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A STUDY ON THE STRUGGLE OF WOLE SOYINKA FOR EGALITARIANISM AND JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

Over the last years, people and organizations concerned about social justice, equality and development have increasingly turned to policy advocacy and campaigning to promote change. Despite the promise of these approaches for advancing people- and planet-centered agendas in public policy, many activists find themselves holding the line against further rollbacks of important economic, environmental, racial justice and gender equality gains, and searching for more effective ways to engage and transform power. This search is leading to deeper inquiries about the nature of change and power, inquiries that revisit past history and approaches regarding justice and equality, while tapping new energy, ideas and opportunities for revitalizing social movements and change strategies. This paper is based on the analysis of Wole Soyinkas' works. The ideas presented in this paper highlight his view on human inequality and injustice as portrayed by the characters in his Novels.

INTRODUCTION

The global context shaping current possibilities for change presents a challenging panorama. Advances of corporate globalization, neo-conservative politics and



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fundamentalisms are tearing apart the social fabric of societies around the world, dislocating communities and ravaging notions of the common good and human solidarity. With the unraveling of this fabric, a profound sense of isolation and alienation permeates many people's lives across class, race, gender and national divides. In the face of terror attacks, war, every-day violence on the streets and growing inequality, governments use fear and intolerance to control and manipulate people, increasing anxiety and alarm. To cope with insecurity and fear, people in all corners of the earth are seeking some sense of community. Under such conditions, any form of community can seem better than none at all. Fundamentalisms of all kinds have provided comforting worldviews that buffer and simplify the complexities of the world and promise some sense of community, and connection.

These simplifications attempt to homogenize life, reinforcing stereotypes, "natural" hierarchy and privilege. They reduce life's complications to a simplistic vision of right and wrong, good and evil, where power relationships embedded in patriarchy; race and class are made invisible. It is generally conceived by many scholars, that literature mirrors the society. However, literature goes beyond just mirroring the society to depict various aspects of human life. The social, political, economical, religions and historical aspects of human lives are portrayed through literature. Basically, there are three major genres of literature, poetry prose and drama. This research concentrates on the concept of satire used by African playwrights (using Wole Soyinka as case studies) to effect societal transformation.

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright and political activist who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. He is among the greatest contemporary African writers. Wole was born on 13 July 1934 in Abeokuta, western Nigeria, to Samuel Ayodele Soyinka, an Anglican minister and the headmaster of St. Peters School in Abeokuta and Grace Eniola, a trader and political activist within the women's movement in the local community. Wole Soyinka is cousin to Fela Kuti, the Afrobeat legend and social critic. As a boy, he was trained in a Christian home with regular visits to Isara, his father's ancestral home, where, despite the incursion of the new faith, African traditions



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are revered. After leaving St. Peters Primary School in Abeokuta, Soyinka went to Abeokuta Grammar School, and there, several prizes for literary writings took – off. In 1946 he went to Government College in Ibadan, at that time, an elite high school. Wole went to University College in Ibadan, affiliate with the University of London, in 1952, leaving in 1954.

He read English literature, Greek, and Western history. He continued his studies at the University of Leeds, where, later, in 1973, he took his doctorate. He was a dramaturgist at the Royal Court Theatre in London from 1958 to 1959, during his six year stay for further studies. In 1960, he was awarded a Rockefeller bursary and returned to his home country, Nigeria, to study African drama Wole Soyinka is one of Africa's great imaginative advocates of native culture. He shows it effectively well in his works by linking up with the traditional popular African theatre which is rich in dance, music, and action, and intertwining it often with the mythology of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war. Like his writings, Wole Soyinka is tough on colonialism, neocolonialism and its structures. Right from his days in the University College Ibadan where he, along with six other students, founded the Pyrates Confraternity (PC) in 1952 till this day. Soyinka, a world respected writer and activist has always been at the forefront, leading struggles on behalf of the downtrodden and the quest for justice and fair play. Soyinka, a Yoruba, was sent to prison for speaking out against the massacre of Igbos and attempting to broker peace during the Nigeria/Biafra war in 1967.

