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The absurdity of Nigerian politics and governance: A critical reading of the drama of Ola Rotimi

Awuawuer and Tijime Justin

Abstract

The writers' commitment to the socio-political issues is highly commendable enough as different Nigerian playwrights such as Soyinka, Sowande, Osofisan, Hagher, yerima and many others who have painstakingly reflected the dismal performances of Nigerian politicians, or call them, the neo-imperialists who took over power from the colonial masters. This article, as a critical discourse unveiled the iconoclastic purview of Ola Rotimi's dramatic culture within the context of politics and governance. To this end, an interrogation of his dramaturge within the praxis of the absurdity and futility in Nigerian socio-political icons is treated in this article. Adopting a Reader-response/Receptive theories and methodologies which stem from hermeneutics, this paper therefore does a close reading of two of his plays; *Holding Talks* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* discovering the emerging features, imageries and images that depict the absurdity and futility of Nigerian politics and governance.

Keywords: absurdity, futility, drama, governance, politics

1. Introduction

It will not be out of place if we begin the text of this paper by citing Marx and Engels, Extract from Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness... (1976: 41-2) ^[1].

Going back to the literary creation therefore, all arts are a reproduction of their host societies. No good literary text exists without a strong socio-political context. This is based on the fact that the beginning of almost all plays is the unique combination of present and past that can be called the given circumstances. Others use different terms — social context, foundations of the plot, playwright's setting, texture, local detail, or literary landscape. They all mean the same thing. Given circumstances are the specific conditions in which the action of the play occurs. Therefore,

any writer, I suppose, feels that the world into which he was born is nothing less than a conspiracy against the cultivation of his talent — which attitude certainly has a great deal to support it. On the other hand, it is only because the world looks on his talent with such a frightening indifference that the artist is compelled to make his talent important (James Baldwin, cited in David Ker, 2004: 3) ^[2].

Thus, it is not an over statement to say that Nigerian contemporary playwrights are poised with the vision of apprehending and comprehending the socio-political realities of the society. This is because every work of art reflects and represents to a greater degree the

society that produced it in an essential aesthetic quality. To this extent, majority of dramatic works originating from Nigerian society reflect and represent to a greater degree the decay that Nigerian society has become. The political and socio-economic problems that bedevil Nigeria are what furnish the nation's drama. Thus, virtually all the celebrated Nigerian playwrights have treated them in their works. In most cases it is presented through satire, parody and metaphor in historical plays. In their plays, reality rubs shoulders with fiction and they prove that every art has a social function and as Soyinka has averred, the artist in an African society has always functioned as the Conscience of his people.

This confirms Augusto Boal's conjecture where the playwright is given a task of mediating between the audience and the society so that the audience/reader is not passive that

By taking possession of the stage, the Spect-Actor is consciously performing a responsible act. The stage is a representation of the reality, a fiction. But the Spect-Actor is not fictional. He exists in the scene and outside of it, in a dual reality. By taking possession of the stage in the fiction of the theatre he acts: not just in the fiction, but also in his social reality. By transforming fiction, he is transformed into himself (1979: xxii) ^[3].

This in summation is to restate that drama does not exist merely to titillate our senses, although it does that in great measure. The whole essence of art should be to reflect, mediate and affect society. Hence, our focus in this article dwells upon the issue of functionalism in the performing arts. It stresses the potency and functionality of the performing arts as diametrically opposed to the idea of art for art's sake. The focus of art for art's sake is basically on the aesthetic purpose of art alone - art for its own sake and nothing else. However, another school of thought subscribes to the opinion that art cannot exist for aesthetic purpose alone, but must have a specific utilitarian function. To Foluke Ogunleye, an advocate of the functionalist school,

The idea of art for art's sake is as strange in our times as wealth for wealth's sake, science for science's sake... All human activities must serve mankind if they are not to remain useless and idle preoccupations. Wealth exists in order that man may benefit by it, science exists in order to be man's guide, and art too must serve some useful purpose and not fruitless pleasures (2012: 8) ^[4].

