

Social Experience and Political Realities in Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and Mulwa's *Redemption*

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Abstract

This study investigated the roles and functions of drama as an instrument of social commentary in Nigeria and Kenya. Drama has been widely acclaimed as a positive medium for mirroring society hence the popular belief that drama is a representation of life. This powerful attribute of drama has been deployed by playwrights across different epochs to make constructive commentaries on the happenings within their various societies with the view of effecting positive change. As a result of the significant role of Drama in the society, it has become increasingly important to write and act drama using a method that is understood by the people. The study sought to investigate how David Mulwa's *Redemption* and Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*, serve as utility carriers of literary responses to the problems concerning the African continent. This study was premised on the supposition that social, historical and political realities in Kenya and Nigeria form a creative reservoir of the two countries' drama. A close examination of the playwrights from the two countries reveals the socio-political temper in the two societies. The article sought to highlight the extent to which the playwrights successfully use drama as a means of communication, even though there are different forms of literature in existence. This is important because, the work of an artist in whatever form usually has a universal appeal. The theoretical framework for this research was based on the Theory of the Avant-Garde and Political Theatre Theory. The theories added impetus to the work as it aligns with the concept of social drama. The methodology that was employed

in this research basically revolved around the analyses of the primary texts and library and internet research to add depth to the line of thought. The choice of the playwrights is purposive and is based on fact that one of the playwrights is a Kenyan and while the other is a Nigerian. The choice was also on the fact that all the playwrights had experienced colonial and post-colonial governance in both countries. The period of the writings also is a factor that influenced the choice.

Key Words: Social Revolt, Politics and Play Writing.

Introduction

African playwrights like other writers on other continents have over the years battled with the difficult social, cultural and political narratives that have held the vortex of the African continent in a firm grip. Different writers from the continent have found ways of re-writing the complexities that define Africa as a continent and Africans as a people in their written works. Achebe (2012) in *There was a country* opines that the writer often has two choices; to either face the daunting task of struggling to write about the inequalities and problematic issues that define our world or to turn a blind eye to the many problems that are constantly stifling humanity. Achebe goes further to advocate that writers most especially those from Africa cannot afford to shy away from the social, cultural and political dynamics affecting the continent. It is in line with this assertion that we look at two plays by Wole Soyinka and David Mulwa and their mastery and depiction of the social and political issues that have become a constant source of worry to commentators and scholars on the African continent.

Wole Soyinka and David Mulwa have written great works of drama whose styles of deployment are of tremendous literary

and social significance (Iji, 1996; Outa, 2010). They have contributed immensely to the development of African literature especially in the areas of African drama and theatre and a lot of critical attention has been paid to their works by African and European critics (Obuh, 2009). However, little research has been done in terms of comparing the distinctive dramatic styles of these playwrights in Africa drama. The researcher deliberately chose the two plays mentioned above, in order to examine the satiric themes and styles treated by Soyinka and Mulwa, so as to highlight the social perception involved in those plays and their perspective(s) about the events that are continually reshaping the African continent. This chapter therefore concerns itself with the etymology of the dramatic styles and thematic preoccupations; this is a comparative analysis of the two plays and their stylistic approach.

The style of drama has been influenced throughout its history by certain cultural pressures (Turner, 1979). Some of these cultural pressures are influenced locally or nationally while others are external pressures that have helped to shape the cultures as a result of constant human interaction (Chatterjee, 1987). That is, social pressures including political, religious, philosophical, and socio-economic constraints, have helped to create specific dramatic constructs. If a reader can identify some of these specific traits, she or he will be able to make distinctions between different plays. For example, it is possible to discuss the characteristics of an eighteenth-century dramatic style. This discussion could be further refined by differentiating between French and English plays of the period or by distinguishing the dramatic traits of romantic plays, from the expressionist or the absurd plays.

Dramatic style of a given period or an ideological movement is generated by a number of different influences. Firstly, a reader can identify a particular style based on information that is presented in a play. A reader can assume that a play captures some of the essence of truth about a particular period. That is to say, writers from different periods or with different ideologies construct the dramatic world in different ways. What is 'truthful' about the world to one generation may not be so for successive generations (Brecht, 1935). Often through their plays, writers attempt to answer specific existential questions such as 'What is truth?', or 'How do we construct reality?' (Trotsky, 1923). The answers to these types of questions differ depending on scientific, religious, and cultural beliefs of the periods in which they are being asked. Despite these ideological differences, all playwrights have the same means of expression available to them. Writers and performers rely on the codes of communication to reveal meaning (Akanji, 1994). Sound and visual images are the two main communication modes used in the theatre. It is the way that playwrights and performers manipulate these codes that generate different plays and different types of performances. Dramatic style results from the way in which a play is presented in the theatre. It is the way that a play is directed and acted, as well as the types of scenery, costumes, and lighting that are used, which helps to influence the style of the production.

