

The Leadership Question in Nigeria politics: A Look at Ola Rotimi's 'Kurumi'

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Abstract: *This study explored The Question Of Nigeria Leadership In Ola Rotimi's Kurumi. The Marxian Theories of Aesthetics and Arts provide the theoretical nexus for the inquiry. The study adopted the content analysis method for the collection of its primary data. Secondary data was generated through the review of relevant literature on the topic. The study observed that Rotimi is a committed dramatist cum social commentator who uses the play in focus to interrogate the perennial leadership debacle in Nigeria. By exposing the inherent weaknesses of the Nigerian leadership model, the dramatist ultimately points the direction the society should go. The study recommended among other that it is time for those Nigerian playwrights who still hold the view of art for art sake to join forces with the pragmatic school and use their arts to interrogate and proffer solutions to social problems so as to rescue the Nigerian society from imminent derailment.*

Keywords: *Politics, leadership, Ola Rotimi, Nigeria.*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The imperative of leadership discourse replete dramatic history. Playwrights, more importantly those of pragmatic leaning, have always been preoccupied by the question of leadership and politics of their nations and have consistently showcase this in their theatres. Sophocles in his play *Antigone* as early as the 5th century thematically explored the issue surrounding leadership in view of the relationship between the leader and the subjects with a pungent argument bordering on whose will is superior, vis-à-vis whose authority should prevail between the will of government as exemplified in the ruler (Creon), and the will of the people-the governed as personified in Antigone.

Also in Euripides' *Bacchae* leadership issue bothers within the gods and man. A few years later, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels further clarified the political imperative in theatre by proposing that theatre should be used primarily to address timeless class struggles in human society. Marx and Engels influenced generations of radical artists, commonly called Marxists, to use their art to explore issues of leadership and compliance in contemporary society. For Karl Marx, drama must transcend space and time to reflect the ultimate conflict in

all human societies. This is between the bourgeoisie (typically the middle class in terms of materialistic values and conventional attitudes) and the proletariat (workers, working class, wage earners, or the common people). There is a constant conflict between them. the common people, the lower classes, the masses). This dispute borders on the distribution of the state in relation to the control of property and factors of production (Communist Manifesto, 1859). In Femi Osofisan's essay, *The Political Imperative of African Theatre*, he notes that two dominant schools have emerged: one is that "art is a self-contained, autonomous entity, an ideological and that: the other argues that "art was the art of all things," and that it depends on and is determined by the surrounding social and political environment." (Asaba, 2001).

According to Richard Anderson, the art-for-life philosophy has inspired generations of playwrights and aesthetes. It is well expressed in the practical theory of Western aesthetics (Osofisan in Asagba (2001)

Playwrights in Africa, particularly in the Nigerian artistic and indeed dramatic landscape, have continuously explored the relationship and interface between art and society and used their works to question, diagnose, and prescribe what they have considered to be better alternatives to the socio-political order, especially the leadership question that has been largely identified as a bane of the Nigeria nation.

For most African societies, leadership is still a crucial existential and developmental issue. Tolu and Dare (2012), stress this point. they claim; Nigeria has been independent for a long time, but it's surprising and terrible that the country is still struggling with good leadership. Nigeria is supposed to be a powerful country in Africa. The leaders who have been in charge since independence were not very good at their jobs. They often spent time being dishonest and fighting with each other instead of doing what was best for the country. This led to bad management of public money and the economy, which resulted in a lot of people being very poor.

Many other scholars have questioned why Nigeria, despite its wealth of human and material resources, finds it difficult to address deep-seated governance problems. This view was also restated in Chris and Otu, (2012). According to a Critique, while some argue that the country's leadership challenge stems from the outbreak of colonial misfortunes in Nigeria, there has been a rift between Nigeria's past and present leaders. Some dismiss such arguments on the grounds that corruption and lack of vision are at their peak in that this hinders all activity. A meaningful effort to ensure good governance in this country (Chris and Otu, (2012).

Some observers of Nigeria's post-independence development crisis seem to agree that lack of leadership is a major factor. For example, according to renowned author Chinua Achebe, Nigeria's problem is simply a failure of leadership (Chris and Out, (2012). Leadership dynamics has therefore become a major thematic issue in African drama and theatre, with almost endless dramas dealing with this subject.

As stated by Ekevere, (2017), Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clarke, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofissan, Bode Sowande and Tunde Fatunde are among such revolutionary playwrights. Wole Soyinka, perhaps Nigeria's and indeed Africa's most famous playwright, opens with this same issue of Nigerian leadership in his first drama, *Dance in the Forests* (1960), in which leadership has not managed tensions effectively, and between the oppressive affluent (Mata-Karib court) and the oppressed masses (soldiers, wives, half-children), society will never be able to keep balance. In *A Play of Giants* (1984), *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), *The beatification of Area Boy* (1996), and *King Baabu* (2001), Soyinka is particularly and relentlessly exposes and satirizes the widespread leadership incompetence and failures in Nigeria. In his *Beatification of Area boy*, he did not only expose and ridicule the failures of Nigeria's military leadership, but also predicts that it is likely to provoke violent resistance from oppressed populations which is emphatically the case today.

For the same reason, perhaps the most prolific contemporary African playwright, Femi Osofisan's plays consistently examine leadership failures in Nigeria: *The Restless Rampage of Locusts* (1975), *Moraundtudan* (1982) and *Once Upon For Robbers* (1991) are examples of such plays. Femi Osofisan emphasizes this by emphasizing the socialist nature of Nigerian theatre. African playwrights united to "remember the communal

spirit of our ancestors, the ancient collectivist organization of our socio-economic life (where there was no divide between the rulers and the ruled), the humanitarian Based on the principles of sharing and caring, our ancestors practised" He further emphasizes that political imperative in African drama means: When I start writing or trying to remember my dreams, I think about all the people in my country who work very hard but still cannot afford food most of the time. I believe things can be better for some people. We need to make our plays and performances speak out even more strongly for these people, using our movements and music to show how much they are struggling against those who unfairly use their labor. (Osofisan in Asagba (2001)

Ojaide (2006) expresses a condemnation of contemporary Nigeria's political and administrative leadership. Ideally, a leader should represent the people, promote and protect the welfare of the people, but in practice, as he points out, the typical Nigerian leader "Threshold crossed, greed-obsessed man, desire unleashed wolf. A man who wears a human mask and has "a hundred hearts in one body", he immediately invokes "crown mysticism" to enable and justify his selfishness, greed and vengeance.

Objective of the Study

In this study, we aim to investigate and espouse on the ways Ola Rotimi has used his Play KURUMI to address the leadership question in Nigeria politics. This will be done through a critical analysis of Kurumi. The specific objectives of the study include:

1. To highlight the deep-seated nature of the leadership question in the Nigerian society.
2. To examine various aspects of the leadership question that Rotimi explores in Kurumi
3. To investigate various ways in which Rotimi addresses the issue of leadership in the play.
4. To highlight the social significance of Rotimi's stance on the leadership question in the play.

THEORETICAL NEXUS

Marxian theory of aesthetics and art forms is used as the theoretical background for this study. Broadly speaking, modern theoretical approaches to art can be classified into two types. The first, according to Gordon, (2016), is a theory aimed at clarifying the defining nature of art. These are philosophical theories whose origins can be found in the writings of Socrates and Plato

Second, in opposition to philosophical theory is sociological theory, which Gordon describes as a theory that sees art as a social structure and phenomenon. These include Marxist aesthetics, structuralism, deconstructivism, critical theory, and postmodernism. However, there is a lot of overlap in the ideas presented by these theories. Marxist aesthetics is a theory of aesthetics based on or derived from Karl's theory of Marx.

