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PROVIDINDG DIRECTION FOR THE NIGERIAN CULTURAL RE-ORIENTATION IN IYORWUESE HAGHER'S *LIFETIMES*

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Abstract
The murky cloud that enveloped the Nigerian nation in the recent times has been laid in the doorstep of various degrees of social vices that manifest in corruption, child labour, illiteracy, early teenage pregnancy, sexploitation, kidnapping and other high level criminalities. These vices undoubtedly are as a result of flagrant disregard for cultural norms and ethos by the Nigerian. Consequent upon this, cultural re-orientation becomes apt in Nigeria. It is in that direction that this paper explores the role of drama as a medium capable of exciting the sought for a change in our cultural orientation using Iyorwuese Hagher's Lifetimes. Thus, we employ analytical method as a tool to identifying and excite attitudinal change that the literary piece under examination underscores in the dramaturgy of Hagher's Lifetimes. Having perused the work, our findings reveal that drama ranks amongst the veritable instruments that succinctly appeal to minds of people as well as a medium that soothingly elicit beneficial change in the people of any giving society. It has been variously established that drama is a luxuriating balm that engender the soothing magic of believability. The paper concludes that uneconomical exploration of the medium of drama is a leeway to cultural re-orientation. The paper therefore appeals to playwrights to rummage into more of the misdemeanours plaguing our society, document them for enlightenment, education, sustenance and cultural re-orientation of our society.

Introduction

Culture is the shelter under which man dwells for the purpose of carving an existence that makes any society attain egalitarianism. Unfortunately, many factors have eroded the expectation that will make the society reach the pinnacle of social equality. Conscious efforts at understanding why, points in the direction of advancement in technology, which made experts in the information platform,

describe the world as 'global village' and a period of 'Jet Age'. These phenomena are the reasons for the changes that the Nigerian society has been witnessing in this twenty-first century. Thus, the revolution of sophisticated technological advancement soars as one of the reasons for the changes witnessed in our society. It also became clear that these changes are the reason behind the orchestrated man's ubiquitous and dynamic reactions to variations around him as well as the adoption of various societal terminologies in the garb of modernisation, globalization, etcetera. In reaction to these, the slogan need for change become so loud and sought for by all and sundry. In our reaction to the momentary slogan; 'change', this paper attempt to excite a direction for a cultural change in this work that we titled: Providing direction for Nigerian cultural re-orientation. The essence of this work is predicated on the fact that the numerous social switches that pervade our entity appears to be the reason for the relegation of the concept of ethicist to the background and while modernity is orchestrated as opposed to orthodoxy.

Just as technology is pined as the catalyst of the transformational phenomena enumerated above, drama also actively reacted to the flurry of changes in the theatre dramaturgy that manifests in form, content, structure and genre, orchestrated in the nomenclature of; Theatre for Development (TFD), Community Theatre (CT), Community Theatre for Development (CTFD), Theatre for Integrated Development (TFID), Theatre of the Oppressed, Total Theatre and many other theatre productions that use various isms. All these phenomena changes point to the change mantras that are witnessed in the artistic parlance in the Nigerian theatre. No doubt, all of the theatrical dramaturgies that have been employed were for the purpose of exciting positive direction in the various areas where they were used. However, we note that the various changes, either at the point of execution or implementation have caused dislocation to Nigerian cultural norms, which in some areas are positive and in some areas negative. The negative effects of the cultural changes spur us into embarking on this research, having noted that the need for drastic cultural re-evaluation, re-orientation and re-appraisal, especially at the dawn of the quest for change in Nigeria is of essence. It is our hope that the submissions in this paper will be beneficiary as well as an approach that will rescue us from the socio-cultural doldrums that our society is plunged into.

Nigeria at 57, no doubt, has gone through series of ups and downs, particularly as a result of various democratic changes it has witnessed in the last few decades. As these changes manifest, Nigeria continues to pay host series of political and policy summersaults. This was what stirs scholars like (Osofisan 41)

who states that: "We prove at once that the problem of development and culture not only exists but has even grown into a crisis". This confirms our position that in so many ways, our culture has been compromised. There is no doubting the fact that the Government that everyone looks up to seems to have lost its focus hence, most government policies that the citizen hoped on are cosmetics and mere lip service and empty boast.

