A SURVEY OF THE MARXIST HEROES' FALL IN SELECTED PLAYS OF FEMI OSOFISAN

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Abstract
This paper is a scholarship survey of the characterization of heroism in the context of the three selected works of Femi Osofisan in depicting the failure of presumed societal heroes of positive change with reference to Altine's Wrath, The Oriki of a Grasshopper and Birthdays Are Not for Dying. The theoretical framework is Marxism Theory. The Theory, which is driven on the platform of pitching socialists against capitalists is known for the detest of the bourgeoise class by its proprietors. The Paper negotiates the idea that the vehement agitation of the socialists may in actual fact be a mere public display of ideology and in certain cases, have underlying admiration for the very upper class it publicly attacks. Hence, the paper captures excerpts from the selected plays in negotiating this betrayal cum hypocritical hidden disposition of the presumed positive change agents.

Keywords: *Marxism, Characterization, Illusion, Heroism*

Introduction

Femi Osofisan as a playwright, undoubtedly deserves to be classed as a relentless advocate of the common man and a revolutionist committed to the pursuit of artistic clamouring for stripping especially the corrupt elite class of the power and position through which they have corruptly devoured the common wealth of all. Put differently, Osofisan, driven by a revolutionist spirit has extensively grounded his vision of change to addressing the sociopolitical challenges facing his society. These identified societal ills which Osofisan have responded to through his artistic platform include; corruption, widespread fraud, underdevelopment, looting, failure of leadership, hypocritical heroism, oppression; general lawlessness; just to mention a few. Thus, this lends credence to why in his artistic engagements; especially as regards reflecting the society in all of its ramifications, Osofisan tends to pay special attention to character delineation in his revolutionary plays. artistic finish in mirroring the identified socio-political issues raised especially in his dramatic works. His drama has continued to be relevant in the artistic measuring of past and ongoing societal structures and values. In this vein, Awodiya states that: "*Osofisan'sstories continue to*

enjoy social relevance as their themes remain topical" (167).

In addressing socio-economic and socio-political and socio-injustice problems bedeviling society in his plays, Osofisan makes effective use of characterization as a literary device in revolting against the identified societal ills addressed in the play. Coined in the 15th Century whilst speaking of the importance of plot over character in *Poetics*, Aristotle stated that "Tragedy is representation not of men, but of action and life". It is deduced that what he meant is that the story is centered on what happened to the plot so writer employ characterization to relay information about thoughts, histories, and dreams, without drifting away from the action. By way of definition, *"characterization is a literary device that is used step-by-step in literature to highlight and explain the details about a character in a story"*. For Awodiya, *"Characterization is the creation, by the playwright, of actions, incidents, and dialogues in such a fashion as to cause the audience or reader to perceive the imaginary dramatic persons as realistic portraits of living human being."* (140). According to Nwabueze, *"Theterm character, is used to designate the fictional personages in a dramatic work. Characterization is an important step in playscript analysis and interpretation"* (156).Eke and Irokwe, cites Abram's definition of character as *"The persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the readers as being endowed*

with moral and dispositional qualities that are expressed in what they say: the dialogue and what they do-the action" (84) Characterization can be deployed by a playwright in either the implicit or an explicit form. On the one hand, Explicit Characterization is a direct approach that is clearly informative using the narrator, the protagonist or the character themselves. On the other hand, Implicit Characterization is the type wherein the character is introduced in a subtle manner leaving the audience to deduce for themselves. These two types of characterization were effectively utilized in the selected plays of Osofisan under study.

Characterization as a literary device is an essential component in writing good literature as it helps readers make sense of the behaviour of characters in a piece of art. In other words, appropriate characterization tends to facilitate the artistic platform for a writer in approximating what is obtainable in his society.