This is a dialectical-materialistic approach to applying Marxism to the cultural realm, especially the taste-related realm such as art and beauty. Marxists believe that economic and social conditions, especially the resulting class relations, influence all aspects of a person's life. Individuals, from religious beliefs to legal systems and cultural frameworks. From the classical Marxist point of view, the role of art is not only to represent such situations truthfully, but also to try to improve them (social/socialist realism). But this is a dispute of interpretation, especially for the limited but important writings of Marx and Engels on art and aesthetics.

There is no distinct difference between Marxist aesthetics and Marxist theory of art, though there is a clear distinction in that aesthetics represents an examination of the more fundamental and philosophical issues. Marxist aesthetics overlaps and reverberates into the Marxist theory of art. It is also heavily focused on defining a prescription for what art should be like and what it should contribute to society by way of social action rather than merely serving as an interpretation or reflection.

Marxism combines a theory of history with a philosophical worldview that seeks to go beyond the contemplative posture of earlier philosophies and provide the intellectual means for humanity's emancipation from oppressive social and political forms, according to Andrew Hemmingway in his essay "Marxism and Art" (In Oxford Bibliographies, 2014). In essence, the Marxian Theory of Aesthetics and Art insists that drama, and art in general, serve practical purposes. It stipulates that this functionality must be geared toward addressing the issue of social equity and the class tension brought on by the unfair distribution and management of the commonwealth.

Applying the Marxian Theory of Aesthetics and Art to this study, we contend that the the play Kurumi by Rotimi is the subject to which it explores, through analyses of various leadership philosophies, the prospects for establishing a superior social alternative: the Marxian collectivist stance as a superior alternative to the individual (messianic and dictatorial) stance of the feudal estate that characterizes the Nigerian body politics. In the end, the playwright recommends the former strategy (democratic) as the solution to Nigeria's enduring problems with leadership and politics. The Marxian Theory of Aesthetics and Arts is based on the idea that art, specifically drama, should be used to address important socio-political issues in order to improve society.

Methodology

For the purpose of gathering information for constructive analysis, this study will primarily use the literary methodology of inquiry. The study will also use a dual design that combines inductive and deductive research to improve a thorough understanding of the study of the issue of leadership in our society and the

social function of drama in our Nigerian politics, a critical diachronic and synchronic analysis of the text:: Kurumi by Ola Rotimi will be made. Additionally, an inter-generic approach will be used to examine the texts and materials from related fields, such as drama, in order to clarify some of the important issues. These will include conducting online research and using some library resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To achieve the common goal of the question of leadership in Nigeria Politics, we shall look at various related literature review on similar issue. From the foregoing, it is Sine qua non to further break this down into the following sub endings:

- i. Drama and Society
- ii. The Concept of Leadership and Politics
- iii. The Leadership Question in Africa and its Influence on Nigerian Literature

i. Drama and Society

Francis Bacon quoted that Drama is basically a fine art and that art is man added to Nature" This infers that it is a cognizant production of individuals acting under the feeling of their surroundings and encounters. Though not all human manifestations influence on society in critical ways by speaking to and some of the time changing human feelings and discernments, Drama does this practically constantly. This is on the grounds that it is deliberately composed to resolve explicit issues in the public arena. Thus it is inseparably associated with society and human connections in a social setting. This is also reaffirmed by Katie (2016) who expresses that: *It has been said that Shakespeare was a pro at utilizing the dramatizations of theatre to not just dismantle society, dismantling it to show it again to the watcher, yet in addition that through his works, society thus had to investigate customary cultural jobs. In this sense, one can start to focus on the job of shows in performance centre as a jungle gym for the significant recursive connections that it keeps up with the general public that both makes it and is impacted by it.* He states further that at a degree of social cooperation, drama and the theatre permit us to zero in on the social relations behind financial matters, legislative issues, orientation, race and class.

As yet upholding the verifiable connection among drama and society, Adewoyin (2016), stated that: drama and society have their starting points in the social settings of the past and the changes of the present. The theatre custom has been important for the custom and public activity of individuals embracing the entirety of their lifestyle, propensities, mentalities and affinities. In spite of the fact that took a gander at as a type of diversion, dramatic exercises and exhibitions are viewed as casual ways by which the nature of lives of individuals can be taught and improved. From the early ages to the archaic period, theatre and religion were viewed as "abnormal

bed colleagues" for example the most broadly acknowledged hypothesis on the beginning of show and theatre is that it emerged out of fantasy and custom.

The earliest recorded semi dramatic occasion traces all the way back to 2000BC with the "enthusiasm plays" of Antiquated Egypt. The tale of the god, Osiris was performed every year at celebrations all through the civilization, denoting the known start of an involved acquaintance among theatre and religion. Greek theatre, being the foundation of the Western practice, was essential for a more extensive culture of dramatic exhibitions, which incorporate celebrations and strict celebrations for example observing Dionysus, the lord of wine and richness. Entertainers wore outfits and veils to address specific legendary or powerful powers.

By the Middle age time, the Congregation, having by implication assumed command over political expert in Europe, sensationalized renditions of specific scriptural occasions on unambiguous days of the year. Theatre was reawakened as formal shows written in Latin and managing Book of scriptures stories and performed by ministers or church individuals. Then came vernacular dramatizations communicated in like manner language and were a more intricate series of one demonstration shows occurring around squares or different pieces of the city. There were three kinds of vernacular dramatizations. Secret or cycle plays were short plays in view of the Old and New Confirmations coordinated into verifiable cycles; marvel plays managed occasions in a specific holy people's lives and ethical quality plays showed examples through metaphorical characters, addressing excellences and indecencies that plague all individuals in the later medieval times. Likewise, energy plays depicting occasions in the existence of the Christian expert additionally became famous (Brockett and Hildy, 2009).

Among the more prominent strict plays were The Palace of Steadiness and Everyman. The Palace of Tirelessness portrays humanity's advancement from birth to death, while Everyman is a moral story intended to show the devoted demonstrations of Christian which are essential for passage into Paradise. Everyman accepts Demise's summons, battles to get away yet at last leaves to need. En route, he is abandoned by Fellow, Carefulness and Strength-just Great Deeds goes with him to the grave (Adewoyin, 2016).

From the previous audit, it is apparent that drama and theatre have reliably interacted emphatically with society by filling in as devices used to sharpen the overall population on issues that influence them on everyday schedule. These incorporate issues of family arranging/kid dividing, conduction of evaluation, crusade against deal and dispersion of phony and unlawful medications, HIV/AIDS and different sexually transmitted diseases, early terminations of pregnancy, youngster misuse/disregard and so forth. An ideal model is the television series, *I Need to Know*, which centres around the edification of the young age on the risks of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sexually transmitted diseases and

teen pregnancies and the need to go without such indecencies to safeguard their future. Drama is the reflection of any general public since it archives what's going on and presents it back to a similar society.

Drama can likewise be utilized for of self-articulation and strengthening by individuals confronting unfriendly political or social conditions. For instance, the Tivs utilized the customary Kwagh-Hir manikin and disguise theatre to voice resistance to political exploitation during the 1960s. Crafted by Hubert Ogunde are parodies that arrangement with effective occasions in Nigerian governmental issues. One of such works, *Yoruba Ronu* (Yoruba Think) reveals insight into the emergency in the Western Area during the 1965 decisions, which ultimately finished into the January fifteenth 1966 horrendous overthrow (Adewoyin, 2016). Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* is a Nigerian transformation of the Oedipus subject of Sophocles, in which Rotimi utilizes the representation of collective debate, self esteem and ethnic pride to represent the issues that finished in the Nigerian Nationwide conflict of 1967-1970 (Adewoyin, 2016). Hence, not the death beings that are at fault for Nigerian public misfortune, yet individuals themselves who drove their country to calamity through their impulsive activities and forceful personal responsibility.

