Interrogating a Playwright's Social Vision in Dramatic Literature: Matters Arising from Julie Okoh's *The Trials*.

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Abstract

Drama mirrors and reenacts the activities inherent in the society in a bid to provide entertainment, information and education to the target audience. The intention of a playwright to re-enact the happenings in the society is geared towards achieving social change. Therefore, it is apropos to state that some playwrights have built creative niche that identify them in dramatic literature. Julie Okoh is one of the contemporary playwrights in the Nigerian dramatic literature who uses her dramatic works to advance the course of society. In the light of the above, one is tempted to aver that issues bordering on gender questions have been a recurring decimal in most of Julie Okoh's drama. The playwright's social vision is to criticize obnoxious patriarchal ideologies that relegate the female gender to the background. It is on the above assertion, that this work is poised to study and analyze issues of gender inequality and other sundry social problems in *The Trials*. The work employs liberal feminist theory toward achieving the aim of the study. The work also employs secondary data collection such as textbooks, scholarly journals, magazines and the

internet amongst others. It uses literary, sociological and analytical approaches as methods of analysis. It is the modest recommendation of this work that gender inequality should be abolished in the society in order to engender peaceful and harmonious coexistence between the male and female genders.

Keywords: Drama, Matters Arising, Social Vision, Playwright and Dramatic Literature.

Introduction

Dramatic literature entails creative and artistic manipulation, reenactment and documentation of social actions in the society into drama. This creative enterprise is crucial in enhancing social transformation/stability, rejuvenation and subsequently stimulates social change. This however, is the responsibility of a playwright who through his or her creative talent and social vision encapsulates the activities in the society into dramatic action. Soyinka has a social vision and feels that an African writer has a greater role in the shaping of his country's development and growth. Soyinka as a dramatist takes a different approach to drama. To him, the role of a writer in the African scenario is to create a rhythm that makes African life meaningful (Ramya, p. 2016, p. 44). Corroborating the above assertion, Adebola (2008), opines that "a writer's social vision should be in consonance with the immediate need of the society and the yearnings and aspirations of his society" (p. 6). It is on the foregoing that, it is claimed that drama mirrors the happenings in the society towards the maintenance of social order and edification. Stating his opinion about drama, Ohia (2022) avers that drama in its very nature mirrors society (p. 35). In support of the above assertion, Okoh (2007) contends that:

> From the Greek word "drama", simply means action. It is an imitative action in the sense that it is a re-enactment of human actions. The concept of mimesis or imitation is crucial to the core meaning of drama. Drama is also a method of expression for the playwright, who tries to give order and clarity to human experience (p. 21).

It is obvious to state that a playwright mills his or her sources of information (data) from the day-to-day happenings in the society. As a creator, builder and constructor, a playwright recreates human experiences into drama for the audience delight. Describing the role of dramatists in the 21st century, Akanmode (2016) opines that:

> Not quite different from what art helps do in society. It is clime and time which often impose compelling artistic tasks. We may say that in the 21st century Nigeria, there is enough discontent in the polity or affairs of the nation that is more engaging for the artist (p. 153).

The above premise demonstrates the fact that playwrights are saddled with plethora of issues of societal concern to be contend with. As a talented playwright, Julie Okoh has in her dramatic literatures criticized issues bordering on womanism and gender discrimination in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Her feminist drive in literature is geared towards achieving gender balance in industry and domestic affairs. It is argued that no human gender can function effectively without the cooperation and contribution of other counterpart genders in society as it relates to procreation, socialization, industrialization and family amongst others. The harmonious cooperation of male and female genders in society is recipe for national development. Going by the biblical account of human creation, God in His infinite wisdom created Adam (male) and his wife - Eve (female) as human genders necessary in procreation in society. Therefore none of this gender should be treated in isolation. Overtime, issues concerning gender inequality have become phenomenal. Male and female genders are almost always at war in terms of distribution of opportunities, decision making, politics, marriages and family amongst other related matters. In this direction, some scholars have attributed gender inequality to obnoxious patriarchal traditions, culture and corrupt socialization as forces of gender retrogression in society.

