Interrogating Nigerian Conflicts Through Drama: A Study of Osofisan's Farewell to Cannibal Rage and Jonathan C. Obilor's A Midnight Adventure

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Abstract

Conflict the world over is often rooted in perceived marginalization and injustice. Many countries have gone through bitter civil wars that left indelible marks on the country's psyche. Nigeria particularly, went though a terrible 30 month Civil War where more than 6 million Nigerians died. Some other countries after learning the bitter lesson from their civil wars, have moved on but not Nigeria. Violent, often disruptive agitations in East, West, North, South Region have continued to dog Nigeria's march towards development, all because of resource control. This study is using a multidisciplinary approach, foregrounded in utilitarianism as espoused in the selected plays and highlights their proposals for solution. The bottom line is that truth must precede forgiveness and reconciliation.

Key Words: Conflicts, Resource Control, Reconciliation, Development.

Introduction

The 20thCentury has witnessed conflicts the world over. We have experienced over 250 armed conflicts that have led to the death of 110,000,000 people, leaving more people wounded, crippled or homeless

(Servae, 2008).Statistics reveal that there are about 233 groups engaged in armed conflict around the world. These conflicts have rendered over 200million people homeless refugees (Cramer 2006: 1).Most of these conflicts have their roots in perceived injustice by one group against the other along economic, political or religion divides.

Africa has had its own fair share of these conflicts. The Rwanda experience is still fresh in our memories. Nigeria too has equally had more than a fair share of these conflicts. Nigeria has fought a 30 months civil war, suffered several ethno-religious, socio-political, socio-economic conflicts in different parts of the country. The Benue State experience earlier this year remains a constant reminder of what conflicts can cause: to set development back in a community. Many innocent Nigerians died, more incapacitated by injury, loss of homes or businesses; families were driven apart by rampaging protesters against one injustice or the other. From the militant groups in the Niger-Delta who are agitating for control over the oil resource in their homeland and calling on the Multinational Corporations and the Federal Government to ameliorate the despoliation of their as a result of oil exploration lands, to the Arewa Consultative Forum who believe in their divine right to rule Nigeria. The ethno-religion fanatics who believe that until everybody is converted to their religion, then the country cannot be safe. But of the lot, the greatest destruction has been from the rampaging Jihadists in the guise of livestock breeders who want to make the whole country a grazing field and they are ever ready to kill, rape and maim for it. All these pose a serious threat to the continued existence of this Flora Shaw's contraption called Niger area (Nigeria). But the really curious thing about these farmers is their acquisition of sophisticated weapons in their quest for more farmlands. To this end, the researcher is able to identify some of these groups that have been involved and are still involved in armed conflicts in Nigeria,

a. Movement for the Survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP)
b. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)
c. Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)

d. Niger Delta People's Volunteers Force (NDPVF)
e. Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)
f. Odua People's Congress (OPC)
g. Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV)
h. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)
i. Independent People of Biafra (IPOB)
j. Boko Haram (No to Western Education)
k. Hausa-Fulani Herdsmen

Most of these groups at one time or the other have been involved in a confrontation with either Federal Government of Nigeria for perceived inequity in the distribution of resources or the Multinational Corporations for the ecological devastation of their lands. However, the last two on the list must constitute the most worrisome of the lot. Their avowed mission is so nebulous and unbelievable in the 21st Century. That a group of Nigerians can wake up one day that they don't want Western Education? Then it is simple, they should just look for an enclave where they can practice their religion without being polluted by the Western world. Again, that a group of humans want grazing lands for their cattle and if not given to them freely they can kill, maim and rape the owners of that land in this century. These two should rather appropriately labelled 'terrorists'.

