

**DRAMA AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION: A STUDY OF
OKWE AGBAALA AND UGOMMA**

Okeyika, Juliet Ifunanya

Department of Igbo, African And Asian Studies
Faculty of Arts

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
08060639119; julifaokeyika@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research looks into Drama as a Vehicle for Social Reconstruction in some selected Igbo drama texts. Literature is a mirror and a tool which artistic writers use to display and reflect the socio-political economic and religious realities of life. It exists to give definitions, meaning and interpretation to several social issues that militate against the well being of any society. Previous works on Igbo drama texts were not emphatic on social transformation as a form of achieving dramatic techniques, without knowing that such exposures of the ills of the society help to make positive change among the people. In view of the above, this study looks at how drama is used as a means of changing the society for the good of mankind. These playwrights advocate for change in the society through their dramas. Okwe Agbaala and Ugomma exposed the ills of the society. Whereas the first drama book portrays social change at its peak through issues like eradication of examination malpractices and intimidation in our Institutions of higher learning, the later book is a drama that corrects the society through issues like religious sentiment and ignoble behaviors among youths. The methodology adopted in this work is the descriptive survey method because there are many Igbo drama books, but two out of them were selected for analyses of social reconstruction. However in this work, it is discovered that the playwrights aim at advocating for a positive change in the society. It is also recommended that people should embrace right and not wrong, peace and not war.

Background of Study

Literature is a reflection of man and his society. It can be said to be a product of human imagination which can be written, acted or performed which has the ultimate objectives of entertaining, granting relaxation and change in the society. Literature has thus become a formidable tool with which people mirror themselves as well as their society. Thus, it is in support of this view that Oluikpe, (2006:3) states that "literature is all about man and his society". This statement examines man as a social being. It looks at human virtues, vices, weaknesses in the human society. It studies man's failures and successes and

how these are affected with time, environment and society at large. It is didactic in nature and also aims at correcting societal ills with the view of reforming them for the good of the society. Literature starts its journey of creation from the society. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1999:65) states:

Literature does not row or develop in a vacuum. It is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by the social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa where modern literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa where modern literature has grown against the gory of background of European imperialism and its changing manifestation.

Here, Ngugi is saying that literature develops out of people's way of life, culture, belief systems, characters and interpretation of events around them and the general notions of life. It also embodies societal problems like politics, lust for power, tyranny etc. it is a decisive factor in the relationship between man and his society.

Similarly, Asagba (2001:6) argued that; "the world of literature is a new world usually created by the artist". According to him, it is a more marvelous, more enduring and more true than the material world of man. For him, the world should look up to the world of literature in order to imitate its perfect nature. Literature is so perfect to him and thus emphasizes that it should be emulated.

Some see literature as a means of reforming the society while some see it as being socially dangerous and morally corrupt. However Plato, a classical Greek notable scholar and philosopher maintains that literature is not useful to neither man nor his society and therefore it cannot claim to have social utility and relevance. He sees it as a negative instrument in the society and it is no surprise why he dismissed literature from his *Ideal Republic* where he said that; "literature is thrice removed from reality because it has a bad influence in the society".

However, contradicting the above views, Onyeagba, Ezeme and Okafor (2011:279) thus opine that; "the writer is a member of a society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him". Those issues will therefore be present in his work. They also say that a writer is a member of the society and he writes about the happenings and situations and also actions

relating to his immediate society and environment. The writer is therefore faced with the task of portraying the social vices in the society such as bribery and corruption, injustice, greed, oppression, suppression of the masses, women subjugation, violence, brutal killings and all sorts of vices that take place in the society.

