

CODESRIA Book Series

A new generation of West African social scientists takes on a new generation of postcolonial problems and possibilities – transitional justice, regional integration and collective security, refugee flows, and the complex interplay of local identities, state institutions and global forces. Theoretically informed and publicly engaged scholarship! Ron Kassimir, Program Director, Social Science Research Council, New York, USA.

'This volume on a deeply troubled yet blessed part of Africa weaves together a complex interface of history, democracy, identity, conflict and reconciliation in the West African sub-region. Refreshingly illuminating in theoretical and empirical depth, the book addresses cutting edge precepts, processes and prospects provoked by citizenship, identity politics and conflict in the often unpredictable search for democracy that works. An indispensable addition to the libraries of those concerned about the future of the state in contemporary West Africa.'

Professor Adigun A.B. Agbaje, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

West Africa, with its large number of mini-states, has suffered more political misfortunes than any other sub-region of Africa. No doubt, the glaring artificiality of the post-colonial state, coupled with the failure of the local ruling elites to rise above the limitations of their provenance, is to blame for the myriad crises. The sub-region has been plagued by one-party authoritarianism, violent coups and military dictatorship, leading to the progressive alienation of the people from the state, and thus raising the critical issues of identity and citizenship which are at the base of political crisis and conflict. Many decades after independence, the sub-region continues to grapple with the problems of intra-state conflict, political instability, state failure and outright collapse, thus calling into question the viability and survivability of the Westphalian state model in Africa. Collectively, West African states are still in search of democratic nationhood.

The book critically interrogates the internal dimensions of the identity and citizenship conflicts at the root of state crisis and the steps so far taken to tackle them. Scholars and students of contemporary African politics and development as well as policy makers should find much of relevance in this well researched volume.

W. Alade Fawole is currently a Reader in the Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Washington University, USA. He specializes in Nigerian politics and foreign policy, an area in which he has published a number of books.

Charles Ukeje, Ph.D. is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

ISBN 2-86978-166-0



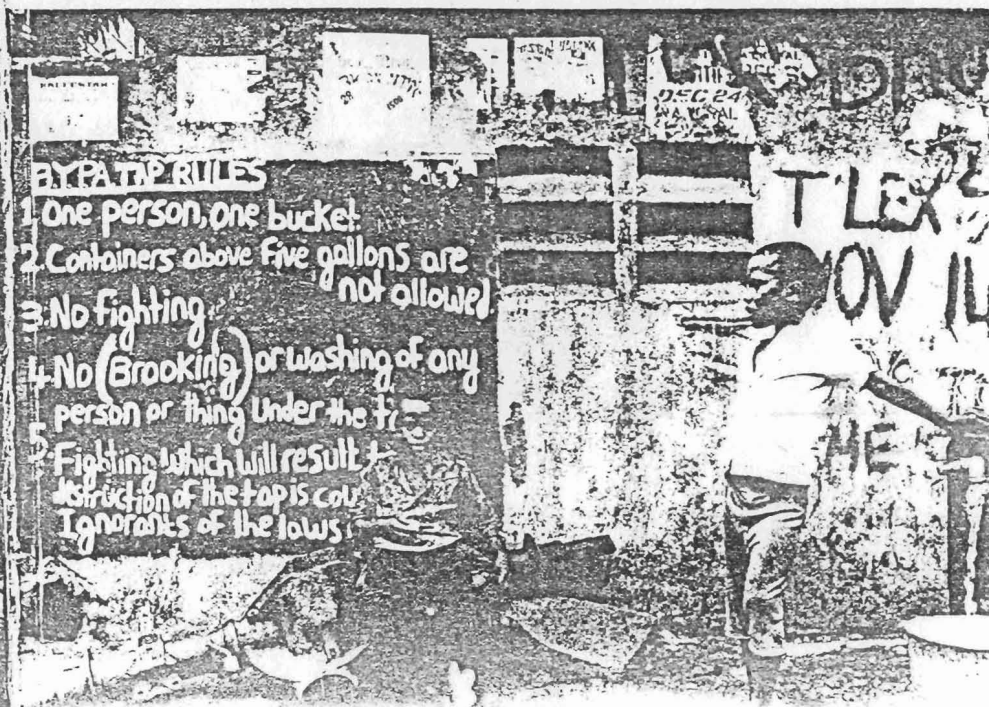
9 782869 781665

Cover photograph: © Teun Voeten/Panos Pictures

The Crisis of the State and Regionalism in West Africa: Identity, citizenship and Conflict
Edited by W. Alade Fawole and Charles Ukeje