Conflicts

Conflict basically denotes a situation of two opposing forces contending for something (Olorunsomo, 2011). As a matter of fact, no society can live without conflict as it is an important part of human existence (Olaniyan, 2008) and as Deutsch (cited in Olaniyan, 2008) puts it: 'it is a basic psychological mechanism that centers on incompatible goals-one set of goals needs or interest disagree with another set' Ugwuegbu (1998) reinforced this by saying that "the basis of conflict in our society lies in perceived and actual relative inequity differing interests receive unequal recognition of the needs and the interests of all"

As posited earlier above, the Nigerian State has had more than her own fair share of conflicts since independence, some of them of monumental proportions (Olaniyan 2008). Managing these conflicts has been a dismal failure in the parts of the successive governments in Nigeria probably because the basic indices of the conflicts have not been properly addressed. (Olorunsomo, 2011).Examples abound in every corner of the country. It is the opinion of many that the Nigerian civil war could have been averted if the Aburi Accord at the instance of Lt. Gen. J.A Ankrah Chairman of Ghana National Liberation Councilat the time had been honoured. The point here is that violent agitation often occurs where negotiation fails. Negotiations entails the spirit of give and take; it is not a winner takes all situation but 'win some, lose some'

At the present, this study has identified different groups pursuing conflict agenda in the Nigerian environment. Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) which blaze the trail in 1992.But the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and the 'Ogoni 9' led to the quiet extinction of this group. But from the ashes grew amore organized and widespread organization called Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND). This group was met midway and palliated, then rose Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). This group was again incapacitated by the arrest of its leader, Raph Uwasuruike. In its place today we have Indigenous People of Biafra(IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu,

who in spite of State sponsored brutalities against his person, has actually setup a radio station in faraway Israel for IPOB operational headquarters. The choice of Israel here is even significant. Israel is a land of the persecuted Jews who have just gained recognition for their homeland after years of persecution by the Arab world. They see themselves as oppressed by the world order and now a land of succuor for the 'oppressed' people of the world. Odua People's Congress (OPC) is largely a socio-cultural organization of the Yoruba people. They are not known for aggression but for defence of the territorial integrity of Yoruba land. Mastatine grew up rapidly as a religious fundamentalist organization and fizzled out with the death of its leader. Boko Haram is a different group entirely. Its known objective is to do away with Western Education, anywhere it is found in Nigeria. To this end, scores of churches and mosques have been burnt North or South of Nigeria and in the process kill defenceless people. So far, at least in the Nigerian experience, the basic cause of all these conflicts is resource control.

The modern day battle for the soul of Nigeria is for the power to control the oil wealth. The agitation from the East is to gain control over the resource from their own land. The National Geographic Magazine (NGM, 2008) points out that the Niger-Delta holds some of the world's richest oil deposits yet the Nigerians living there are poorer than ever. Violence is rampant and the land and water are fouled (NGM, 2008). This oil wealth is being managed by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) on behalf of the Federal Government and it controls up to 60% of multinational oil corporation onshore which fetches up to 60billion USD in 2005 (NGM, 2008). The federal government of Nigeria usually takes more than half of the accrued earnings of the oil wealth every month, the Niger Delta communities are to share 13% of the total for derivation while the 36States, including the Niger Delta, (Abuja is now considered a State apart from being the seat of Federal government) share the rest with the Local Government according to a pre-determined ratio. The blow out of all these is the marathon race for the jugular of the Nigerian State Presidency. This

is because he who controls that seat holds the key to the commonwealth. This has continued to irk the people across the Niger Delta belt, who have in the more than 5 decades of Nigerian self-rule, only succeeded to have one of their own on the seat directly. Then, one more troublesome, intriguing feature of this incessant struggles for the resource control is the Fulani herdsmen angle. This group of militant often murderous farmers have been on the downward march to the South in their search for arable land for their cattle. Miyetti Allah, the coordinating council of the herdsmen had not masked their disdain for any community who refused to give them land. A bill has been presented to the National Assembly on this matter, the illogical reasoning here might be: since the Nigerian nation can share oil wealth, then they should also be able to share land. But the illogicality of this is obvious. The cattle is a personal property of some people not even a group. The wealth derived there goes to a personal purse. Why then should the whole community divide land to individuals for personal enrichment? The more burdensome thought there is that the herdsmen are not only ready to kill, maim, cripple and rape women of communities who refuse to give them land.