Drama as vehicle for social reconstruction portrays or explains drama as device that can be used to correct societal ills and in doing so, moves the society ahead of all the negative or social vices with the aim of making the society a better place to live in. It deals with the way drama works change, reform and re-affirm the society. Reconstruction becomes necessary when a general damage has been done especially in a physical structure as a road, bridge or a house. On the other hand, reconstruction becomes relevant when something has gone wrong with the social behavior, moral standards, norms, ethics and orientation of a people or tradition and these cannot be corrected, repaired or amended with drugs, physical torture, detention or imprisonment but it can only be corrected through art that is by the use of literature (drama) where all these ills will be portrayed and tackled against so as to effect a positive change in the society. Every human community has its shortcomings and vices and these problems are heightened by the silence of the rules who are either ignorant of the situation due to high illiteracy or lack of medium to cry out and these vices include bribery, corruption and political instability etc but with clarification and education, people are more knowledgeable about the happenings in the society. Some that are deeply concerned, felt the need to use their pen and paper as a means of correcting these societal ills for the benefit of the masses and the society.

Social reconstruction is thus made possible through drama and drama is one of the genres of literature amongst which others include poetry and prose. Drama examines, portrays and reflects the affairs of man in the society. The works or plays of a playwright by a greater percentage are engineered by the need from social reconstruction and reformation. Drama imitates the mannerisms and characters of living men. In drama, the amusement is usually embedded in satire that subtly exposes and mocks the human frailties, vices and shortcomings with a view to changing the behavior for good. The work of a satire is to dismantle an unjust and dysfunctional social and political system and enthrone in its stead, enduring moral principles. Satire is a form of drama which ridicules human follies and in the work of, he opines that satire is:

...a form in which human vices, follies, abuses and shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, burlesque, irony, parody and the like the internet to bringing about improvement...a weapon of attacking man's sense of probity and revealing his hypocrisy
To the effect that man may feel ashamed and learn to be good...
a weapon for the society to look at itself in the mirror and make a change.

The view explains the fact that satire as a drama is used to ridicule and criticize human follies with the aim of correcting them.

Definition of Terms

What is Drama?

The word "drama" is derived from the Greek "dran" which means "action" and is derived from "to do" or "to act". Onyeagba, Ezeme and Okafor (2011: 282) defined drama as;

"Any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors". They also said that since drama is primarily meant to be performed by actors on a stage and in front of spectators, it appeals and creates a communal experience that is intensified through interaction between actors and audience. They went further to say that; "in modern times, drama especially in literature is often used to mean a play, a course of study in higher institutions of learning such as colleges of education or universities and an actual representation in which people (actors) play roles". Drama in its infancy with prospects of improved steady growth and improvement is part of our everyday life and living and that of the people. Social functions, religious ceremonies and traditional festivals lend themselves easily to dramatic performances.

Drama here is defined as a story or write-up that is acted or performed on stage usually by different characters which use gesture and dialogue to pass across its messages or information which is usually centered on conflict.

Ikeokwu and Onyejekwu (2004:56) define drama as:

"A prose or verse composition especially for one telling a serious story that is intended for representation by actors impersonating characters and performing dialogue and action and as a serious narrative work or program for television, radio or the cinema. It is also the art or practice of writing or producing dramatic works and

also a situation or succession of events in the real life having the dramatic progression or emotional characteristics of a play”.

Here, drama is seen as a verse composition especially the one that tells a serious story that is intended to be acted or performed on the stage thus imitating real life situation and characters.

Abrams (1998:45) also defines drama; “as a literary form of designed terms for the theatre, in which actors take the role of characters, perform the indirect role or action and utter the written dialogue”. Drama as a phenomenon arises from one’s relationship with his environment and its impact function can be seen in the fact that it contributes to the development and growth of the human mind. It brings together all aspects of life. Here, drama as a literary form is designed to be performed in the theatre by actors and this arises as a result of one’s relationship with his environment in the life of the individual as it contributes to the growth and development of the human mind and the society as well.

What is Vehicle?

Vehicle is derived from the Latin word “vehiculum” which means a mobile machine that transports passengers or cargo. It is defined as any kind of contrivance, on wheels or runners used to carry people or goods from one place to another over land. Also it can be seen as any person or thing used as a medium to convey ideas, emotions etc.