The Crisis of the State and Regionalism in West Africa

Identity, Citizenship and Conflict



Edited by

W. Alade Fawole and Charles Ukeje

Drama and the Quest for Democracy in Post-Military Nigeria

Gbemisola Remi Adeoti

Introduction

Doubtless, democracy is a key element in modern theories of development. It is believed to be a necessary system for harnessing social energies and resources towards combating inequality, misery, unemployment, illiteracy and oppression. Diamond (1999: 7) makes the point when he writes that democracies 'appear in the long run to respond better to the needs of the poor and marginalized, because they enable such groups to organize and mobilize within the political process'. The notion of democracy in this paper transcends the formal confines of party politics, elections and the contest for power among elites. It refers to a process and practice of harmonising diverse socio-political interests in society. Supported by a free press and independent judiciary, democracy seeks to guarantee the rights of citizens to participate directly or indirectly in decision-making, and to mobilise human potential towards national development.

Literature, especially drama, and politics are not mutually exclusive, but inherently complementary. Both, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'are created by the same reality of the world around us' while '[their] activity and concern have the same subject and object: human beings and human relationships' (1981: 71). Ken Saro-Wiwa in his prison diary – *A Month and a Day* – asserts that 'literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, by intervention, and writers must not merely write to amuse or to take a bemused, critical look at society' (1995: 81). As T.S. Eliot has observed almost four decades ago, a deep political philosophy has its foundation in the realm of the 'pre-political' where seminal works of imaginative literature belong. This, in his words, 'is the substratum down to which any sound political thinking must push its roots, and from which it must derive its nourishment'. The most fundamental question which virtually all political

thinking addresses, is: 'What is Man? What are his limitations? What is his misery and what is his greatness? And what, finally, his destiny?' (1968: 144). Different cultures across the world have sought answers to these questions through the arts of drama.

This chapter focuses on the crucial intersection between the goals of politics and drama. While it identifies certain factors militating against the development of a genuinely democratic polity in postcolonial Nigeria, it highlights the prospects for a more democratically engaged dramaturgy and a reformed polity where democracy thrives and endures.

Reflections on Nigerian drama and the democratic imperative

The supposition of an inter-relationship between drama and politics informs the works of many a Nigerian dramatist from the established to the emerging talent. Drama as a social art form is a product of socio-political and historical realities, as well as the human daily condition of existence (Booth 1981; Calinescu 1982; Etherton 1982; Malomo and Gbilekaa 1993; Lihaba 1994; Kerr 1996; Williams 1996; Yerima and Akinwale 2002). While drama can be used in the construction and stabilisation of hegemony, it can also serve the 'marginalized' in the task of deconstructing the dominant power structure and contesting marginality (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996).

From the anti-imperial temper of the pre-independence era, drama has remained a vehicle for the articulation of social content and discontent, being a notable part of cultural assertions in the decolonisation struggles. Here, the opera-dramatic compositions of Hubert Ogunde and his African Music Research Party in the 1940s denouncing the excesses of colonialists readily come to mind. Some of these include: 'Strike and Hunger' (1946), 'Towards Liberty' (1947) and 'Bread and Bullet' (1951). In spite of the hostility with which they were treated by the colonial state, Ogunde and his theatre group made a trenchant 'political statement in favour of self-rule' through the plays (Clark 1979: 43). His political intervention through the theatre, however, did not abate with the attainment of independence, as those who inherited political power from the colonialists could not realise the liberation ideals of self-rule. The political crises that soon engulfed Nigeria shortly after independence imperilled national development as corruption, power abuse, political repression, and nepotism overwhelmed the polity. 'Yoruba Ronu' (1964) and 'Otito Koro' (1965) were Ogunde's stage responses to the acrimonious politics of the Western Region of Nigeria from where he hailed. Both plays were inspired by the unpopular premiership of Samuel Ladoke Akintola, in the Western Region. The pervasive collapse of law and order later culminated in the military coup of January 15, 1966. The intervention by soldiers in politics not only effectively scuttled first attempt at democratic rule in Nigeria but also made the military a permanent feature of the Nigerian political scene.