On the other hand, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is a creative reproduction of the courageous pretended by the amazing Dedan Kimathi, the head of the Mau development in Kenya. Through emulate and flashback, it similarly shows the noteworthy commitments of the Kenyan labourers and labourers when they rose against the English colonialists to recover their lost grounds and accomplish political autonomy.

A Complete Drama is therefore a blend of emulate, beautiful ensembles, customary drumming, music and stories which uses practical actual symbolism and an adaptable utilization of language. Writers and pundits have utilized these procedures, yet expressed them with "an extreme enthusiasm for the issues of society." Consequently, drama becomes a mechanism of diversion as well as a vehicle of social transformation.

Starting from the beginning of autonomy during the 1960s, African Drama researchers have been enraptured by the administration question in Africa. Their anxiety was generally invigorated by the unfurling shocking real factors of the quick post freedom period, which saw numerous African countries move retrogressively from a place of extraordinary commitments of thriving to one of despondency and void. These worries have expectedly enlivened various works investigating the subject of authority. Noticeable among these producers are Soyinka, Arthol Fugard, Ngugi Wa Thiong' O, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Ibrahim Hessein, among a few others.

ii. The Concept of Leadership and Politics

The idea of leadership and Politics is essentially an “established phenomenon”. This means that management permeates each corner of the society. It is a primary characteristic of human relationship which can't be finished without because for there to be progress, there ought to be a person on the helm navigating the affairs of the kingdom. Michael Hughes and others opine that, “without leadership, human beings generally will have problem coordinating their activities” (stated in Ezeugwu, 2009).

A Leader is a frontrunner who occupies a position whereby he/she is needed to carry out some positive defined roles that's aimed toward accomplishing not unusual and collective dreams. To this, Fyneface, (2010) says: *leadership denotes the occupancy of reputation and the energetic overall performance of a position that mobilizes extra or much less organized collective and voluntary efforts toward attainment of shared goals and objectives.*

Charles de Gaulle talking about the qualities of effective leadership management states that; *virtually, it isn't always the elite that topics in leadership. it's far the people themselves. but the elite frequently direct the people in their numerous moves. this is why there are so many variables in political leadership mainly while it carries the stigma of partisan elements* (Quoted in Fyneface, 2016).

In group settings, some people exert greater authority and impact than others. Society calls these individuals leaders. There is an axiom that says that as a society, “we comply and also disagree”, which means that that conflicts are crucial functions of every human society. Battle can be negative to the development of the society while there's no leader or head to fix fences, reconcile opposing forces and reach a compromise. At the contrary, within the absence of an individual performing as leader, absolute chaos will reign.

Nonetheless on the nature of leadership, Ezeugwu (2016) notes that even animals also obey the laws of leadership and followership: “Zoologists inform us that positive animals like Baboons, wolves, lions and gorillas to say but a few, have organizations where one adult male is the leader and protector of the organization”. Mascot explains it for this reason; If a gorilla organization consists of extra than a unmarried grownup male, one is dominant and he's the leader of the group and handiest that one generally breeds. There may be a standard rank for the organization primarily based specially on size. Groups are enormously strong and the dominant male keeps leadership for years (Mascot, 2005).

From the above, it is possible to say that leadership is a human and a natural phenomenon.

On the challenges of leadership, Machiavelli (1960) observes that, “there is nothing greater or tough to soak up hand, greater perilous to conduct, or greater

unsure in its achievement than to take the lead within the creation of a new order of things”

iii. The Leadership Question in Africa and its Influence on Nigerian Literature

The problem of leadership is one of the most intractable problems in postcolonial African society; Historians, politicians, sociologists as well as dramatists have continued to use their works to beam a searchlight on this seemingly difficult and malignant problem. Ezeugwu (2009) states that with a closer look at Nigeria, there exist two schools of thought on the genesis of this problem.

The first school traces the problem to European colonialists, who imposed the alien political concepts of Indirect Rule, Assimilation and Association on the African continent. Among the proponents of this position are Walter Rodney, Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Franz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, etc (Ekevere, 2017). Achebe, for instance, blames the colonialists for the failures of African socio-political systems. In his popular novel *Things Fall Apart* he declares that the colonialists “have put a knife in the string that holds us together and have made us fall apart”. This school also blames the incompatibility of people in modern African states on the unchecked balkanization of the African continent by the colonial powers without considering old boundaries, tribal enmities, and differences in language as well as diverse ethnic groups and customs.

Reinforcing the above position, Nwabueze, (2003) states that; *“the political officers hardly considered the sociology of a village or their leadership idiosyncrasies before imposing a warrant chief on it”.*

On the other hand, the second school of thought identified by Ezeugwu (2009) argues that the problem is not colonization, but the people, and the society itself. Nwabueze (2003), also sharing this opinion posits that, “The current problems in Nigeria have little to do with colonial legacy; instead, they are primarily caused by corruption and mismanagement on the part of the leaders”. His argument is that these leaders, having been wrested from colonialism should have used the opportunity to develop their countries better. Instead they assume the position vacated by the colonial power and victimize their own people for selfish interests. Osofisan is equally of the view that the failure of leadership in Nigeria is a function of the self-centred nature of the leadership class.

Deviating slightly, Wole Soyinka in his drama, *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), treads the middle point. While acknowledging that the foundations of discordance in African societies reside in the colonial heritage, he argues that the perpetration of the woes is a function of the failure or inability of modern leaders to reflect on the mistakes of the colonial past, act upon them to produce a viable present and inspire a future that is free from the limitations of the colonial heritage. The thrust of this position is that

if indeed the colonialists caused the problem with the indiscriminate balkanization of Africa, what stops African leaders from re-partitioning the continent along the old lines as has been the case in Eastern Europe?

In recent times, leadership has aroused a lot of questions throughout the globe on what makes a good leader; why is there bad leadership and what are those factors that lead to bad leadership whether democratic or autocratic? In Nigeria however, the case has often been a tale of bad leadership which may have been caused by lack of good political ideologies.

Fyneface (2010) has insightfully opined that: The neglect of leadership whether political or military after the advent of the European imperialists who came to administer or govern Nigeria after its amalgamation can be traceable to the lack of clear cut political ideologies of leadership from the period when Nigeria gained independence to the present day.

Leadership is not an easy task, nobody is born a leader contrary to the opinions of some dictators and tyrants, for leaders are made and not born.

A good leader is explained thus by Rotimi in an interview with Enekwe;... Above all else, must act for the benefit of others, not he alone. This expectation unfortunately seems to be the reverse in the experience of leadership in contemporary Africa (Cited in Ezeugwu, 2009).

The above characteristic of bad leadership is the hallmark of most leaders of the third world countries, including Nigeria. Whereas a good leadership should possess certain characteristics like honesty, accountability, openness, transparency, responsibility and sensibility, connection to the community and empathy with the led, the reverse is the case with most leaders in Nigeria. The reason for this being that immediately an individual assumes a leadership role, the people around him automatically begins to shield the truth away from him or her, and thus the leader becomes somewhat detached from the people. This robs the leader of the opportunity to relate to his followers, thus he does not lead properly and crisis of leadership ensues. Tom Bottmore and others in agreement with the above state that, "... No leadership succeeds unless it speaks to the needs and conditions of the people" (1978). Pennock and Smith assert on the other hand that good leaders...Analyze problems into their basic elements, so that they can be understood by people who cannot perform the analysis for themselves... By definition, leaders influence more than they are influenced (1960).