Illusion is defined as a "misrepresentation of a real sensory stimulus; that is, an interpretation that contradicts objective reality as defined by general agreement. In the context of this research, it is an artistic impression emanating from the ideological commitment of the playwright expressed in a piece of work which consequently faces opposing views based on popular societal norms or expectations.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Heroism is as a "heroic conduct especially as exhibited in

fulfilling a high purpose or attaining a noble end". In the Greek mythology, the word hero referred to those who were favoured by the gods or had "godlike" qualities. For the purpose of suitability to focus of this research however, heroism is viewed from the perspective of acts of determination, deliberate self-struggle, courageous, capable of lightening the way and not motivated by public opinion. In scholarship alignment of this to the selected plays, heroism is viewed from a paradoxical perspective wherein the surface interpretation contradicts the expectations of a socialist audience. Put differently, respective heroes either outrightly fail, fall short of heroic expectations, face complex mental dilemma or re-define heroism in a manner that question's the playwright's disposition about heroic acts. Hence, the illusion of individual-driven heroism becomes a case for scholarship.

Theoretical Framework

There indeed, exist considerable scholarship on Osofisan's works in the area of radical theatre, and specifically, Marxism approach to presenting societal ills via the vehicle of revolutionary dramaturgy but there is evidentially the need to add to scholarship on the disillusionment of the Marxism ideology that featured in the works of this prolific playwright under study despite the playwright's unwavering commitment to the

course of advocating against oppression and leadership corruption. Literature utilizes Marxism from the scholarship angle of historical materialism. The view rests upon the argument that the economic system is a base while social relations are the superstructure. Consequently, 'art for art's sake' is unacceptable for these thoughts. Of Karl Marx's interpretation of the world and on the part to be charted by intellectual change, Terry Eagleton states that "He is not out to replace ideas with mindless action, but to fashion a kind of practical philosophy which will help to transform what it is seeking to comprehend. Social and intellectual change go together: and philosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence of the proletariat" (3). Concerning Marx and thoughts on the same vein, Eagleton further added Marx's comments on money as:

The universal whore, the universal pimp of men and peoples, a kind of garbled language in which all human and natural qualities are scrambled and inverted and anything can be magically transformed into anything else"...If the means of production were to be commonly owned and democratically controlled, then the world we create together would belong to us in common, and the self-production of each could become part of the self-realization of all" (33).

Altine's Wrath, is a one-act play that revolves around LawalJatau, a Permanent Secretary in a Northern Nigerian State Ministry who was engaged with enriching himself through abuse of his public office position to extort kickbacks, from private developers and in doing this, hard-heartedly robs peasants of their farmlands. The play opens with Lawal sitting in his living room and anxiously waiting for the arrival of a supposed business partner. Whilst eagerly waiting for Maikudi, Lawal's mistress, the possessive, forward and aggressive Mariam emerges with an air of ownership over Lawal's life and prepared to be formally fully absorbed into Lawal's home. Conversations between the two establishes Lawal's depravity, lack of respect for the family institution and infidelity which was responsible for the lack of respect and ill-treatment meted to his presumed permanently timid, dumb and illiterate wife; Altine. Still in the course of waiting for AlhajiMaikudi, AinaJibo, Lawal's old class mate emerges with a liberated woman's self-driven advocacy mission on behalf of the displaced peasants. Beclouded by the threat to his corrupt lifestyle, the hard-hearted Lawal is irritated and angry upon hearing Aina's plea on behalf of Baba Audu and MalamOnene; the duo being the representative of local farmers who had been rendered landless by Lawal's crude wealth amassing; land-grabbing engagements.

AlhajiMaikudi, Lawal's long awaited visitor eventually arrives and the business deal is discussed, negotiations agreed upon and business sealed bringing to bear, the endemic corruption that especially, Lawal was enmeshed in.

In the end and to Lawal's surprise, Altine shockingly debuts her new assertive, educated self and boldly announced to the perplexed Lawal how she had successfully disposed him of his ill-acquired monies and assets which he had made her clandestinely signed to safe-keeping for him. Shocking also to Lawal was the fact that his supposed "foolish" houseboy, Ahmed, had been privy to Altine's covert acquisition of western education which liberated her. Unfortunately, and by virtue of her love for bananas, Altine ironically dies after unknowingly consuming some babanas that had been poisoned and targeted at Lawal by the aggrieved peasants.

Altine's Wrath can be described as one of Osofisan's profound social document that presents a clear artistic summation of social vices plaguing the society amongst which are; corruption, frivolities of the middle-class, infidelity, oppression, domestic violence and gender inequality. Specifically, the lenses under which this study shall view the play is from the perspective of the loss of moral values in public and private lives and the incapability that becomes of an individualistic approach in addressing those issues.