Writing on the same functionality of drama, Biodun Jeyifo (1985) asserts that

... drama deals at a highly concentrated ... intense level with the contradictions of social existence. A dramatic piece which does not, in one form or another, deploy as its organising structural criteria, a physical or emotional conflict, a moral or spiritual contest of wills, a confrontation between contending principles, is almost inconceivable. Equally important is the fact that drama does not merely subsume conflict merely as its organising structural motif, beyond this; drama also axiomatically attempts a resolution of sorts, a provisional synthesis in the conflicting pulls within its constitutive action ... (7) ^[5]

Therefore, good drama then, apart from the obvious function of entertainment, should aim at improving the audience's state of knowledge and change the people's behaviour for the better. This is also in accordance with the position of Marx and Engels concerning arts and ideology that

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process (1976: 70–1) ^[6]

The above assertion is by implication considering drama as an artistic genre that is a viable tool for socio-political commentary in a given society. Charles Uji (2001) also buttressing the symbiotic relationship between drama and society holds it that

It is perhaps the realization that drama in general, and profound drama specifically, cannot be purely contemplative that prompted Aristophanes – that talented comic dramatist of antiquity – to express that “the dramatist should not only offer pleasure but should, besides that, be a teacher of morality and a political adviser (2001: 1) ^[7]

This is further stressed by Ogunleye that

Drama imitates life by bringing on to the stage or screen replication of real-life situations. The audiences are able to relate to the circumstances of the characters, borrow ideas from them, especially in the way conflicts are resolved (2012: 8) ^[8]

Considering the above vis-à-vis the history of literary drama in Nigeria, this zeal to run political commentaries by Nigerian dramatists began as far back in the ‘golden age’ of Hubert Ogunde, who treated social and political issues apart from his early religious themes. His plays were used to satirize social vices. For instance, *Human Parasites* (1946), a Tragedy in Two Acts was a satire designed to expose the vulgarity and ostentatiousness of the ‘Aso Ebi’ Craze, which is presented as a social vice in the play. His plays justified the dictum that drama mirrors, reflects and refracts or mediates the actuality of the society because he presented the socio-political issues of his time on stage. His plays *Yoruba Ronu* (1964) (Let the Yoruba Think) and *Otito Koro*

(1964) (Truth is bitter) launched him into comments on political issues. The plays were based on the political upheavals in the then western Nigeria, the consequence of which was the declaration of the state of emergency in that part of the country. The government banned him from performing in the Western region.

This really reflects what Ngugi Wa 'Thiongo says about the writer and the society that:

Literature results from conscious acts of men in society. At the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody. At the collective level, literature, as a product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies in words and images, the tension, conflicts, contrast, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming. It is a reflection on the aesthetic and imaginative planes, of a community's wrestling with its total environment to produce the basic means of life.... (1981: 5-6)^[9]

This therefore authenticates why Ola Rotimi as a dramatist, was committed and concerned with issues of survival of the society. These can be seen in all his dramatic creations beginning from his classic, *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971) through *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988) to *If: a Tragedy of the Ruled* (1983) and *Holding Talks* (1979). Indeed, Nigerian theatre artists see themselves as waging a war on behalf of society. They see themselves as performing a function of social responsibility towards their fellow-citizens.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a Reader-response/Receptive theories which stems from hermeneutics. Mary Klages (2012)^[10] on these theories explains that this is the study of how readers respond to literary and cultural texts. Reader response theory, or reception theory, emerged as a reaction against the New Critical insistence that all meaning was contained entirely within the text alone without regard for any external factors. Reader-response theorists argue that reading, making meaning, is an active process not a passive one; readers engage with texts and form interpretations based on subjective experiences as well as on what the text says. Some branches of reader-response theory examine individual reader's responses, often from a psychological or psychoanalytic perspective; others look for the social parameters within which interpretation takes place, arguing that "interpretive communities" establish particular modes of reading. Theorists associated with reader-response theory include Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, E. D. Hirsch, and David Bleich.