Conflicts and Development

How can there be development in Nigerian with all these conflict situation? Development can only occur in an atmosphere of peace, whether negotiated or natural. Development, according to Oxfords Dictionary online, is a 'specified state of growth or advancement, a new and advanced product or idea; an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation'. Conflicts often hinder development (Adolfo, 2005) and deter socio-economic growth (Mail and Woodhaver, 1999).Since most violent conflicts in Nigerian are predicated on economic, or socio-political issues relating to wealth distribution, its solution often goes beyond normal order of things (Otite, 1999). Yanma (2012) suggests that the solution could be found in the Transformative Theatre or Forum Theatre. This kind of Theatre employs people's theatrical and dramatic traditions such as songs, dance and folk

media (Yanma 2012: 6). Brecht (1964) regards this kind of theatre as a weapon of social change.

Interrogating Nigerian Conflicts through Drama

Drama is a play in performance (Zaccheaus 2014).Drama mirrors its society, studies its problems and postulates probable solutions (Bamidele 2000). This is the characteristics of the Marxist School of playwrights such as Femi Osofisan and lately, this upcoming writer Jonathan Obilor. They do not only identify the problems of the society but goes ahead to suggest solutions. Nigerian drama has not lagged behind in this social responsibility.

Conceptual Analysis of the Play

Farewell to a Cannibal Rage by Femi Osofisan

Synopsis

This is a simple story of domestic love affairs between two intending couples who came to their village to inform their parents of their intention, only to be confronted with age long animosities between their different families. They were told they cannot marry because of the long standing feud between their parents. Akanbi wants to marry Olabisi but Akanbi's father has been killed in error by Olabisi's father. Adigun, Akanbi's uncle killed Olabisi's father in retaliation. Adetoun, Akanbi's mother became mad as a result of the incident, a silent reminder that things can no longer be at ease between the two families. Yet the two men were friends originally before destiny played tricks on them. But, at the end, two protagonists chose to love instead of hate. Olabisi expressed it thus:

> *Let it be so buried because of us. You taught me love mother, I learnt the word in your knees…Akanbi is not guilty of the sins his parents committed. He is not like them, he is different* (Osofisan, 2003 p. 152).

With this argument, Titi relents and allows the relationship. It took Olabisi some time to convince Akanbi what really happened as told by her mother before he decided to forsake the toga of vengeance and choose the path of forgiveness and love. When confronted by Adigun, Akanbi says:

Vengeance is in the past
How can one walk with his eyes
Always turned to the back?

Adigun insists that:

The past is a taproot
To the stem of the future

Akanbi answers:

These are men, Adigun
As there are trees, many wither young
And drop barren in the wind, they
Are those whose stem grow on hate!

Adigun agrees reluctantly, knowing the times have changed, society does not need his type any longer, he decides to commit suicide. His death provides the nourishment for flowering of the love of these young people. This play thrives on imagery and symbolisms.

Adigun and Titilayo, the two parents may represent the feuding communities bred in the animosities of the past. Akanbi and Olabisi may represent the future of that same community. The mountain Iloto may stand for primordial conflicts standing in the way of development of the community. Baba Soye, the Ifa priest, may equally represent the esoteric playwrights who just narrate a well-known problem of the community without offering any meaningful solution for it. By the dramatic death of Adigun and the intending couple bidding farewell to Iloto, the mountain of animosities, they chose the way of development and progress.

A Midnight Adventure by Jonathan C. Obilor
Synopsis of the Play

Who controls the past controls the future
Who controls the present controls the past
George Orwell '1984' (1949).

The play A Midnight Adventure dramatizes the main ingredients involved in human conflicts all over the world. Set in a transcendental amorphous village, the protagonist is seen on a journey of liberation to the city of Monaso where the Prince holds court. He is a casualty of the relentless war going on. He has lost both parents and siblings in the war. Left alone, he grew up in bitterness and hatred probably not even knowing the cause of the war because he was too young then. In this situation, he got married and sired a twin, one a realist and the other idealist. Simon the protagonist set out in the company of his idealist son, Mark, all keyed up to go and fight to liberate their kinsmen still in the dungeon of prince of Monaso. They were dissuaded by the wife Eunice and the twin brother. Victor. Brushing aside all reasons to see the fruitlessness of their journey, they left to join others in a refugee camp preparing for war. A problem arose. One of them betrayed them to the enemy's camp. They suspected Okito, an elderly war veteran, embarrassed him but later found out that its part of the enemy's propaganda.