He was sentenced to death in absentia by General Sani Abacha, the Nigerian dictator, in the early 1990s. A fearless writer and champion of anti corruption, the Professor of Literature has kept the faith with the masses, stinging Nigerian leaders like a bee. He hardly comes short on the defense of core African values and the continued western media propaganda to rubbish the image of Africa. Without fear or favour, he bases his mind and writes to counter assertions or actions against Africa. He once lambasted the BBC for running a show which Wole described as “the worst aspects of colonialist and patronising.” Speaking to the Guardian in April 2010, Professor Wole Soyinka said that Welcome to Lagos, the BBC – Two observational documentary which follows various



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people in poor areas of the city, was “the most tendentious and lopsided programme” he had ever seen. His works are numerous and stylish. Among them are, *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981), which recounts Wole’s first eleven years (1934-1944), *Death and the King’s Horseman*, the celebrated 1976 play about colonialist attitudes, and *King Baabu*, a 2001 satire on African dictatorships.

LITERATURE

Wole Soyinka is a writer whose interest is in exploring in depth the socio-political situation of the African society. His works focus on analyzing the nature of his society. To him, a writer should be a vision of his people, one who will go all the way to project a meaningful future for his people. By analyzing the society, Soyinka intends to make the society come to terms with the nature of their problems which is an indispensable step towards solving the problem. Opera *Wonyonsi* Indeed I am definitely in agreement that art can, should reflect with dominant temper of the age, those vital positive points which even in the darkest time are never totally absent. Equally it is necessary that art should expose, reflect, and indeed magnify any decadent rotten underbelly of a society that has lost its direction. Soyinka sees it as his own task and in general the task all artists to analyze and unravel the society’s lack of awareness. Through the satirical writings, he believes that transformation is achievable. Also, some other writers are of the same opinion.

Talking about artistic responsibility to their society, Achebe cited in Olu Obafemi (1992) says; “An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issue of contemporary African will end up being completely irrelevant”. Soyinka sees it as his own task and in general the task all artists to analyze and unravel the society’s lack of awareness. Through the satirical writings, he believes that transformation is achievable. Also, some other writers are of the same opinion. Talking about artistic responsibility to their society, Achebe cited in Olu Obafemi (1992) says; “An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issue of contemporary African will end up being completely irrelevant”. Soyinka sees it as his own task and in general the task all artists to analyze and unravel the society’s lack of awareness.



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Through the satirical writings, he believes that transformation is achievable. According to Eldred Jones cited in *African theatre today* (1976) Soyinka use of theatre is a platform the salvation of the society he submit to the fact that: Soyinka see society as being in continual need of salvation for itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act. It comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision. In spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save. They frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision. The salvation of the society then depends on exercise of the individual will. The preoccupation of Wole Soyinka is the exploration of human conditions. In most of his works, he satirizes the society with the ultimate aim of analyzing and presenting the absurdities abnormalities and ills inherent therein. His intention is solely to evolve changes in the society's way of life.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Theories depend on what the scholars under each school of thought feel literature should be and be used for. Various critics and scholars decide to evaluate or approach or criticize literature from their various perspectives. These variant perspectives are often referred to as approaches of literature. Hence the words, theories are approaches are synonymously used. A pre-knowledge of the theory adopted for the critical analysis of our text will be highly essential to our understanding. We have adopted the sociological criticism under which the liberal humanist sociological critical form is used as a variant.

This brand best suite our study as it: "Owes its rise to the rather reluctant realization on the part of some critics that the literature which forms the object of their enquiry is made peculiar by the fact that it is concerned with problem in African society at various points in its development". Irele's position on criticism, especially his defense of the liberal humanist sociology of literary production is remarkably espoused in *African experience in literature and ideology* the emphasizes that the long cultivated collective



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social force, its shape and movement in time are some of the determinants of the direction of the artist's mind and sensibility. Eagleton's analysis of liberal humanism particularly reveals of the fundamental weakness and based it on. "Liberal humanism has dwindled to the impotent conscience of bourgeois society gentle, sensitive and ineffectual.