Playwrights are affected, consciously or unconsciously, by the conditions under which they conceive and write, by their own socio-economic status, by personal background, by religious or political position, and by their purpose in writing. The literary form of the play and its stylistic elements are influenced by

tradition, a received body of theory and dramatic criticism, as well as by the author's innovative energy. Auxiliary theatre arts such as music and design also have their own controlling traditions and conventions, which the playwright must respect. The size and shape of the playhouse, the nature of its stage and equipment, and the type of relationship it encourages between actor and audience also determine the character of the writing. Not least, the audience's cultural assumptions, holy or profane, local or international, social or political, may override all else in deciding the form and content of the drama. These are large considerations that can take the student of drama into areas of sociology, politics, social history, religion, literary criticism, philosophy and aesthetics, and beyond (Benjamin, 1936).

To qualify the above paragraph is the statement of wa Thiong'o (1981) when he avers that the literary works of any writer is most times influenced by his environment, and the social powers that govern that society. In other words, he is saying that no writer writes or exists in a vacuum, and that every work of art is influenced to a greater extent by the society from which the writer of that work originates. This goes to say that the style upon which a playwright deploys while writing is most times influenced by the events that permeates his society and therefore his worldview. Brecht (1935) in his seminal work Writing the truth: Five difficulties alludes to this fact when he states that the playwright must arm himself with the truth at all times because he is a citizen of a society that is always in combat with itself and with other forces that make up the components of that society. Brecht encourages the playwright to possess the courage to write the truth in a manner that it would sound pleasurable to the oppressors within the society; this can only be possible based on

the style of writing that the playwright chooses to use as a means of hiding the truth in plain sight. It therefore goes to say that style as a basic component in writing is very important in the realization of the aims of the playwright (Bennet, 2005).

Summary of Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*

The drama is a social commentary about the nature and form of postcolonial African leadership, Soyinka created a play of four messianic characters. It is a social commentary on the political and social confusion that thrives at the highest level of governance on the African continent. The play also highlighted the hypocritical nature of the western powers and the international organizations. It is an absurdist play that satirizes the despotic nature of African leaders and their western cronies. The playwright did not make any effort to hide the identity of the leaders in question as he explained in the preface to the play (Soyinka, 1984: iii). The real life characters include:

- (i) Benefacio Gunema: Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea
- (ii) Emperor Kasco: Jean-Baptiste Bokassa of Central African Republic
- (iii) Field Marshal Kamini: Idi Amin of Uganda
- (iv) General Barra Tuboum: Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire

Kamini the host is the central character in the play. Soyinka focuses on the abstraction and absurd nature of the character of Idi Amin. The play also points an accusing finger on some Western sycophants and apologists. Most of the characters are satirical caricatures; Soyinka did not spare any of the leading world powers of the cold war era in this satirical master piece. He points out the total lack of decorum and abuse of trust and power by the western nations who intentionally sustain their puppets in

power across the African continent. The play is a disparaging statement about the true character of the western world powers as established through the characters of their representatives and also through the depiction of the Western journalist (Gudrum) and the Professor.

Soyinka depicts the African leaders in their complete absurdity, drunk with power, mad men with no concept of politics, economics or diplomacy and worst of all, no bearing on the ideals of leadership. The play mirrors the inhuman nature of some leaders and their lack of understanding of political and social economics and problems. The treatment of the Chairman of the Bugaran Central Bank by the monstrous security personnel loyal to Kamini is a pointer to the excessive abuse of power by most African leaders.

Soyinka also paints in another light, the shameful role(s) of the American and Russian diplomats as cold war realists who are scrambling for the soul of an innocent continent. He paints an imagery of greedy western diplomats who do not care about the plight of the African people and nations, as long as their political and economic interests are served. The play is an absurdist trademark with very little humour; the use of satire as the driving style was aimed at exposing the excesses of these real life personalities. In terms of the techniques and the structure of the play, it is a play that is written in two parts; a clear avant-gardistic trend of moving away from the conventional method of acts and scenes.

Summary of Mulwa's *Redemption*

David Mulwa wrote *Redemption* as a commissioned play for the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCK). The play is

targeted at the church, the family and the nation generally, he challenged the members of the society to embrace the message of change, growth and trust in the values of the church, the community and the power of the individual to invoke change in the community. It is a play that centres upon the issues of religious hypocrisy, political power and misuse of religious and parental authority. The play reflects on the role(s) of the youth in a world that is torn apart by greed and selfishness. The play reflects the quest of the playwright for a redemptive force among Kenyans and Africans alike for unity and good neighbourliness.

The story in the play revolves around the hypocritical activities of Archbishop Muthemba and the autocratic and uncompromising attitude of Pastor Mutema. The conflict between them evolves as a result of the unscrupulous activities of Muthemba who ordained himself an Archbishop and formed his own congregation to the chagrin of Pastor Mutema an orthodox Evangelist and a faithful crusader of the old church. The two of them (Muthemba and Mutema) are locked in a battle to win the congregation from the valley; their children on the other hand are in love with each other (Rebecca and Antonius).

