

The Democratisation Process and the Nigerian Theatre Artiste

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the issue of democratisation and the role of the theatre artiste in the Nigerian context. It adopts the historical and analytical methods to argue that an enhancement of the social condition is necessary for the nurturing of a true democracy, characterized by a robust political atmosphere which ultimately engenders socioeconomic and socio-cultural development of society. In doing this, it attempts to provide answers to certain posers: has there been an enabling social condition which allows the operation of a democratic system of government in Nigeria? If the social condition has existed, has there ever been a democratic system of government in Nigeria? The paper further appraises the role of the theatre artiste, as agent of one of the several segments of the Nigerian society that have contributed to the many attempts at democratisation and concludes that he/she must liberalise his/her art by taking it to the masses as a way of sensitizing them to contribute to the entrenchment of true democracy in a country which is in dire need of democratic ethos.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of democratisation has been the most topical in recent times as regards Nigeria's political development. Democratisation simply connotes the process of installing a democratic system of administration. This, of course, involves an enhancement of the social condition necessary for the facilitation of a democratisation process, characterized by a robust political atmosphere which ultimately engenders socioeconomic and socio-cultural development of society. A democratic system of government is that political system in which everybody has equal opportunity to participate in the political process in whatever capacity that is deemed fit. A government, in this regard, derives its authority from the people who, in essence, choose those in government. An important feature of this system is the supremacy of the national or common interest, which must supersede personal interest.

Certain ingredients must be manifest in a government operating a democracy. These ingredients are the lifeblood of the system. Some of them are freedom of speech/expression (Adeyemi 2006), freedom of association and of movement as well as of choice of leaders. The system must, above all, be devoid of all the instruments of threat and coercion which are obviously at variance with its survival. There should be equal opportunity to aspire to the position of leadership as well as the prevalence

of all other fundamental human rights (such as right to information, to education and to live anywhere one deems fit). The social condition which fosters the prevalence of these ingredients can hardly be seen as favouring the possession of unpatriotic tendencies which are usually manifest in a situation of social decay and political crisis reminiscent of most developing countries.

The question now arises as to whether the enabling social condition has ever existed to allow the operation of a democratic system of government in Nigeria. If the social condition has existed, has there ever been a democratic system of government in Nigeria? It can hardly be said that Nigeria has ever had the enabling social atmosphere needed for democracy to thrive. It is also apparent that the country has not had a true taste of democracy, whether in the colonial past or in the years after flag independence. Rather, there have only been attempts at democratisation. Several segments of the society have contributed immensely to these attempts at democratisation. One of these segments is the theatre. And it is the contributions of the Nigerian theatre artiste that constitute the crux of this paper. These attempts have hardly been successful owing to a number of reasons which are inherent in the Nigerian society. Perhaps, this contention could better be espoused through an analysis of the country's constitutional development as well as an examination of its political dynamics since independence.

NIGERIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Nigeria's constitutional development could be regarded as the various attempts at evolving a democratic system of government. Regrettably, these attempts have never progressed beyond the swaddling stages. Attempts at democratisation started just eight years after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates into one Nigeria. This was in 1922 with the Clifford Constitution. This constitution did not do much in the direction of unification of the various nationalities existing within the geographical boundaries of the country. The Richard's Constitution of 1945/46, which came into force on January 1, 1947, took the issue of unity into consideration. It addressed three issues—promoting the unity of Nigeria, providing adequately, within that unity, for the different elements which made up the country, and securing greater participation by Africans in the discussion of their own affairs (Crowder 1978).

The attempt of Sir Arthur Richards was not enough to install democracy. Other attempts culminated in the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 by which the 1951-1952 elections were held and the Oliver Lyttelton Constitution of 1954 which established the basic pattern of self-rule for the country. These three constitutions were the prelude to the Independence Constitution which was fashioned in 1957 but came into force at independence in 1960. The Republican Constitution was drafted when the country became a republican state in 1963. The Republican Constitution barely operated for two and half years before the military intruded into the governance process of the country in January 1966. The military abolished whatever constitution that was in force and ruled with decrees for thirteen years before relinquishing power to civilians in 1979. This led to the drafting of the Second Republic Constitution by which the civilian administration took over government in 1979.