This ability of a leader to influence, leads us to the division of leadership into two kinds. They are leadership by consent and leadership by force. The terms are self-explanatory in that some rule with people's mandate and permission, while others take leadership without consulting with the people, which can be either through rigging, imposition or selection. Arthur Nwankwo has this to say about self-appointed leaders; African leaders who want to perpetuate themselves in power because

they believe there is no alternative to ruler-ship, or that they stage a coup d'état to redeem the people whereas they did not hold any consultation with such people (1990).

We have several examples of such leaders who have led by force: Adolph Hitler of Germany, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Idi Amin of Uganda, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Samuel Doe of Liberia, Sani Abacha of Nigeria and a host of others. These individuals subjected their people to unprecedented terror and dehumanization. A proper sensitization of the people can help put an end to the evil machinations of these tyrants and dictators.

Nnaji, concurs to this when he posits that;

History is filled with evidences that leadership by force cannot endure. The downfall and disappearance of dictators and kings is imminent. It means that people will not follow a forceful leader indefinitely (1992).

The pervasiveness of the leadership question in the African continent and indeed the Nigerian nation inevitably makes the issue of leadership a constant subject in the Nigerian literary landscape either as a literary or revolutionary concept. Nigeria has had her own share of such leaders, Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha, Abdusalami Abubakar, and very recently, Olusegun Obasanjo, who tried to subvert the constitution and aspire for a third term in office. This political leadership phenomenon has provided much material for contemporary Nigerian playwrights. It is then not surprising that a scholar such as Simon Umukoro observes that, "there is, in most Nigerian plays, a crisis of the political system and leadership and the dramatist's mission is to explore how to resolve the crisis (for better for worse)" (1994).

Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) explores the quality of the leadership and the response of the people to that leadership. It suggests that there is neither collective will in the people nor responsible leadership. Moreover, in *Achebe's Arrow of God* (1964), *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960), a collective voice at the community level, through which agreement is articulated, is projected as lacking in African societies. In *Arrow of God*, Ezeolu's vision of a people cantered leadership is opposed and defeated by anti-people forces led by the self-serving Nwaka. Okonkwo suffers a similar fate when his people refuse to heed his rallying call to resist the white man and his religion in *Things Fall Apart*.

By the same token, the Nigerian poet, Tanure Ojaide, engages the disturbing issue of leadership. His work *When Your God is a Pander* is his denunciation of contemporary Nigerian political and administrative leadership. A leader, he contends, should represent the people, should foster their wellbeing and protect them, but in fact, the typical Nigerian leader is "gone out of the threshold", a man consumed by greed, "an unleashed wolf with a human mask", a man with "hundred hearts in one body", he is quick to invoke "the mystique of his

crown”, to make possible and to justify his “self-servingness”, his acquisitiveness, and his vindictiveness (p.2).

In Femi Osofisan’s *Red is the Freedom Road*, we see a situation where Akanji in a bid to free his people from slavery and bondage tows the same line of murder and destruction thereby perpetuating what he intended to prevent. Most leaders start off with a good intent, then end up wrecking what they initially set out to rebuild. Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi is a classic case in point. Some others assume leadership positions with the sole intent of squandering the national treasury. Lekoja Brown evidences this tendency in Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, when he declares; “Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics.....” He goes into politics with his heart set on a definite goal – to plunder the common till. In a country that does not hold its past leaders to account, this has become the dominant trend in political leadership. Femi Osofisan reinforces this position in his two “midnight” plays *Midnight Hotel* and *The Album of the Midnight Blackout*.

Ola Rotimi in two of his plays has explored two opposite leadership qualities. In *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988), According to the wikipedia.org, Ola Rotimi: Depicts a different kind of leader: a selfless, result-oriented, committed leadership, complemented by a followership that believes in the good of the generality of its members through the application of itself to the cause that is beneficial.

On the other hand, Fattah (2012:19) describing an exploitative leadership as opposed to a selfless leadership wrote:

The issue of exploitation is such an undesirable but recurrent issue in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society. It has become commonplace for African and Nigeria leaders to exploit and impoverish their subjects. Hence, the art of this epoch out rightly frowns at and protests against exploitation. In this text, Lejoka-Brown represents the exploiters who prey on their subjects to achieve their selfish gains.

In Nigeria, as in the entire African continent, many writers have been subjected to severe indignity and dehumanization because of the protest they render against bad and tyrannical leadership. Writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Ama Ata Aidoo and a host of many others have spoken out against the oppression by leaders and have been incarcerated for their efforts. Simon Umukoro states that, “Drama like other art forms undeniably reflects ways of ordering the society in which it is based” (1994:11). Dramatists, therefore, are like the custodians of old, whose duty it is to hand down the customs, traditions and laws guiding the community through folktales, enactment via masquerades (Ezeugwu, p. 42).

In all of these, the point being made is that the question of leadership is a recurring decimal in the African continent and expectedly, drama as the reflector of vital socio-political and cultural realities, has consistently

focused on this reality with a view to instituting a basis for a social re-think on and better management of the problem.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Ola Rotimi: The Man and his Background

Ola Rotimi, a Nigerian playwright, scholar and director was born Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi on April 13, 1938 in Sapele, Delta State of Nigeria. Ola Rotimi was born to an Ijaw mother and a Yoruba father. Rotimi’s path into the world of art was charted for him by a number of family influences. According to *Essaymonster.net* (2016), Rotimi’s father often wrote and recited poems. He also organized the community theatre in Port Harcourt where his son, Ola, grew up. Ola’s uncle, Chief Robert Dede, was the lead performer in a traditional dance troupe. Dede and his dancers, dressed in elaborate costumes, danced, sang, and acted in what was one of the most spectacular of such troupes, more often called masquerades, in Rivers State. Ola first appeared on stage when he was only four years of age in 1942 in a play directed and produced by his father. For the next 58 years, Rotimi lived on the stage, across the world, with steadfastness, devotion, commitment and zest.

Oyin Ogunba states that Ola Rotimi, who started his writing career in 1966, remained a well-rounded theatre man and a first rate play director. As a playwright, he frequently deals with the theme of cultural diversity and often examines Nigeria’s history and ethnic traditions in his works and often shows the redemptive and transformatory power of theatre in a society in dire need of social and spiritual regeneration (Drama and Theatre in Nigeria, p. 112). Some of his works were broadcast on Nigerian radio and published in institutional magazines. At his early stage, Rotimi had his education in Port Harcourt and Lagos in Nigeria. After receiving scholarship to study theatre abroad, he traveled to the United States in 1959 to study at Boston University where he bagged his B.A. in Fine Arts in 1963. He later attended the Yale School of Drama where he got an M.A in 1966 and also learned much about dramaturgy; he was active in the African Students Union at Boston University, serving as its president, and actively engaging in protests against colonialism and in favor of African nationalisms.

Afterwards, Rotimi turned his focus on playwriting. By the time he came back to Nigeria in 1960, he became a lecturer and taught in the Theatre Arts Department at the universities of Ife and Port Harcourt. Because of the political unrest in the 1990s, he travelled and lived in the Caribbean where he taught at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota and the United States. He came back to Nigeria in 2000 to continue with Obafemi Awolowo University where worked directly with the University of Ife

Theatre Arts Department, a repertory company that performed works in Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin, and English.