Mulwa introduces a new dimension into the conflict of the story when the mother church sent a young and rather well educated Pastor Manela to take over from the old crusader (Pastor Mutema). The coming of the young pastor ushered in a new era in the play. It created an imagery of the New Testament whereby sinners were once again not banished but welcomed back into the household of God upon repentance and deliverance from their old ways. This we see in the character of Katika the gravedigger who was banished from the church by Pastor Mutema. The

introduction of the young pastor (Manela), also serve as a new challenge to the Archbishop Muthemba.

The play is set structurally in three movements with scenes to attach to each movement so as to help in organizing the storyline as it unfolds. It is a drama of emancipation, introduction of the redemptive power of truth and liberation and a message to the Kenyan and African people at large that for progress and unity to take place in our communities, we need to stop fighting among each other, and allow progressive ideas to take root in the “valley”.

Dramaturgic Analysis of Soyinka’s A Play of Giants and Mulwa’s Redemption

In analyzing the dramaturgic aspects of the two plays, the researcher considers the setting of the plays, and prominent events around the world during the period of writing the plays and how these events might have influenced the direction and style of writing by the playwrights. The researcher looked at how the characters and events in the play are shaped by the predominant forces within the social and political environment of the playwright during the period of writing the various plays. Nnolim (2009) believes that the issues and presentation style(s) that a playwright or any writer in the literary world adopts as his method(s) of creative presentation are greatly influenced by the predominant socio-cultural and political factors in his/her immediate society.

Based on Brecht’s concept of period-dialectics, it is important to note that both plays were written within the period when the whole world was still trying to recover from the effects of the cold war. As a result of this the tussle for power and control that was

a major feature of the cold war era could still be felt in many other ways of human endeavour, and since drama as an art form thrives on the representation of social issues and discourses, the template of most of the plays written within that period were influenced by the effects of the cold war and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and the shift in economic and cultural indices of humanity (Esslin, 1980).

The playwrights (Soyinka and Mulwa) relied a lot on the use of dramatic elements to create imagery and expand the metaphoric relevance of their plays. In terms of deployment of language, both plays were written in plain English language. The use of English as the language of communication is a deliberate act of accusing the role(s) of the imperialist and their educated African partners of exploiting the African continent both in terms of natural and human resources.

Wole Soyinka's A play of giants reflects a savage portrait of a group of dictatorial African leaders in an embassy in New York City, close to the United Nations building. The play is written to show the resemblance between the recent historical characters/African leaders who were known for their authoritarian rule. These include Macias Nguema (Late) of Equatorial Guinea, Emperor for life Jean-Baptiste Bokassa of Central African Republic, Life President Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo and the Hero of Heroes, Field Marshal El-Haji Dr Idi Amin of Uganda (Soyinka, 1984).

It is true that no African play has ever carried such a large cast of archetypal anti-people characters (Soyinka, 1984). They are ruthless and find no room for freedom of human expression and rights. They mismanage the resources of their various countries with the aid of their western imperialist friends. The playwright

makes no pretensions about the focus and intentions of the play, to write back about the illegalities of African leaders and their partners in foreign lands. Through the dialogues, we see a true picture of the atrocities and injustices that leaders unleash on their followers. Soyinka creates the insensitive nature of the African leaders. This trait is seen in reality in all the African leaders, as portrayed in the character of Kamini and the other characters in the play, Each has his own peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. The metaphor of having four major characters is a pictorial reality that tells the absurd story of leadership in sub-Saharan Africa.

What happens at the end of the play is that the central figure, Kamini, becomes an individual hero suffering by himself through his own lusts, faults and excuses. Each of the leaders is seen in the light of Kamini's plight and tragedy, in a desperate attempt to hold onto power they all fall out with their followers and international allies. The plot is a linear plot that develops as the events in the play unfold and it is further developed through the use of satire. From the choice of style and the use of language it is clear that the post-civil war popular political satires of Soyinka are clearly in response to the cries of the critical agency and of the readers thus debunks the earlier defence of "bourgeois situated literature" by Soyinka.

In the political satires, Soyinka moves away from the extreme intellectual use of English language and intimidating dialogue to an accessible English and penetrable dialogue. The popularity of the satires is attested to by Soyinka (1981) in his description of the reactions of the Military Governor, the representative of the Visitor, to a performance of Opera Wonyosi that he thought was attacking the military, on the occasion of a convocation

ceremony of the University of Ife. Contained also in the account is the identification of the university cooks and staff of Parks and Gardens with the preoccupation of the play and the play itself. We also must note the reaction of General Sani Abacha to the play The beatification of area boy and the declaration of Wole Soyinka as wanted in Nigeria (Soyinka, 1999) as attesting to the popularity of the play. Beyond this, there is a clear wall of difference between the canonical plays and the post-civil war political drama in terms not only of language but also of plot structure, setting, figures and motifs from oral tradition and *mis en scene*. The only thing that audience members enjoy in the canonical plays is the spectacle and not the knowledge of the meaning. In the case of the post-civil war plays, readers are now able to gain access into the primary level of meaning of the plays. In other words, they could make headway with the ordinary meaning of the texts without the service of the critics. With the understanding of the primary level of meaning of texts, they could on their own go about processing the deep and deeper connotative meaning.