The military came in again four years later in December 1983 and set aside the 1979 constitution. The General Ibrahim Babangida constitution of 1989 was to usher in the Third Republic as the General had promised to hand power back to civilians. However, he reneged on this promise and aborted the transition programme at the very

end of its course. Babangida left office after installing an interim government lasting only eighty-four days before General Sani Abacha forced his way to power in November 1993. Abacha promised to return power to civilians and his government, rather than foist another constitution on the people after the constitutional conference of 1994-1995 presumably to usher in the Fourth Republic, kept the submissions of the conference in abeyance and the constitution never came into force. Abacha died in office on June 8, 1998 and General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who took over power, eventually returned power to civilians on May 29, 1999. The government, headed by retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, operated with a new constitution, which was handed over to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua who has been on the saddle since May 29, 2007. Though the constitution is still in use, there are clamours from certain quarters for its review.

Thus, ten constitutions (including Abacha's own) have been drafted in a period spanning about ninety years. Yet they have all failed to produce, in the true sense of the word, a democratic ethos in the country. For instance, General Obasanjo's eight-year rule from 1999 to 2007 was largely, a dictatorship. It was a regime which, through the manipulation of the electoral process, compelled the liquidation of other parties as there was massive decampment from other parties to the ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Though Obasanjo tried to manipulate the constitution to give constitutional backing to his "sit tight" policy, his selfish dream was dead on arrival in the murky waters of Nigerian politics because some of his party men and those in the opposition strongly resisted it. To get back at the people who fought against his "third term" bid and oil his bruised and selfish ego, General Obasanjo installed a sickly President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Nigeria and Nigerians are sorrier for it. The 2007 elections have been the worst in the nation's history as could be gleaned from the various court judgments nullifying many of them, including gubernatorial seats. Today the country is almost a one-party state with the PDP having an "unassailable" majority in the legislature. This kind of attitude may have informed the observation that the socio-political horizon in Africa shows that the masses in various countries have frequently been subjected to the evil machination and craftiness of dictators. These political dictators are often costumed in either military

uniforms or flowing robes or three-piece suits. They succeed in wielding political power with the connivance of a few sycophants who constitute the pseudo-ruling cabinet. Such dictators further perpetuate themselves in power through intimidation, oppression and outright rape of justice (Anigala 2001).

The period during which these constitutions have been operated were characterized by such social, political and economic conditions that are pejorative to the operations of democracy. It is evident that civilian governments have always been plagued by political crisis, administrative inertia and system breakdown, the consequence of which has been the imposition of military rule for almost three decades of the country's 50 years of independence (Aziegbe 1992). Such was the situation in the few years of independence which ushered in the military in 1966. When the military handed power back to civilians in 1979, it was expected that the civilians (mostly the discredited gladiators who were overthrown in 1966) would correct the mistakes that necessitated the military's intervention. But there was reason, once again, for the military to force its way back to power in 1983 and they remained in power until 1999.

THE PROBLEMATIC OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

It is hardly surprising that the various attempts at democratisation have failed abysmally. The reason for the continued failure is not far to seek. One basic problem has remained unsolved right from the drafting of the first constitution in 1922. This is the problem of integration (Onoriose 2006). This problem appears to have bifurcated and continues to multiply in different trajectories with the effect that the plethora of problems associated with disunity continues to manifest as insurmountable impediments to a true democracy. Omotola (2006) corroborates this observation when he notes that the democratisation process in Nigeria's fourth republic, like the previous waves before it, has been an object of massive abuse from several quarters. The Boko Haram crisis in some northern states, the recurrent Jos Plateau crisis as well as the Niger Delta question are only but a few of the relatively recent challenges thrown up by this problem. Though some persons contend that these challenges will help to strengthen democracy in the country (Mark 2010), a deeper analysis of the Nigerian (African)

predicament does indicate that the failure of post-colonial state to live up to its people's expectations is due in part to the erosion or lack of democracy (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2006).