Thus, this study examines the perceived idea of the playwright that individualistic approach to addressing societal ills like corrupt practices is more or less, a grope in the dark. It is argued that the idea of individualistic approach to warring societal ills will most often than not; hit ideological waterloo and consequently not yield the desired positive results as regards righting identified societal wrongs. This leads to the analysis of certain characters delineated by the playwright in pinpointing the idea that individual-driven anti-corruption heroes are illusionary personalities. We commence with LawalJatau, a publicly and privately morally debased character. Right from the commencement of the play, we are presented with a restless, desperate and an impatient personality in the person of Lawal as expressed in attitude towards Ahmed; his houseboy captured below:

Lawal: (*Calling*) Ahmed! Ahmed!

Ahmed: (*Off-stage*) Sir!(He appears)

Lawal: Go and see who's at the door. Maybe it's Alhaji(2)

Lawal: ..Take her luggage to my room (*Ahmed stays confused*)

Mariam: So that's it then, you were waiting for someone else!

Lawal: Oh, not that kind of person! (*Laughs*) I mean, a business acquaintance. Can't you see the way I am dressed?

Mariam: Yes, I've noticed. But you were dressed like that too the first time you took me out.

Lawal: Indeed! Well, this time it's purely business, nothing more. You will see for yourself anyway, when he arrives

Mariam: Hope I won't be in the way.

Lawal: Not at all. In fact, it's probably lucky you showed up. I'm sure a pretty face will soften him up even more.

Mariam: Lawal!

Lawal: It's true anyway. What! (*Sees Ahmed who is still waiting*) What are you waiting for? I said take her luggage to my room.

Ahmed: (*Alarmed*): Your room sir?

Lawal: (*Shouting*) Yes, my room! You don't know where it is anymore? (p.2-3)

The excerpt above introduces the nature of personage that Lawal represents assessing from both public and private life perspectives. In one sweep, an expression of his discourteous and oppressive personality is showcased in the manner he related with Ahmed his houseboy with utmost impatient and ruthless authority. Also, the vividness of his being swamped in corrupt practices is well depicted in his restlessness whilst awaiting his private sector collaborator,AlhajiMaikudi dubbed "business acquaintance". Equally, Lawal unreservedly made it clear that his desperation to secure ill-gotten wealth had no regard for the dignity of his

Mistress. He told Mariam that he considered her an expediting item for his business acquittance as he affirms that "a pretty face" possessed the possibilities for "softening up" the expected AlhajiMaikudi. Consequently, with a character like Lawal, a Permanent Secretary in government so grossly enmeshed in the modus operandi of corrupt practices; the hope of diminishing corruption in the public service is indeed gloomy. This lends credence to the fruitlessness of the redemptive efforts made by AinaJibo, Lawal's old school mate who came on anti-corruption advocacy mission on behalf of the peasants whose lands were corruptly stolen by Lawal. The dialogue between the two old friends says it all:

Aina: These men-MalamAudu, and Mr.Onene-live in Tudun Wada. Or rather used to live there, till the land was acquired by the state Government. Thai is, your Ministry...

Lawal: Tudun Wada? Yes, I remember. The land acquired for the new layout.

Aina: Well, what happens to them now? And to all the villagers affected by the acquisition?

Lawal: They'll be adequately compensated. They were told that at-

Aina: When?

Lawal: What do you mean, "when"?

Aina: It's five years now, Lawal, since they were driven off their lands. Their houses were

demolished, their farms and crops destroyed by your bulldozers-

Lawal: Wait a minute!. Wait! What do you mean, by *my* bulldozers?

Aina: Well, I mean bulldozers from your Ministry...

Lawal: It was government decision. And when it comes to government decisions, Ijust execute. The responsibility is not mine in any way, and I cannot question or delay! (15-16)

With this kind of verbal response made by Lawal, AinaJibo, even though did not physically expressed it is driven mentally to the state of a failed hero, hence, deflating the assumed capability of an individualistic-driven anti-corruption hero. His callousness and ruthlessness is displayed as attempts to wash himself clean of being labelled as a corrupt official. This typifies the kind of self-defense put forward by corrupt public officials when confronted with their corrupt engagements. They either shift the blame on government, the general public or the direct victims of their corrupt actions.