These theories are very essential for this paper, because it involves close readings of the selected dramatic literary texts of Ola Rotimi, so that the writer would be able to conjure the a deeper meaning out of the subtext vis-à-vis the meta-text. This approach will help to evoke objective interpretative responses that are germane as far as the text of this paper is concerned. This does not mean that this paper is religiously tied to these two theories. To some extent, the paper romances with the Critical theory, which Mary Klages (2012)^[11] holds that it draws heavily on the works of Marx and Freud in investigating the operations of ideology; its goal was to find ways of understanding human culture that

would help liberate people from the illusions of ideologies that distort or deny their objective interests. In this sense, Critical theory has more to do with Marxist sociological and political theory than with literary theory per se; its focus on ideology, however, led many members of the Frankfurt School to investigate the role literary texts play in creating and maintaining ideologies. Walter Benjamin, for example, argued that art and literature are not just reflections of social relations, but are among the many modes of production of social relations, as mediated by aesthetic (in contrast to economic) practices.

3. Our Husband has Gone Mad Again^[12] and the absurdity of Nigerian politics

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again (1977) is a hilarious comic play by Ola Rotimi. It tells the story of Lejoka-Brown, a retired soldier and a man of many wives. One of the wives he married while fighting in the Congo, the other (Mama Rashida) was the wife of his elder brother who was married to him by default after the death of his brother. The third wife, Sikira, was married for political reasons. Her mother is the president of the National Union of Nigerian Market Women and standing for a political, he needs the support the women.

The comedy starts when Liza, the one only wife who thought she alone owns Lejoka-Brown as a husband, decides to come home (Nigeria) to her husband after completing her medical studies in the United States. Lejoka-Brown does not want her in his family house and so decides to pick her up from the airport. However, the plane landed earlier than scheduled. And Liza, having known of Lejoka-Brown's father's name, proceeds to find it and makes herself at home.

What follows is a series of comic incidences that need to be read and appreciated. For instance, Liza, having stayed in America, comes to the traditional marriage with 'White' culture in terms of dressing and her relationship with her husband. She is bold to say whatever she wants, whereas the others were not. She plays with her husband whilst the others could not. It is during one of these love-plays, chasing one another that the third wife (Sikira) runs away to her mother's house shouting "our husband has gone mad again" - she left the marriage for good so that she could peace and stability of her mind.

Thus, in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* Ola Rotimi attempts to use drama as an icon of a political contest. One of the messages of the play is that political campaigns in Nigeria for elections in various positions are roughly schematized and too dramatic so that such activities are so entertaining and elucidative. This is to say that there is much drama in political activities such as is depicted in this play. This kind of political attitude is carved around the characterization and antecedents of the hero in the play. According to Major Rahman Taslim Lejoka-Brown (the hero in the play), politics is war. He says to Okonkwo:

It is war! Politics is war. Oooh -I am taking no chances this time, brother mine. Mhm. Last time, I took things slow and easy and what happened? Chuu! I lost a by-election to a ... a small crab... a baby monkey... (p.7)

A critical reading of *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* depicts that Rotimi is making a serious statement

concerning the insincerity and dismal misbehaviour of Nigeria political gladiators who conceive politics and political offices in terms of the material gains and social influence, and a dare hope to acquire from such positions or vantage grounds. Consequently, such politicians employ every device at their disposal to win the elections. This kind of attitude was evident in the 2007 general elections when Olesgun Obasanjo made a categorical statement that the election was going to be “a do or die affair” while seeking for a second tenure. This kind of statement is not far from the statement made by Lejoka Brown in the play. Commenting on this Ejeke Odiri Solomon asserts that

Politics ...creates more problems in the Nigerian Situation. This is what Ola Rotimi has dramatized subtly in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. From our experience it is only true to assert that all general elections that have been conducted in this country so far have suffered from the bug of rigging and other irregularities, thus bringing the less qualified candidates into power with the attendant non-performance of such representatives (1999: 24) ^[13]

The violence and irregularities which, have become ever present characteristic features of elections held in Nigeria since independence is occasioned by the above reasoning as pointed out by Joke. This is to say that the play explores a satiric dramatic excursion to the methodology and odd motives of democratic cultural practice in Nigeria.

Rotimi in this play makes fun of Nigerian politicians as he creates the character of Major Lejoka-Brown as a core and typical Nigeria politician. In achieving this, Rotimi creates a story around an ex-military officer (Lejoka Brown), who leaves his cocoa farming business for politics with the main intention of enriching himself, acquiring social significance and becoming famous through the misappropriation of public funds and the wrong application and use of government machinery at the expense of the electorates.