One fact about Nigerian politics is that the country has not progressed beyond the assertion of Obafemi Awolowo in 1945. According to him, Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographic expression used to distinguish the various national and ethnic groups within the boundaries and which are erroneously referred to as tribes (Sklar 1983). This feeling was echoed by Tafawa Balewa in 1948 when he said that many people engage in self-deceit by thinking that Nigeria is one and that the feeling of unity is mere pretence, as the north will continue to look upon the southern tribes pouring into the north to be domiciled there as invaders (Coleman 1963). The lack of unity gave way to the installation of a consociational administration, which was exemplified in the pre-independence government (1957-60) in terms of sharing of power. The different regions were more or less different countries in their own rights, seeking control of the central government. Failure to achieve this objective automatically meant working to weaken the central government and rendering it ineffective. The consociational system, therefore, gave birth to what Richard Joseph (1991) has rightly termed the politics of prebendalism. The concept of prebendalism aggregates the Nigerian polity around the struggle to control and exploit public office. The appropriation of state power is, therefore, seen as providing the much needed access to the control of the state treasury which is then exclusively administered essentially for self-aggrandizement. The politics of prebendalism thus connotes the pursuit of personal economic interest by the appropriation of state treasury effected through the acquisition of political power. Wilmot (2007) refers to this trend as the triumph of kleptocracy and goes on to posit that:

Instead of passing laws to promote economic development, justice, probity and the rule of law, legislators await the president's bagmen to bribe them with up to \$1,000,000 to ensure he continues to misrule.

Prebendal politics thrives best in a consociational administration because consociationalism builds upon and perpetuates the plural divisions in the society, thereby entrenching diversity as an essential concept of democracy. This trend is not exclusive to civilian regimes. It

became a most notable feature of the military especially during the advent of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha. In this regard, Soyinka (2007) asserts that:

Even over and above notorious national looters like Mobutu Sese Seko, Abacha, in merely five years, succeeded in depriving the Nigerian treasury reserves of a modestly estimated amount of some twenty-five billion dollars.

The obvious way through which one could sustain oneself in the esteemed prebendal position is to devise means of perpetuating oneself in power. Such means include thuggery and election rigging in the case of civilian administration and physical elimination of real or imaginary opponents perceived as threats to the wish to remain in power, in military regimes. Perhaps the wish to remain in power compelled General Babangida to annul the June 12, 1993 presidential elections which should have concluded the transition to the Third Republic. The annulment took the country back more than thirty years. People started talking about regions, south, north and even the tribes. Some even threatened to go to war to protect their interest. These were all political anathemas during the Gowon, Mohammed, Obasanjo, Shagari and even Buhari eras.

During the military era of the 1990s the society was decimated, rule of law, became virtually non-existent and the judiciary was rendered impotent. Freedom of speech and of movement became a luxury and high – level corruption reigned supreme. Serving in government became an opportunity for acquisition and ostentatious display of wealth. Education was no longer a right and one was no longer free to live where one desired. All the ingredients necessary to build a strong democratic foundation and nurture a fruitful democracy were completely lost in a labyrinth of wrong priorities as the General Abacha ruling junta, like other military regimes before it, continued to scheme out ways of perpetuating itself in power. The same scheming for self-perpetuation in power was the hallmark of Obasanjo. The refusal by Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar to support Obasanjo ambition resulted in a crisis leading to the exit of Abubakar from the party. Abubakar, thereafter, contested for the position of President on the platform of the Action Congress (AC) in the 2007 elections.

