denterean Country: Nneka, Dankwushi and Awotoye, lead other Dentereans to demand for their freedom and independence from the colonial masters. After several agitations, the colonial master hands them the power to govern their own country independently. Unfortunately, their self aggrandisement to the disadvantage of the country leads to more chaos and eventual takeover of government by the military which left the society and its economy in shambles. Of course, there seems to be no solution in sight until the intervention the Supreme Being in the fashion of the Greeks' *deus ex machina*, who eventually proffers solution to the quagmire.

Ododo in his words assert that the play was written “in 1995 as an experimental script on a nation caught up in socio-political quagmire” (2012, p. 8). The first experimental production of this musical drama was in 1998; just some months before the transition to the democratic system of government in Nigeria. The script chronicled the socio-political state of the nation. It was again reproduced in 2002 as a command performance for the University of Ilorin Convocation ceremonies; a period which was a build up to the 2003 general elections. Again, prior to the 2007 general elections in Nigeria, the musical drama was performed at the Creative Arts Department, University of Maiduguri. And, in 2014, this musical drama was again produced as a full-fledged opera performance for the final year practical project of this researcher at the University of Ilorin. The researcher-director, in his artistic consciousness, also felt the urge to re-produce the opera as it was another build up to a general election in Nigeria, the 2015 general elections, just as it was in its previous productions. These are not just mere coincidences. Like Achebe (1983) rightly asserted on the Nigerian problem:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility...

By this assertion, these periods are the best moments to re-orientate the masses on the need to vote, into power, worthy and effective leaders. There is no doubt, the problem of leadership is evident in Ododo's portrayal of Characters in the libretto. In his own analysis of the musical drama, Eyo (2015, p. 104) notes that "Ododo presents issues pertinent to Nigerian leadership in a symbolic way". He puts it rightly that "Ododo's satire comes alive through symbolism, characterisation, language, and song" (p.104). The three major characters in the opera; Dankwushi, Awotoye and Nneka symbolically represent the major ethnic and religious affinity of the Nigerian Nation. Ododo fictionally represents the Nigerian nation as "Denterean country" as a result of the political atmosphere in the country during the period of writing the play. Imageries and symbolic messages are hidden in his characterisation. The character of 'Mother Earth' represents the Nigerian nation in entirety; the riches, wealth and natural resources in the country. She recounts and laments the glorious past of the nation until the country nosedived after being milked and exploited by the slave masters, colonial masters (who handed over power for independent rule after several protests) and subsequently the Nigerian leaders who have also continued to loot her wealth afterwards.

Dankwushi, a Muslim, represents the Northern Hausa/Fulani bloc of the country. He is extremely diabolical, greedy and absolutely corrupt. He is the most tactical of the three political leaders. Awotoye, represents the Southwestern Yoruba bloc. He is a canny, selfish, greedy and equally corrupt! He lost to Dankwushi in the game of politics. Nneka who represents the South-Eastern bloc of the country is an inconsistent, chameleonic, greedy and also a corrupt politician. In this researcher's directorial purview during the production opera in 2014, he saw the central theme of the libretto as "The Quest for Power". And, considering this theme, his directorial interpretation of the libretto then was "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely". Abuse and misuse of power is evident in the characters of the Colonial Master, Dankwushi, Awotoye and Nneka. "Greed" which is evident in the characters, was his directorial concept. Images such of power, corruption, pride, hatred, greed, selfishness, discrimination, betrayal, and contest run through the story to the end. Unfortunately, after 26 years of this script, 23 years of its productions and its

publication in 2012, the Nigerian story has remained same. Ododo has hoped 26 years ago that Nigeria will one day:

...return from the void to end her plight,
Receive nourishment devoid
Of self-deserving properties
In service to humanity and God,
Knowing that it is with the glory
Of the sun the moon shines (2012, p. 11)

Yet, today, class politics and oppression as reflected in the libretto are still very much with us in Nigerian politics. Rummel cited in Ebekue (2018, p. 74) defines class as “ownership of property. Such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes”. Actually, Class politics is an age long reality problem in most nations of the world. Ebekue (2018, p. 74) notes that “there is a constant struggle for power and relevance between the different social classes. Africa most strikingly has just two major classes; the 'haves' and the 'have nots’”. While the 'have nots' are the oppressed, the poor, the powerless; the 'haves' are the rich, the powerful who use their privileged position to oppress and subjugate the powerless. Sunnie Ododo's *To Return from the Void* actually exposes class politics and the oppression of the powerless by the powerful as evident right from the colonial period. The Colonial Masters hold on to power and ridicule the leadership of the masses:

Colonial Master: I am of a special race whom the crown fits

Chorus: I am born to rule, I am groomed to rule

Stop to waste your time, do not waste your time

Colonial Master: Your black heads too malformed to fit the crown of
authority

Chorus: You are born to serve, you are doomed to serve

Stop to waste your time, do not waste your time

Colonial Master: Your frames too fragile to wear the gab of authority
(Ododo, 2012, pp. 23-24)

Despite over 100 years of the colonisation of different nations, the colonial masters were unwilling to grant the colonies any independence, including Nigeria.