The above representation in the world of the play, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is usual and a common practice of political office holders in the Nigerian political landscape since independence. But this method of realizing his dreams through the ballot boxes is ill conceived and rather naive or simplistic. It is quite undemocratic. His use of coercion or force to get what he wants from his party members and supporters falls short of their expectation. This leads to his replacements as his party's flag bearer in this play. His behavior and attitude towards members of his party do not befit a leader. He believes strongly to his dismay that money and influence are all the requirements for him to be elected.

Apart from the pride, zeal and ego to win the election at all cost in Nigerian political scene, their electioneering campaigns are mostly characterized with rancor and bickering as most of the politicians belittle their political opponents or even blackmail them in some cases to score a political point. This is evident in the 2015 presidential campaigns when Patience, the wife of the sitting president, Goodluck Jonathan was all out to destroy her husband's opponent Buhari. In bid to campaign for her husband, Patience was always going about destroying the personality of Buhari by referring to him as an old man who is close to his grave. Imagine the First Lady of Nigeria inciting people to be violent during the campaigns. She also brazenly

insulted the people of the North and a former Head of State without due regard to the party chairman, who is from the North. Fayose and Fani-Kayode also engaged in the hate campaign against the opposition. (Jerry Ukwu, “7 ways Patience Jonathan prevented her husband from wining the 2015 polls”, <https://www.legit.ng>) ^[14]

In the same characteristic, Jonathan came out openly to say that Buhari could not remember his phone number off-hand because of his age (Buhari Can't Remember His Phone Number –Jonathn, Naijaloaded, <https://www.naijaloaded.com.ng>. 10 January 2015) ^[15] This kind of political mischief is linked to the words of Major Lejoka-Brown; He calls his political opponent “a small crab”, “a baby monkey”. This is obviously not a good political game. This very political attitude is been experienced presently in Nigeria. Even within the same political parties, there are factions simply because of personal interest. This is evident in the situation around PDP as a ruling party decorated with camps and decamping that began in 2013 to 2014 just because of the presidential seat and hidden issues that were not readily publicized (Nigeria 2015 Election Scenarios and Recommendations Adamawa State. [fundforpeace.org>global>2015/01/15/](http://fundforpeace.org/global/2015/01/15/)) ^[16].

More than the above behavior which is a characteristic feature of the Nigerian political terrain, during electioneering campaigns, the political atmosphere becomes negatively charged as if opposing parties are poised for physical war. More often than not, this leads to real physical confrontation between party members and supporters of the opposing party. Thus, in the play, Ola Rotimi warns Nigerians to be careful in electing their leaders. This is seen as he carefully makes Lejoka Brown to lose in the primary election. Because it is quite clear that Lejoka Brown is not an organized person to lead the party to victory if he had been chosen. His flaws or inadequacies would have adversely affected his party and his position if elected. Ironically, one of his erstwhile wives, Sikira, is chosen to replace him (Lejoka-Brown). This again Rotimi is making a statement concerning the choice of Nigerian leaders; if we are not careful in voting in our leaders, we will continue to have national problems because Nigeria is a nation that is blessed with abundant human and the natural resources. However, one of the problems Nigeria is facing is the absence of committed leadership and followership who are poised to bringing development closer to the masses. This may be one of the reasons for underdevelopment in Nigeria and other African countries.

This political statement from Rotimi as pointed out in the play is reminder to Nigerians as far as elections are concerned. This position is also maintained by Gbilekaa who says that.

Politics is not only about winning elections or about positions gained. Politics is an art of assembling and organizing people towards purposeful goals. Politics is about going into a covenant with the people and sustaining the relationship (2002: 75) ^[17]

The above statement really negates what Lejoka Brown thinks politics is all about. This is because, most times, electing people in vantage positions in Nigeria is simply a process of come and “eat” as it negates the policy of come and serve. Electioneering process is expected to give the chance to decide who will govern at all the levels of

government. It is also expected to serve as an opportunity for the public to make choices about the policies, programs, and future directions of government action. At the same time, elections promote accountability. Thus the threat of defeat at the polls exerts pressure on those in power to conduct themselves in a responsible manner and take account of popular interests and wishes when they make their decisions.