The development of literary drama in the 1960s was anchored around the personalities of playwrights and dramatists like Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Wale Ogunyemi, Ola Rotimi and Sony Oti. These authors provided discursive strategies for interrogating, engaging and negotiating the political sphere in a very critical manner. Interestingly, the betrayal too soon by politicians of expectations held out by political independence necessitated a dramaturgy that could not afford insularity from politics as witnessed in the concert tradition of the colonialists or the literary pamphleteering tradition of Onitsha Market Literature.

Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, written to celebrate the nation's independence in 1960, anticipates the early collapse of the democratic experiment after independence as well as the prolonged authoritarian rule that followed. For the playwright, there seems to be nothing in the polity worthy of celebration when all available social indices point to a festering crisis of governance, which the politicians and nationalists hardly attend to with a sincerity of purpose. Whether in the community of the Dead summoned by the human world to celebrate 'the Gathering of the Tribes' or among the mythical dwellers of the forests like *Eshuoro* and *Ogun*, 'The Gathering of the Tribes' refers to Nigeria's independence celebration, amidst unmediated ethno-religious and geo-political differences. Among the participants in the play are characters drawn from Yoruba mythology like *Eshuoro* who is a fusion of the attributes of *Eshu* (the Yoruba trickster deity) and *Oro* (a deity of mystery associated with the ancestral cult), and *Ogun*, the god of iron. In the re-enacted court of a medieval tyrant, Mata Kharibu, intolerance, selfishness and narcissism are the norm. The play alerts its audience to the dearth in the public sphere of consciousness and attitudinal traits necessary for sustaining democratic governance. It warns that a political arrangement founded on such habits is fated to encounter disaster.

Kongi's Harvest and *Madmen and Specialists* depict the evils of tyrannical governance styles. Both plays are imbued with the censuring temper of satire in a manner that makes them fresh and relevant, many years after their premiere. For instance, Kongi, who is the eponymous hero of *Kongi's Harvest* and Dr. Bero in *Madmen and Specialists* ably personify absolutist tendencies of military rulers. The playwright equally portrays in a contemptible and laughable manner the authoritarian ethos foisted on the African polity by the military in *Jero's Metamorphosis* and *Opera W'onyosi*.

Apart from Soyinka, Ola Rotimi engages the stage in the discourse of Africa's post-colonial crisis of governance. For instance, he deplores the shrinking of the democratic space consequent upon the vices of the elite in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Earlier, the recurring problem of leadership arising from the challenges of decolonisation and nation building is confronted in two historical plays – *Kurunmi* and *Olorunmwen Nagbaisi*. *Kurunmi* captures the fall of Aare Kurunmi, the Generalissimo of the Oyo Empire who rebels against the Empire as personified

in Alaafin. Kurunmi anchors his rebellion on the need to defend the 'sacrosanct tradition' of succession, which Alaafin seeks to alter in favour of his heir, Adelu. The author, however, shows the futility of war as a means of resolving conflict in place of dialogue. The use of history in the play is to provide a detached but topical comment on the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the origin of which many writers have traced to the failure of democratisation after independence.

The exploration of African myth, legend and history to make artistic statements is palpable in Ogunyemi's *Obaluwaye*, Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso*, Ogunyemi's *Kiriji*, Ladipo's *Moremi*, and Sofola's *King Emene*. These plays express the temper of what Osofisan describes as 'our nation's age of innocence' (1997: 11). The dominant trope in each of these plays is a 'mono-archival' figure that embodies power and authority while others are subordinate to him. Thus, a unitary order is subtly created in the universe of the stage.