This study will look at vehicle as a means or medium of correcting, reforming and reconstructing societal ills. Vehicle here can be seen as a means through which ideas will be conveyed as they help in reforming the society for a better change. Thus, drama being used in the study as a vehicle for societal reconstruction entails that drama is used by the playwright as a medium of changing and reforming the society for growth and development.

What is Reconstruction?

According to Ujowundu (2007:28), reconstruction is defined as; “the work that is done to repair the damage to a city, industry etc especially after a war”. Thus reconstruction for the purpose of this study can be seen as means of repairing, rebuilding and reforming a society that is filled with vices. Reconstruction becomes necessary where a damage has already been done. In the case of this study, reconstruction will be explored as a means, a tool or a vehicle for effecting a better change.

What is Social?

Social according to John, (ed) is defined as “relating to human society and its organization, or the quality of people’s lives”. It deals with the way the society is being organized and connected with every facet of the human society and people’s lives. It can also deal with a call for social change in the society.

What is Social Reconstruction?

The wise Greek says that Social Reconstruction is a philosophy that promotes peaceful coexistence and unity within a population using nonviolent ways to settle disputes. It aims to address past abuses through reconciliation and strengthen the appreciation of differences among people in a community. The main theory behind social reconstruction suggests the development of a national identity through cooperative communities to prevent people from restoring to violence when differences arise. Social reconstruction promotes social recovery after conflict by sharing a vision for the future. It is therefore a very positive tool for reforming and changing the society through drama.

Purpose of Study

The aim of this study is to discuss how the Playwrights; Nwadike and Echebima used their works as vehicles for the society. This study will also look at how far the playwrights have gone in performing this function and its impact in the society. Furthermore, this study will examine the opinion, ideas and views of some scholars, critics and dramatists regarding how the playwrights have exposed the ills in the society and this shall be explored and corrected through the use of *Okwe Agbaala and Ugomma*.

Scope and Delimitation of Study

This will focus on drama which is one of the genres of literature. It will study the dramatist as a social reconstruction in the society. Also the ways through which the dramatists have reconstructed the society will be highlighted.

Literature Review

Literary works derive different perception from different people, likewise topics are criticized from different angles, therefore there is need to review the scholarship around the topic and text in order to find out what has been said and

then to know what to say, the contributions, views and the under-pining ideologies of various scholars, critics and philosophers in this area in relation to the current study to determine their impact. It has been observed from this study that social reconstruction emanates from the desire of the playwrights to use their dramas as a means of correcting societal ills. Social reconstruction thus awakens consciousness to things in the society. The playwrights address the ills relevant in the society.

Agreeing to this Ohaeto (2009:422) asserts that;

“In a continent or even a country that has undergone severe and sustained decades of political stresses, uninstigated years of social tribulation and convulsive economic disaster, it is not unexpected that its writers would chronicle such social, political and economic issues and ultimately use them either as symbols or metaphors ...to persuade readers to consider precious complacent attitudes and urge them into relevant actions”.

Here, he is simply saying that it is normal and natural for playwrights in a country like Nigeria that has undergone series of societal ills and crises to use drama to portray these ills for the masses and the leaders to see in order to make amends for better growth and development of the country. To him, the playwright is the mouth-piece of his people, a seer, a prophet, a minstrel and should therefore seek the welfare of her citizens. In doing this, the playwright needs to be impartial and speak on behalf of his people through the use of drama as a weapon for criticizing societal ills. Thus he further maintains that drama can be used as an instrument for change or social reconstruction not just in a country but also in a continent that has undergone severe turmoil, anarchy and crisis in the hands of her leaders.