He has written many wonderful and interesting plays. His plays in a chronological order include: *To Stir the God of Iron* (1963), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1966) *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971), *Kurunm i* (1971), and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), which was written about the last Benin ruler of the Benin Empire. He wrote *Grip Amin* (1973), *Invitation into Madness* (1973), *Akassa Youmi* (1977), *Holding Talks* (1979), *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled* (1983) and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988). He also wrote the critical text, *African Dramatic Literature: To be or to Become?* (1991).

Rotimi also founded the Ola Rotimi Literary Society which was a blog aimed at promoting his literary legacies and ideologies. This great playwright, scholar, dramatist, father, brother and friend of the theatre died on August 18, 2000.

Leadership and Politics

Rotimi's drama is replete with variegated themes ranging from leadership, political corruption, social justice/welfare, and traditionalism to the reconstruction of history. In most cases, Rotimi explores these themes not for the sake of mere exploration but to use them as platforms to address some serious contemporary realities. This point is underscored by Femi Obafemi, who posits that it is Rotimi's "conviction that the Nigerian historical past is instrumental to the reshaping of our contemporary experience... Rotimi's purpose is to raise audience's perception of these events in a way that makes the material relevant to the contemporary reality". (*Osifisan in Asgba*, 2001).

In his play *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Rotimi, as part of his contribution to African cultural renaissance, attempts to counter the received and dominant British authored and propagated account of the true motivation for and the events that remotely and immediately caused the tragic Benin massacre in 1897. As Onokoome Okome noted, the British version of that history presents the Benin monarch and his subjects as blood thirsty savages who without provocation attacked and massacred a hapless British trade expedition to Benin (In *Cross Currents*, p. 177). But in Rotimi's perspective and perhaps more balanced reconstruction of the same event, the true imperialist motive of the expedition is revealed. Rotimi underscores the objectivity of his account in the preface to the play by citing earlier duplicities exhibited by the same British expedition as prelude to the displacement of other powerful African monarchs like King Kosoko of Lagos, Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, among others. In the final analysis, Rotimi declares in the said preface that "Oba Ovonramwen was a man who was more wronged than he ever wronged". Rotimi's claim in this regard is further reinforced by Ahmed Yerima in his own dramatic

reconstruction of the same event, titled: *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* (1998).

The theme of social justice is espoused by Rotimi in the plays *If, A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*. In these plays, the playwright's focus, respectively, is the everyday masses and the disabled and displaced in the Nigerian society. While not absolving the masses of their complicity in the manipulation of the super structure to the advantage of the leadership class, Rotimi clearly shows that the condition of the ruled in the Nigerian society is deplorable. Rotimi's major concern in *If...* and *Hopes...* revolves around some emasculated or, in his words, 'chosified' individuals in the contemporary society. The setting of *If...* involves certain depraved characters in a multi-tenanted building, whose lives the landlord ungraciously threatens with quit notices to secure their votes. The landlord becomes a signifier of the ruler in Nigerian nation struggling to make sense of multiplicity in political transition, towards achieving manipulation and exploitation.

Hopes... is a satire of a group of people whose 'insignia', leprosy, symbolizes poverty and deprivation in a society unknown to providing for its weaker members. Both *Hopes...* and *If...* are full of characters who could pride themselves on the leadership qualities of Papa and Whyte, respectively. However, *Hopes...* is set in Port-Harcourt and has people analogous to Fanon's Wretched of the Earth surviving the malice of their oppressors as a result of collective revolt. In a similar vein, the unfortunate people in *If...* are not lucky enough as they face the brutalization and dehumanization of the landlord, which culminates in the death of Onyema, the beacon and symbol of hope, who should have enlivened the struggle and precipitated the desired egalitarian society.

In *If...* Rotimi portrays the agonizing and extreme harsh experiences of the ruled arising from the unjust social structure. For example, Adiagha (Mama Ukot) was forced to abandon her husband's residence in Port Harcourt for her father's home at Ekpene Ukpa with her only son Ukot due to family insecurity arising from the fact that her husband Akpan has not been able to provide the basic necessities for the sustenance of the marriage. She felt that the best option is to leave the marriage since her dreams of marriage have not been fulfilled through her husband. In her calculation, there is no need to continue with a failed marriage as far as she is concerned because it does not have the anticipated security to provide their basic needs particularly for her child Ukot. She laments her miserable condition and thus orders Ukot to be prepared to leave his father: You there- Ukot! Crazy as your father, I don't want to start looking for you the moment I'm ready to get out of this hell, understand! Off I will go! You bet me! And if you think your crazy father will have a kobo for your transport fare, you're just as crazy as that father of yours. On foot it will be for you! Foot! And alone from Port Harcourt here, all the way to Ekpene Ukpa! Bet it! (37)

From every indication, she has lost hope in her marriage and the society which produced it. Adiagha in her lamentation of the failure of her country Nigeria symbolized by the ruling government observed that the greatness of a nation is measured based on the ability of the citizenry to feed themselves and not by singing and speaking grammar which her husband Akpan engages in with Guevara and Banji. She retorts: Everyday a return work; e eat; open book; e go butut, dey talk grammar with Che Guevara and Banji. De e go begin sing: Tiolele, tiolele ... Nigeria will be great! "Nigeria go great,..na by sing nahim country dey take great? Ebn? No be inside belle nahim person dey take know country wey great? Una answer now? (p. 37).

Indeed, it is in the availability of food and other social amenities such as water, road, power, and health services that the greatness and standard of living of a country is measured.

According to Adiagha, a socially unjust country like Nigeria with large population of beggars and hungry citizenry can neither be said to be great nor secured. This is because "a hungry man is an angry man" who can attack the state or be recruited by the enemies of the state and be used as an instrument of destabilization and threat to the nation.

Rotimi shows this possibility in his other play, *Akassa You Mi* (2001) or the Akassa War of 1895, which captures the attack on the Royal Niger Company of the British government by the people of Nembe. The cause of war is the British maltreatment of the natives, through multiple imposition of taxes on goods and services; thereby hindering the natives from trading or fishing freely in their waters. They insist that the "Nembe people obtain licenses before trading in their own areas" (*Akassa...*, p.xii). Therefore, in order to liberate his people from British economic and political domination, King Fredrick William Koko(1848-1898) on 29th January, 1895 leads the attack on the company's headquarters at Akassa.

Thus, in these plays, Rotimi exposes the callousness and injustice in a Nigerian society that not only exploits and refuses to cater for but also attempts to deny its disadvantaged members their right to free living and legitimate pursuit of self-actualization and happiness.

The theme of traditionalism is explored in *Kurunmi* (1971). *Kurunmi* dramatizes the conflict between tradition and change. It emphasizes the importance of tradition but clearly demonstrates the need for change through the dramatic vehicle of confrontation. In this play, conflict is presented as the bedrock of change.

In the play *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* Rotimi depicts the corruption, naivety and ignorance of a former military major-Rahman Taslim Lekoja-brown in his bid to go into politics. His motives are selfish, actions misplaced and his unpatriotic motives makes it difficult for him to succeed as a politician or even win any party primaries, and his attempt to adapt to a situation he hardly comprehends produces high comic effects and results. He attempts to use military tactics in place of political

strategies. This corruption, inexperience coupled with his domestic problems and misdirected political ambition ruined him as a politician and almost wrecked his matrimonial home as well. All these were achievable through the use of language which the artist cleverly weaved together to produce high comic results.