In *The Trials*, Okoh queries gender disaggregation in the hospitality industry, marriages and culture. The play raises critical issues bordering on lack of unity in matrimonial front, economic resources and other sundry cultural/patriarchal factors. The above statement forms the gender question in the play. In her opinion, the playwright moves to unravel the teething demarcation between male

and female gender. It is on this note that this paper seeks to ask the following questions bordering on gender inequality in the society.

1. What is gender inequality?
2. Is gender inequality an attribute of the society?
3. Is gender inequality a social and biological constructs?
4. Who benefits from gender inequality?

The above questions constitute the crux of critical examination of Julie Okoh's *The Trials.* However, other issues of importance in the play will be evaluated, analysed and discussed accordingly. From the perspective of gender inequality, it is referred to as an unfair treatment given to one gender over the other in the society. Mefeuwo (2021) reveals that 'an important factor concerning the undermining of women in the Nigerian society is when male chiefs and British colonial agents came and regarded women as nothing' (7). Makama (2013) is of the views that "gender is the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women. For instance, gender roles of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household are society, historically and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences (p. 116). It is also important to establish the fact that the concept of gender and sex are different in use in context and content. While gender concerns its characteristics on the various roles, opportunity, and action designed and assigned to male and female human beings, it is a social construct of the perception of people's socio-cultural worldview. This is the creation and delineation of what the male and female is expected to do in society. The concept of sex therefore is biological feature which separates male and female base on reproductive organs. Makama further asserts that:

> Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female. For instance, the adult female has breast that can secrete milk to feed a baby but the adult male does not have. Gender roles differ from place to place and change with time. But sex roles are naturally fixed (2013, p. 118).

This seemingly demarcation in the various roles human beings (male and female) play in the society has become a source of worry to cultural scholars and gender activists. However, it is claimed that gender inequality is a creation of cultural values, norms and tradition amongst others. Some traditional and cultural beliefs

place more values on male child than the females. This is because it is believed that the male child is created by God to fight the battle of life as the head of the family; consequently the female is regarded as weaker vessels. Obire is cited as saying:

> Women all over the world have been labeled or tagged as belonging to the disadvantaged group of people due to the patriarchal structure of the society which makes the women to picture herself as a weaker human being (2013, p. 68).

It is also observed that obnoxious patriarchal traditions are responsible factors that create gender inequality in the society. This is a system or cultural mechanism that separates the roles of man and woman into gender types. Patriarchy is mostly rooted in the cultural worldview of Africa (Nigeria inclusive) in particular and the world in general. In Nigeria, cultural and traditional perceptions of the people create or rather move the female folk to a disadvantaged positions. In this case, some cultural practices see women as sexual benefit to men; therefore are being relegated to the background. Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, Obire asserts that " their only useful role was to help in procreation" (2013, p. 70).

The objectification and denigration of women to procreation and family attendant purposes is not only retrogressive to harmonious co-existence, but catalyst for gender inequality in the society. This fundamental gender question has lured many playwrights to query the excesses. Amongst the vocal women dramatists that used the instrumentality of drama to advocate for gender equality and inclusion in the society is Julie Okoh. In *The Trials*, the nexus of her artistic inquiry is to de-radicalize the crunching influence of obnoxious patriarchal tradition that hinders female visibility in the society. The play calls for mutual understanding and cooperation between male (husband) and female (wife) in domestic affairs.