Mulwa on the other hand has equally written a number of plays that are largely satirical in form and content. As an accomplished stage and screen actor who started acting at the tender age of 7years in 1952, he has grown in leaps and bounds since then. Mulwa is also a stage director per excellence who is well known across the Kenyan nation as a man of the theatre. His reputation as an actor made him one of the prominent adjudicators of the Kenyan National Schools Drama festival. He has been on the bench of adjudication since 1975 up to 2005. As a prominent playwright, he has written a lot of plays among them Redemption, Glass houses, Master and servant, Buriani, Ukame,

Mkimbzi, Daraja, Champion and a host of other plays. Most of the themes in his plays revolve around issues of good governance, social change, greed and injustice.

Thematic Depiction of Religion and Hypocrisy in the two Plays

In most plays, the underlying reason for writing is to pass a message to the society. Most times the playwright uses a coded means of unveiling his message to the target audience. Soyinka and Mulwa have used drama as a means of heading and passing the coded or subliminal messages in their plays. It is therefore left for us to decipher the themes from the plays. A theme in drama simply means the underlying message, the subject matter or the issues that the writer is trying to project to the readers using the vehicle of drama. From the reading of the two plays the following themes seem to have formed the crux of the discussions in the two plays though there are some sub themes like those of greed and human suffering, corruption and human suffering.

Struggle for Power and Control

The quest for good leadership is one of the key issues in both plays. As playwrights who are both resident in two regional super powers in sub Saharan Africa, it is almost certain that the issue of leadership would feature prominently in their plays. Soyinka's play A play of giants revolves around the theme of leadership and the quest for power, authority and recognition by the four super characters; these are basic features that most leaders are always willing to acquire. He (Soyinka) is questioning how and why the characters have been able to entrench themselves in power for so long after they have been exposed for the monsters that they are. He observed in the introductory notes to the play that at

different points during their rulership, these leaders were supported by western super powers because of the economic gains that they (Western powers) stand to gain from the continuous stay in power of the said rulers. He opines that:

...this certified psychopath was sustained in power at various periods by group interest and ideologies as varied as those of Great Britain...the United States, the Soviet Union, the Organization of African Unity, Cuba, Libya, the PLO and Israel not to mention the vociferous support accorded him by the cheer leaders among the intelligentsia of the African continent and the Black Caucuses of the United States...(p.vi)

Riding on the crest of such support from the continent and beyond, the leaders misuse the trust of their followers and want to gain total control over the people in all aspects of their daily lives; one of the characters Gunema sums it all when he says:

...but I have not finished. Beyond la responsabilidad, beyond politics lies- ah – power. When politics has become routine, organized, we who are gifted naturally with leadership, after a while we cease to govern, to lead: we exist, I think, in a rear space which is –power....(p.2)

To further add to the arrogance with which these leaders rule over their countries he (Gunema) goes ahead in another conversation with Kasco when they said:

...impossible! Jamas, never! My friend, you are not unhombre ordinario. Like me and our comrade the emperor Kasco, we are not ordinario. Why you think we rule our people? Some people are born to power,

others are—cattle they need ring in their nose for us to lead....(p.11)

Emperor Kasco then supports Gunema by saying:

...there are persons, individuals who are born with the imperial sign here (he taps his forehead) on head. Me, I think – de Gaulle, Robespierre. But the prime, the leader of them all in history, in all the world history—the sans pareil of all time is Napoleon Bonaparte!...(p.11)

Looking at the same theme of leadership and the misuse of power and trust in Mulwa's Redemption, he (Mulwa) has been able to use the political skirmishes within the church as a way of creating imagery about the leadership struggles within the larger Kenyan society and Africa as a whole. Mulwa captures the deceit of the leaders through the word of one of the characters Archbishop Elton Muthemba in Page 43 when he says:

Take this thing about the superstition in this valley. These poor people believe in witchcraft and their infernal traditions. So how do you get them to church? Get them paying? You stand there and encourage them. Let them go to witch doctors as long as they are in church tomorrow and singing and dancing in expiation: you see you let them leave their lives and come to you on Sundays for a little spiritual uplift and everybody is happy. It is this that that fool of a pastor didn't see. Every Sunday it was thunder and brimstone...so I saw the crack in Mutema's citadel and I moved through the wall and right into the heart of his congregation: I offered them a new spiritual lease!!...(p.43)

Mulwa continued with his expose of the crooked ways of the leaders when Muthemba says:

...genius is seldom understood. What I mean is, in this battle for the pockets, purse and souls of men, you must allow these fallen creatures certain religious fringe benefits. Okay, so a man has gone and sinned. What do you do? You hold a private confessional and tell him it's alright. That's why our Christ died. Go and sin no more, if you can help it...(p.43)

The passage above sheds light on the activities of some of the leaders across the African continent who most times fails to invoke the laws of the state for the development of the society, simply because they are calculative and looking for how the breakdown of law within the society would benefit them. Mulwa concretizes the corrupt nature of leadership in the conversation between the Archbishop and his sly political accomplice Mr. Chilulu:

CHILULU: Especially for men like you and I, Archbishop. You never know when some disgruntled element of mortality might pop up from the darkness and demand retribution.

ELTON: Retribution from an archbishop!! Are you out of your political head?

CHILULU: My friend, when I used to be a lawyer I used to think it is impossible. And then your good tongue and prayers put this political cane of authority into my hands in that grand alliance...what did you call it now?

ELTON: The marriage of the opposites, earthly Caesar hand

in hand with the One Above!

CHILULU: Yes. And now I know. You and I are yoked together in common fortune. My political enemies are your religious enemies, my friends, likewise. It is not safe to assume that your collar will always protect you. Take that as a warning...

From the conversation between the two characters above, the playwright has been able to create an imagery of the dirty connivance and corrupt activities that goes on between the political leaders, and their partners in the religious circles, at the detriment of their political and religious followers, the main textual understanding of the conversation and the specific choice of the religious and political personages is that the social, cultural and political ways of the people in any society are most times controlled by the religious and political leadership found within that society. Therefore the choice of the prominent institutions (religion and politics) is a clear pointer to the thematic message in the play.

Between Soyinka and Mulwa's plays, we can clearly see an insightful link between the sensitive institutions within the society and the problem of leadership. Nguema one of the super characters in A play of giants tries to explain to his fellow leaders that he uses voodoo to control the minds of his people, therefore engaging in the dark religious arts for the sake of accruing unwanted control and power over his people. Archbishop Muthemba in Redemption on the other hand, connive with the lawyer turned politician (Chilulu) to rob the poor people in the valley of their lands while hoodwinking them in the name of religious redemption. In essence, the two playwrights used the imagery of leaders who are ready to go the extra mile to acquire

excess powers at the expense of their followers. They are therefore using their art form and different styles of presentation to create the imagery of bad governance and the quest for excess power and total control.

International Conspiracies

Most of the major African writers (novelist and playwrights alike) from the era of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi aa Thiong'o, Ola Rotimi, Francis Imbuga, Ayi Kwei Armah, Peter Abrahams, Ebrahim Hussain, Athol Fugard, Nadine Gordimer and a host of new playwrights writing out of the African continent have constantly reflected the theme of international conspiracy in different forms. Most of these playwrights are seen as postcolonial writers because they have constantly protested against the issue of imperialism and neo colonialism on the African continent. It is for this reason that most of what is considered as African drama or African literature in general is viewed as protest literature; protest against colonial invaders, protest against African leaders, protest against imperial or neo colonial forces and also protest against the lived experiences of the human condition within the continent and the activities of the outsiders who have decided to remotely control the activities of the various African leaders. Ogude (1988) alludes to this when he stated that:

...but to the African writer, "protest" implies something much more sinister than the mere human act of confronting normal human existential problems. The painful memory of slavery, the humiliation of colonialism, the disarming but invidious power of neo-colonialism, the whole sense

of impotence, of total impotence, these are the historical realities that have inspired, or rather tortured the African imagination...(p.7)

Bates Besong (1993) agrees with Ogude when she opines that:

...the power of the writer is not always enough to change the political and social situation of his time but his art can become a fighting literature; he can write works which are artistically profound and politically correct. He can write works that show how his world is and could be... (p.18)

From the above, it is clear that there is a quest upon which most African writers have embarked upon because every literary work is a protest literature from the character of Tom Stockmann in Ibsen's An enemy of the people, to Hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Okonkwo in Achebe's Things fall apart, The Sculptor in Soyinka's A play of giants and Pastor Mutema in Mulwa's Redemption. All the writers are trying to breach a gulf between the various experiences of the universal human condition. In the same vein the two playwrights in this chapter are protesting against the uncompromising choices that have been placed before the African by the western governments in cohorts with their African conniving partners who masquerade in the cloak of leaders and redemptive saviours of the suffering masses across the African continent. Such acts of defiant protest can be seen in the bold representation of the western journalist and diplomats at the Bugaran Embassy in Soyinka's A play of giants. The depiction of the cold war scramble by the American and Russian diplomats and the appearance of the Secretary of the United Nations at the embassy is a clear depiction of the neo-colonial or

imperialist scramble for the soul of independent African countries. Soyinka captures the behaviours of the western powers clearly in the play and how they conspire with western educated African academics to set the various African leaders who have fallen out of favour with them on the path of destruction. The conversation between Kamini and the Russian and American Diplomats is a testament to that fact:

2nd RUSSIAN. Dr Life President, I wish to assure you, at all times...