The importance of liberal humanism is a symptom of its essential contradictory relationship to modern capitalism. For although it forms part of the official ideology of such society, and the "humanities" exist to reproduce it, the social order within it exists has in one sense very little time for it at all" Irele draws attention to the potential of a literary sociology which approaches art criticism from the study of the responsiveness of the artist to his social background. With all these characteristic of liberal humanist criticism, we can deduce that it best suite our study and it can be applied in the analysis of two of Wole Soyinka texts *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *A Play of Giants* as the African writers makes his focus in African experiences in literature and ideology. It is seen from the fact that both problem facing African society at various points in its development. Their focus even though they are diasporian writer is on African society and the social problem that are in the African society.



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ACHIEVING EQUAL ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Occupational segregation the labour market continues to be characterized by phenomena of horizontal and vertical segregation and to reflect major areas of inequality between men and women particularly in access to jobs, correspondence of women's level of qualification and the quality of their jobs, career progression, pay and experience of discrimination and harassment. It is still mainly women who undertake unpaid work for the family and there is still over-representation of women in some sectors, including, for example, in the caring professions and in part time work, less skilled jobs, atypical and/or temporary contracts, and under-representation in others, for example, the science, engineering and technology sectors.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

The employment of women is, and will continue to be, an essential component for ensuring women's autonomy and independence as well as successful economies. It is therefore vital to combine the measures targeting employment with other measures strengthening the national social protection systems in order to ensure adequate support for women and men in their dual responsibility as workers and parents/careers.

Promoting equal participation of women and men in decision-making: The unbalanced representation of women and men in decision-making positions is another issue of deep inequality. Despite some increase of women in decision-making positions, the under-representation of women in politics is a serious issue of democracy and fundamental rights. There are also a low proportion of women with leadership roles in politics, in public administration, in public and private enterprises, in the media and universities, in employers' organizations, trade unions, etc. Although women are becoming more and more qualified, barriers that prevent the access to decision-making and political representation persist.



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Achieving equality between women and men in education and skills: The Lisbon Strategy focuses on an economic and social model generally known as the "knowledge society". However, gender differences and inequalities persist not only in terms of choice of subject and performances, but also in qualitative aspects of the education and training experience. Education offers real opportunities to challenge inequalities. Primary and secondary education have an important role in achieving gender equality: it could challenge gender stereotypes that are related to the choice of education and discourage early school leaving. Moreover, teachers and trainers should be instructed in the practice of incorporating gender equality and the fight against gender stereotypes in education. The university system of higher education also plays a key role since it represents a key stakeholder in the production of human capital.

Social justice: the equivalent of distributive justice: In the contemporary context, social justice is typically taken to mean distributive justice. The terms are generally understood to be synonymous and interchangeable in both common parlance and the language of international relations. The concept of social/distributive justice is implied in various academic and theoretical works and in many international legal or quasi-legal texts (such as the Charter and Universal Declaration) that may only include broad references to "justice". In certain international instruments, including the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, references to social justice are more explicit. In the tone-setting first chapter of *A Theory of Justice*, a masterpiece published in 1971, John Rawls refers on several occasions to the "principles of social justice" when formulating his two "principles of justice".

Social justice is treated as synonymous with distributive justice, which again is often identified with unqualified references to justice, in the specific context of the activities of the United Nations, the precise reasons for which may only be conjectured. Issues relating to the distributive and redistributive effects of social and economic policies—issues of justice—have therefore been addressed separately from issues of rights,



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including those inscribed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The unfortunate consequences of this dissociation must be acknowledged. To support the concept of social justice is to argue for a reconciliation of these priorities within the context of a broader social perspective in which individuals endowed with rights and freedoms operate within the framework of the duties and responsibilities attached to living in society.

Notwithstanding the implied associations between social justice, redistributive justice, and justice as a more general concept, the fact is that the explicit commitment to social justice has seriously deteriorated; over the past decade, the expression has practically disappeared from the international lexicon and likely from the official language of most countries. The position will be taken here that the United Nations must work to try to restore the integrity and appeal of social justice, interpreted in the contemporary context as distributive justice.