Some Factors That Cause Gender Inequality in the Society

i. **Corrupt Socialization:** Unequal exposure to basic social needs and career leads to noticeable factor that hinder equal participation in the socio-economic and political spheres of life. In a family and other institutions of human endeavour, the need to place the male and female child on equal social development should be emphasized. This is because unequal

socialization will always contribute to gender inequality. A female or male child should as a matter importance have equal social exposure in the society in order to create social harmony. The corrupt socialization in gender careers, education, and politics amongst others widen the gulf of gender inequality in the society.

ii. **Religious Factor:** To state the obvious, some religious practices have contributed to unhealthy disparity in human relationships. Most religious faiths in Africa and Nigeria in particular do not provide equal opportunities for the male and female genders. It is therefore claimed that some religions favour the male gender more than the female gender. For example, some cultural and traditional practices pay attention to the needs of men forks than the females. "Despite the widespread engagement of women in their religious communities, religious leaders and those authorized to interpret religious doctrines are predominantly men. As such, the processes of the production of religious knowledge largely exclude women" (www.partner-religion-development.org). To this end, values, knowledge, influence and norms are mostly impacted or rather inculcated in the lives of males. This acculturation processes render the female inferior and uphold the males as superior beings. These religious practices have engendered gender inequality; thus relegates the female to the background.

iii. **Political Factor:** It is observed that the social structure of society is male-political oriented than the females. Governance in Nigeria, most times, favour the male gender more than the females. From the perspective of political economy, male gender is more economical empowered and politically favoured at the detriment of the females. In the Nigerian nation, politics and political positions, most times, are weighed on the economic stands of individuals of which the male gender controls more of the economic resources. This is why the female folks find it difficult to compete and contest favourably with the male counterparts in politics and thus are denied of or put in disadvantage positions.

iv. **Educational Factor:** Fundamentally speaking, education is a right to individuals in the society, not a privilege. "Of all the illiterate people in the world, ⅔ are women. When girls are not educated on the same level as boys, it has a huge effect on their future and the kinds of opportunities

they'll get" (www.humanrightscareers.com). Unfortunately, it is observed that more attention is given to the male child over the females in as much as education is concerned. It is argued that educational factor is "another constraint that hampers women from equal access to politics or encounter restricting their quest to participate in active politics." Afolabi (2003) reiterates that most women in Nigeria are illiterate despite the facts that they constitute half of the country's population" (p. 64). In recent pastand of course in some places nowadays, some parents attribute the sponsorship/training of female child as a waste of resources. This is because; they believe that the females will end up being marrying off to other family and thus become a 'property' to their husband. This primordial perception and ideology have to a great extent contributed to teething gender inequality in the society.

iv. **Economic Factor:** There is no gainsaying the fact that economic resources have been adjudged as basic factor that influence authority, power, integrity and visibility in the society. A man or woman with economic wealth is always identified and recognized in the society. However, those without economic resources may not have the same command of authority and power like the affluence ones. In a situation where the male and female genders do not measure in the same level of economic wealth; the one in an advantage position will always oppress and suppress the others economically. This condition enhances disparity in gender related opportunities in the society. It is important to state that gender inequality is also referred to as gender segregation or discrimination. The concept of gender segregation simply refers to the unequal distribution of men and women in the occupational structure. Again, this is also called occupational segregation by sex. Below are the illustrations of two forms of occupational distribution

1. Vertical Segregation

Men
Women

In vertical segregation, men occupy the topmost positions and the women remain at the bottom.

2. Horizontal Segregation

Men ⟷ Women

In horizontal segregation, men and women have different job tasks in an occupational classes or occupations its self.

Synopsis of *the Trials*

Julie Okoh's *The trials* epitomizes the age-long gender struggle that characterized some marriage relationships in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The play questions the role of patriarchal ideology that relegates the women folk to the background; in a fast changing world. This is noticeable in the character of Sotonye who represents men patriarchal influence over the will and wishes of his wife – Ibiso. Ibiso is of the view that men and women should be represented equally in domestic affairs and socio-political spheres of life. In her absence at home, she tells her husband – Sotonye to dish the food he will eat himself but Sotonye's chauvinist ideology deters him to do so. He says that tradition abhors men to cook in the kitchen. As an unemployed man, who strives to survive, he calls on his friend, Tamuno to secure employment opportunity for him. However, Tamuno tells him to take a job of a cook in one of his hotels. Despites the earlier rejection of the job offer, Sotonye finally accepts the offer as the only available means of survival. Upon the acceptance of the job, Tamuno reconciles Sotony and his wife – Ibiso whom he had thoroughly beaten on an account of domestic disagreement. The play also highlights the issues of religious hypocrisy, political instability and unfavourable government policies that create unemployment crises in Nigeria. The playwright calls for equal gender representation in matrimonial homes and other socio-political engagements in the society. The playwright also frowns at the rate of increase in unemployment and other social problems that deter national development in the Nigeria nation.