The tendencies for an individual-driven anti-corruption crusade to hit waterloo with its champions rendered hopeless and frustrated is also captured in the conversations between Lawal, Aina and the two representatives of the peasants:

Lawal: Well, go to the Local Government Office-

Audu: We went there, sir. They sent us to the Town Council

Onene: And the Town Council sent us to the Ministry and-

Audu: At the Ministry, they sent us to the Governor's office

Lawal: Enough! Enough! I'm not interested in your life history. Really Aina! I must ask you to go now.

Audu: At the Governor's office, they said the money had already been paid out!

Lawal: You see! So why are you coming to me?

Audu: To whom, we asked?. To whom was the money paid? None of us from the village has touched even a kobo!

Lawal: There's nothing I can do about that, I'm afraid.

Onene: They cut out our land into so many plots. And they gave them out to big people. They didn't give any of us even a single one of them!

Lawal: Really! Now try and be serious! Could any of you have found the money to pay any of those plots?

Audu: Pay! Why should we pay?. It was our land!

Lawal: You see!

Aina: What do you mean? Don't they have a right to their own land?

Lawal: Sorry, but that's not how government reasons!

Onene: Nonsense! Which government? Is it not those rogues in those your offices? Those who-
Lawal: What! You wretches! You dare say such things in my house! Insulting your superiors like that! Aina, take these men away before I get them locked up! (16-17)

An individual's effort is not sufficient for an anti-corruption advocacy in tackling a morally debased personage like Lawal. This is a clear case of the illusion with an individual-driven anti-corruption advocacy as no change came or was indicated as a result of AinaJibo's individual challenge against Lawal. It is also clear that Altine's supposed anti-corruption personage which have earned several scholarship surface interpretations thumb-ups, may, by the assessment of this scholarship be far from it. Consequently, it is the view of this scholarship that Altine in the real sense, is an illusionary anti-corruption champion going the way she greedily migrated herself to a beneficiary of ill-gotten wealth. This is captured thus in her own words in the play:

Lawal: What! You've been reading my letters!
Altine: All of them Lawal. That's how I came to know quite early that I had no future in your house aa far as you were concerned, and I made my own plans. Yes! That's why I grew dumb so suddenly! Oh! yes, you too Lawal, you're going to suffer!

You'll be reduced to abject poverty, to dust, to nothing!

Lawal: (*Trembling*) What do you mean?

Altine: (*Going*) You'll find out soon enough! Bye bye...

Alhaji: Do something, Mr.Jatau! Don't let her go like this!

Altine: He can't stop me! Tomorrow, when you go to the bank, you'll find out! You won't find a single kobo left ther! I've transferred the money to a new account!

Lawal: What!.Altine, no!

Altine: Why no?. It's my money, isn't it? (*Laughs*) Thanks to you. The money was all there in my name! All I had to do was just collect! With my thumb!...

Mariam: What money is this darling? You don't mean you kept all your money in her account?

Lawal: It was ...er, it was a ruse, you understand? I was only using her name as a cover?

Mariam: Your salary?

Lawal: Who's talking about salary! Is that what I would live on?

Mariam: Then what money is this? Some business?

Altine: Yes, right on the heads! Some business! A business called ten percent!

Lawal: It's the money I was going to retire on. Altine. The harvest of my long years at work, the-

Altine: At work!. That's what you call illegal gratifications!
Lawal: Then return it! After all everybody in the government does it!.All my colleagues. Or else, how shall we make up for our salaries? We all take kickbacks!
Altine: (*Laughing*) Well, I.ve turned it into a kick-forward for myself! I'm building a completely new future for myself. Without you.!
Lawal: ...But Altine, are you really taking it all away? You want to stela away all my life, just like that!.
Altine: (*To Alhaji*) Please, Alhaji, help me talk to this man!. Who's stealing his money ?...(32-33)