Contrary to the above, politics in Nigeria has become a business enterprise and a vocation for money making for most political gladiators amidst god-fatherism and sponsorships. This is deduced from what Lejoka Brown tells his friend, Okonkwo, in the play that:

Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? –No, no – you want to chop a big slice of the national cake? Na politics...Cakes are soft...just you wait! Once we get elected to the top, wallahi, we shall stuff ourselves with huge mouthfuls of the national chin-chin...something you'll eat and eat, brother and you know you've eaten something (P.4)

Because of this singular reason, the post-independent Nigerian state is one faced with a lot of leadership induced poverty, corruption, religious charlatanism, war and restiveness, Boko Haram unstable political system, dictatorial governance, lack of adequate basic amenities etc. Despite Nigeria's obvious wealth (from oil and other natural resources), it has undergone dramatic economic deterioration, under the civilian and military rules, since independence. Even before the first military incursion into Nigerian politics in 1966, the country was already experiencing severe and devastating socio-economic, political and developmental crises (qz.com/africa/1313380/nigerias-has-the-highest-rate-of-extreme-poverty-globally/borgenproject.org/10-facts-about-poverty-in-nigeria)^[18].

These crises can be seen in the activities of almost all the executive governors in all the states in Nigeria. For instance, when the present President Buhari first assumed office in 2015, all state workers were not paid for many months, he therefore decided to institute a "Bail Out Fund" to help them clear salary arrears, but because of the definition of politics by these people, this money was not paid to the deserving workers. Similarly, there were two payments of Paris Club refund to these same governors with instructions to clear the arrears to no avail.

(www.pressreader.com/nigeria/thisday/20180912/281573766591980, THISDAY Newspaper 12/9/2018)^[19]

4. *Holding Talks*^[20] and the futility in Nigerian talking culture and Governance

Rotimi's *Holding Talks* (1979) is popularly contextualized as the genre of 'The Theater of the Absurd' which grew as a response to what critics saw as the collapse of moral, religious, political, and social structures in the twentieth century. The primary aim of its plays was to point out the absurdity of life. Though it incorporated a diverse group of playwrights, each with his or her own set of beliefs, many influenced by the dadaist and surrealist movements, in general, they agree that human life and endeavor had become so essentially illogical, and language such an inadequate form of communication, that the only refuge was

laughter. In absurdist plays, all truth becomes relative, and life is reduced to an illusion, to highlight the absurdity and hopelessness of the world. Martin Esslin defines the movement as striving to

express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought...The Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it. But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief (1996: 20-26)^[21]

Holding Talks (1979) one of Ola Rotimi's avant-garde plays, is a satire, showing how much Nigerians energy are spent on discourse, talks and dialogue even in situations requiring action. The characters in this absurd play are purely symbolic, and that is the reason why the characters bear type names like: Man, Barber, Apprentice, Blind Beggar, Boy Beggar, Press Photographer, Police Woman. The audiences are given an impression of a barber's shop; "the shop of a poor man." When the play begins, we see the apprentice perusing through pages of tattered newspapers and idly reading out some of the captions in the pages, and the barber lies on the bench at the other corner of the shop, sleeping in snatches. When the man enters, obviously a customer, as we understand, he is fat and arrogant, *he surveys the room, letting his eyes sweep slowly across its entirety, taking everything in* (p.1)

First, he asks the barber an unusually indirect question that is not relevant.

Man: (Who has been scanning Barber's face) you know Gabriel?

Barber: (Trying to think) Gabriel... Gabriel... Gab... Gabriel who, sir?

Man: 'Gabriel who?' (Chortles incredulously) You... you mean you don't know... [To Apprentice, still laughing] 'Gabriel who?'

Barber: (still nonplussed) Gabriel... Gabriel...

Man: Never mind... (Becoming sober) If you don't know Gabriel, you don't know Gabriel. (p.3)

Then, almost immediately after the man has successfully thrown the barber into a brief spell of confusion, the Man notices that the Barber's handshakes, and immediately picks up a heated argument with him. The man gets more miffed by the barber's stubbornness. Even the apprentice gets a bit exasperated:

Apprentice. (To Barber): Ooh, say it shook, for Jesus'

sake! Why argue long? What is in a hand shaking, anyway, or not shaking, anyway? Tell him it shakes, let's have peace. (p.5)

Barber: Why must I say my hand shakes, when it never shakes? (P.5)

Apprentice: It does not matter, tell him it shakes, for Jesus's sake, the Customer is always right. Make the man happy, for Jesus'-(p.5)

The one act play is just like any uneventful working day of the week. A customer comes to a barber's shop and sits on a swivel-chair, demanding the service of a barber. Suddenly, that barber falls to the floor and is supposed dead. The Man does not offer help rather he begins to ask irrelevant questions.