The self-succession bid of Obasanjo resulted in his administration directing all its resources on fighting the opponents of the bid, all to the

detriment of the development of the nation. To get support for his government, Umaru Yar'Adua who succeeded Obasanjo continues to yield to the whims of the legislature whose budget for 2008 is a whopping 95 billion Naira (more than the budget of two states). The electoral process remains questionable and corruption continues to eat deeper into the socio-political system despite the government's daily cries about its determination to fight it. The recent "78-day headless-ness of the country" occasioned by the absence of president Yar'Adua who went to Saudi Arabia for medical attention without handing over to his deputy clearly shows the mutual distrust, suspicion, fear, undemocratic attitude and selfishness of most of the people who are at the helm of affairs in Nigeria. That the country was rudderless did not matter to them provided their pockets were continuously lined with Nigerian money. All these point to the glaring fact that democracy is still very far. Perhaps, only a bloody revolution can salvage the country from the doldrums of retrogression it has found itself. It is quite clear then, that Nigeria has never experienced democracy in the true sense of the word. This is because there has never been any time the democratic ingredients have been expressly manifest in the society. This thought may have informed Okaneme's lamentation that:

Since the attainment of political independence till now, democracy in Nigeria has faced many challenges and upheavals. All efforts aimed at democratisation seem to yield little or no result at all. Democracy in Nigeria seems to be a wild goose chase (2008).

The point being made is that the mere fact that civilians ruled, or are ruling, is not enough evidence of democracy as the voting process has been characterized by acts which are at variance with democratic culture and ideals. The feeling, then that a civilian administration connotes democracy is mere a fallacy. Furthermore, various sections of the society have continued to contribute either positively or negatively to the democratisation process. The theatre is one of the most important parts of the society and its contribution in whatever direction would be quite immense. What is the role of the theatre artiste in the Nigerian democratisation process? Has he/she worked towards the establishment of democracy or has he/she contributed towards the perpetuation of the politics of prebendalism and consociational democracy? The answers to these

questions lie in the examination of the role of the theatre artiste in Nigerian's political development.

THE THEATRE ARTISTE IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The theatre as an integral part of society cannot be expected to be detached from the political dynamics of the Nigerian society. In this regard, the theatre artiste has not been apolitical. Neither has he/she been apathetic to the struggle for democracy. According to Ayo Akinwale (1993), the blazing of the trail of productions which have political undertones, could be traced to the father of Nigerian theatre, late Chief Hubert Ogunde. His earliest documented effort was in 1945 with his play *Worse than Crime* which presented colonialism as a system that is worse than crime. In this same year, he produced *Strike and Hunger*, which expressed the hopeless condition of labour in colonial Nigeria at the time. "The opera was so successful and popular that it attracted government attention. It was banned in Jos in 1946 with Ogunde fined \$125 (Akinwale 1993).

These pioneering efforts of Ogunde blazed the trail for other theatre artistes to make political statements regarding the absence of democracy in the country. Ogunde's impact was felt once again after the Republican Constitution had come into force. At the time, political life had degenerated into a war of attrition with betrayals and violence pervading the entire Western Region. The events leading to the production of Ogunde's *Yoruba Ronu* started in 1962 when Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group (AG), the main party in the Western Region, fell out with his deputy, Chief S. L. Akintola, who then formed his own party, Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). He then formed an alliance with the main party in the Northern Region, the Northern People's Congress (NPC). This caused a serious political and economic upheaval in the Western Region, more so when Chief Awolowo and his associates had been jailed by the Federal Government in 1962 for treason. Egun Clark in Akinwale (1993) documents the events appropriately. According to her, the cultural arm of the NNDP commissioned Ogunde to present a play for their entertainment in February, 1964. Ogunde came up with *Yoruba Ronu* which sought to make the Yoruba see the need for unity. The play focused on the conflict between Oba Fiwajoye who is betrayed to his

enemy by his deputy. Fiwajoye's enemy then got him imprisoned and the deputy installed himself as the new King. But because of the cruelty of this deputy, the people rebelled, killing him and releasing Oba Fiwajoye and peace returned. The satire was clear enough. Fiwajoye was regarded as Chief Awolowo, the deputy was Chief Akintola, while the enemy was the Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello. Akintola, then Premier of the West had to ban the Ogunde theatre from performing in any Yoruba-speaking area in March 1964.