Apparently, another African scholar and critic Chinweizu maintains that; “Playwright needs to be committed to the problems of his society and should through this act rectify the ills of the society”. To him, commitment is a matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and of making perceptions available in the works of the reader to help promote understanding and observation of change in the society’s norms and values. He also emphasizes on the role of drama as a means of promoting changes in societal norms and values.

Akoma, (1999: 23), thus recognizing the need for drama to be used as an instrument for social change opines that; “It seems that the playwright does not believe in violent resolution but finds more comfort and solace in the effective

use of witticism and satirical jibes in accomplishing an ideal social change...". Here, he is saying that the playwright does not believe in violent resolution as a means of effecting social change because the resolution will either wreck havoc and cause damages in the society. He goes on to observe that the playwright finds solace in the effective use of witticism and satire as means of achieving the ideal social change.

Based on the above view, it has been clearly depicted that a committed playwright should be conscious of his society and it falls on him to make his people aware of the social, economic and political problems as well as find the causes and possible cure for such problems.

Social Reconstruction in Nwadike's *Okwe Agbaala* and Echebima's *Ugomma*

The drama *Okwe Agbaala* is satirical play. The drama book is set in Nigeria and in Igbo land in particular around 1991. The use of real places like Obinaozara and names of individuals like Chinyere established this fact. The plot of the drama is built around the fate of Dr. Emezina a lecturer who leaked degree exam questions to his girl friend named Chinyere and how Dr. Emezina intimidated Ozuruigbo a course mate to Chinyere by failing him in the degree exam, simply because he met him one day in his girl friend's house. Ozuruigbo being a brilliant student wrote a petition to senate against Dr. Emezina for remark of his scripts. The university senate after due process finds Dr. Emezina and Chinyere guilty. The management withdraws Chinyere's degree certificate and expelled Dr. Emezina from the university.

Social Reconstruction in *Okwe Agbaala*

This aspect reconstructs the society through examination malpractices and intimidation. This drama vividly portrays the effects of examination and intimidation in the society hereby changing the society for good. The playwright used two concepts to reform the society and these concepts are:

- a. Examination malpractices should be eradicated in our institution of higher learning.
- b. There should be fair treatment in our society and not intimidation.

Examination Malpractices:

The playwright through this play aims at total change from the universities which is part of the society. This can be seen as the central theme of the play.

Nwadike through the character of Dr. Emezina and Chinyere both in the university of Alaubi, presented corruptions, malpractices, damage and decays in the universities. He observed this as thus:

Dr. Emezina elelie anya elu, kọọ ọkọ n'iku bido fosasiwa akwukwọ,
Mechaa weputa otu mpe mpe akwukwọ Nwaada, lee ya, top skriit
Biko mkpurukpu anyasi ekwela anya ọzọ hụ ya.

Chinyere: Egwu atula gi, onye m kwọ n'azu ukwu anaghi akpu ya
n'ala

(Ya afonye akwukwọ n'ime ara, jiri ihu ochi puo, oku anyuo).

Intimidation

The playwright apart from using examination malpractice to indicate the nature of the society, he revealed the level of intimidation in the society. Nwadike indicates this through the character of Dr. Emezina and Ozuruigbo, in the play. Dr. Emezina frowned face at Ozuruigbo simply because he met him in his girlfriend's house one day and decided to deal with him using his power as a lecturer. Nwadike presented this as thus:

Dr. Emezina: ...aga m egosi ya na m ji ji, jide mma. Onye m wanyere, o rie
Aga m emechaa ya o hụ n'anya. O kwa mụ na ya na mahadum a...

Bia nne, gwa m nomba ya. Hapu ubochi nta mụ na ya achuo
n'owere nchi. O makwa na onye ka mmadu ka chi ya?

The playwright in achieving his aim for social reconstruction in this drama shows that to reconstruct such a damage, it requires serious punishment to its supporter as it is in the case of Dr. Emezina and Chinyere. Nwadike in his drama reconstructs this through the character of barrister Iheako, as he said:

...o buru na a pitaghi ihe ha ibi abu, gini ozọ ga-agba abu? i hapu ita
Dkt Emezina ahuhu kwesiri ekwesi, bu ime ka ihe ojoo na-amuba
n'obodo.