The prince of Monaso organized a party in honour of his daughter's birthday. Mark decided to attend the party against all entreaties. At the party the princess fell in love with Mark. They eventually got married without the prince knowing that his son-in-law is an enemy. Mark later beseeched the princess to get his father whom he called uncle, fixed up as a cupbearer to the prince. The princess obliged him; he again requested that she should help him effect the release of the hostages. The request was turned down by her father. But upon the threat of death, her father ordered the release of the hostages but suspected the man's hand in all of these. He therefore ordered his execution, but before they could do it, Victor, the twin brother came searching for him, he was captured by the guards and beaten

to death. Simon seeing this wanted to rescue this Victor he but was killed in the attempt. Mark finally came back to kill the Prince, marries the princess and becomes the next Prince.

Conceptual Analysis of the Play

The play is developed along two premises:

Power can be used to promote human suffering

Power can be used to promote human goodness

Prince of Monaso typifies the first premise. He devolves his absolute power to evil intents holding other human beings hostage. Apart from the physical prison in which these people are kept, they are also kept in the prison of his heart because of the age long hatred targeted at them. Besides the love exhibited by prince Monaso towards his daughter is a self love which Martin Luther classified as phileo (Australian Journal). The decision to release the hostages was taken to safeguard the life of his only daughter not for any altruistic love of the other. This was why he was planning to eliminate Mark, who to all appearances had done nothing to warrant such cruelty except that he came from the south.

Simon and his household typify the devotion of power for the common good. In this same household are two streams of the same premises- the idealist and the realist. Victor and his mother are the idealists who believe that what will be will be- the pacificists which are a corruption of nonviolence resistance. Simon and Mark are the realists who believe in using power for the attainment of common good. Though they are essentially non-violent resistors, resisting the spread of evil in the world. But they are not passively resisting it, they are ready to do whatever is necessary to blot out the ugly face of oppression from the human world. They are not open to the door of freedom to others. Their mission to Monaso is for this very purpose. They are under no illusion that the journey would be easy. Their only weapon is the truth.

On getting to Monaso they did not attempt to fight their way in, instead they employ the weapon of love- agape- love, taking root in the heart of the Princess helped them to achieve their mission.

In Prince Monaso's camp, loyalty and respect is demanded as a matter of right not earned whereas in Simon's trust when this was tested by enemy propaganda. The trust obliterates the foul smell of betrayal. There, tact characterizes the liberation struggle all over the world. The ubiquitous South in the play is an idiom for the down trodden, the oppressed people of the world. Significantly in Nigeria, the Southern people are the minorities at the mercy of the Northern oligarchy who are born to rule. In America, the South plays home to the African Americans. They are the slaves that keep the plantation running smoothly. At the two places, migration symbolizes a step towards freedom and realization of self-potential. The significance of the migration lies in the fact that what pacifism or violence could not have fetched them they have achieved with non-violent resistance, Mark, by his marriage to the Princess became an heir apparent, and a reason the Prince wants him exterminated. Sure, enough with the death of the Prince, Mark ascended the throne, the two of them now united in the same goal:

Princess: *we are all one. Enough of this hatred we bear ourselves, language should not be a barrier to our unity and love if we all recognize the fact that we are all from the same parents- Adam and Eve, I will give whatever it takes to unite and settle this age long difference between my people and yours*

Mark: *the same mind with me* (Act 3 scene 3/page 43)