Other dramatists have contributed their own quota towards the democratisation of the country. One of the most prominent in this regard, is Wole Soyinka. He has not only written and produced plays designed to enhance the process, he has also been personally involved in the process itself and has suffered so much indignity for wishing that the process be speedily actualized. He had to flee into exile in mid-1995 when it was apparent he would be thrown into detention like other pro-democracy activists. Soyinka's most notable effort in 1960 and thereafter were *Kongi's Harvest* and *A Dance of the Forest*. According to Akinwale (1993), Soyinka's vision in *A Dance of the Forest* where he believes that a country with a regrettable past and a chaotic present has an uncertain future, is still seen in literary circles today as a high level of the artiste's prophetic eye. Soyinka also emphasized in *Kongi's Harvest* that the old order must give way to a new one in a most violent way if peaceful change is rendered impossible.

Ola Rotimi is another dramatist whose contribution to the democratisation process in Nigerian cannot be neglected. His comedy, *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* portrays the political terrain of the country in its actual light during civilian administrations. However, his best plays in this direction remain *If...* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, where he throws his lot with the masses and the exploited class by condemning the ideology of the ruling elite (Gbilekaa 1993). In both works, the plight of the down trodden is focused upon and some hope provided in the direction of giving the leadership which the country lacks.

Radical playwrights have emerged since the advent of these dramatists. Most notable among these is Femi Osofisan. His play, *Morountodun*, features peasant revolt against the oppressing elites who have been cheating on them. It is rehash of what actually happened in western Nigeria in the sixties. The relevance of this play is best

analysed against the backdrop of the anti-SAP riots of 1989. Osofisan's *Another Raft* echoes one salient point played up in Rotimi's *If...* This is the fact that our destiny is in our hands and if the oppressed do not come together and control their own destiny, they shall continue to remain oppressed.

It is apparent, then, that the Nigerian theatre artiste has been very much involved in the Nigerian political process. He/she has been quite concerned with efforts at installing a long lasting democracy. As noted by Emeana (2005), "theatre practitioners over the ages have performed plays to entertain their audience with the purpose of calling attention to injustice, making statements against war, or raising moral and social questions". The Nigerian theatre artiste has, therefore, been concerned with the evolution of a better society in all its ramifications. However, this concern has not had any substantial impact on the political system. And this is contingent on the way theatre has continued to operate in the country. It is evident that theatre has not transcended mere communication. It has only led the people to the stream, but has not been able to make them drink.

So far, the theatre artiste has operated with the philosophy of theatre being a mirror of the society and nothing more. It is the feeling that while mirroring the society the theatre artiste unveils his/her vision which he/she wants the people to share for the purpose of making amends and moving in the right direction. Even then, such vision has not been expressed outside the confines of elite theatres or academic environment. For example, strong as the vision of Soyinka, as expressed in *Kongi's Harvest*, may be, it has not gone beyond the elite theatres of universities and other academic citadels. Even so, some scholars are beginning to become uncomfortable with this vision of radical fatalism, which is predicted to befall the nation unless we changed our way of life. Harry Hagher (1995), for instance, suggests that Soyinka's vision must be rejected because it lacks hope for the common man and predicts unavoidable death. However, part of the discomfort results from a rebellion against the complexity of Soyinka's language, and not his vision which is shared by a majority of scholars. One of such scholars is Tunde Fatunde. According to Dunton (2006), the generational rapture in Fatunde is more extreme than that apparent between Soyinka and Osofisan (xvi).

Dunton finally submits that Fatunde and two female playwrights – Tess Onwueme and Stella Oyedepo "have produced works for the stage that articulate far more overt engagement with politics of resistance than generally encountered in the plays of their predecessors".