Thematic Thrust in the Play

Gender Inequality: The play is a parody of gender inequality and discrimination in the society. In African society, especially in some Nigerian societies women are always relegated to the background due to gender disparity. From politics, occupational engagements to domestic affairs; women are seen as subordinates to their male counterparts. Most especially, male chauvinists see women as domestic attendants rather than career developers or public servants. Dastidar (2018) contends that "the term 'gender inequality' refers to unequal treatment of

individuals based on their gender. Gender inequality arises out of cultural differences in gender roles, which are socially constructed systems" (p. 383). This situation is what Julie Okoh encapsulates in *The Trials*. To further, strengthen the foregoing statement, Ejiofor (2019) reveals "Julie Okoh's *The Trials* succeeds in unmasking the various phases of development of the patriarchal mind-set in African society" (p. 314). In the play, Sotonye summaries the roles of his wife – Ibiso as mere cook and domestic attendant whose duty is to take care of the home front. The dialogue below explicates thus:

> SOTONYE: It's women's duty to take care of children.
> IBISO: Who said so?
> SOTONYE: You are equipped to do so. But since you women have decided to work outside the home, you now want men to take over your domestic work. Isn't it? (Okoh, 2008, p. 18).

The patriarchal mentality of Sotonye blindfolds him to realize the fact that time changes so also the values and perception of life. Even when Tamuno tells him that some men are better cook; Sotonye remains headstrong in his chauvinistic stands. He says "to be served is one of the rare privileges enjoyed by all men, both rich and poor. Why must I deny myself of that privilege? The kitchen is for women" (Pp. 30-31).

Women Empowerment/Equality: The play demonstrates the fact that women can be empowered when given the right opportunity. The play shows that Ibiso is, liberated from the patriarchal tradition that hinders women from asserting their authority in the society. The possibility of Ibiso becoming a professional was, enabled by the tailoring institute established by Ebiye. Revealing how she gained economic empowerment, Ibiso praises Ebiye thus:

> Thanks to Ebiye. If she hadn't thought of setting up that workshop for women co-operative, all these wouldn't have happened. From a humble beginning she lifted me up high. Suddenly I'm in the lime-light (Okoh, 2014, p. 13).

The play calls for the need to empower the women folk economically in order to better the society. According to the play's narrative, in time past, some women in Nigeria have occupied lucrative occupational engagements such as trade, politics amongst others. This does not only enhance the personality status of women but also has contributed to the economic advancement of the nation. Telling Sotonye the prospects of her career, Ibiso says:

> With good machines, we will be able to make sophisticated dresses. So, instead of going abroad to waste our foreign currency on shopping for wedding clothes, people will buy wedding clothes made here in Nigeria by Nigerians for Nigerians. All we need now is some money for expansion (Okoh, 2014, p. 14).

Naturally, an economically empowered person will always contribute his or her reasonable quota in nation building (most especially women). This, tallies with the saying "develop a woman and develop the nation." To balance the growth of the society in nation building, the contributions of the female and male gender are needed. It is therefore on the foregoing that women crave for equal opportunity with men in the society. This singular drive motivates Ibiso to say, "They want to have equal rights and opportunities with men" (p. 19). She re-emphasises that:

> So as to be able to work both inside and outside their homes, participate in decision making processes, invest their talent and skill in contributing to the development of this country. Or isn't it a noble idea for women to participate in the struggle for national development? (Okoh, 2008, p. 19)

The thematic focus of the play is to criticise obnoxious tradition and attitude of some men who refuse to give women equal opportunity in the society. "Gender equality is fundamental to the achievement of human rights and is an aspiration that benefits all in the society, including girls and women" (www.unfoundation.org). It is on this note that the playwright advocates for both men and women are, created as human being and therefore should be, given equal opportunities to advance the course of humanity. Judging by the play's narrative, Sotonye champions the course of inequality against the women race, while his wife, Ibiso is an agent of women liberation, as she attests to the playwright's social vision.