The Plays and National Development

The two plays in this study came from two widely different perspectives but they arrive at the same point. Both start from the position of socialist, realist, see the problems of the conflict ridden Nigerian society, work their ways through a labyrinth of hate and deep seated animosities. Both navigate the labyrinth with a binocular of love working through forgiveness. But forgiveness presupposes the acknowledgment of guilt

which is the point of recognition before there can be true denouement or catharsis in a tragic play. In *Farewell to Cannibal Rage* Akanbi owns up to the tragic errors of his uncle's mistake in killing Olabisi's father. Olabisi insists that she is the one that needs forgiveness, after all her own father is the first aggressor. Both characters agree that the events belong to the past and should be better left there while they may move ahead with their promising love devoid of parental prejudice. They decide to jettison the prejudices of the past and embrace the bright future their love promises. Iloto the mountain typifying the scenes of conflict situation in Nigeria may represent- social, economic, political, ethnic and religion must be left behind, find a way around it through love recognizing the fact that continued animosities will only engender more hatred and will not wake the dead. The country must forge forward by bidding farewell to the past histories of genocide at different sides of the divide. Leaders in all spheres of life must never forget that their actions or inaction today will constitute the history of tomorrow; parents must teach their children the virtue of forgiveness, irrespective of religion.

A Midnight Adventure, by Jonathan C. Obilor, a Niger Delta who had all his education in the South West part of the country, wrote this play as a student of English and Literary Studies Department, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti. This play equally proposes that all feuding communities in the country should sheath their sword, especially his primary community which is the Niger Delta and embrace peace through forgiving and forgetting the past. It is instructive that the Prince of Monaso had to die too before true love can emerge. The Princess and Mark now joined together in love can now administer a war torn country in their march towards wholeness and wholesome development.

Marriage as an Institution of Accommodation

The two plays employ the typology of marriage institution to symbolize the relationship between the family groups in Nigeria and the federal government. Akanbi and olabisi in Farewell to a Cannibal Rage

opted to go ahead with their marital plan in spite of their family animosities. Their initial hesitation to go ahead with the marriage being that period of deep, reflective thinking on both sides of the feuding divide before the latter decision of compromise and accommodation.

Mark and the Princess on the other hand end up using love to bridge the gap of animosities between the north and the south of the play. To achieve their goal, some living obstacles had to be removed-the Prince of died, Simon, the realist fighter for freedom who will never brook any compromise had to die too. It is after then necessarily sacrificial death that Mark and the Princes were able to marry.'

The import of thin symbolism of the plays in that as marriage in based on accommodation of diverse interests for common interests for the conflict ridden country of Nigeria to know true peace, there must be a dogged determination to accommodate one another one another based on dialogue.

Before now, the dialogues across Nigeria different divides could be at b4est be termed dialogue of the deaf became everyone man interested in having his own say without really brothering to listen or try to understand the other side. It is through thin honest dialogue that truth could be revealed about the real cause (causes) of the conflicts could be unearthed, addressed man conscious effort made to understand the issues, then can come the basic ingredient of human relationship-accommodation. It is when the different federating units have decided to accommodate each other, and then there will be true reconciliation.

Conclusion

Osofisan's Farewell to Cannibal Rage may be directed to resolution of conflicts that arose as a result of Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, yet it is still as relevant then as at now. It still speaks to the Nigerian.

Jonathan. C. Obilor's A Midnight Adventure too may been based on the irreconcilable differences between the Niger Delta's and the other parts f the Nigerian nation, yet the basic recipe for conflict resolution in the play

is still relevant to Nigeria today. It is as if the playwright was saying with Martin Luther King Junior that "an eye for an eye" everybody becomes blind.(1)

Therefore both playwrights call for resolution of the Nigerian conflict through dialogue, true reconciliation that can only come by the determination to accommodate each other. South Africans have done it, Africans American in America have come to embrace dialogue to put to rest the age-long genocide in the most advanced democracy of the world.

NOTE: Martin Luther King (Jr) stated that violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all.

The oil flow from the wetlands of the Niger delta which has become the albatross of Nigerian songs of discord, if properly managed, could serve the whole of the country without rancor, after all each of the federating units have something to bring to the federation, the way we surveyed befo4re the discovery of oil. The cereal grain of the North to be properly harnessed the cocoa and yams from the west, oil from the south while the industrial managers come from the East. Tin may bring the much needed development. Nigeria may still attain her true potential.

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