Incidentally, Soyinka's theatre and those of other theatre artistes who have been mentioned, merely mirror the society, predicting what is likely to happen, like Ogunde did in 1964. Such a vision is orchestrated to influence the political system and engender change in the right direction. Such a theatre is reminiscent of such a philosophy, which prescribes the examination of one's conscience as the best way of solving political problems. Angya (2005) rightly notes that "plays have always been written based on the writer's understanding of the society and its needs". Hence, Soyinka continues to warn before the doomsday as could be seen in his play *Madmen and Specialists*. The philosophy is fast become obsolete in transforming the Nigerian society into a stable polity. It is, perhaps, still the idea of today's theatre, that by merely mirroring the society, the theatre artiste would engender the pertinent change, as the people would see their nakedness, notice their aberrant social and political life and change. Just as Bertolt Brecht changed the German society with his plays and Arthur Miller changed the concept of tragedy, thereby restoring the dignity of man, with his *Death of Salesman*, so it has been expected that the theatre in Nigeria would change the political scene by merely mirroring the society. The suggestion, then, is that unless there was/is a change of political attitude, perdition would be the ultimate result of our political rigmarole.

However, this role of mirroring the society cannot be taken as the ultimate role of the theatre artiste in the nation's democratisation process. Being a mirror of the society should merely be the first step. The theatre artiste must be involved in the democratisation process in a capacity which transcends merely showing the society as it is without saying how it ought to be and how we must go about making it what it should be. The people must be persuaded about, or mobilized towards the adoption of the ideals of democracy. The situation in the country today is still a transition from the war situation with an undeclared state of emergency into which the country degenerated. Democracy had receded into oblivion in the days of Abacha as pro-

democracy activists, journalists and theatre artistes continued to be harassed perpetually, intimidated, arrested, detained, jailed for life and even killed- the execution of Ken Sero-Wiwa is a clear point of reference. The theatre artiste must fight for the accomplishment of the task of installing true democracy. The theatre must participate in the mobilization of the people to join the fight. In essence, the theatre artiste must no longer be the detached observer in the political arrangement of the country. He/she must be an active participant- not merely using his/her trade to make political comments and urging the people to adopt a better system. He/she must strive to be part of the political system, so that he/she can determine what is better for the society. Needless to say that one has the best chance of influencing a system when one is part of it.

The theatre, then, should become more militant, moving beyond mere prescription. In this regard, the example of the Philippines readily comes to mind. The theatre in that country contributed immensely to the enthronement of democracy by forcing Dictator Ferdinand Marcos to abdicate the seat of power and flee into exile in February, 1986. The contribution of the Philippino theatre is well noted by Van Erven (1987). According to him:

Throughout this island-nation of 60 million inhabitants...community-based repertory troupes incorporated in the Philippines' People Theatre Network, were involved in the election campaigns, siding either with Cory Aquino's Laban Coalition, or with the more radical Bayan boycott faction.

The plays created between December, 1985 when the elections were first announced, and February, 1986 when Marcos fled with his wife, Imelda, were biting satires as well as realistic dramas designed to bring down the dictator. The people were urged not to vote for Marcos.

The suggestion here that the theatre artiste should be more militant and play a more active role in the Nigerian democratisation process can only be cosmetic unless problems pertaining to the theatre itself are solved. These problems have to do with the theatre itself becoming a democratic enterprise. The theatre itself must be a democratic model which the people should emulate. According to Dan Uwandu (1995), "to think of theatre in democratic terms is to think of how people – the rural folk – can be involved in the making of theatre for individual development as well as the development of the society". It has

been noted that Nigerian theatre is mostly elitist, having no impact on a majority of the people. To have the pertinent impact, it has to move out of the elite environment and to the people and influence them.

THE THEATRE ARTISTE AND THE WAY FORWARD IN THE DEMOCRATISATION OF NIGERIA

The task of fostering the march to a true democracy is by no means an easy one for the theatre artiste. For the theatre to be a democratic model the theatre artiste must take cognizance of the condition which must prevail to qualify it to be called democratic. Then it must fight for the prevalence of those things, which portray and nurture democracy. Nwabueze (1993) elaborately lists those things which democratisation must entail to include:

- i. multi-partyism under a democratic constitution having the force of a supreme, overriding law;
- ii. a complete change of guards and the exclusion of certain other categories of persons from participation in democratic politics and government;
- iii. a genuine and meaningful popular participation in politics and government;
- iv. a virile civil society;
- v. a democratic society;
- vi. a free society;
- vii. a just society;
- viii. equal treatment of all citizens by the state;
- ix. the rule of law;
- x. an ordered stable society;
- xi. a society infused with the spirit of liberty, democracy and justice; and
- xii. an independent, self-reliant, prosperous market economy