Tradition Verses Modernity: The conflict in the play is, anchored on the struggle between tradition and modernity. Traditionally, it is the belief of male chauvinists that women are 'property' of men, therefore are, not allowed to work outside their homes. Revealing the ill- treatments against women in the Nigerian society, Ejiofor (2019) informs that women have been maltreated in the hands of some indolent husbands and it has increased family crises" (p. 310). This belief is, exhibited in the character of Sotonye who relegates the role of his wife to the kitchen. From his myopic perspective, Sotonye attributes women's cardinal role to that of cook. In fact, he sees it as a taboo for a man to cook food in the kitchen.

From the change perspective as it relates to modern realities, men have become better cooks than some women. This occupational engagement has helped in improving their economic resources. This revelation is, noted in the character of Tamuno, Sotonye's childhood friend who out of his busy schedule cooks for his family. As a cook, Tamuno established hotels in various locations in Port Harcourt. When Sotonye complains of his jobless condition to Tamuno, he encourages him to take a job in one of his hotels as a cook but Sotonye refuses. Hear this:

SOTONYE: The kitchen is for women.
TAMUNO: Do you know that the best cooks in this world are men?
SOTONYE: I don't know about that.
TAMUNO: I am telling you the truth.
SOTONYE: Do you cook yourself?
TAMUNO: Of course, I do (Okoh, 2008, p. 31).

Social criticism in the play anchors on deliberate caricature on the ignorance of Sotonye to come to terms with modern realities. This is because must men have realized that times have changed thus the need to discard the obnoxious traditional philosophy that demarcates the female and male gender in terms of economic, socio-political, and religions amongst other variables that deter peaceful and harmonious co-existence in the society. Revealing the change mantra of the playwright, Tamuno, tells Sotonye "of course, it is possible. Every human being and everything is subject to change. Change is the only thing that does not change" (p. 45).

Character Delineation: An Analysis

Ibiso: She is a hardworking, lovely wife of Sotonye and a mother of four children. She is a woman who sues for equality between man and woman. Through her character, the playwright reveals that the duty of a woman does not end in the kitchen. Despite the joblessness of her husband, Ibiso strives to make ends meet by engaging herself in a tailoring institute. As a kind woman who believes in the unity of her family, she shares her money with her husband. She tells Sotonye "immediately I'm paid this week and I'll buy two cell-phones, one for you and one for me… it is our money, for you, the children and me" (Okoh. 2008, p. 14). Ibiso is the authorial voice who conveys the thought, feelings, and emotions of the playwright to the readers. Through her character, the feminist intention of the playwright manifests. The play satirizes the chauvinistic attitude of men as it reveals in the character of Sotonye; who believes that it is the duty of women to cook and serve food on the table for men to eat. This imaginary mental orientation played out in the marital relationship between Sotonye and Ibiso. It is in the interest of Sotonye that Ibiso stays at home and takes care of the domestic duties. It is on this regards that Ibiso tells him that "is it even a new thing in this country for women to work outside their homes? Don't our grandmother and great grandmothers do so? They went to farms and to markets far away from their homes only to come back, sometimes, very late at night" (Okoh. 2008, p. 18). Ibiso portrays the quality of a woman of substance, who despite fulfiling her duty at home sorts to pursue a career as a fashion designer. This did not only bring fame to her but also helped to develop and increase her economic resources.