KAMINI. Yes, always you assure Kamini. Always you assure life President of Bugara, but still, you stage coup. Your KGB take care of my security, not so?

US DELEGATE. Perhaps I may come in, Field Marshal Dr El-Hajj. You need be in no fear that the US government will recognize these rebels who have taken over-whoever they are. As far as my delegation is concerned, the head of state of Bugara is right here in this embassy standing before me. My delegation will certainly make sure that Your Excellency address the Assembly tomorrow as planned and of course, the proposal which we were bringing to Your Excellency regarding your life size statue, remains in force, we have given it our unqualified support. The only condition we attached to our support was that the statue of our own nation-founder, George Washington be given appropriate...

KAMINI. (Swinging the gun dangerously to and fro). You hear? Always... you Plan coup, you telling World

Bank, no loan for Kamini. Is the fine trick of superpowers, we know, when you call conference and everybody is making talk at conference tables, you are undermining talk and giving weapons to all sides. When you are making disarmament talk, you are making more atom bomb...you think Kamini big fool...

The dialogue above from page 61 of A play of giants sheds some light on the theme of international conspiracy, that is, how the super powers consistently conspire to bring down leaders from the third world. To add to this level of conspiracy Soyinka goes ahead and exposes the role(s) of the international academics in the whole saga in the following dialogue between Professor Batey and the Russian diplomats:

2ND RUSSIAN.

Yes. A common butcher, we knew him. We had close studies of him sent regularly by our own men, not just western reports. But in any case, we did not create him- the British did. They sustained him in power, backed by the Americans. Then they disagreed. The pupil had more than mastered the game of his masters. So we stepped in to fill the vacuum...but you sir, what about you?

BATEY.

What about me?

2ND RUSSIAN.

Come, come professor you are not naïve. You have visited Bugara. An intellectual, you have met many Bugaran colleagues. Progressives, committed to the cause of socialism- authentic socialism, not

rhetorical. You have spoken with them. Sometimes, surely you speak to them one day, only to learn that they have disappeared the next?...did you really believe it was all western propaganda?

BATEY.

You claimed it was! You shouted it loud enough in the United Nations.

2ND RUSSIAN.

What was the word you used, professor? Opportunism. It is our duty to discredit the western press when it tries to discredit the instrument of our policies. The western powers do the same- why not? But what about you? You are here to write a speech for this er...heroic leader. But what of the peasants and workers he has destroyed at will? You write speeches on their behalf?

BATEY.

He is a product of the economic and historical conditions of our people on the continent. There is no such thing as monster- you, if nobody else, should be the first to acknowledge that. You know it is colonial history which must bear full responsibility for all seeming aberrations in African leadership.

2ND RUSSIAN.

I see, you have promoted these views among the survivors of the Kamini's policies in Bugaran villages and towns?

BATEY.

No, I had no opportunity to...

2ND RUSSIAN.

On your next visit perhaps, You see, professor, we also believe that there are

no eternal virtues. Like honesty, it is fiction, or intellectual honesty, its later, bourgeois refinement. But our position and yours...what shall we say?...

From the ensuing conversation, it is now clear that both the international academic community most especially African intellectuals in Diaspora and the leaders of the super powers have all in one way or another conspired to keep the dictators in power across the continent for their own economic and socio-political gains at the expense of the suffering masses across the African continent.

Mulwa makes the same sad analysis on the roles of the international organizations in the continuous suffering of the African people in his play Redemption when he silently linked the activities of Bishop Muthemba and his political friend Chilulu to a Donor agency outside the shores of the African continent. Unknown to the Donor agency (the mother church) the money they sent was used by Muthemba and Chilulu as a means of generating more income and power for themselves at the expense of the poor and wretched souls of the people of the valley. It can therefore be safely said, that the international donor where hoodwinked into financing a criminal scheme against the majority of the innocent landowners in the valley. We can therefore say that metaphorically, the international organization means all foreign donor agencies who usually send money to their African counterparts money under the supervision of the governments for development projects that are never carried out, rather the government and their political allies share the money among themselves while the primary beneficiaries suffer.

An example of this conspiracy can be found on page 51 of Redemption:

ELTON. Remember how I started? Plan A

CHILULU. ...how can I forget? You, a leading elder of the church holding the old pastor to ransom, telling him you had to be paid for advisory services rendered.

ELTON. The man flew into a rage! Called me names and grabbed me, well he bit the dust!

CHILULU. It was you that bit the dust!!

ELTON. We both rolled on it and after that, parted ways. I did my research; found there's no branch of Church of Christ Reborn anywhere in Africa. So I applied abroad to the Mother church, received an enthusiastic license and started Christ Reborn...but I needed money. And that's how you came in.