Ola Rotimi can be seen as a very visionary writer who perceived what the political scene in Nigeria and other African nations would be in the nearest future and therefore decided to take a comic swipe at ideological misfits and opportunists who flood the ever accommodating political landscape of contemporary Africa. The issue of the use and manipulation of women in politics is also highlighted in the play. With little information and instruction from Lekoja Brown's American trained wife, Sikira (a political and illiterate wife) of Lekoja Brown abandons her husband and takes to politics which she feels will lose her from the grip of oppression and fetch her the dividends of democracy and popularity.

Nationalistic Spirit

Rotimi possesses and has consistently shown a strong inclination towards cultural nationalism. This position has been robustly espoused by critics like Egwugwullah and Geoffrey Axworthy, among others. Illah posits on Rotimi's nationalism that:

To begin to see how cultural politics informs the stylization of historical material in Rotimi's drama, we must establish that Negritude or what has been referred to as the Roots Movement was a reaction of the literary elite to the hegemony of colonial ideology ("Culturalist Assertion" p. 113).

For Axworthy, as presented by Ahmed Yerima in *The Geoffrey Axworthy Years* (p. 52), Rotimi was one of several dramatists who went back into history for the purpose of awakening the cultural values of the rich history of Nigeria. Even the legendary Wole Soyinka, as cited by Emasealu, had words to say in acknowledgment of Rotimi's cultural nationalism. According to Soyinka, Rotimi was one Nigerian writer for whom his cultural nationalism was constantly at work against a total usurpation by imported forms (*The Theatre of OlaRotimi*, p. 33).

Though Rotimi demonstrates this nationalist commitment in several of his plays including *Kurunmi* and *The Gods are not to Blame*, perhaps its most palpable expression is in *Akassa You Mi*, a play written about the Nembe people of Ijaw extraction in the Niger Delta. The play dramatizes the British occupation of Nembe with heavy colonial force and the struggle by the Nembe people to regain their lost voice and glory. In the play, Ola Rotimi opened the window of Nembe's glorious past and spirit of nationalism through the character, Crocodile – Without – Shame and his second in command Amazige. As Benedict Binebai puts it:

The picture of Nationalism and the need for its attainment is vividly highlighted in the circle of the play. It is at that circle that we are informed that Goldie and the Niger Company took over all the trades of Nembe along the

Niger Coast protectorate. Crocodile-Without-Shame (C-W-S) and his group of pirates are by the playwright's brilliant plotting, used significantly as instruments for drawing up the differences in Nembe between the past and the present of Nembe for positive action to be taken for the actualization of her self-determination ("Dramatizing Subaltern Speakability: Nationalism and Economic Identity in Ola Rotimi's *Akassa YouMi*" p. 5). In essence, Ola Rotimi gives the Nembe cultural pride and identity a regenerative force of antithesis against colonialism, which united and produced the people's voice that mobilized them against British rule. He presents Nembe nationalism and national identity on the political agenda of their struggle as a foremost vector of the movement of history as the national character of Nembe struggle epitomized in *Akassa YouMi* decks itself out to preserve Nembe nationalism and identity.

Characterization and Style

Characterization is the dramatist's creation of imaginary dramatic persons through actions, incidents and dialogues in such a way as to cause the audience to perceive them as realistic portraits of living beings. Muiwa Awodiya notes that characterization is the playwright's means of differentiating one dramatic personage from another. Rotimi's characters (whether in his comic or serious plays) are realistic and believable models, which makes it easy for audiences to relate with the characters. In creating his characters, whether as groups or as individuals, Rotimi examines his society and identifies certain character prototypes which he models his fictional characters after.

In his earlier plays like *Kurunmi*, *The Gods...* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* where the individual is emphasized, Rotimi pays much attention to the physiological and psychological details of his characters. Modeled on the Epic theatre style, the characters develop through the plays as the audience is gradually made to understand the psyche of the characters vis a vis what motivates them to act the way they do.

In *The Gods Are not to Blame*, the play's protagonist, Odewale, the son of King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola of Kutuje, grows up far from his native town. A man of an irascible nature, Odewale, unwittingly slays his father, marries his mother, and in so doing pollutes the land. To save his people, he must be cleansed. Odewale's tragic flaw is not primarily pride as much as tribal animosity. When he attacks the old man (his father, the king) who has intruded on his land, Odewale is determined not to be violent, but when the old man refers to Odewale's tribe as a bush tribe, the protagonist loses all control and slays the intruder. Throughout the play, the theme of tribalism reappears. When the village seer, Baba Fakunle, accuses Odewale of being the murderer of the former king, Odewale's immediate instinct is to see tribal bias. Odewale believes

himself to be an Ikejun man among the people of Kutuje. Odewale chooses to see tribal resentment as the basis of any criticism directed towards him.

Ola Rotimi uses Odewale to suggest to us that man is his own albatross; his own nemesis; his own enemy. He shows that one of the sources of life's tragedy is amnesia; man's willed forgetfulness as well as his hubristic discountenancing of the remedial functions of introspection.

On the psychological plain, Rotimi presents an Odewale who acknowledges his flaws and seeks divine help to redeem himself. Witness, for instance, Odewale's desperate supplication before his household gods:

Odewale: God! What a woman! [kneels before the household shrine, arms raised]. Give me some of her patience, I pray you. Some... some of her cool heart... and cool the hot, hot, hotness in my blood- the hot blood of a gorilla! [cleansing himself in the sacred water] (39).

Odewale, in his soul-wrenching supplication, highlights his "hot blood", which invariably refers to his famed hot temper or "raw anger" (27), his intemperate impetuosity under which his subjects wilt and quail. We therefore empathize with Odewale, in spite of his flaws, because we understand that, like ourselves, the man struggles and loses to his inner demons. We find a similar trait in *Kurunmi*. Despite being generalissimo, in his quiet moment, *Kurunmi* reflects on his challenges and fears. He begs Ogun, his patron deity, to show him the right direction and let him move. We therefore witness a transition or oscillation in these characters as infallible larger-than-life personages in their social roles as leaders but pathetically human and vulnerable in their private moments.

In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Rotimi creates a character, a god-monarch challenged from within and abroad. To secure his place, position and pride, he takes some far reaching actions that culminate in his tragedy. *Ovonramwen's* tragedy is, however, inevitable, for act or not upon the adversities, he is bound to lose significantly. Another level of characterization in Rotimi's drama is the collective model. In this model, the playwright focuses on groups instead of individuals. Class divides is usually the basis of characterization. The ex-lepers and tenants in *Hopes...* and *If...* respectively represent this model. Even when Harcourt White is presented as the indisputable leader of the inmates, he does not stand alone but rather derives his strength from the dogged support of lieutenants like Hannah.

The Play: *Kurunmi*

The play is premised on the Ibadan-Ijaiye war that erupted shortly after the establishment of a new Oyo Empire by AlafinAtiba (the royal custodian of Oyo Empire) by the middle of the 19th century in Nigeria. Atiba succeeded in building a new capital but for military strength, he depended on two major warrior towns;

Ibadan and Ijaiye. He, therefore, cleverly, gave titles to the leaders of these towns. The leader of Ibadan, Ibikunle, a fierce warrior was given the title of Balogun (War General), while the leader of Ijaiye, Kurunmi, was invested with the title of Aare-Ona-Kankanfo (Generalissimo).