The perceived polemical limitations of drama written during this 'age of innocence' contribute to artistic revaluations by some writers who believe that the arts should play more intervention roles in national politics. Indeed, the challenges of democracy as a means of addressing the inadequacies of military rule have been more trenchantly dramatised in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The period coincided with yet another fool's errand in the democratic experiment in Nigeria, between 1979 and 1983, and the second full-blown military rule (31 December 1983; 29 May 1999). As the military re-inserted themselves in the nation's politics, Nigerian drama's political engagement assumed a more critical dimension.

In this political/artistic dispensation marked by torrents of creative energies from Esiaba Irobi, Femi Osofisan, Fred Agbeyege, Tess Onwueme, Ahmed Yerima, Ben Tomoloju, Stella Oyedepo, Taiwo Olorunfoba-Oju and Chinyere Okafor as well as established playwrights like Soyinka and Clark, dramatists became so-preoccupied with themes relating to authoritarian tendencies in governance and a wish for democratic re-ordering of power relations. In their plays, they urge the expansion of the public sphere to include those hitherto excluded by undemocratic mode of governance. Their plays condemn dictatorship while also projecting the creation of a new political order for the country.

Nigerian writers and performing artists have not only used drama as a scourge of autocrats, but also as a means of canvassing for a democratic culture based on popular sovereignty, equity, equality, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, respect for rule of law and tolerance of dissenting views. In broad terms, the audience is confronted not just with mere 'imitation' or 're-presentation' of action in Aristotelian terms, but with a deeper negotiation of the public sphere by re-constituting real historical events and situations.

Undoubtedly, the most important historic challenge before Nigeria at this particular period was how the country would, after recovering from the adverse effects of military rule, launch itself on the path of genuine democracy and

development. Dictatorship tends to deny people's rights and freedom, and when people are not free and their choices curtailed, it becomes difficult to mobilise them for development. In view of this, democratic governance seems to hold a brighter prospect for the actualisation of the visions of independence - especially freedom and empowerment.

To this end, Nigerian playwrights create in different ways, a social space where power use and abuse represent the norm rather than an aberration of social-political interaction, depending on the thematic pre-occupation of their plays. They also lay bare disorder and corruption apparent in a supposedly democratising order. For instance, Osofisan's *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* is an eloquent metaphor that depicts evils of dictatorship. In a way that is somewhat reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Aringindin*... attempts to soothe the people's feelings of helplessness and lethargy induced by prolonged alienation from power. It strives to reanimate their being as individuals and a collective by ridding the society of repressive forces. Osofisan contends in the play that a true match to genuine democracy will begin when people are ready to confront tyranny, dislodge Aringindin (a theatrical anticipation of Late General Sanni Abacha) and the Nightwatchmen from the fortress of power.

In summary, the play enacts the ordeal of an unnamed Nigerian community whose peace is constantly violated by armed robbers. The robbers unleash a spate of violence on the people, claiming several lives and property. At Aringindin's suggestion, the community sets up a night guard squad (vigilante) under the leadership of Aringindin. However, the community soon cedes its liberty to the squad as a result of the latter's arbitrary actions, all in the name of providing security for the people. The community sinks deeper into anarchy culminating in the death of Tisa (Aringindin's arch critic) and the abdication of the throne by the community's traditional head, Baale. The exit of the Baale, in turn, paves the way for full-blown dictatorship, led by Aringindin and Kansillor, his civilian collaborator. It takes the vengeful bullet from Yobioyin (Tisa's fiancée) to end Aringindin's life and his reign of terror.

In terms of dramatic forms and theatrical conventions, a general survey shows that some dramatists provoke contempt at the anti-democratic conducts of the elite, both civilian and military. Through wit and disdain, they censure the will to narcissism upon which military dictatorship and other antitheses of democracy are founded. Again, Osofisan's *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen*, Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*, *From Zia with Love*, *The Beatification of Area Boy*, *A Lagosian Kaleidoscope*, and *King Baab* exemplify this possibility. In another vein, some playwrights adopt a dialectical materialist reading of the nation's socio-political reality. Their experiences in this respect are represented through a fusion of Bertolt Brecht's elements of 'epic' theatre with the communal participatory aesthetics of traditional African performance. Such artistic experiences are found in Osofisan's *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest*, Rotimi's *If... a Tragedy of the*

Ruled, and Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju's *Awaiting Trouble*. Visions of a new democratic Nigeria are articulated through a revolutionary alternative or what Saint Gbilekaa (1997) has tagged 'radical' theatrical discourse.