This is why the theatre practitioners and scholars, being fully aware of these lacuna decide to explore the method of taken the campaign for cultural revival to the grass-root, through theatrical enactments as Iyorwuese Hagher has done in the play under examination. This singular effort has warmed drama into the heart of the people at the grass-root haven distinguished itself as a genre of literature that employed non-riotous but wailing medium, which has excited critical, objective, and result oriented approach, using the performative idiom of a re-birth of our culture from its state of comatose. Aristotle confirms this feat when he alludes to drama thus: "drama as an imitative and or performative art is superior to all other arts forms. Besides, it is the most effective and most sociological of all literary arts" (qtd. in Dasylva 32). It is in the light of this that we, in this paper, underscore the potency of drama as a medium that has provided direction in the Nigerian cultural re-orientation as exemplified in the dramaturgy of Iyorwuese Hagher's *Lifetimes*.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms and Concepts

In this paper, some terms and concepts featured, which we felt should be explained as they are used in the context of this work to put paid to any seeming ambiguity. They include: culture, drama and re-orientation.

Culture as a term has been variously defined. Needless go into all those definitions but for our use in this work, we find Edo's definition of culture as apt. He describes it as:

> The total way of life of a people...pattern of learned behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society from one generation to the other. It is made up of the customs, tradition and beliefs, behaviour, dress language, works of art and craft, way of living, net-work of relationship, attitude to life, as well as the technology and institution of the people in the society. (1)

This definition is all encompassing and detailed in describing what culture stands for. Drama on the other hand as described by Brockett, is;

> a play (drama) is a representation of man in action. But "action" does not mean mere physical movement; it involves as well the motivations (both mental and psychological) that lie behind visible behaviour. "Man in action" therefore includes the whole range of feelings, thoughts, and deeds that define what sort of creature man is – what he does and why he does it. (qtd. in Johnson 48)

We adopt the above definition for this paper because it appropriately describes Drama in its performative (action) characterised as that medium that has the power of mirroring the society, which is the reason why it is referred to as slice of life of man's follies and foibles and evocation of emotion that affects the sensibilities of the audiences. On the other hand, Aristotle describes it as: "purgation of emotion" through fear and pity.

Dramaturgy as defined in the online *Britannica.com* is: "the art technique of composition or theatrical representation." We adopt this definition because it manifests in Hagher's dramatic piece under examination.

Re-orientation is a rebirth, a process of overhaul, a direction in which something is re-directed or re-focused for a better result. We also adopt it as another approach to change. Since the thrusbes of this paper explore the mantra, change, which has been adopted as the slogan for an improved Nigerian society.

Literature Review

Theatre, Culture and the Artists in the Society

Society as described in *Merriam-Webster on line Dictionary* is: "a part of a community that is a unit distinguishable by particular aims or standards of living or conduct: a social circle or a group of social circles having a clearly marked identity."

On the other hand, culture, which is dynamic, has been defined multifariously by scholars. For instance, Oyewo describes culture as:

> Ubiquitous, multidimensional, complex and all pervasive. Culture is the deposit of knowledge, experience, belief, value, attitudes, meanings hierarchies, religious, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. (qtd. in Oshuntokun and Olukoju 8-69)

If culture is complex as Oshuntokun and Olakoju posit, then it is bound to be explored from multifarious dimensions and that is why Osofisan's position is apt that:

> In fact, it is perhaps more apt to talk of the cultures of a society, rather than of one culture. Every class in society defines itself by its culture, and therefore to talk of 'cultural development' is simply to say that some of the existing cultures in it should die, while others are promoted and revitalized. (qtd. in Unoh 43)

Therefore, if the society according to *Merriam-Webster* is a group of social circles having a clearly marked identity then, the society is the landlord of culture. The entwined nature of the two concepts makes Osofisan to say that society defines itself by its culture. Although Chatman describes Hagher as one who believes that "the traditional way must change" rebuking that opposition to maintaining status quo and insisting that "some traditional way must change at times with new ways", he however highlights the traditional ethos which indicates "that is how history is created" (251).

However, we seem not to totally agree with the position that when cultural development manifests the existing ones should die. Much as change is an evidence of development, we think it should not be digging a new hole to fill an old one; rather, there should be complimentary efforts in development, in that when a new culture evolved, the existing ones should be kept for posterity and robust development. Obafemi underscores this when he succinctly states that "Culture offers meaning, purpose and value to the socio-economic, political and aesthetic ethos of society" (64). This shows that irrespective of change that one may want to infuse into culture, the existing one must not be eroded. In the same vein, Obafemi draws from the position of one Professor Obichere who affirms the "inseparability of culture and civilization" confirms our position that in pursuing meaningful change, our cultural re-orientation should be an effort gear towards exciting meaningful cultural improvements and not erosion of an existing culture (64).