The city or district of Ijaiye with a population of about 100,000 people at the time was virtually the most feared because everybody dreaded standing trial before its leader, Kurunmi, or Aare as he was popularly known. Thus, there was a rivalry between these towns established because the Ibadan people often questioned Kurunmi's overt domineering attitude. When Atiba sensed that he was soon to die, he called his leading chiefs, notable amongst them, Kurunmi and Ibikunle to accept the crowned Prince Adeolu, as his successor. However, this was contrary to the constitution of Oyo, which stipulated that at the death of an Alafin, his eldest son, the crowned Prince, has to die with him. Ibadan accepted Atiba's plea while Ijaiye, under Kurunmi, rejected it as a violation of tradition. The outcome of their respective stances is, therefore, the source of Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*. The play, *Kurunmi* is a deliberate attempt of the playwright to extract and dramatize the conflict between tradition and change. It pungently presents the need for change through the dramatic medium of conflict. Ola Rotimi uses this play to dramatize conflict as the metaphor for change. At the beginning of the play, the author has established the confrontation using Kurunmi who is the protagonist, a warrior who has just arrived from a meeting in Oyo, the seat of the Alafin, king of Oyo kingdom. From him, we understand that Alafin Atiba has decided to pervert tradition by appointing his son Adeolu, the heir-apparent. Kurunmi:

Oba Atiba came down from high throne. In his right hand the sword of Ogun; in his left hand, the bolt of Sango. He came towards us: 'swear, my people, swear to Ogun and my forebear, Sango, that my son will be king after me'... 'Clown', I yelled, 'out of my cursed right (spits) I shall be no party to perversion and disgrace'. I picked my staff and walked out. (*Kurunmi*, 15-6).

The above incident apparently denotes that the current king is to be succeeded by his son Adeolu and Kurunmi will have none of it. Going by the tradition of the land this was not right because, "Whenever an Alafin dies, his first son must also die with him" (*Kurunmi*, p.19).

From the foregoing, it is clear that Kurunmi is disappointed that the Alafin enacts this obnoxious verdict which is clearly unlawful and against the spirit of the extant Yoruba tradition. To oppose the legality of the new law, however, is to confront legitimacy; to antagonize constituted authority.

The choices before the people of Oyo kingdom are:

i) To stick to tradition and risk confrontation with the Alafin; or

ii) Ignore tradition and respect authority and allow peace to reign.

The camps divide is clear. Kurunmi chooses to lead his people of Ijaiye through the path of antagonism. Soon we hear of the death of Alafin Atiba and the coronation of his son, Adeolu as the new Alafin. Kurunmi refuses to pay homage to the new Alafin who later sends emissaries to inquire why Kurunmi refused to attend the ceremony of installation of the new monarch. As *Aare Onakakanfo*, the generalissimo of the kingdom, this was out of place. Kurunmi replies with insult and contempt by sending a gift of soiled cloth to the Alafin. The battle line is drawn and the die is cast.

In spite of warnings and spirited protestations from Kurunmi's lieutenants and chiefs, he declares war against the Alafin, indeed against the very kingdom he was expected to protect. With this scenario, the stage is set for war.

The ensuing conflagrations proved to be one of the most horrendous tragic confrontations in the history of the Oyo Empire. The strength of the dissident warrior was too substandard for the superior firepower of the Empire. Kurunmi is overpowered. To make his defeat even more traumatic, his five sons die in the war. When Kurunmi learns of this, he surrenders the will to live on and commits suicide.

In his reading of *Kurunmi* from a traditionalist standpoint, Sunday Ayodabo states that Rotimi presents a traditional society that stands close to an advanced industrial or modernized society in which a major, or perhaps only the dominant elites, already have experienced, or see themselves as having experienced, a decisive rupture with the past and thus perceive themselves as no longer traditional (*The Belogradchik Journal for Local History, Cultural Heritage and Folk Studies*, pp. 69-89). As a result, Ayodabo continues; older traditions are wrongly perceived as dead or declining and no longer relevant. In order to preserve such traditions, the roles of traditionalists are very important.

The term "traditionalist" refers to a person or a group of people who have a strong preference for recourse to tradition (genuine or invented) as the primary source of authority. Kurunmi's quest to save a dying tradition is the dominant theme that brings about the conflict in the play. *Kurunmi*, from the exposition to the resolution of the play, shows defiance and obstinacy in his struggle to avoid tampering with his African (Yoruba) traditional beliefs. In the first scene of the play, the audience is made to understand the bond of love that Kurunmi has for his traditional belief system through his 'gaboon viper' narrative.

The above expression, as Ayodabo (84) puts it, is evident of the fact that Kurunmi is a custodian of culture and tradition. The conflict of religion is evidently expressed in this play. In a scenic description, Rotimi details the clash between the Ijaiye's Egungun festival and the Christian religion:

A band of Ijaiye Christian converts appears,

led in a procession by Rev and Mrs. Mann. Suddenly from the distance the sound of 'Egungun' drumming breaks forth and the converts begin to react very uneasily... Screams, yells, hoots of wild excitement as a weirdly clad masquerade rushes into full view, accompanied by a frenzied mob of Ijaiye old men and youths... the mob converges on the Rev Mann, then moves away, leaving him bleeding from a slash on his forehead (Acts 1, Scene 2: 22)

However, whatever claims Kurunmi can lay to good intentions in ultimate defense of tradition is rubbished by his obstinacy and arrogant refusal to rescind his erroneous and egoistic decision and thread the path of peace for the common good. For despite seeing the odds stacked heavily against him, following the defection of his key allies, Kurunmi still commits to an obviously lost cause that not only claims the lives of his subjects, his sons but ultimately his own life too.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Plays as Social Documents

The dramatist is the gadfly of his society which God has attached to the state and all day long in all places feasting upon society, arousing, persuading and reproaching it (Ebo, 2008). Therefore, as the watchdog of the society, the dramatist uses drama as a tool to affect changes in his environment through his works, the dramatist aims at showing how things stand in his own society (Obadiagwu, 2002) through his re-creation of events or in some instances by making postulations about the future. This is why the dramatist is sometimes referred to as visionary because he deals with contemporary situations, and also functions as a visionary who utilizes recent experiences as perspective on both the present and the future (Dandaura, 2002).

Most dramatic works that aim at making caustic comments on society are known as satires. This is because satirical works aim at "hurting us so that we can make amends" (Bamidele, 2001). The dramatist employs satire in his work to call the reader/audience to attention such that "even when we laugh, we see through the front and reflect on our inadequacies" (Bamidele, 2001). Therefore, in using drama as a tool for social commentary, the artist is making an objective evaluation, exposition or a critical assessment of the socio-political conditions in society" (Ebo, 2008).

The dramatist is therefore a social commentator and a critic. Although some theatre scholars like Ngugi Wa thiong' O sees the satirical artist as one who is "standing aloof, to view society and highlight its weakness" they urge the playwright to "try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends".

The effect of satirical works upon society overtime cannot be underestimated.

Kurunmi is an important play used by Ola Rotimi to comment critically on the Nigerian society. In *Kurunmi* the playwright, on the one hand, captures the typical Nigerian psyche, especially the penchant for people in authority to manipulate the rules and social structures for individual benefits. This is the example of Oba Atiba who insists on changing the tradition-succession-order to perpetuate his lineage on the throne. This is a recurring decimal in Nigerian politics and civil service where patriarchs continue to install their children in every available lucrative position without recourse to due process. This is also manifest in the fierce opposition to constitutional review by the political class, who are the sole beneficiaries of the current faulty document.

On the other hand, Rotimi uses the play to comment on the phenomenon of change and its inevitability. Kurunmi's blatant refusal to accept change as the only constant decimal in life and adapt accordingly leads to his cathartic fall. The play is therefore a warning against fundamentalism, fanaticism and all forms of extremism in human societies. For as Rotimi's *Kurunmi* shows, the individual who refuses to acknowledge the wind of change gets broken ultimately by that wind of change.

Leadership as Theme in the Play

At the centre of the the play under review in the study is the theme of leadership, albeit treated from varying perspectives.