The perceived marginalisation of women in the polity and the imperative of women's empowerment against the backdrop of democratisation also gain the attention of some dramatists. Expectedly, these thematic concerns have generated their own gender-centred theatrical discourse as demonstrated in J.P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, Rotimi Johnson's *The Court of the Queens*, Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* and Chinyere Okafor's *The Lion and the Iroko*.

In *The Wives' Revolt*, Clark shows the limitations of a society that lays claim to democratic culture, yet, excludes a vital segment of its population from decision-making organs- the women. The image of the African woman portrayed in *The Wives' Revolt* is that of a human being who can successfully challenge the mores of patriarchy in order to achieve a genuinely democratic society where the two sexes co-exist as partners and stakeholders. Such a harmonious order will require the removal of socio-cultural encumbrances that account for gender imbalance. The crux of the domestic feud in *The Wives' Revolt* is the money paid by the foreign oil company operating in Erhuwaren. The money is, perhaps, paid in compensation for the devastation of the community's means of livelihood due to oil prospecting activities. The issue in contention is the appropriate formula to adopt in sharing the money equitably among the people. The formula proposed and adopted by the Elders' council sparks a row as it divides the money into three equal parts. One part is given to the elders, one part to men across age grades and the third part to women across age grades. To the elders, it is 'a most fair and equitable settlement'. But to the women, it is not fair and equitable because it privileges men who propose it. They are allotted two-thirds of the total sum, leaving only one-third for the women. The adoption of this proposal queries the democratic claim of the decision-making organs of the community represented in the Elders' council and the General Assembly.

At the basis of the gender dispute are issues of freedom from domination and women's rights to participate in governance in all its ramifications like men. Consequently, in place of the unequal formula, the women demand that the unspecified amount of money should be divided into two equal halves - one for men across grades and the other for women across age grades. This will place both sexes on an equal pedestal. Mutual rejection of the 'other' position clearly shows the conflict as that between advocates of equality and inclusion on the one hand (women) and defenders of domination and exclusion on the other (men). In pressing home their demands, the women abandon their domestic duties and thereby cause a great dislocation in the social order. They quietly walk out on their husbands. But the absence of women threatens the existence of the society itself and men do not have any choice at the end of the day other than to acknowledge the import and role of women in the society. The play among

other lessons stresses the importance of debate, respect for people's rights and the virtues of co-operation beyond gender partition.

The same issue is treated in Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia*, but from a more radical feminist perspective. Part of Onwueme's theatrical revisionism in *The Reign of Wazobia* is the negation of traditional rites that nurture gender disparity. The play depicts a group of women who join forces to gain political advantage over men, exploring men's perceived obsession with power. Consequently, the women succeed in reversing the culturally erected disequilibrium in power relation within the society. She contends that for democracy to take root and be sustained, the woman's otherness must be properly addressed.

The Reign of Wazobia denounces socio-cultural and political practices that encourage sexual inequality especially in the public sphere. At the centre of conflict is Wazobia, the female regent of Ilaa in Anioma kingdom. Her provisional tenure of three seasons has expired, but she is reluctant to yield power to a substantive male king as demanded by tradition of the kingdom. She is consequently locked in a fierce battle for the throne with male chiefs who are poised to end her allegedly 'terroristic' interregnum. On her part, Wazobia seeks to perpetuate herself in power as a way of rejecting women's exclusion and men's perpetual domination. To her, the custom that prescribes the role of regency for women and limits them to that is discriminatory. It basically ensures that only a man will always become the substantive king and the female regent would have to leave office at the end of three seasons when the new 'male' king would have been installed. She captures the perceived exploitation in a metaphor of fruit which men for ages have 'used, sucked dry and disposed off at will'.