Man: [coolly] where do God-loving people carry their neighbours to, who fall down dying?

Apprentice: To the hospital, sir.

Man: Can we do like God-loving people, then? (p.9)

The Man has definitely kept his initial anger at the barber's obstinacy and this makes him silently unenthusiastic to help the barber out of his present tight spot. He talks at length to rationalize himself, blaming the barber and his strong-headedness.

Man: That's the point...you have just put your finger neatly on the point....I was rejected. Can you imagine that? Even without religion, I was rejected (*Moves away*) (P. 10-11). Even though the apprentice told him: "He didn't reject you, sir". (page 11). This is how the man continues bringing up excuses that would have made him help the barber.

The next line of action is to try and save Barbers life, no matter what. What makes the day abnormal is, the man's incoherent and superfluous babbling of finger pointing and rationalization. The apprentice is the only human being there who desperately wants to help the barber, but the man tells him that he does not have the means to render that help. He succeeds in confusing the apprentice. Together, they waste determining and asserting whether the barber is dead or not.

When the beggars come, the man demonstrates pseudo-charity by giving them pennies and just before they depart, taking two out of the three bananas they had. The presence of the reporter and press photographer shows unwarranted publicity of the situation. Even when the policewoman comes in, the man confuses and ridicules her and out of frustration, she departs. What was the essence of the man searching the body of the barber after he sends the apprentice away to call for "help"? Was he looking for something to do? It is presumed that the barber is dead, because there is no definite proof of death. At the end of the play, the barber is still left unattended to and the talking never stops.

It would be very convenient to say that *Holding Talks* is a constant reminder of the futility of the Nigerian talking culture that does not yield any meaningful result. Anote Ajeluorou (2015) notes that

Nigeria's current situation since the inauguration of a new government in May typifies Ola Rotimi's absurdist

play *Holding Talks*. There has been so much talk about change, fight against corruption and how to make life bearable for all Nigerians. Sadly, it has been all talk. A reversal of the promises made during the campaigns has been the daily reality (The Guardian Newspaper) ^[22]

There are several issues and problems in Nigeria that require prompt attention and action, but because of these talking habits, solutions are not arrived at. For example, the problem of Boko Haram in Nigeria is aggravating day by day because the military are talking too much. Most of their security tactics are made public over the air. One begins to wonder the ethics and ethos in Nigeria security where the perpetrators of the act are already in the know of the plans ahead of them. The security tactics are made known to the public through the Mass Media; Radio, television and the social media. For instance, the following authenticate this assertion: (*saharareporters.com* › 2019/03/19 › *video-nigerian-soldier-taunts-boko-ha*) ^[23], (Boko Haram: Nigerian Army announces plan to relocate Baga residents <https://www.premiumtimesng.com › regional › nnorth-east › 303388-boko...>) ^[24]

Going down memory as far as Nigerian polity is concerned, we have had, Operation Feed the Nation (1976); Green Revolution (1980); Austerity Measure (1984); Structural Adjustment Programme (1986); War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (1994); Mass Mobilization and Social Economic Reorientation (1987), National Orientation Agency (1993), recently, the Dora Akinyili's Rebranding Nigerian Project (2009), and many of these kinds that are not mentioned here are all icons representing the 'talking' nature of Nigerians. The same endless talking culture is depicted at the end of the play at the event where the Policeman is trying to do a preliminary investigation.

Policeman: Sir, I have been lenient with you all this time and you seem to be taking undue advantage. (man remains silent) Do you know this is a serious incident, with suspicious of foul play potent in this man's death?

Apprentice: Can I talk now sir?