The above should be the objectives of theatre for democratisation. The theatre must fight for the entrenchment of these values which, in essence connote a lasting democracy. For the theatre to lead by example, the theatre artiste must, first of all make the theatre culturally relevant and acceptable to the people. This can be achieved by adopting the seven-point process enunciated by Ross Kidd (1985). This involves:

- a. building a relationship with members of the community and motivating them to participate in the theatre making process;
- b. working with them to study their situations

- and identifying the political issues for in-depth analysis;
- c. learning the indigenous forms of cultural expression and utilizing them for the theatre activities.
 - d. exploring through theatre arts ways of deepening the understanding of the issues and looking for solutions;
 - e. organizing the community through a performance and unifying the people on the course of action;
 - f. discussing ways of perpetuating such theatre activity; and
 - g. evaluating the activity and making changes.

From the above, it is apparent that the first step is for the theatre artiste to study the people, know their codes of communication and analyse their political dispositions. These will then be used for the theatre activity which the artiste must seek ways of projecting.

One major problem in this regard, however, is patronage. The major sponsor of theatre activities in the country are those, the theatre must fight to remove from the prebendal positions of authority. For example, the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artistes (SONTA) has had to depend on highly placed individuals and government to successfully organize its annual conference. The Nigerian University Theatre Arts Students Association (NUTASA) also depends on the same people or organizations to organize its annual theatre arts festival. But the interests of these people, organizations, or government remain the sustenance of the undemocratic and prebendal system. By depending on them for survival, the theatre artiste continues to give the much-needed credibility necessary to perpetuate the unjust system.

In the same vein, the theatre artiste should refuse to serve any despotic regime, because to do otherwise is tantamount to the endorsement of such a regime. When the theatre artiste continues to depend on the agents of an undemocratic system for survival, it becomes difficult if not absolutely impossible, for him/her to change the system because he/she will begin to luxuriate in it. The theatre artiste must, first of all, liberate himself/herself from the clutches of our retrogressive political system and seek other ways of survival before he/she can have the moral wherewithal to mobilize the people for a change of the system. Anigala (2001) made this point when he argued that the role of the theatre artiste

lies in his/her ability to use his/her resources to effect the necessary political change. The role expectation demands that he/she must first liberate himself/herself from disillusionment. He/she also needs to reassert his/her integrity on the political space by being incorruptible. Only then he/she would be able to function as the prick of the conscience of the nation.

Apart from striving to break the pervasive disillusionment which seems to have enveloped the masses, the Nigerian theatre artiste must find a way to sensitize the political consciousness of the masses through playwriting and play productions. Enita (2006) made this point, though in a slightly different context, that the immediacy of the effect of the theatrical experience makes it a potent medium for sensitization and mobilization. The theatre artiste should be able to expose the “divide and rule” stratagems of the dictatorial clique which often use the veneers of religion and ethnicity to polarize the populace for their selfish ends. To achieve this, he/she needs to persuade the masses to free themselves from all forms of clannish and religious manipulations. He/she should be able to persuade the masses into accepting accountability and integrity as alternatives to the twin evils of bribery and corruption (Anigala 2001).

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that democracy, in the true sense of the word, has not taken root in Nigeria. Rather, there have been half-hearted attempts at evolving the system. The theatre artiste as an important member of society has been involved in these attempts but he/she has not played his/her role adequately. A more radical role has, therefore, been advocated whereby he/she would mobilize the populace and fight for the deepening of democratic ethos and not merely mirroring the society. Most importantly, the theatre artiste must democratise his/her art by making it truly liberal, rather than remaining a conservative, elitist art. The theatre artiste must take the theatre out of the university and other higher institutions to the people and make them part of the theatre-for-development (TFD) experience. In this way, the theatre artiste’s activities aimed at scaling up socioeconomic and socio-political development would have more impact on the people and his/her contribution to the democratisation process would be more meaningful.

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