The passivity, which makes women, not actors on political stage but social beings always acted upon is what Wazobia is set to stop and she is stirring other women's consciousness in that direction. The play's prologue indicates this goal as it features a mock battle between the mob of men fiercely demanding Wazobia's immediate abdication and an army of 'naked' women protecting her against men's aggression. What follows is a battle for the vacant throne between the forces of tradition led by Iyase, Idehen and other chiefs on the one side and the forces of female ascendancy represented by Wazobia, Omu and the women folk on the other.

In another category are plays with a similar concern with the travails of democracy and governance, but which defy easy taxonomy, as they are more receptive to various dramatic influences. Such plays as Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi* and Ahmed Yerima's *The Silent Gods* adopt the eclectic option in their responses to the project of democratisation. Eclecticism here involves a conscious adoption of multiple artistic forms and styles by playwrights to react to the challenges of democratisation. Its inherent circumvention of notable conventions of play-making carries within it, elements of innovation, reform and renewal.

Consequently, it is a kind of departure from the traditional genres of comedy and tragedy.

However, in spite of this demonstrable identification with the national quest for nationhood and development within a democratic framework, valid contributions and potentials of drama constitute an area of research that is yet to be adequately explored, judging from the extant literature on democracy. This hiatus is particularly registered in the common tendency to treat democracy almost exclusively as a political and economic concept. Meanwhile, the complexity and dynamism of democracy as a human phenomenon demands a broad analytical mechanism, and a multi-disciplinary approach.

Drama and the discourse on democratisation

The character and persistence of political instability that confronted many post-independence regimes in Africa, and pressures arising from the abrupt end of the Cold War, made democracy as a mode of governance, a very compelling option. Fukuyama (1992) is quite right when he submits that:

the most remarkable development of the last quarter of the twentieth century has been the revelation of enormous weaknesses at the core of the world's seemingly strong dictatorships, whether they be of the military authoritarian Right or the Communist-totalitarian Left (xiii).

It is gratifying to note that another civilian administration has been inaugurated since 29 May 1999. The regime, led by a retired General, Olusegun Obasanjo, was the product of a multi-party election conducted by the military in February 1999 to conclude its transition to civil rule programme. The former military ruler has also been re-elected in the 2003 general elections for another term of four years. However, what is earnestly in contention is whether what obtains now is truly democratic.

At the moment, there seems to be a wide chasm between democratic ideals and the realities of Nigeria's governance since the return to civil rule in 1999. While there is wide room for improvement, it is important to bear in mind that democracy is not about providing immediate solutions to all social problems, but about developing institutions, attitudes, values and procedures that can facilitate the provision of such solutions. It is in this regard, in spite of what is now generally recognized as visible indicators of authoritarianism, like arbitrary increase in fuel prices, declaration of a state of emergency in Plateau State, the suspension of the State Governor without following due process and the withholding of funds meant for local governments in Lagos State in spite of Supreme court rulings among other indices, that there are still some prospects that democracy can thrive and endure in Nigeria. That is given a concerted effort at eradicating corruption, reform of the economy in favour of the well being of majority of citizens and overhauling of the political processes especially

the electoral process to ensure that the people's participation and choices actually matter.

In view of its capacity to promptly respond to the changing social tempers, the most defining challenges before Nigerian drama in the 'post-military' dispensation involve creating a template for state reconstruction and national re-birth, completely erasing the unpleasant legacies of military dictatorship and as a replacement, entrenching democracy. Drama can and should contribute to this development by generating – through its aesthetics – useful ideas that can facilitate the enthronement and consolidation of a stable democratic culture. Since a stable polity impacts on the practice of the arts, artists need to partake in the construction of such a socio-political order.

In the last decade or so, dramatists, it is pleasant to note, have been exploring the home video medium to reach a wider audience, apart from the text and the stage. This medium is now very popular in Nigeria today, especially with the South Africa-based Multichoice Direct Satellite Television (DSTV) with its 'African Magic', which features titles from the Nigerian home video films. Apart from this, video shops selling Nigerian films are emerging in major cities in London, and in West Africa – Lomé, Cotonou, Ouagadougou, Abidjan, Freetown and Monrovia.