CHILULU. It was simple. Had the Mother Church publish our poverty and the malnutrition of the Children abroad with S.O.S blazing across the headlines!! Well the money came rolling in.

ELTON. Lots of it!

CHILULU. Rags today-

ELTON. Riches tomorrow! (they laugh, pause)

CHILULU. That money never got there! The poverty and malnutrition are still there, Archbishop.

ELTON. My friend Chilulu I'm surprised at you!! Rome was not built in a day! I have no intention of transforming my congregation of peasants into millionaires overnight! That way I will lose the congregation. At least not until plan B is completed.

CHILULU. Plan B?

From the conversation above, we could see a clear indictment of the political class and the religious leaders, in the race to get international grants or aids in the name of development interventions yet none of those monies are ever used for the development of the common people in the society. It shows the greed of the African religious and political leaders who act in line with their foreign donors and sometimes cohorts. The playwright (Mulwa) use the play as a way of highlighting the sufferings of the people across the continent, how development funds are been diverted to individual pockets at the expense of the people. This aspect of social injustice and human pain and suffering are major thematic flags in African literature, they create the automatic lifeline upon which the imagination of the playwrights get the essential materials for the production of their art. Soyinka and Mulwa have both tapped into this reservoir of human sufferings and experiences to get continental and universal themes for their plays.

We can see that though the two writers lived and wrote their plays on different axis and corners of the continent (Africa); they still have a way of connecting through the social, political and cultural issues that they discussed through their dramas. This is because they are all custodians of the cultural and social lives of the people, meaning their custodianship is not only to their immediate social environment alone but also to the wider environment. As a result, a playwright can write his/her play using social, cultural and political resources from other countries as subject matter. Therefore, it is possible to relate the various themes to events across the African continent and also to events across the world.

Dramatic Representation of Political Issues in the Plays

One of the major issues in modern and postmodern drama is the representation of political issues by playwrights. The popular style of writing in terms of political drama most times is satire. Most plays written in this epoch are targeting specific political-social issues that need to be addressed by the political elites within the given social context. In the case of A Play of Giants and Redemption, both plays are a subtle political commentary on the African situation as the playwrights informed us in their prefaces to both plays. As social commentators, they used their plays to write the truth in a satirical manner, for both writers having written in different literary genres, drama remains their preferred mode of communication and this is because of the flexibility that the dramatic art form gives to them to give life to their imaginations for the benefit of changing their societies.

Soyinka and Mulwa have both provided a template for discourse on the issue of political responsibility and development both by the followers and the leaders in any given society. Using Africa as a focal point of origin, developed as a result of their knowledge of the political experiences and histories of countries on the continent, they separately choose to highlight the travails facing the continent in terms of poor political leadership using different styles and writing approaches in their plays. From Soyinka's classical ambiguity in terms of use of language which seems surprisingly simple in this text, to Mulwa's direct satirical approach, they have dissected the issues of political greed, to international conspiracy and human suffering. The major reason for writing is to create a high level of political and social consciousness among the people so that they can see the dialectics of political change and demand for improvements in

the way(s) they are being governed and also so that they can challenge the international community to stop playing politics with the fate of the African but rather stand up and be counted. We can therefore read the plays as political commentaries because of the political undertones that formed the foundations for the subject matters of the plays. From the monstrous assemble of four African dictators and their lapdogs in the Bugaran embassy overlooking the United Nations building in downtown New York in Soyinka's A play of Giants, to the cold yet wilful struggle for power between the Aged one and Archbishop Muthemba at the beginning of Mulwa's Redemption and the subsequent conflicts between the young Pastor Manela and Pastor Mutema and Archbishop Muthemba, it is clear that the stage for a high political drama is set and the playwrights both gave us a beautiful interpretation of the existing political climate across the continent in both plays. Both of them showed us, distinct political situations of leaders who feel they are untouchable and are therefore willing to hold on to power even when it is clear they have fallen out with the people. A case in point, is the struggle by the four dictators in Soyinka's A Play of Giants to hold on to power and be remembered by all means and so the idea of the Statue to be placed at the United Nations Gallery for public display.

We see flashes of the political commentary and scathing satire throughout both plays, an example is the sudden political outburst of Professor Batey at the Bugaran embassy when he joined issues with the coup plotters:

BATEY. ...you slave, you sacrifice. You devote your entire existence, day after day, hour after hour, with no rest, no let up, no distraction. From a hundred tribes,

tongues, cultures, religions, animosities and suspicions, you weld a single, united people. Deprived, reviled, sabotaged and subverted by outside forces, from whose hands you have wrested your people, put an end to their centuries of domination sometimes through force of arms...the invader is driven out, but is the battle over? No. you discover that the greed is still in their eye and they bring new, camouflaged weaponry to bear wresting from your hands the fruits of your people's labour. Eternally vigilant, sifting through the deceptions of diplomacy and traps of preferred friendship, you ensure that the wolf of yesterday does not parade before you as the sheep today. And sometimes even the people you serve must betray you; that is the unkindest cut of all...