We should not lose sight of the fact that in a development prone society, chaos is imminent. Where such a situation occurs, there should be a mediator, which we found in Drama. Drama, according to Bullon, is "an exciting event or sets of events" (473). Sets of events here are series of socio-cultural and political events, some positive and some negative. When it is negative and it has snowballed into chaos, then there is the need for a direction to be provided to re-

orientate a disoriented society. This drama unequivocally provides. As Chatman submits, a leaderless society suffers "lack of leadership in some areas" (25). The potency of drama as a tool for direction is what is chronicled in Hagher's *Lifetimes*. The play enumerates some of the misdemeanours that the society has been contending with as he underscores drama as the tool that can ameliorating the situation and provides direction.

It is in that premise that this paper, in keeping track with the reality of life considers the play; *Lifetimes* as a medium that fits as a model of re-orientating the disorientated Nigerian culture for a better society. He underpinned this by enumerating the barrage of cultural derailments that have bedevilled our society while he presents the play as the dramatic piece that is fit to provide the much awaited direction.

Expounding on the Symbiotic Relationship between Drama and Culture

The society is, and has remained the umbrella that houses all paraphernalia of the institution amongst which is; culture, ethics and ethos. Overtly, one can say that the society is the parent that sublets those elements to other agents with a view to currying symbiotic rapport for the benefit of the society. Drama on the other hand, because it mirrors the society, it ranks as one those agencies that have drawn from the society by providing nourishment for a healthy society. In underscoring the symbiotic relationship, Bamidele connects drama, society and culture and submits that: "Play (drama) attempt to re-create the social world of man's relation with his family, with politics, with the state in its economic or religious constructs" (4).

Given the above, one would agree that drama can, and has functioned as a tool for re-orientating the cultural ethos of the society. Aside from the fact that drama entertains, it has proved to be a tool that has stir up attitudinal changes in many societies. The credence to this assertion is given by Mao who describes drama as: "a reflection of that society which includes that society's economic structure, its class formation, its conflicts, and contradictions, its class power political and cultural struggles, its struggles, its structures of values" (25). Wickham also underscores the potency of drama thus:

> Drama, I submit, far from being 'no subject' is in fact a subject with remarkable integrating power which can relate the ancient world to the present day, which can bring critical appraisal into direct contact with creative experiment, which can provide the arts man with a lively introduction to scientific thinking and the scientist with as

lively a reflection of his own human condition. (qtd. in Umukoro 6)

It is in further affirming this that we explore Hagher's *Lifetimes* as a literary that exposes the vices, foibles and follies of the society and recommends a change for a better society. We also relish on Illah's illumination on the ideological effrontery that run through Hagher's literary works. He made a particular reference to his play, *Lifetimes,* on which he pungently submits that it is one literary work which provides "the parameter of the drama in the next millennium since it advocates democratic pluralism…development entertainment…social vision, located in actual cultural process with an alternative potential to counter bourgeois globalism" (Illah 11). It is still this entwined relationship between drama and the society that Idegu accentuates in his submission on the relevance of the theatre, theatre artistes and the society. More emphatically, he states that:

> The theatre artist does not operate in isolation. He is a member of the society and his relationship with the society via-a-vis (sic) his work, is of significance. The creative process in theatre includes several links, one of which is reality or the presentation of real life experience to the reader, spectator or listener. (17)

We further underpin the symbiotic relationship between drama and society, following Akinwale's assertion that: "so long as there are human societies with their attendant human problems, drama will always reflect them in its effort to guide human thought, mould human life and expose social ills" (3). Let us see how *Lifetimes* reflects these.

Synopsis of *Lifetimes*

The play revolves around Pa Jimoh, a traditional healer and his two sons; Mufu and Jimoh. Jimoh is based abroad, while Mufu is a school drop-out turned tanker driver with twenty-one children from nineteen different women. Mufu is in the habit of having a woman friend at every of his tanker bus-stop, which was the reason for the harem of women and the number of children in his kitty. Consequently, Mama Quadri and Hafusatu are saddled with the responsibility of taking care of Mufu's battalion. They also keep Pa Jimoh's company. Pa Jimoh, a traditional healer fell in love with one of his patient, Laide who is HIV/AIDS positive as a result of genital mutilation. Atanda, Mufu's friend in a circle of

immorality got Mama Quadri and her thirteen-year-old daughter Hafusatu pregnant. However, the play illuminates on the failure of leaders as the cause of the high level of corruption, religious intolerance and other social vices that our society has to contend with. These are epitomised in Mufu's attitude, the Alabe error, religious bigotry and the civilian Governors maladministration, craftily weaved in the play-within-a-play *LifeTimes* all to emphasise the need for change that our society needs.