From the above dialogue, it becomes convincing that Altine is indeed a surface-valued saint, who is unblemished and deserving to be woven in her husband's moral rottenness. This action is not linkable in any sense to her having her get-back on her husband for the maltreatment she had suffered in his hands. Consequently, this scholarship advances that her supposed anti-corruption heroism is indeed a mirage going by the fact she effectively re-looted the converted stolen wealth of the common man. Hence, Altine in the real sense does not deserve the honour of being adorned with the crown of an anti-corruption champion going by her misdeed of opening a fresh bank account in her own name and successfully

moving her husband's ill-gotten wealth into it. The machoism-driven Lawal had caged himself in so much self-dominance and moral rot that he became extremely gullible about the possibility of a sudden emergence of Altine's transformation. He practically lived in the illusion that Altine was a never-do-well.

A One-Act play, *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* is about the ideological shipwreck of a Imaro, a comrade intellectual hitherto sold out to championing verbal attacks on and propelling revolutionary agitations against the oppressive, corrupt ruling government. As the play opens, Imaro is enveloped in fear of an impending arrest by law enforcement agent for his linkage with activist' demonstrations carried out by agitating students. This fear, the pleasure of expensive wine and cigar and the realization of the powers of the frontline capitalists to rescue him steadily led him to migrating to the side of the oppressors. Hitherto publicly known for his commitments to comradeship pursuits, Imaro by this betrayal attitude lost his self-esteem and made vivid a double-faced personality of himself. Shocked by this let-down action of Imaro, Moni, bemoaned him and unreservedly labeled him a betrayal of the comradeship bond and ethos. In furthering his escape strategy from being arrested, Imaro proceeded to accepting a share of an expensive

liquor and cigar with his capitalist friend, Claudius and seamlessly submitted to a brain reset in porting to the bourgeoisie class.

Imaro is however bemoaned for turning double-faced by his girlfriend and fellow female comrade, Moni, who saw his action as a let-down behaviour as she adjudges it as opposed to the anti-capitalist cause which they had together been holding firmly to. Consequently, the reality of the person of Imaro as a rhetoric socialist, weak, swamped in self-delusion and more or less sunk in psychological aberration, hence; lending credence to the idea that characterization of an individualistic anti-corruption champion is indeed an allusion in the quest for socio-political change. This then becomes the truism of the vacantness of dependence on heroism for desired societal change. Right from the commencement of the play, Imaro established an indication that raises eyebrow to the sincerity of his outward personage as a revolutionist. This is captured in his dialogue with Claudius:

Claudius: Wait. I brought you this. (*Takes out a bottle*)

Imaro: (*Takes the bottle. Whistles*) You'll never die!

Claudius: At least not before you, you drunkard!

Imaro: Where did you get this?

Claudius: The old man. He brought it back from Europe last week.

Imaro: (*Opening the bottle, preparing to pour the drink into glasses, then tears some toilet tissue to clean them first before pouring the drink*)

Claudius: (*Bringing out cigars*). And these.

Imaro: Drink. And cigar.And women. Your old man's talents are a legend!

Claudius: That's why I didn't take after him.

Imaro: (*Drinking*) No, you have only surpassed him. (37)

The above dialogue between Imaro, a supposed comrade and his Claudius, a wealthy businessman clearly establishes the fact that Imaro is a 'fake comrade' going by his embrace of liquor and cigar coming in from Europe, being items of pleasure associated with the bourgeoise class. Expectedly, an activist of his class who champions agitations against the rich, renowned for his stans for antagonizing the upper-class, should not be even seen exchanging pleasantries with the bourgeois class not to talk of going as far as relating to the extent of sharing expensive liquor and cigar.This showcases the conflict of interest of ideological belonging as we are presented with a man who is more or less double-faced, publicly championing the cause of the masses and privately wining and dining with the oppressors of the masses. Drama here is created by Osofisan to put up a poser to the audience on interpreting how a supposed comrade is caught in the midst of upholding his verbally proclaimed ideological

commitment and how this is jettisoned in the face of perceived threats to his existence.

Consequently, the essence of drama in mirroring certain deep salient realities of the society, especially as regards the ability to sustain public and private ideologies; is herein depicted. In yet another dialogue between the duo, the play's depiction of surface-value revolutionist in the personage of Imaro is presented thus:

Imaro: All that distance.