Sotonye: He is Ibiso's husband and a father of four children. Sotonye is a childhood friend of Tamuno – an industrialist. He was forcibly retired from work due to government policy on privatization. This circumstance rendered him jobless as he lives without sufficient money to take care of his family. He laments "worst of all, up till this very moment, I've not been paid my pension and gratuity… How can the government be preaching poverty alleviation policy and at the same time deny people of their source of income?" (Okoh. 2008, p. 4). Naturally, Sotonye is a male chauvinist who advocates for superiority of male folks over the females. In this tendency, he believes that it is the duty of women to cook food in the kitchen for the consumption of the family. Even when his wife,

Ibiso tells him to take care of his stomach in her absence, Sotonye takes it as an affront and denigration of his personality. Hear this:

> SOTONYE: Oh God! Why are you doing this to me? Hear that I should go and cook. Me? The son of Preybiyie! Oh no, she will not succeed in turning me into a cook. Tamuno dukuna! (God forbid!) (p. 23).
>
> IBISO: I can't understand this fuss over the issue of men going to the kitchen. If a man can go to the living-room, bedroom, toilet and bathroom, why can't he go to the kitchen?
>
> SOTONYE: The kitchen is for women (Okoh, 2014, p. 24).

It is this gender division; especially as it relates to domestic duties that the play queries. The butt of the playwright's social vision is to ridicule the senseless gender classification in the society. Biologically, men and women are, created as equal human beings. Overtime, patriarchal traditions separated gender responsibilities. This issue of gender disparity creates unnecessary conflict in the society; especially in matrimony. As a show of pride, Sotonye tells Tamuno thus:

> To be served is one of the rare privileges enjoyed by all men, both rich and poor. Why must I deny myself of that privilege? Oh, because I am jobless? I see. You too have joined them to be laughing at me (Okoh, 2014 p. 30).

Tamuno replies, "I am not laughing at you. I'm telling you to face reality… anybody can cook" (Okoh, 2014, p. 31). Tamuno is yet another carrier of the playwright's social vision. It is in the best interest of the playwright to disorient the patriarchal mentality, which emphasizes that the domestic core is only the responsibility of women.

However, Sotonye gains economic survival and employment courtesy of the cooking job his friend, Tamuno offered him in one of his hotel businesses. Despite the earlier disagreement between Tamuno and Sotonye on the issue concerning joblessness that nearly ruined his family, Sotonye shows some appreciation to

Tamuno for providing employment for him. He thanks Tamuno thus: "you are something else. How many rich men in this country ever remember their poor childhood friend? When they see the latter from afar, they tell their drivers to drive faster. Sometimes they splash puddle water on the poor men in the process…" (Okoh, 2014, p. 40). Having been provided a job, Sotonye makes to reconcile with Ibiso, his wife whom he had quarrel with; why Tamuno wishes them well by saying "with pleasure, madam. Well I'll say good night to both of you; and I wish you happy reconciliation" (p. 45).

Tamuno: He is a childhood friend of Sotonye. Tamuno represents the change mantra that the playwright advocates for. The character of Tamuno is, used in the play to change the old tradition that says, "The role of women ends in the kitchen." Nowadays, men are not only cooks but also better cooks. Tamuno is a kind person who ensures that Sotonye's family is, peaceful by reconciling them together. Tamuno is a change catalyst who advocates for equality and change in the society. This is evident as he says, "Of course, it is possible. Every human being and everything is subject to change. Change is the only thing that does not change" (Okoh, 2014, p. 45)

***The Trials*: Matters Arising**.

The social enquiry of the play focuses on the teething gender discrimination that characterize the society especially the Nigerian nation. Gender inequality constitutes a dangerous socio-political problem that hinders rapid national development in Nigeria. The existing patriarchal tradition in Nigeria, for instance, has hindered women folks from asserting authorities in both domestic and national political activities. This is however, shown in the dramatic exigencies in the play – *The Trials*, where the roles of women in nation building are relegated to the kitchen. This bad orientation is seen in the character of Sotonye who believes that the responsibility of his wife – Ibiso, is that of a cook and domestic family attendant. Buttressing this fact, Sotonye asserts, "To be served is one of the rare privileges enjoyed by all men, both rich and poor. Why must I deny myself of that privilege?" (Okoh, 2008, p. 30). The play queries obnoxious patriarchal philosophies towards the right, role and existence of women in marital relationships. From the narratives of the play, women and men should share equal responsibility in the family. Hear this:

> IBISO: That is not the issue right now. The problem is that you are blind and too strong-headed. You have refused to understand that the confinement of women to the private sector has changed. Co-operation among all members of the family is the only way to a happy family life. So if I am not at home, stop waiting for me to come and pass food on the table for you to eat. Stop it! (Okoh, 2008, p. 25)

This fixated attitude of some men towards believing that the role of women is in the kitchen needs to revisit, because time and tradition have changed to place women in their right perspectives. Confirming this situation to Sotonye, Tamuno tells him "of course, it is possible. Every human being and everything is subject to change." Change is the only thing that does not change" (p. 45).

Apart from the disturbing gender question in the Nigerian socio-political terrain, issues of bad governance constitute yet another matter arising from Julie Okoh's *The Trials*. To be candid, Nigeria is, blessed with mineral resources that are capable of attending to socio-economic needs of its citizens but incompetence and improper management of these God-given resources have caused untold hardship to the citizens. This singular situation remains yet another phase of social vision of the playwright. It is therefore in the best interest of the playwright to caricature the activities of bad leaders who do not provide quality leadership that will alleviate the sufferings of the people. This socio-political reality is, demonstrated in the character of Sotonye who was, retrenched from his place of work without adequate compensation. Revealing his ordeal to Tamuno, Sotonye laments "worst of all, up till this very moment, I've not been paid my pension and gratuity" (p. 4). Going by the civil service rules of engagement, a retired civil servant is entitled to prompt payment of his or her pension and gratuity to enable the person carry on with life endeavours. Unfortunately, this is, not faithfully implemented. It is on this premise that the play ridicules this socio-political anomaly in order to seek change of attitude for a better society.

A society characterized by high unemployment rate; cannot be free from socio-economic crisis. Also, some of the factors that create unemployment are, attributed to unfavourable government policies. This is evident as Tamuno posits that:

> That is the irony of it all. The current economic reform agenda pursued by the federal government lacks human face. It has created unprecedented social tension through unemployment. In fact, the current level of unemployment in this country has reached a crisis point (Okoh, 2008, p. 4).

The unfavourable business climate in the country cuts across various business enterprises that create employment. In Nigeria, many private companies have closed to business due to unfriendly government policies. In turn, this has contributed to high rate of joblessness in the country. Revealing his feelings to Sotonye, Tamuno laments on the insensitive attitude of government to the operation of private firms in the country thus "how can the private sector succeed in creating jobs, when the government continues to hammer the private sector with policies aimed at stunting their growth?" (p. 7). The aforementioned factor lures the playwright in ridiculing such unwholesome practices of government on the business climate in Nigeria. Through this social commentary, it is, hoped that those in the helm of leadership should as a matter of importance redress their attitude in order to curtail socio-political challenges that negatively affect the development of the nation.

The play also questions unhealthy political activities in Nigeria. Naturally, the essence of joining a political party in any nation is to provide quality leadership that will attract the dividends of democracy to the electorates. This will amount to selfless services that promote peace, unity and development of the country and its citizens. Put differently, the kind of politics practiced in the country today according to the play's narrative tilts towards selfishness, looting of public funds and acrimony. This is, captured in the dialogue between Sotonye and Tamuno thus:

> TAMUNO: Please don't give up. Have hope. Why don't you join politics? That's the only lucrative business right now.

> SOTONYE: I'll rather die of hunger.
> TAMUNO: Why?
> SOTONYE: To do politics, one must be willing to lie, cheat, steal and kill. I don't have the skill for any of those vocations. Besides when I die I want to be able to face my creator `with a clear conscience (Okoh, 2008, p. 9).