But, the Union Jack is eventually lowered. And, as the colonial masters

are leaving the scene in the opera, the people begin to sing with high hopes:

Oh God of creation,
Help us to build a nation
Of prosperity, peace and abundance
Oh God of creation,
Help us to build a nation
Where no man is oppressed! (p.35)



Fig 1: A scene from the opera depicting the oppression and dehumanising situation experienced in the hands of the whites through the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.

Unfortunately, Nneka and Awotoye, the supposed leaders of the masses, are quick to exude their greed and thirst for power even before getting to the helm of affairs. For example, at point the Colonial master asks for “whose head is ready for the crown?” they immediately begin to engage in the brawl of it is “Mine!” “It is mine” “Mine it is”. This quickly shows they are leaders who only want to take positions for selfish reasons and for personal aggrandisement. And, immediately after the independence, these new ‘Denterean’ leaders could no

longer hide their greed and exploitative nature as they eagerly amass and acquire wealth, and personalise the nation's resources as their personal inheritance:

Awotoye: Dankwushi, this independence cannot be sweet because my
10.8 billion dollars still hangs in your bank account

Dankwushi: Haba Awotoye, there is no problem we're together

Nneka: Listen, you need to see my own account. It keeps smiling at
me

Dankwushi: And now business of constitution. Remember, the North
belongs to me?

Awotoye & Nneka: Haba, the entire North?

Dankwushi: Yes, no compromise and no negotiation

Awotoye: And the South is mine!

Nneka & Dankwushi: South?

Awotoye: I mean South West

Nneka: That means the entire South East is mine

Dankwushi, Awotoye & Nneka: Independence is sweet, it is so sweet, it
is sweeter than honey, it is so sweet (Ododo, 2012, pp. 37-38)



Fig. 2: Dankwushi, Awotoye and Nneka swearing the oath of joint rulership and sharing formula of the nation's resources. Source: Researcher

It is just as Affiah and Elekwachi (2018, p. 13) rightly submit that “the post-independence disillusionment is very glaring in every part of Africa, Nigeria inclusive. There is a general spate of unbridled acquisition of wealth by the ruling class, the tendency towards property accumulation by those in leadership”. The wealths of the nation are greedily shared and looted by the privileged political class while the poor masses are left to wallow in abject poverty. Writing on such experiences of leadership recklessness in Nigeria, Chinua Achebe in his 1983 essay, captures it thus:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility...

Osofisan cited in Affiah & Elekwachi, 2018, p. 11) states that:...although so much has changed, nothing really in Africa has changed... our continent has remained backward, static and decaying... and the principal reasons for our backwardness are still very much the same... a treacherous leadership and elite... the elite and their allies still gobble the wealth of the land, leaving the vast majority in abject poverty.

As at September 2021, Nigeria is arguably said to be the poverty capital of the world with the highest rate of poverty globally (Source, please?). A country that is blessed with numerous natural and human resources yet, with most of its people living in extreme poverty. Issues bordering around poverty, and high rate of unemployment among the youth have always been behind the rise in crime and criminality. Sarcastically, Ododdo, in the 5th scene of the libretto, through Nneka, recounts how Nigeria is blessed with all shades of talents, different kinds of people, including robbers with gun or pen, drug peddlers, 419, prostitutes and all manners of good, bad, genuine and counterfeit people.

In the Nigeria of today, civil unrest seems to have become the order of the day. The once developing multi-ethnic and multicultural nation is now beclouded with secessionists' clamours, separatist agendas, insurgencies, kidnappings, banditry, inter-ethnic and tribal clashes. At the present, several security issues have become real-time challenges and threat to the survival of the nation. Responding to these realities, Binebai (2016, p. 116) notes that Nigeria is a nation that is disunited by unity and is united by disunity. It is perhaps the reality of statements like this that has always been responsible the forceful takeover of government by military forces. The military leader takeover address below seems to lend credence to this fact: Military Leader: Fellow Dentarians. In

consequence of the ethnicity chaos, disorder, mismanagement and misappropriation by the political leaders. The absolute military force has taken over. It has come to our notice that the country is drifting politically, economically and socially as a result of the myopic sight of the political leaders. From now on, all parastatals are hereby dissolved. A special task force has been put in place to take care of your needs. However, all international agreements remain intact, and it is important to note that our country is a sovereign state; therefore, all external interventions will be vehemently resisted. All airports and seaports are hereby closed till further notice. Dentarians are advised to go about their daily businesses, peacefully. Long live the Absolute Military Force; long live Dentarians (Ododo, 2012, p.50).

