

Drama and Politics in Nigeria: A Study of Chidubem Iweka's *August Inmates* and Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Another Weekend Gone*

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Abstract

Literature has always mirrored life and its facets. Literature strives to reconcile societal problems, including ethnic and cultural conflicts, injustice, inequality, corruption, class struggle, moral decadence, political disillusionment, eating propensity, marginalization and inequity in any given society. The literature found in Nigeria is strongly rooted in the economic and socio-political whimsies of the Nigerian society. The Nigerian writer strives to be relevant to the society of his time. Through literary writings, the playwrights under study seek avenues to bring about peaceful initiatives in their environment. The writer stands as a peacemaker, an observer and an admonisher. In this course of advocating for peaceful initiatives and good social reforms, the writer should be able to divorce all sentiments and emotional attachments from his writings. Chidubem Iweka's *August Inmates* and Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Another Weekend Gone* appear to be literary works of art that have their focus on peaceful resolution, corruption, class struggle, moral decadence, political disillusionment, and eating propensity in the Nigerian society. The critical theory employed in this research is sociological criticism. Through dramatic prowess and use of assertive characters, these playwrights have strived to show that in aligning drama with politics, the predominant socio-political problems of the country are brought to light and possible solutions proffered. The paper indicates the average Nigerian playwright's interest in advocating for peace and positive transformation of his contemporary society.

Keywords: literature, drama, Nigerian playwright, political disillusionment

Introduction

Literature is an imaginative work of art through which writers and creative artists reflect their societies. According to Maduakor, literature is a means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of the society such as politics, religion, economics, social conflict, class struggle and human conditions through the medium of language (43). Literature reflects man and his society. Literature addresses social, political and economic issues found in a given society. Robert Diyanni rightfully opined that 'Drama is a mimetic art, one that imitates or represents human life and experiences'. For Martin Esslin,

in *Anatomy of Drama*, drama is the most concrete form in which art can recreate human situations and relationships (57).

Every literature of a given society is rooted in the social, political and economic vagaries of the society where it emanates from. Just like every other literature, Nigerian literature results from social, economic and political events in Nigeria. This paper looks into socio-political vagaries and events which have so far plagued the Nigerian society. These societal issues include corruption, class struggle, cultural conflict, moral decadence, injustice, inequality, eating propensity, marginalization, political disillusionment, and nepotism.

According to Chuma-Udeh, Nigerian literature is the aggregative experiences of the Nigerian society in its entirety as perceived by the Nigerian writers of different epochs (6). Chuma-Udeh, in *Trends and Issues in Nigerian Literature*, states that the type of literature found in Nigeria consists of specifically literature that portrays the typical Nigerian outlook (5). The author is of a firm belief that Nigerian literature has been greatly influenced by the tidal sequence of events which have pervaded contemporary Nigerian society (6). The essence of Nigerian writers remains their responsibility of voicing out the societal concerns of their society. Emenyonu therefore projects that the writer is the mouthpiece of his people; he speaks out the mind and concern of his people (43).

According to Nnolim, every generation of writers confronts the burning issues in their society and wrestles them through writing (10). These writers reflect their milieu by writing about happenings in their immediate contemporary society. According to Ngugi Wa Thiongo, a writer's work must reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in his society (2). Through the writings of these playwrights, they have endeavoured to criticize, extol, satirize, admonish, and reconcile societal issues which have posed as burdens to the nation.

Aspects of nepotism and dramatic illustrations of societal problems in Chidubem Iweka's *August Inmates*.

Chidudem Iweka's *August Inmates* is a typical Nigerian contemporary drama which has endeavoured to reconcile societal problems in Nigeria. The hallmark of this literary work of art lies in the ability of the playwright to create fictional characters and to assign specific roles to them. These characters in one way or the other have come in contact with the social, economic and political issues found in the Nigerian society.

The characters portrayed in the play are high-profile individuals in the society, ranging from politicians, federal civil servants to notorious criminals and journalists. These characters are Chief V.I.P Okoli, the federal minister for

trade and finance, who is believed to wield more political power than the president; Adebayo, the Inspector General of Police; and Alhaji Gambo, the federal minister of petroleum exports. Archie Kane is identified as a notorious arms dealer who supplies ammunitions to many third world nations. Ojemba Nutbari is known as a convicted armed robber. Obi Okoli is presented as a clever, honest and learned journalist. The presence of the prison guards help to confine and checkmate these characters, who were gathered from different walks of life to a particular place. The society is an important feature in the setting of a work of art because it is within it that interactions between different individuals take place.

The playwright presented us with a scenario where all the characters were detained in one place. The situation in which these characters in the play found themselves became a platform for discussing the various issues confronting the Nigerian society.