In *Kurunmi*, Rotimi presents an interrogation of the leadership question. Here paternalism as a leadership attribute is laid bare and shown to be undemocratic and retrogressive. This is precisely the type of mindset that has pushed many Nigerian leaders such as Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975), Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), Sanni Abacha (1993-1998) and Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) to attempt to perpetuate themselves in office. Kurunmi is the all-knowing and all sufficient leader and self-styled messiah who does not consult his followers before taking any decision; even decisions as far-reaching as secession and declaration of war. He unilaterally decides to oppose Atiba and Adeolu, his successor. He commits to war without the approval of his people. Even in the face of imminent defeat arising from multiple desertions and withdrawals of key allies in the middle of the war, Kurunmi stubbornly refuses to heed the counsel of his generals and call for a truce. The result of this paternalistic disposition is not just the death of Kurunmi and his progenies but also the ultimate defeat and destruction of the Ijaiye nation.

Admittedly, Kurunmi claims that his actions are spurred by his love for and commitment to the defence of tradition. But he conveniently refuses to acknowledge the reality of Timi Ede's superior argument that ultimately, the people validate tradition and by consensus have agreed

to the institution of the new tradition proposed by Atiba. His refusal to bend to popular will and opinion therefore exposes his dictatorial and selfish tendencies. Whereas he tries to present Alafin Atiba as the dictator, he proves to be the real dictator. Notice that Atiba does not actually impose his will in demanding the change to the tradition but solicits the understanding and approval of his subordinates. If Atiba was the dictator Kurunmi attempts to present him as, he would have moved against Kurunmi the moment he walked out on him and the council. Atiba could have ordered his arrest and execution on charges of insubordination and treason. But he chose to give Kurunmi time to change his mind. Even when this does not happen, Adeolu does not rush into a conflict with Kurunmi but leaves that decision to the general which Kurunmi hurriedly takes. Two of the major hallmarks of progressive and peaceful coexistence are negotiation and compromise. Kurunmi blatantly spurns both principles. At the meeting, Alafin Atiba asked his chiefs to swear that at his death, his son, Prince Adeolu will be king of Oyo. All the chiefs; Oni of Ife, Timi of Ede, Bashorun Oluyole of Ibadan agree to the Oba's demand but Kurunmi stands against it obstinately as he does not wish to be "party to perversion and disgrace" (Act 1, Scene 1: 17).

This obstinacy and arrogation of all knowledge and leadership wisdom to oneself is the bane of leadership in Nigeria. The political class believes and act like they know it all, hence they pay no attention to the popular calls for the amendment of a national constitution that has proven to be grossly inadequate and incapable of addressing the 21st century's challenges. Kurunmi represents this class of leaders. He is the champion of the sustenance of a tradition, a retrogressive, barbaric and obsolete system that makes no meaningful contribution to social development. But he stands alone in this defense.

This is where the true leader respects the will and decision of his people. Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya were faced with a similar situation. They chose the obstinate and paternalistic alternative. The result was the respective tragedies they suffered. Conversely, Ben Ali of Tunisia took the path of honour by bowing to the will of the people. Perhaps a more recent example of the people centered leadership that Kurunmi negates is that displayed by British Prime Minister, James Cameron, who despite his personal opposition to British exit from the European Union in 2016, ultimately accepts the decision of the majority of his people to leave. Rather than impose his will on the people, as Kurunmi does, Cameron chose to resign as leader

Relevance of the Play to Nigerian Politics

The challenges of leadership in Nigeria particularly in the 21st century are currently generating concerns among well-meaning citizens of this country. That Nigeria is yet to harness the abundant human and material resources in her domain for development for over

the past 50 years of nationhood has left much to be desired (Chris and Out, 2012).

What is not in doubt, however, is the position that there is leadership failure in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that Rotimi's decision to use the play in the present study's focus to offer more insights into the nature of the leadership crisis in Nigeria must be appreciated.

The plays do not just project the nature and consequences of the leadership problem on national development but also offer insights on what could be done to remedy the situation. In this regard, the playwright seems to suggest that our leaders, in acknowledgement of their failure and its toll on the society, should emulate Kurunmi, who when he realized that he has failed to lead his people to victory says:

When the leaders of men have led his people to disaster, and what remains of his present life is but a shadow of his proud past, then it is time to be a leader no more (Kurunmi, 93).

It is instructive to note that in Nigeria's recent political history, there was a public umbrage against the Minister of Petroleum on allegations of her complicity in official corruption. This outcry forced the nations parliament to summon the said minister to set the records straight, but much to everyone's chagrin, she replied that she was not answerable to the people but only to the president who appointed her. This is the kind of impunity and leadership arrogance that Rotimi warns should be avoided to prevent rebellion.

In *Kurunmi*, the message is related: a leadership that refuses to respect and accept the supremacy of people power and the reality of change will ultimately be consumed by those forces. Kurunmi's stubborn refusal to acknowledge and respect these realities caused him everything he cherished, including the exulted political authority that gave him the false hopes of infallibility and invulnerability.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The imperative for drama and theatre to engage the social realities of the society that produces it is increasingly being appreciated. This is the thrust of all committed literature and art which underscores the symbiotic relationship between art and society. The problem of leadership has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria and indeed continental Africa. Expectedly, it has generated and continues to generate much scholarly interests. The play (*Kurunmi*) examined in this study suffice as veritable paradigms in this direction. The play functionally engaged in interrogation of the Nigerian cultural and socio-political reality, articulating lucidly, the leadership issues that have endemically undermined the development of the Nigerian nation.

Recommendations

In the present digital age, where the reading culture among Nigerians is manifestly waning, it is necessary that an alternative and effective medium of mass communication, social orientation and mobilization be deployed to communicate messages necessary for the people to achieve self and communal actualization. As Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal have rightly observed, it is only through the effective education and enlightenment of the oppressed masses that they could be sufficiently empowered to take decisions and actions that could change their social conditions for the better. It is in this regard that the study recommends that drama be increasingly deployed in the quest for true pedagogy and empowerment of the Nigerian people.

The study also recommends that it is time for those Nigerian playwrights who still hold the view of art for art sake to join forces with the pragmatic school and use their arts to interrogate and proffer solutions to social problems so as to rescue the Nigerian State from imminent derailment, for it is only when we have a society that man and art can exist meaningfully.

In the efforts to create more pragmatic theatres and drama, playwrights should strive to deploy a language that is easily accessible to the majority of the Nigerian people so as to make their messages meaningful and socially relevant. The example of Ola Rotimi is thus recommended. This is the thrust of Downs' Preponderance Theory of mass communication. Media researcher and theorist Denis McQuail states that this theory is the first of several typologies of the public interest concept propounded by Downs in 1962. According to McQuail (1992, P.22), Downs posits that the thrust of the Preponderance theory is the imperative of the media to give paramount consideration to the aggregate interests of the majority of the public. Downs refers to this as the Majoritarian Way. The public interest is held by the Preponderance theory to lie with the majority choice or what is believed to maximize the number of individual preferences. McQuail argues that this can be measured:

Through the working of the market; by voting; by weight of public opinion; Whatever happens, the public interest cannot, by this definition be on the 'losing side' in the sense of a being demonstrably contrary to the interest of the majority (*Mass Communication and the Public Interest* p. 23).

This research therefore argues that the use of several Nigerian languages mixed with a tempered English language like we find in Rotimi's drama will make the plays more accessible to the majority of the Nigerian people whom such works target primarily. For in truth, effective drama communication is when dramatists write in a manner that caters for the interest of the most mass of their audiences.

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