WOLE SOYINKA AND THE PRISON EXPERIENCE

The Prose work *The Man Died* could be referred to as some form of prison notes. It does not only discuss Wole Soyinka's prison experience, but also those he came across whose lives and their manner of arrest and treatment as detainees also interested him. Dr. Seinde Arigbede, for instance, in the course of his duties as a medical doctor was caught up in the violence unleashed on the citizens of Ondo by the Nigerian State after the disputed 1963 elections. Dr. Arigbede was taken to an empty cell, where he was hung up by the wrists and left dangling, his feet were away from the ground while he underwent serious beating and torture. He heard the cries of other inmates who were subjected to even worse treatment. Some of the detainees even went through the agony of having broomstick switches driven up their penis.

Others who were tortured include Gogo Chu Nzeribe whose offence was undisclosed during the Gowon regime and imprisoned in Dodan Barracks where he died. Dr. Adeyemi Ademola was another victim who was mysteriously gunned to death and at

this time, he was conducting a sensitive autopsy on a highly placed military brass (the head of one of the armed forces division). Wole Soyinka was moved from one prison to another and queried on so many issues. He was taken away from Ibadan to Lagos under the pretence that Gowon wanted to ask him some questions. He never saw Gowon, he was rather questioned with a view to knowing his political stand. The major question they asked him or their major comment was:

"But what gives people like you and Tai Solarin the right to think that you know everything? What makes you think from your Ivory Towers that you have solutions to the problems of the country? When the government has already laid down a policy what makes you think you know better? You are intellectuals living in a dream world Yet you think , you know better than men who have weighed out so many factors and come to a decision" (Soyinka, 1972: 34 -35).

When Wole Soyinka did not cooperate with them, they ordered that he should be handcuffed. As a result he went on hunger strike. He was later moved from the maximum to the medium security prison. He lived under unhygienic condition and when he fell sick they never wanted him to be treated by his personal doctor, it was only when his wife came to see him that they made some provision for his needs. However, immediately his wife left, they took away all that was given to him under the pretence of living well in detention. Soyinka puts it thus:

"You staged a farce! You wanted my wife to leave satisfied that I was now receiving humane treatment at your hands. You went through a performance, which lasted nearly two hours. You made sure that she saw me off to my cell laden with books and paper, even a radio. Then your goons come here and sweep it all off. I want to know Mallam A, if these were part of your instructions" (Soyinka, 1972: 285).

Wole Soyinka was put under severe pressure to confess and co-operate at all times. When a note was smuggled out on behalf of Wole Soyinka, he was threatened to



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mention the name; of the man that helped him to smuggle the note out but he insisted he did not know (Soyinka, 1972: 79). All the other answers he gave were not encouraging, he neither co-operated with them nor did he tell them the truth throughout his prison life. He was later released. That was how Wole Soyinka suffered in detention for an offence that was not committed except the state's impression of Soyinka (Soyinka, 1972: 24 - 35). So many Nigerians suffered from the period after 1966 to date, especially under repressive and brutal military regimes, which have ruled the country for the larger part of its post-colonial history. Military rule and militarism have in no small way contributed to the agonizing social and political crises in Nigeria. The same situation that prevailed then also persists till the present, with a high level of corruption, unlawful arrest, and lack of commitment to the values of honesty, social justice, equality, fairness, accountability, and the rule of law. Nigerian prisons are still in the worst shape. With the situation presented above the question that may be asked is; which way forward for Nigeria?

CONCLUSION

literary writers must show optimism for the future of the country. As such, they should reflect this in their writings and the way they shape discourses and consciousness through their writings. Literary writing should cover the issues of good governance, accountability, transparency and due process. Literary writers should lament legs about the happenings of the past and think of a better future. This may also help to reform our leadership for a positive future. The criticism of the Nigerian state under military dictatorship by Wole Soyinka in *Open Sore of the Continent* (1996) is quite healthy. In the work there was a strident attack on the military, how they undermined democratic rule, the social and political costs of the annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election and the forces that have tried to build democracy in Nigeria and how military rule threatened the nation-state project in Nigeria and shook the patriotic ideals people shared.



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