A hapu ya, echi nke ka nke emee. A hapu nwata ka o noro n'ulo na-
anyu nsi,

otu ubochi o nyunye nsi n'ite ofe nne ya maka na nwata nna ya
dunyere ohi na-eji ukwu agbawa ibo... A hapu Dkt. Emezina
ka o laa, echikwa, agaa njem alotaghi
alota.

Conclusively, Nwadike uses his play to reconstruct and reform the negative (examination malpractices and intimidation) aspects of the society. The support of wrights and rejection of wrong in the society were seen.

Social Reconstruction in *Ugomma*

The drama *Ugomma* is also a satirical play that criticizes religious sentiments and ignoble characters among the youths in the society. The drama has typical Igbo setting background. The drama was set about some years ago. The plot of the drama is centered on a young girl called Ugomma due to her beauty epitome. Ugomma is still in primary five when a young man came for her hand in marriage, but her parents refused and said that he is not their church member. Ugomma as she gradually grew, deviated from her Christian life and got unwanted pregnancy from three men which she was not able to hold even at the end. In this drama, Echebima based his social reconstruction on two concepts: religious sentiment and ignoble behavior among youths.

Religious Sentiment:

In the beginning of the play, the playwright revealed a suitor (Alozie) that wanted to marry Ugomma, but she and her mother said “No” simply because Alozie was an Anglican by faith and Ugomma’s family, Catholic.

Echebima in his effort to reconstruct the society, presented these as he spoke through the character of Obinna as thus:

...ya bụ ihe gbasara choochi asịla maọbụ choochi asighị... Nne Ugomma juru aju, juwaa isi. Ugomma nwa ya doo kwara ukwu...ya mere aga asi gi hapu okwu ahụ otu ahu ka anyị lewe ma ha aga atughari uche ha.

The playwright here indicates that church shouldn’t be a problem in the society be it Catholic, Anglican, Redeem, Winners etc for we all are one and are worshipping one supreme God.

Ignoble Behavior or Characters among Youths:

The playwright through this play aims at changing the immoral acts in the society which can be seen as he displayed in the Ugomma’s life. The playwright is not comfortable with youths’ characters and tends to dramatically reconstruct the damages in the society. In his effort to reconstruct youths characters in the society today, he passed his message through the chief character; Ugomma in the play and said thus:

...Obioha : Biko nne, i si na o bu ginị na-egbu gi?

Ugomma: A choro m igwa gi na ihe ahụ apụtala nsogbu

Obioha: Ihe a bu gini?

Ugomma: A di m ime

Obioha: Gini?

Ugomma: A di m ime

Obioha: Biko, sikwanu n'aka onye?...

The playwright at the end of the play, called for immoral change among the youths in the society and advised them to adhere to the sensible words of their parents. Echebima indicated his social reconstruction through the character of Ezeoha where it was seen as:

Oge obula anyi bu ndi nne na nna unu na-agwa unu okwu, unu a na-akpo anyi Okongwu na ndi iberibe.... I hulanu ya ugbua.

Conclusion

The study 'social reconstruction in drama' has exposed people to various concepts and ideas of how dramatists through their plays correct societal ills like corruption, intimidation, church sentiments etc. they advocate for a positive change in the society through their writings. This study has made the masses to know that playwright sensitizes the society on the need to embrace a positive change. The playwright visualizes the society and reveals same to the masses. He believes that the power for change lies in the pen. The playwrights in their plays have critically exposed certain factors that can bring about social changes in the society that should either be shunned or emulated for the growth and development of the society. They presented issues prevalent in the society and therefore it is no doubt that *Okwe Agbaala* and *Ugomma* were able to clearly depict social reconstruction at its peak.

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