The home video refers essentially to a screenplay made up of dialogue, lifelike characters using remarkable gestures, within a setting that is somewhat life-like. The increasing popularity of this home video entertainment coincides with the decline in the production and patronage of literary drama on the one hand, and live theatre performance on the other. Several reasons can be adduced for this trend. First, a low literacy level, put at thirty percent in the country, inhibits the audience's access to written dramatic texts. Second, stage production is more demanding and not as commercially rewarding when compared with the movie. Third, home video can easily be accessed from the comfort of people's homes, hence sparing the would-be-patrons of live performance the risk of violent crimes like armed robbery, extortion, assassination, kidnapping and ritual murder, which haunt the nightlife of many urban centres.

While there is a lot of mediocrity in the presentation and storyline of many home videos in circulation, this medium seem to have become one that dramatists can explore to the fullest towards realizing a constructive engagement with public policy vis-à-vis democracy and good governance. As we have noted elsewhere, in spite of the organisational problems being encountered in this growing industry, it has a great potential to contribute to the realisation of the overall goal of nation building. The variety of talents available within the industry should be explored in raising awareness in civil society about developmental issues – apart from promoting opposition to authoritarian tendencies (Adeoti 2004).

According to the National Film and Video Censor's Board (2003), well over 4,000 home video-films have been produced in English and indigenous languages

like Edo, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo within the last decade. The dominant subjects among these include bloodletting, murder, sex, witchcraft, rituals, violence, religious bigotry, and the illusion of material success (Ekwuazi 2002). It is important that scriptwriters and producers begin to focus more on contemporary issues of democratic governance and development. The values and facts disseminated through the medium of home video films often have a remarkable imprint on the minds of the growing viewers nationwide, and even outside Nigeria.

This medium cannot afford to be merely for entertainment and remain in the realm of the apolitical. Rather, it should provide a forum for engaged and sustained discourse between the artist and the ordinary people on the imperative of a democratised polity. Already, a few titles have been produced with this pre-occupation in mind. Akinwumi Isola's *'Saworo Ide'* (1999) and its sequel, *'Agogo Eewo'* (produced in 2002 by Mainframe); Yinka Smart's *'Akobi Gomina' I & II* (produced in 2001 by Smart Image Entertainment and Corporate Pictures), Yekinni Ajileye's *'Alaga Kansu'* (produced in 2001 by YemKem International), Wemimo Olu Paul's *'Oyato I & II'* (produced in 2003 by Wemimo Films) Abiodun Majekodunmi's *'Her Excellency'* (produced in 2003 by Wemimo Films), are worthy examples. Not only do they lay bare the limitations of absolutism of the recent past, but also point the way forward to a democratic order. *'Alaga Kansu'*, for instance, tells the story of an elected Local Government Chairman who wades through intrigues and corruption to make a difference in governance. His tenure is marked by accountability and probity and he is later elected as a State Governor. His counterparts like Koledowo suffer electoral defeat in their bid to retain their seats as Councillors and Chairmen, largely because they use their offices to accumulate wealth for themselves with little regard for the electorate.

Akinwumi Isola's *Saworo Ide* (Brass Bells) and *Agogo Eewo* (Gong of Taboo) take a backward glance at Nigeria's postcolonial history and conclude that military dictatorship, apart from inhibiting the emergence of a truly democratic polity, stifles national development. These works demonstrate the need to dethrone dictatorship as a precondition for democracy to flourish.

In addition, practitioners of literary drama, especially prominent ones like Soyinka, Osofisan, Yerima and others should also consider the option of video production in articulating their views on democracy and governance. While some of their plays mentioned earlier like *King Baabn*, *Midnight Hotel* and *The Silent Gods* could be re-worked for the screen, new ones can be written for the medium with the same political end. In any case, their intervention becomes imperative in the home video industry that still needs greater artistic competence and intellectual depth. This is with a view to uplifting the quality of thematic engagements and technical output from its present level.