Through ridicule, the playwright tells the political gladiators to refrain from indulging in unwholesome political practices that are retrogressive to the advancement of the nation. The issues of looting public treasury, killing and kidnapping amongst other social problems need to be redressed in order to achieve a peaceful society.

Despite criticizing the leadership gaps in the country, the playwright also beams her search light on the religious circle. As a place of worship, the target of religious leaders is to win souls for God (salvation). Unfortunately, some churches in Nigeria have deviated from the norms – soul winning to material acquisition. It is on this premise that some unemployed youths have resorted in becoming 'Pastors' by opening their churches overnight. The play reveals that Sotonye; having been forcibly retrenched from his place of work, takes to the street looking for jobs. In his quest for employment, he meets Tamuno, his childhood friend, who suggests to him to start church business. Tamuno assures him that opening a church is a sure way of overcoming unemployment. He advises that:

> Good idea! Why don't you start a church? That's another booming business in this country these days. People become pastors overnight. No qualification is required but a gift of sharp tongue and the sense of tortoise. The more eloquent you are the faster the members of your congregation will increase. So, why don't you start a church, first of all, in your own living-room? Before you know it, you have already made enough money to build a gigantic church. Then, you give it an attractive name. Members will flock to you in millions for example: Mount Zion Miracles Ministry, Holy Temple of God's Wonder, Holy Ghost Assembly, Citadel of Miracles and Healings (Okoh, 2008, p. 9).

The play questions the attitude of some pastors who turn their churches into business ventures. This immoral behaviour constitutes a serious factor that deters socio-economic and religio-political advancement of the Nigerian nation. Nowadays, it is a common sight to see churches in almost all the streets in Nigeria. The reason is, attributed to the quest for material acquisition; rather than seeking salvation.

Conclusion

Dramatic literature is a veritable platform used by playwrights to ventilate their opinions and thus document social action. This creative endeavour creates avenue or opportunity for the playwright to create and re-creates inherent activities in the society. It is also noted that some playwrights in their creative artifices choose specific issues and style of documentation in their literary works. This mannerism or approach to issues distinguishes them in literary works. In the light of the above, Julie Okoh is one of the renowned playwrights that carved a niche for herself in dramatic literature. In this direction, the dramatist emphasizes her creative exploits in discussing issues bordering on gender discrimination in the society. This however forms the fulcrum of discourse in her pla ys. This is evident in *The Trials* in which the playwright condemns obnoxious patriarchal traditional/cultural practices that create women invisibility in the society. It is revealed that unfavourable government policies that create unemployment, religious hypocrisy and political instability constitute the bane of critical discourse in the play. The paper further identified some causes of gender inequality in the play and thus, reviewed the thematic thrust of the play to reflect the playwright's social vision.

Recommendation

Having done a critically interrogation of a playwright's social vision in dramatic literature with a particular focus on Julie Okoh's *The Trials*, the paper puts forward the following recommendations thus:

- The work recommends that obnoxious traditional/cultural ideologies that deter gender balance be discouraged in order to allow gender equality in the society. This is because; these traditional practices constitute unnecessary agitations in gender related opportunity in the society.

- The playwright's social vision should be tailored towards crticising issues bordering on national unity, equity and progress in the society. It is because the avoidance or inability to condemn social problems lead to anarchy and social segregation in the society.
- It is also the kind recommendation of this paper that government should put in place policies and programmes that will enhance equal participation of males and females in the socio-political structure of the society.
- Playwright should as a matter importance be encouraged to emphasize on their dramatic literatures gender equality and justice. This will go a long way in creating confidence and sense of belonging in the minds of the citizens.
- The work recommends that government and non-governmental agencies should be encouraged to promulgate policies that will create employment opportunity for male and female gender in the society.
- Religious hypocrisy and other anti-social behaviours that causes moral and social decadences should be abhorred to create sanity in the society.
- The work also recommends that government institutions should be encouraged to create employment opportunity to curb poverty and political instability in the society.
- Finally, religious oriented and gender related early child marriage should be discouraged and abolished.

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