***Lifetimes:* A reflection of multifarious moral ills in our society**

The choice of *Lifetimes* to interrogate this work in spite of the age of the work is borne out of the fact that it presents issues that bothers on the ills plaguing the Nigerian society. Again, the content of the play is based on incidences drawn from a community theatre research experience, which is relevant to the present day happenings. Hagher underscores this in his submission below:

> This play is derived from the Theatre for Development (TFD) Workshop held at Iseyin, Oyo State, Nigeria, during the period 29th November to 4th December 1988…We sought to establish dialogue with people of Iseyin on some harmful traditional practices. These were: female genital mutilation, scarification, child labour, and teenage sexuality. (1)

He further explains this reality that "We became drawn unto the vortex of the crisis of family and leadership values, pitted against the needs of urbanization, change and challenges posed by the intrusion in the rural community of a deadly, unfathomable and incurable disease – HIV/AIDS. The resultant crisis is the premise of this play" (*LT* 1).

We shall not discuss all the societal ills that Hagher enumerated in this piece for the fact that some of them have been discussed at many fora, but we shall identify just a few ones that truly emphasise how we can excite true change in our society. They are enumerated and discussed below.

Leadership laxity as the bane of moral uprightness

In Hagher's dramaturgy in the play under examination, Mufu is presented as a perfect example of the carefree leaders that sit on the affairs of our nation and messed it up as a result of their selfish tendencies and self-centeredness. The metaphor of Mufu, a tanker driver, presents the prototype of the type of the leaders in Nigeria who are bestowed with responsibilities of distributing equitably

the state wealth and resources of the nation to those that they govern but like Mufu, they take advantage of the resources and use it to better their lots. This act of self-centeredness eighty years old Pa Jimoh, his father attests to in the dialogue below:

Pa Jimoh- ...He is now a tanker driver. Instead of sending money to maintain me at home, he sends his illegitimate children every season. (*LT* 4)

The culture of a child ploughing back to his parents who nurtured him is eroded here. In the submission of old Pa Jimoh, it is obvious that Mufu has neglected his parents that trained him, which is the reason behind the cry. When a cultural norm is broken, the resultant effect is the affective cry that we see here. Ostensibly, the Old Pa Jimoh in this play represents the Nigerian masses that are constantly denied their share of the state wealth as epitomised in Mufu's attitude here. Instead of showing remorse, they silence the governed with draconian policies that further impoverishes them. Failure of our political leaders to discharge effectively their responsibilities is nothing but a cultural dislocation, which is a sharp contrast to how Oyewo describes one who is culturally responsible as: "deposit of knowledge, experience, belief, value, attitudes, meanings... and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving" (qtd. in (Oshuntokun and Olukoju 8-69). When a leader fails to discharge the responsibility to those that looks up to him, then cultural disorientation is imminent.

Lack of Education as the bane of cultural re-orientation

One major problem that has made our society to wallop in the pool of ignorance and grope in the forest obviously is half or lack of education. This Hagher unveiled in the characters of Jimoh and Mufu, using education to as a scale in measuring the output of his two male Children. Jimoh, the educated one; who trained as a doctor and the one that drops out of school; Mufu, a tanker driver indicates that the lack of proper education of the latter is the bane of his untoward attitude. Consequently, the challenge to educate our children so that they can be a better person tomorrow is the admonition that Pa Jimoh directs at the wife of his son; Mufu, who rather than send their six years old son to school decides to send her on apprentice work. Pa Jimoh underscores the importance of education as a weapon for exciting good direction in the dialogue that ensures between Pa Jimoh and Mama Quadri below:

Pa Jimoh- Which work?

Mama Quadri- Apprentice work

Pa Jimoh- Why? He is too young –only six years –send the boy to school.

Sending the children to school will indeed curb the menace of child labour and teenage sexuality as these kids will be engaged in educational activities rather than being turned toddler apprentices and exposed to all forms of vices. The attention that we pay to our children education is a pointer to the type of leadership quality that we want to implant in them. Just like a say in the Bible in Proverbs 22:6 that: "Train a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." More often than not, we as leaders don't show the way to our children. When we fail, what happens to Pa Jimoh, which we recap below, is usually the result:

> **Pa Jimoh-** These children are terrible; there is rubbish everywhere. My sons have no pity on me... I sent Mufu and Jimoh to school, Mufu dropped out. He is now a tanker driver. Instead of sending money to maintain me at home, he sends his illegitimate children every season...Quadri, like his father, has dropped out, he smokes Marijuana like chimney, Azeez is training as a garage tout – and Kunle too is apprentice thief. (*LT* 3-4)

A society that is striving for development, must be up and doing on the issue of their child's education.