Man: Yes, let talk. (p.42)

This kind of culture makes Alex Asigbo to confront and challenge the seriousness of Nigerian by saying that:

What this plethora of efforts shown is that Nigeria is not a serious country. When they see snakes, instead of killing them, they will set up committees on killing snakes (2010: 75) ^[25]

That is why in Nigeria, several national committees' meetings are held day by day concerning national problems to no avail. For example, a lot of odd things have been happening in Nigeria without really getting to the root cause of them. For instance, the unjust murder of good citizens of Nigeria, starting from Dele Giwa to Bola Ige, and many other good people of Nigeria had elicited good talks that ended up without getting the perpetrators. (Flashback: Excerpt of Interview with Ogunade confirming who killed Dele Giwa, *saharareporters.com/.../flashback-excerpt-interview-ogunade-confirming-w...*) ^[26] Tor Iorapuu (2016) in a keynote address at the 2016 Faculty of Arts Conference,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in the same vein asserts that

Nigerians are living dead though hopeful because we are full of “ifs” the same way the talks never end. An economic summit just held in Abuja a week before this event and the President just returned from the 71st UN General Assembly claiming it was a successful event for Nigeria. Academics are holding talks; Politicians are holding talks; economists and the corporate world are holding talks and world leaders continue to hold talks. And yet, not one talk has transformed the lives of the poor except corporate organizations. No wonder, all the adverts from our telecom industry focus on talking. Etisalat presents an interesting illustration. This *Muzungu* (Asian character) caricatures Nigerians who pay just to talk even to dogs and cats.^[27]

This shows that Nigerians talk more and do less. Whereas, there are popular saying that ‘action speaks louder than words’, ‘Faith without works is useless’ (James 2:26). All that the Man said in this One Act is not justified because he did not act just like Nigerians will say without doing what they are expected to do. Each regime that comes on board comes with lofty policies and programmes, the reverse is the will and might to achieve these intended manifestoes that is a case. What Nigerian leaders do is to engage in endless talks and feel relaxed just as the Man in the play feels relaxed without caring to assist the barber. Rather he antagonizes the Barber because of the poverty the Barber “chooses” to wallow in. There is a saying that a rich man never likes to hear that you are poor when you meet him for help.

This talking culture elongated the 2013 Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) strike that lasted from July to December, and the 2018 strike that ran for over two months. The Non Academic unions were not left out of this situation, in August 2019, they were on warning strike, thereby truncating the smooth academic flow on Nigerian campuses (Vanguard, 19/08/2019).^[28] It took the Nigerian leaders then six months, and more than two months to accept the agreement reached with the union leaders in 2009. Committees were set and reset just to waste and delay the Nigerian universities’ academic calendars. The playwright may have gone to mother earth long time ago, nonetheless, this particular play remains a classic so long as futile conferences, committees, discussions and discourses with no end and solutions overflow in Nigerian polity. For example, the federal government of Nigeria had instituted a CONFAB (2014 National Conference) to address national issues. One begins to wonder the duties of the senators and the members of the House of Representatives. Will the CONFAB solve the problem of terrorism in Nigeria? This CONFAB (<https://www.premiumtimesng.com> › *Nigeria National Conference* › *News*),^[29] Town Hall meetings and other national forums for national discourses are really reflections of Ola Rotimi’s statement in *Holding Talks*.

5. Conclusion

From the above therefore, it could be deduced that drama and theatre in Nigeria have an important role in actualizing the Nations socio-political culture and governance. This is because drama as art is capable of influencing its numerous audiences in the sense that there is a symbiotic relationship

between drama and the society. Thus, the two plays discussed in this article confirm to a great extent the level in which drama can be used as a tool for discussing the inadequacies and limitations in the society.

This presupposes that, Ola Rotimi as a product of Nigerian society is not left out in the process of becoming an amplified voice so as to make a significant impact on the nation’s polity. Theatre is thus used here as the container for the human experience, to transcend and transform time and space to nurture the power of the human spirit.

From a critical reading of these plays; *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *Holding Talks*, we are made to have a rethink on issues concerning Nigerian party politics and the national question for a way forward. This implies that Ola Rotimi as a Nigerian dramatist was conscious of Nigerian society from where he used to draw his raw materials while living. This made him to explore powerful and strong images and icons on conflicting and difficult issues of politics and other domestic crises in his literary creations.

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