The long winding speech by the professor is a political statement on the irony of political struggle and betrayal that has become a constant feature in the political circles across the African continent. He painted the sordid imagery of the various stages of political and socio-economic struggles of the African, the diplomatic conspiracies that have become a permanent characteristic of most African governments.

In Redemption, we equally find dramatic imageries of the political commentary that runs unhindered throughout the play. Mulwa discusses the political scenario from the church to the family and the larger society using the simple imagery of the conflicts within the church as the template for the discussion. Mulwa have craftily created imageries of political conflicts and lobbying between individuals in the work place as can be seen between The Aged one and his ambitious assistant Bishop

Martin, we also witnessed the same politics between Pastor Mutema and Archbishop Muthemba. The playwright constructs different conflicting scenarios that are laden with heavy political innuendoes for the readers to grapple with. A deep look at the conflicts within the play-text reveals a sarcastic laugh at the political situation in Kenya during the Moi era and also the laughable political and military dictatorships that had taken hold of the African continent.

The Plays as Statements in Social Revolt

The different movements and theories in modern theatre constitute a revolt. Revolt, although looking to overthrow a particular political or cultural movement, does not intend to disrupt the notion of society as the primary organization of human existence. Some excellent work has been done exploring the relationship between revolt and modern drama. Robert Brustein's classic The theatre of revolt: An approach to modern drama (1964) explores three different types of Modern Theatrical Revolt; Messianic revolt occurs when the dramatist rebels against God and tries to take His place—the priest examines his image in the mirror. Social revolt occurs when the dramatist rebels against the conventions, morals, and values of the social organism—the priest turns the mirror on the audience.

Existential revolt occurs when the dramatist rebels against the conditions of his existence—the priest turns the mirror on the void. Brustein (1964) points out that each of these revolts takes place within the play's content, not necessarily in the relationship between the playwright and his text. A play's protagonist enters into a battle with conventional notions of religion, culture, or self. Brustein finds examples of his theory by tweaking traditional

interpretations of modern classics and does not regard a play's experimental style as a prerequisite for a certain type of revolt. It is therefore along this line of thought, that the two plays in this chapter would be discussed as revolt plays, because of the styles that the playwrights used and also because of the activities of some of the characters in the plays. In terms of the structural styles of writing, the two playwrights used two different approaches in structural construction for the plays. Whereas Soyinka divided the play into three parts instead of Acts and Scenes as advised by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, Mulwa used movements for his own play. This goes to show that the negation of the conventional acts and scenes by both playwrights is actually a deliberate act. Considering the epoch when both plays were written, the strand of structural revolt in the dramaturgy can be explained.

Both plays were written in periods when both countries were under repressive regimes. In Nigeria, General Mohammed Buhari had just toppled the democratically elected government of Shehu Shagari hence political structures within the country were all suspended. In the case of Kenya, the country was still under the repressive rule of the Daniel Arap Moi's government and so most playwrights and writers generally had to find softer methods of advocating for a better society. From the two plays, one could see the subtle objection to the problems within the two societies, the advocacy for change and pure satire that is evident in both plays is a testament to the revolting nature of the playwrights who are both on a quest for change within their societies.

One of the major features of a social revolt is the ability of the writer to write in a manner that would not belittle the efforts of the present regime. Brecht (1935) opines that in such situations

the writer should adopt the following method to get his message across to the target audience:

...Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the keenness to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; the judgment to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the cunning to spread the truth among such persons. These are formidable problems for writers living under Fascism, but they exist also for those writers who have fled or been exiled; they exist even for writers working in countries where civil liberty prevails... (p.1)

It is therefore clear from the above advice by Bertolt Brecht that for the writer to write the truth in a repressive environment or state, he/ she needs to develop the means of concealing it from the claws of the agents of the oppressive regime. For Soyinka and Mulwa as writers in a postcolonial era in Africa, they had to find a means of writing about their frustrations with the leadership and the followers in their respective societies. The creation of imagery and metaphoric representation of the events in the plays presented them with the best means of “concealing” and passing their coded messages across to their target audience.

Both playwrights (Soyinka and Mulwa) employed the use of satire as a style of writing; this helped them in concealing their social and political messages in the open (Eagleton, 2012). Their stylistic choices aided the development of the story lines and the deployment of the messages. Like most playwrights and literary writers, the two playwrights, used drama a literary device as the

platform upon which to demand for social and political change in their societies.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the playwrights though from different societies have written about the peculiar problems that have remained inimical to social and political growth on the African continent. They have projected the social and political issues of leadership, international interference and corruption among the various African leaders. They have alluded to the connivance of the African leaders and their western collaborators. Other playwrights also exploited the ideas of political and social realities on the African continent.

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