Apart from the video-film, Theatre for Development (TFD) or Community Theatre is another viable artistic outlet that deserves a careful consideration. This is a form of popular drama that draws its subjects, players, costumes, props, stage and audience from a particular community, focusing on certain social problems. Usually, its focus group is the subaltern or the underprivileged in rural areas or city suburbs. Shorn of the trappings of elitist drama, TFD can be regarded as 'the theatre of the people, by the people, for the people' as the theatre goes to the people, identifies their problem(s), dissects the problem(s) and through dramatic deliberation, proffers possible solutions.

This type of theatre where the artists and the audience are united in a common search for solutions to a communal predicament can play a pivotal role in mobilising popular consciousness and action within the civil society on governance and rights issues. Interestingly, TFD is capable of generating ideas that can widen, within a short period of time, the public space in a manner that ensures free and fair participation of citizens in governance issues on equal footing. Nigeria has witnessed, in the twilight of military rule, a remarkable increase in the activities of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), each stirred by different political persuasions. Their foci and target groups notwithstanding, these organisations will find it rewarding to incorporate TFD in their grassroots and community-level advocacy programmes. TFD can also be used to promote accountability in governance, campaign against corruption, enlighten the people on health related issues, eradicate ignorance and promote co-operation across ethno-religious divides, to mention a few.

In conclusion, drama in its various manifestations like the stage, the text and the screen, remains an effective strategy for strengthening civil society toward achieving an expansion of the democratic space to allow for greater participation. Drama can serve to mobilise the people and enlighten them on the ethos and practice of democracy. Nigerian drama recognizes this fact, and much of the genre has been channelled towards the tasks of widening the democratic space. But it is still capable of contributing more towards freeing the polity from the ills of absolutism if it mobilizes appropriate discourse on values and attitudes. Through its consciencitising schema, drama should continue to sensitise the government to the dangers posed by authoritarianism to nationhood and development in post-colonial Africa. It should also educate the civil society on the consequences of lethargy or acquiescence with anti-democratic actions and policies of the government.

References

- Adeoti, G., 2004, 'Home Video Films and the Democratic Imperative in Contemporary Nigeria', A paper presented at the Faculty of Arts Weekly Seminar Series, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife. February 4.
- Awa, E., 1996, 'Democracy in Nigeria: A Political Scientist's View', in O. Oyediran, (ed.) *Governance and Development in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Oyediran Consult Int., pp. 1-21.
- Booths, J., 1981, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Calinescu, M., 1982, 'Literature and Politics', in J. Barricelli and J. Gibaldi, (eds.) *Interrelations of Literature*, New York: M.I.A., pp. 123-49.
- Clark, E., 1979, *Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Diamond, L., 1999, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Ekwuasi, H., 2002, 'Towards a Sustainable Motion Picture Industry', Lagos: *The Guardian*, Thursday, May 2, p. 64.
- Eliot, T.S., 1968, 'The Literature of Politics', in *To Criticize the Critic*, London: Faber and Faber, pp. 136-144.
- Etherton, M., 1982, *The Development of African Drama*, London: Hutchinson University Library.
- Fukuyama, F., 1992, *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Gbilekaa, S., 1997, *Radical Theatre In Nigeria*, Ibadan: Caltop Publishers.
- Gilbert, H. and Tompkins, J., 1996, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*, London: Routledge.
- Kerr, D., 1995, *African Popular Theatre: From Precolonial Times to the Present Day*, London: James Currey.
- Lihamba, A., 1994, 'Theatre and Political Struggle in East Africa', in E. Osaghae, (ed.) *Between State and Civil Society in Africa: Perspectives on Development*, Dakar: CODESRIA, 196-216.
- Malomo, J. and Gbilekaa, S., eds., 1993, *Theatre and Politics in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Caltop Publishers.
- National Film and Video Censor's Board, 2003, Lagos, April.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981, *Writers In Politics: Essays*, London: Heinemann.
- Ogunbiyi, Y., ed., 1981, *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.
- Osofisan, F., 1997, 'Playing Dangerously: Drama at the Frontiers of Terror in a Post-colonial State', Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan, July 31.
- Saro Wiwa, K., 1995, *A Month And a Day*, London: Penguin Books.
- Williams, A., 1996, 'Literature in the Time of Tyranny: African Writers and the Crisis of Governance', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, No 2, pp. 349-62.