Claudius: It wasn't too bad. In fact it was pleasant!

Imaro: What! You don't say! You mean, even for a millionaire! Such as you!

Claudius: Even for a capitalist! Don't disappoint me by changing your vocabulary...

Imaro: And all for what, I ask you? All that dust and sweat, just to come for a rehearsal! A rehearsal, not a contract! You're not behaving to type, Claudius! You're a disgrace to the rest of your class!

Claudius: So that makes two of us, ehn? Look at you puffing away at that cigar, and drowning yourself in Chivas Regal! (*Mock salute*) Comrade! Revolutionary greetings! A luta continua!

Imaro: I'm glad you admit that you corrupt me...

Claudius: What?

Imaro: The falsehood of our lives! So easily it shows!

Claudius: I don't know what you mean. I'm a businessman. I make money...

Imaro: And I'm an intellectual. As they say, I make words...

Claudius: So each one to his profession...

Imaro: It's a masquerade, Claudius! And you're right to laugh. Everybody laughs at us...(39-40)

The above excerpt from the play clearly indicates that Imaro is more or less a cynic as his hitherto revolutionary stance has become illusionary judging by the fact that he through his own words confirmed that he was living a falsified 'ideological' life. In other words, his political cum ideological convictions has been silently renounced in the inward man and as such, not befitting of the outward anti-corruption champion he is known for. He is psychologically and physically worn out; weary, lost self-esteem and becomes too weak to boldly match his words with action. This is made vivid in his own words:

Imaro: But that's it, Claudius!. That's what I'm trying to say!. We've been waiting all our lives!. You said it just now. We the so-called intellectuals, we're just professional waiters. We're just-

Claudius: ...Take your mind off it

Imaro: But it's true, isn't it!. We wait. We talk. We fiddle with the props. Sometimes even, we relish the leftovers....

Claudius: Let's talk of something else, Imaro...

Imaro: ...Like the cigar. The wine.The car.The deejay. Or maybe it's Mozart, Beethoven, or the unending conferences. All the props of our empty lives...

Claudious: Imaro-

Imaro: ...We're capable too of pity, Claudius!..The wretches born with a rope round their neck. Who suffer and continue to suffer mainly because they are incapable of shedding their burden. Because, absurdly, they have been persuaded to accept patiently the lavish whips of their oppressors...(42)

Another instance that exposed Imaro's hidden, yet painful admiration for the powers possessed by the oppressive bourgeoises whom he publicly detests and war against is seen below:

Claudius: (*After watching his angry gestures for a while*) Imaro, Estragon will not be coming today.

Imaro: What?. You know?

Claudius: He won't be coming. And they'll not come for you.

Imaro: How do you know?

Claudius: Since last night. Iknew all about it. And I intervened to save you. You can unpack your bag.

Imaro: (*Speechless*) You...You...

Claudius: Last night, some officer phoned my father. They'd got instructions to take you all in. I spoke to him, made him read out the list. You know, he was clever. He tried to jump your name. But not fast

enough. There was something in his voice that I caught. So he confessed. You were on the list.

Imaro: And you told him "Remove it". Just like that!

Claudius: Well...

Imaro: How does it feel, ehn?

Claudius: What?

Imaro: To be clothed in power? To have such wealth that nothing can touch you or those you protect. Not even the head of state!. Tell me, it must be wonderful!

Claudius: You made your choice. So did I. And now, I am in a position to save you. (51-52)

This excerpt depicts the tortured state that the psyche of a revolutionist as attained and points to the fuelers of frustration, depression and loss of self-esteem. This, it is believed is what pushes an individualistic anti-corruption hero into concluding that the hope for securing a positive socio-structure balancing is indeed, an illusion. He experiences first-hand; that the wealthy men who occupy the upper strata of the society can decide the destinies of other citizens over a mere telephone conversation right in the comfort of their home. Imaro did not mince words in stating the realities that confronts the outwardly vigorous intellectual who have committed to utilizing their intellectualism in the pursuit of socialist ideas but on the inside, a physically and psychologically

walking corpse. Deception, thus becomes the game as affirmed by his girlfriend, Moni:

Moni: Go on pretending that you don't know what I'm talking about. But the rest are gone, all our comrades, and you are here, you alone, and Claudius.