Clearly, bribery and corruptions have grown to become a norm in the nation's polity. This is evident from the leadership to the followership. Today, it is common to see Nigerians seeking to bribe their way out or receive bribe in their day to day activities. However, the persona of the likes of Bulldozer in the libretto symbolises the revolutionary and radical approach of Fela Anikulapo Kuti towards social reconstruction. Bulldozer uses his Afro music to ridicule the political leaders and the people:

Bulldozer: All of you no dey shame? You still dey follow all dis myopic leaders wey dey spoil our country. Anyway sha, common sense no common at all. Make I yab dem small, I beg.

Bulldozer: All because of kobo kobo

Response: Eya

Bulldozer: All because of Egunje

Response: Eya

Bulldozer: All because of rimari

Response: Eya

Bulldozer: All because of okoobi

Response: Eya

Bulldozer: What a lost generation!

Response: What a lost generation!

Bulldozer: Shame on you all

Chorus: Shame on you all

Bulldozer: For selling your will

Chorus: Shame on you all

Bulldozer: Cheaply for no fill

Chorus: Shame on you all. (Ododo, 2012, p. 57)

Evidently, corrupt practices have eaten deep into the fabric of the nation. It is the norm amongst the political leaders who explore the complacent nature of the common Nigerians to perpetrate this heinous act. They launder the nation's resources to foreign accounts as seen in the confrontation between Awotoye, Nneka, and Dankwushi over the affairs of the state.

Awotoye & Nneka: Dankwushi, you have gone too far, this time around
too far, You have bitten more than you can chew, this time around,
too far.

Dankwushi: Far but not too far, Keeping only a slim account in Swiss
(Exhibits anger.) Leave the people alone.

Awotoye: Leave the people alone eh, and allow them to pour sand into
our garri?

Dankwushi: Please let go, since they are not complaining

Nnmeke: Dankwushi, let go, let go, let go and they will start protesting

Awotoye: True! Let go, let go, let go and they will start protesting.

(Ododo, 2012, pp. 45-46).

Towards a Panacea To Return from the Void

Over time, several measures have been taken to salvage the nation from its socio-political quagmire and nip the aforementioned issues in the bud. Unfortunately, most, if not all, of the efforts have been futile and abortive, for, evidently, the Nigerian social, political and economic situation keeps degenerating every day. Will there ever be a way out? Will Nigeria ever rise again?

The Children which represent the citizens of the Nigerian nation lament thus:

Children: (*Sing.*) To God we shout

For his way out

Doctors try in vain

To reduce your pain

Sacrifices we offered to no avail

As your pains still prevail

Your family degenerates to no avail

Every day to no avail

To God we shout



Fig 3: Image depicting the sick state of the Nigerian nation. Source: Researcher

For his way out
Many are Jobless
Many are hopeless
Many are thirsty
Many are hungry
Many are sick
Many are dying
To God we shout
For his way out (Ododo, 2012, p. 51)

SEO prophesied that “only divine intervention would bring us from the woods” (2012, p. 8). However, the Holy one in his Divine Majesty will not descend physically to proffer the solutions as he has given us the free will to act right and execute justice. The Angelic Spirit in his response rebukes the people thus:

Angelic Spirit: But why disturb me/2x
When the solution is in your midst. (Ododo, 2012, p. 52)
Ironically, the solutions are right within the people. It is not far-fetched.
Angelic Spirit: To get to the truth

Circumcise your hearts,
Let common sense prevail,
In all your actions
And your goals you shall reach. (Ododo, 2012, p. 53)

The numerous resources (human, material and natural resources) the nation is blessed with are capable of being the pedestal to rapid development and the catalyst for becoming great and relevant among the comity of nations. However, these will not happen until there is conscious individual reorientation, mind restructuring, sincerity and faithfulness towards the growth and development of the nation. This is what Ododo refers to in the libretto as the 'circumcision of one's heart' and 'letting common sense prevail'. Everyone must play its part expressly:

Angelic Spirit: To return from the void
Stop sowing among thorns
Let love bore aloft
Let common sense prevail,
In all your actions
And your goals you shall reach (Ododo, p. 53)

Conclusion

An art without relevance to its immediate society is not an art. Such is sure to go into the dustbin of history. However, the arts through the performing arts subset have proven to be effective and relevant in the building of a habitable, just, and humane society. The didactic yet entertaining opera brings to bare before us again our social realities towards a conscious reorientation and mind reengineering for effective development. Making a nation great to achieve its full potentials is a collective and conscious responsibility of every citizen and the inhabitants of such nation. In conclusion, we dare say that opera performances and other theatrical performances are effective tools for causing and evoking socio-political changes in any society.

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