Chidubem Iweka used straight and simple English language to portray the high level of crime and nepotism committed by well-paid federal government officials in the country. Through the eyes of his characters, he gave us a proper insight of the economic situation found in most African continents today. Through their conversations we are led into the heart of the Nigerian society and also shown the extent to which the societal problems have eaten deep into the fabric of the nation. Contemporary Nigerian society has been marred as a result of negligence and lack of peaceful initiatives.

Chidubem Iweka is a Nigerian playwright who has deliberately endeavoured to advocate for peaceful initiatives and positive socio-political reforms of the Nigerian society through his literary outputs. The ability of this playwright to swim in the tide of social criticism enables him to communicate meaningful messages to his readers. He is aware of the role of the Nigerian writer as an instrument for provoking positive structures and transformation in his given society. Here, the playwright delves deeply into the social and economic issues of the Nigerian society and strives to address them. He presents assertive characters who understand the norm of their society. Through their discussions within the confinement where they were kept, they were able to address some of the societal problems in the country. Below is an excerpt taken from the play:

Scene one opens in a VIP detention room after an apparent coup d' etat in an African country.

The detainees are unaware of who their captors are. A general tension exists among them as they await the final word. There are six cushioned, easy chairs and a table in the room. CHIEF OKOLI is seated in the centre, flanked by the inspector General of police ADEBAYO and ALHAJI GAMBO (7).

OKOLI: Adebayo ! I don't care how you do it but you must get word out to my family at once. No matter the cost. These guards are human beings and must need money.

Adebayo: Money is not the problem, Chief, these men are under strict orders not to help us communicate with the outside world and anyone of them caught helping us knows he's a dead man.

Okoli: Don't tell me that! As the Inspector General of police, you know how to negotiate with such men!

Adebayo: Talk to whom? Chief I don't even know who is who or what exactly is going on. And don't forget, I am no more the Inspector General. (6)

From all ramifications, one will see the extent to which corruption, bribery and nepotism have marred the social structures in the various in the country. Through the interactions of the characters in the play, the dramatist showed the level of economic decay that was prevalent in the Nigerian society.

Moreso, this paper projects drama as a framework for a discursive understanding and analysis of the Nigerian society and its history as well as its contemporary woes. Through the lenses of the playwright under study, we see his effort in bringing to light the problems that have maligned a society of people bedeviled with many social issues.

However, in line with the symbiotic relationship that exists between the playwright and his contemporary society, Iweka uses his drama to draw attention to the impoverished, oppressed, exploited state of his class-conscious society in a bid to proffer an alternative vision and advocate for proper political redirection. The dramatic presentations of the playwright under study raise a number of political questions provoked by the multitude of socio-economic challenges that give a clear insight into the intrigues surrounding the Nigerian society.

Iweka, through the actions of his characters, has portrayed the socio-political problems associated with allocation of public revenue, a matter reserved for the ruling and upper class in Nigeria. He is unhappy about the physical decimation of the average person in Nigeria. He is also bothered about the spiritual and physical repression of people in the lower class; he feels sorely the denigration of his people and the nonchalant attitude of the government. This playwright is saddened by issues bothering on injustice, corruption and the segregation of his people. The playwright projects the fate of his downtrodden and deprived people ravaged by poverty and subjugated by the authorities. Through dramatic presentations, attention to the inhuman treatment meted to the average Nigerian person as result of class-conscious oppression and marginalization has been portrayed. The Nigerian people suffer from the trauma of socio-economic devastation and bad governance even as the Nigerian military dictatorship and

their civilian allies connive with multinational companies to drain the proceeds from the nation's oil resources. The Nigerian playwright wears the scorching cloak of his traumatized people.

The playwright writes as the mouthpiece of his people and has described their sorrowful experiences, the wicked exploitation of their human and natural resources, as a "multi-tragedy". The play lays bare the pathetic destruction of the social structures in the country by the insatiable political and elite class. The Nigerian playwright is full of loathing for the conspiracy of the government and its allies in the vicious destruction of the country.

For Iweka, introducing dramatic representation in politics is a kind of public duty which he owes to the Nigerian people in order to expose, reconstruct, and publicise their political disenchantment. The core essence of this research is to prove that the playwrights under study reflect the realities of political disillusionment in Nigeria and, as such, have become formidable and reliable voice in Nigerian literature. The Nigerian playwright under study has endeavoured to use drama as vehicle for political mediation and social control. This paper projects the infinite power of the Nigerian playwright as an agitator, and a promoter of positive events. This research strives to attend to the socio-political inclinations of the society in which the playwright found himself seeking for political re-direction.