Claudius: Moni, that's not-

Moni: Deny it! Deny that it's because of you that he's here untouched...

Claudius: I won't deny it...

Moni: He knew! He's always known! Haven't you, Imaro? That's why you carefully planned out your insurance, isn't it?. You cleverer than the rest of us...

Imaro: You see now, Claudie!

Moni: Don't call Claudius! Is he the only one? What of the others with whom you've carefully surrounded yourself? The Johnsons! The de Gammas! The Abioyes! The Chukwuras!. Shall I go on? The rich powerful people you preach against but who are always guests at your house? Whom you abuse, but dance around, and fawn for? Is it a lie? You're there when their wives give birth; when their uncles die and are being buried! ...And on Sunday afternoons you put on a jersey and accompany them to the squash court...God, how we've been deceived! How I loved you! all that talk about revolution, war, exploitation, the masses...but you had built your escape route...

Claudius: Moni, maybe it's not my business...

Moni: You can't understand, Mr. Claudius. And I don't expect you to. You live by sucking on others. You cheat and extort and ruin others and you call it making profits. ...But he had always claimed to be different. He knows what it means to run with the hare, in the morning, and then at noon, to change skins and hunt with the hounds. (54-55)

Ambushed with the facts of the matter by Moni, Imaro unreservedly admitted to his betrayal of the radicals when he responds to her by saying "...Maybe I made the wrong choice, gave my life to a cause that I could only end up by betraying. Maybe I am just too much on the other side... (55). Undoubtedly, the character portrayal of Imaro succinctly captures the physical and psychological state of the typical hero who vehemently wars societal ills and its perpetrators verbally in the public sphere. On a closer examination however, his private life reveals otherwise and this is brought about by either the secret craves or benefits derived through certain channels of the very capitalists or the commencement of frustration. Hence, the illusion of bogus acclamation or bestowment of ardent heroes of social change.

Set in the bedroom of KunleAremo, an only son of a late business mogul, now emerged to take up the role of heir apparent as stated in his late father's wills. It is his 30th birthday and in

commemorating it, he decides to unveil his firm decision to eradicate corruption and its perpetrators within the business empire. the play raises the playwright's disillusionment with lone anti-corruption heroes and affirms the presence of endemic corrupt practices in the private sector. In situating the play in this scholarship's perception, the lay presents a son's vengeance on his late father's corrupt and disloyal friends who had seen to his death with the hope of inheriting his company. KunleAremo, the heir to his late father's company consequently embarked on confronting the company's top officials and business associates with their respective corrupt deeds which connectedly is perceived to have sent Kunle's father to an early grave. Kunle's anti-corruption heroism mission stemmed from his personal believe that his late father raised him for that purpose and no amount of threats would deter him from executing judgement on the identified corrupt elements. Additionally, he was out to make the point that he had attained maturity and needed to prove that he was not by any means; a weakling nor incapable of handling adult matters as assumed by his late father's business partners.

Kunle's fierce determination to execute his vengeance mission did not however go down well with his mother as she believed that his being killed for it by the corrupt cabal through diabolic means was inevitable. Displeased with Kunle's no-

going back stand, the corrupt cabal united on doing everything within their power to shipwreck his anti-corruption mission and in fact, send him to an early grave. In purging the everything around him off the stench of corruption, Kunle equally shocked his wife with evidences of her infidelity which he found out happen shortly before their marriage ceremony, thus, questioning the authenticity of his being the father of their only child. In the end, all attempts to have him abort the anti-corruption mission proved abortive and ironically dies from pangs of headaches. Consequently, the play ends with the idea that an individualistic pursuit of anti-corruption heroism is indeed; an illusion. This formidable team of corrupt men presented themselves as a well-coordinated union strong enough to fully defeat the lone self-styled anti-corruption hero who was presumed a weakling and incapable of ending their corrupt reign. First, Kunle is viewed as a child, who was given birth to right before their very eyes: This is made evidence in their conversations:

Kunle: I know, I also know the cause. And I intend to deal with it. This evening.

Chief: You!. Excuse me, but...It's a joke! What do you know?