Corruption: the social diseases, and the bane for meaningful development

The metaphor of AIDS and its devastating effects on human health in the play under analysis reminds us of the long eroded cultural ethos, which made the most revered African culture to be relegated to the rear. There is no doubting the fact that just as deceases are inimical to the wellbeing of every human so also is the fact that misdemeanours like corruption is a bane for meaningful development. In this direction, allusions to 'incurable diseases' epitomised in 'teenage sexuality', 'scarification', 'genital mutilation', 'corruption', 'religious intolerance' and the likes in the play illustrate are what we refer to as sacrificing culture on the altar of carelessness.

No doubt, corruption and religious intolerance have been the banes of the backwardness that Nigeria nation has had to contend with over the years. This we witnessed in the recycling of Nigerian political leaders who are out to amass

wealth at the expense of the electorate. Their corruptible tendencies are the viruses that have driven Nigeria into the state of economic comatose that is currently witnessing. In underscoring the benefits in the dramaturgical approach that Hagher employed in the literary work under examination has been described as "using the arts to re-interpret a people's mode of existence and experience" (Mude 228). One can only conclude that there is nothing as good as being morally upright. This, Hagher, artistically weaved in the play text under examination and which Mude attests to.

Cultural re-orientation as Panacea for Social Change and Development

The comradeship that makes African culture unique from time immemorial is its practice of communalism. Africans irrespective of where they come from and the nature of the person within their community, see themselves as culturally responsible to the wellbeing of one another. However, as modernity finds its way into the cultural system of the African's way of life, civilization, which is the immediate product of modernity, erodes the conception of oneness. Pa Jimoh, the metaphor of cultural re-orientation in the play under examination calls our attention to the importance of returning back to the era of being our brother's keeper. This he succinctly underscores in a position he advanced that it is not all challenges that we have that are caused by the carrier but some are as a result of the cruelty of the society. He explores the plight of Laide who contracted AIDS through genital mutilation and circumcision and sees her plight as a victim of cultural stagnation. After Laide contracted AIDS, her parents and the society that made her to go through the ordeal turned their backs against her as she laments here:

> **Laide-** I got AIDS from circumcision…Imagine me, the daughter of the Local Government Chairman, a final year sociology student at theUniversity…my mates mock at me and speak about me in whispers, my mother says I am a bad example. All hate me… (*LT* 13-14)

It was in this situation that Pa Jimoh demonstrates his brother's keeper's ingenuity by agreeing to take responsibility for the health care of Laide and also takes her as a wife. In his fondness of her he calls her:

> **Pa Jimoh-** My beautiful wife…this is your home. Remember your parents brought you back from the University dying from this disease called

> AIDS… AIDS has no cure so they brought you to me and left you to die here with me.

Assuring her that she will not die and even turns his ears to all kinds of name calling by demonstrating his genuine love as he made this categorically in his dialogue below:

> **Pa Jimoh-** Don't let that worry you Ashawo or no Ashawo, I love you. If nobody loves you, I love you my pretty wife. How else should a person demonstrate being his brother's keeper, if not the way Pa Jimoh has done? His disposition is what we describe as a positive direction in the re-orientation of Nigeria for a better society (Mude 228).

Conclusion

So far in this paper, we have seen how drama, in the play of Iyorwuese Hagher's *Lifetimes* has been used as a weapon for providing cultural direction, having pointed to the various areas of decadences that have debased our society. When critically appraised, the subtle dramaturgical approach of Hagher in using drama as a tool for preaching change, gives hope. If government's efforts will encourage this area of scholarship, by promoting drama education or drama in education as well as promote stage and television drama, then Nigeria is back on the track of exploring the right medium for providing direction towards a better society.

No doubt, drama has been notably a medium of entertainment. Its other garbs as an enlightenment and edutainment tool will compliment various legislative efforts of the government. One recalls the Nigerian Convention on the right of the child (2001) and the Child Right Law (2003) as well as various anti-graft and anti-corruption efforts, which were geared toward curbing various infringements of child and citizens' right and see them as a welcome development in attainment of a better society.

Giving the fact that government and individuals have benefited from the direction that drama has provided in e-orientating our society, Government should in all strata of our education, introduce drama curriculum and encourage formation of drama clubs. This will help educate and create awareness at an early stage of man and cause attitudinal change that has affected our cultural practices. After all, what is seen with the eyes sinks deeper into the mind and last longer than what is merely heard with the ears.

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