Aspects of nepotism and dramatic illustrations of societal problems in Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Another Weekend Gone*.

This paper has endeavored to prove that the playwrights under study are concerned about socio-economic and political problems of the country. Nigeria's socio-political experiences are depicted through the two dramatic texts being reviewed here, as we can see in the following dialogue taken from Anyanwu's *Another Weekend Gone*:

2ND Prisoner: That is the issue! We shouldn't be paying for our rights! Look at the young man they killed the other day-

1ST Prisoner: Yes? What about him?

2ND Prisoner: They murdered the young man and to cover up for their wickedness, what did they do? They converted his paltry three months sentence to a death sentence! We should protest!

3RD Prisoner: To what end? You protested out there and got landed here. Where do think a protest here will land you?

2nd Prisoner: It doesn't matter.

3RD Prisoner: Oh yes, it matters here, the rule, if there is one, is to survive and self-preservation is the law. The government in the country is pathetic and

irresponsible despite abundance of resources. Unemployment, bribery, corruption, ethnic crisis, marginalization, oppression, lack of basic amenities becomes the order of the day (27).

Anyanwu uses his play to highlight the oppression and deprivation under which the common people live, thereby making a case for a change in the manner in which the country is governed and for the enthronement of an accountable, people-oriented political system. With a systematic use of language laced in Chaucerian bluntness, the playwright relieves a gruesome experience that has marred the good fabrics of the Nigerian society.

This research has critically re-examined and analysed the socio-political and economic perspectives found in Chukwuma Anyanwu's *Another Weekend Gone* through the dramatic representations and dramatic lenses of the playwright. The study has looked more into the dramatic illustrations of the nation's socio-political vagaries and strategies which the playwright employed in order to actualise a basic societal commitment and awareness.

The paper presents drama as a medium for political intercession and social control. The task in this paper is an exploration of the playwright's use of language to expose the socio-cultural and political dilemma of Nigeria. Some regions in Nigeria suffer great social deprivation, political marginalization and economic alienation in spite of its abundant natural resources. The problem of Nigeria is further complicated by an instituted economic conspiracy of the moribund Nigerian civilian politicians, top government officials and other various exploitative structures. The Nigerian playwright is saddled with the task of practically assessing the contemporary situation in society with the mind of identifying and proffering solutions to the different prevailing contradictions.

Anyanwu, like Iweka, uses drama as a vehicle for political mediation and social control. The concern of this paper is to explore how the average Nigerian playwright uses art (drama) to represent and reflect the socio-economic and socio-political tides of Nigeria. The playwright under study sees drama as a potent instrument which can be used to expose the dilemma of the Nigerian contemporary society. It is undisputable to say that the minority ethnic groups suffer great deprivation, political marginalization and economic alienation. Very importantly, the landscape itself is reduced to a land receded by her citizens in spite of its abundant natural resources. The problem of Nigeria is further complicated by an instituted economic conspiracy entrenched by Nigerian military regimes and various civilian governments. It is very pathetic and very dehumanizing that the political structure expected to pursue and defend the cause of its subjects is responsible for their frustration and affliction.

From a dramatic perspective, this paper has critically examined the irresponsible Nigerian governments and their negative contributions to nation building. The Nigerian playwright has pointed out without reservations the degradation, infringement on minority rights, and the politics of nepotism practised by the government against minority groups.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that the quest for peaceful initiatives should always be the watchword of the average Nigerian writer. The sources of the societal problems which have bedevilled Nigeria should be located and dealt with to avoid further destruction of the social structures of the country. The Nigerian playwright is a developer of alternative rules and procedures as well as avenues through which positive transformations can be engineered.

The Nigerian playwrights under study are of a firm belief that the ideology of portraying and presenting political, social and economic issues in the country has become a paramount issue. The force of their literary values becomes charged with a portrayal of the tension and intensity of the predominant issues found in their contemporary society. Therefore their writings turn out to be a means to a peaceful resolution and good social reforms in their contemporary society. Moreover, as a result of the influence of the issues prevalent in the Nigerian contemporary society, some Nigerian writers consider it necessary to use their art to focus on aspects of the sad realities that touch the core of the people's existence as they represent, through their works, the socio-political issues of the Nigerian society.

The two playwrights whose works we have reviewed have, through their literary prowess and dramatic presentations, advocated for peaceful initiatives and good social reforms in their society. This researcher strongly believes that Nigerian writers whose themes are basically centered on peaceful resolution and reconstruction of the country's social structures will definitely make a positive impact on our political leaders. This is why this paper has portrayed the Nigerian playwright as an engineer trying to create a railway passage for peace and positive transformations.

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