Kunle: You'll find out sir. And then maybe you won't be laughing anymore.

Chief: I know it's your father's wish. In all our life together. I never had cause once to disagree with

him. Not once...But death I suppose is a funny thing. His mind must have decayed in those last minutes.

Kunle: Do you think so sir? Or are you just afaraid?

Chief: What do you mean?

Kunle: I've gone through his papers. I've read his diary. My father was a very faithful and loyal man, but he was not foolish. He knew his friends thoroughly, even if he felt powerless to act.

Chief; I see. And you think you can act?. That you have the guts?

Kunle: We'll see(*Brief knock, Enter Major Ajala, with a parcel*)...(116)

Another instance in the play that depicts the weakling treatment meted out to Kunle, the depicted hero is as captured thus:

Chief: He's going to take over, Major.

Major: I beg your pardon?

Kunle: Wrong, father. Not going to. I've already taken over.

Major; Is this a joke?. You, you wish to be Company President?

Kunle: I am Company President, Major. I've been since four this afternoon.

Major: But...but that's crazy! You know absolutely nothing.

Kunle: You read my father's will.(117)

From the excerpts above, it is clear that Kunle is seen as not just too young to take over the mantle of the business empire but that he is seen by the cabal as weak, not competent and totally unqualified business-wise to assume leadership of the Company. For the cabal, the whole game of corrupt practices that had been institutionalized in the Company can only be played better by their likes and not someone as young and 'inexperienced' like Kunle. They simply see him as a misfit. On his part, Kunle is out to prove that he can no longer be tossed about and treated like the child they have always known, he consequently presents like someone suffering from low self-esteem and wanting to prove to as many as cares to know, that he is np weakling as assumed; hence, his relentlessness in his vengeance pursuit. In doing this, he pinpoints his father's will and his determination to fulfil his father's wish as the major propeller for his sanitization mission. His response also indicates that he is a man trying to make a name for himself, free himself from some form of low self-esteem, hence his aggressive disposition:

Kunle: Mama, I am not saying I disbelieve you. But I am certain that my father was fully in his senses when he made his will. I've read his diary...I think I know he wants

Mother: And what is that?

Kunle: That I avenge him. (107)

From this type of statement, it becomes clear that Kunle may in either not be in the complete know of the course for which he is warring the corrupt cabal or he may simply be on a selfish mission of freeing himself of being treated as a boy by his father's business partners and friends, hence, not a born or committed anti-corruption hero. Another instance that lends credence to this idea is seen in yet another conversation as provided below:

Kunle: Councillor, no one can live forever with shame and humiliation. Tonight, I am freeing myself of all burden. Tomorrow the lawyer is having a busy day. One of his assignments will be to file in a divorce application on my behalf.

Councillor: What! How-

Kunle: The Chief understands. Two years ago, he had an interesting discussion with my father, in this very room. That discussion eventually led to a wedding. He couldn't have forgotten the details.

Chief: I can't recognize you! No, not anymore, Kunle!. You're grown, grown into a terrible young man! A monster! Ah! I'm glad my daughter is leaving you.

Kunle: Yes, you're glad now. But two years ago, two old men came here and decided that their business was more important than

someone else's honour. Man manhood was at stake, all my friends were anxious, but those two men met and put their feet down. And it didn't matter if I live the rest of my life as a fugitive, running from those who would meet me and quickly hide their grin behind their handkerchief. (125-126)

From the foregoing, it becomes clearer that Kunle's vengeance mission to have his self-esteem restored and secure a get-back at the identified corrupt men stemmed more or less from a selfish standpoint as opposed to the surface-value critical interpretation of his being branded an anti-corruption champion. Put differently, the fall of the hero here tends to stem from a self-driven heroic mission as opposed to being more of the societal positive change point of view, hence, the illusion of an individualistic driven anti-corruption mission.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is observed that credible character portrayal in the course of the delivery of a piece of work can go a long way in buttressing the thematic drive of that given work as showcased in the selected plays. However, as the playwright engages with encasing and testing the deployment of its adopted theory in his works, various scholarship negotiations begin to emerge in response to the societal changes in tandem with the

societal realities. Hence, the illusion of individualistic heroism in characterizing for positive social change founded on ideology.

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