

NIGERIAN PLAYWRIGHTS, THE BURDEN OF HISTORY AND THE NOTION OF NATIONHOOD

Azeez Akinwumi Sesan

Abstract

*The patriotic zeal of nation building involves every Nigerian, irrespective of social status, ethnic background, vocation and political affiliation. Through their plays, Nigerian playwrights have been reproducing the nation's history and historical events for the purpose of nation building. Playwrights such as Wale Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi and Ahmed Yerima have written historical plays that have significant reflection on the making of Nigeria as a nation. The position of this paper is that the way a playwright handles history may mar or make social relationship which is a catalyst to nation building. It is however discouraging that the Nigerian audience does not attach utilitarian values to plays, but they rather see them as means of entertainment. If carefully and properly read, plays contain latent messages that can promote democratic governance and the notion of nationhood in Nigeria. For critical discourse and analysis, Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* are selected, while the tenets of psychoanalysis and new historicism are adopted. It is observed in this paper that the past experiences of intra- and inter-tribal wars, as well as the Civil War, still affect national cohesion and harmony. Time past has its existential being in time present to attain a formidable future.*

Key words: History, War, Literature, Democratic Governance, Psychoanalysis.

Introduction

That literature is not made from vacuous space cannot be disputed. The rationale of this argument is found in the subject matter and thematic orientations of texts produced in Nigeria and the world over. It is therefore logical to say that literature is life because it (literature) draws its innuendoes and symbolic references from life at a particular age, period and historical epoch.

Before the introduction of modern written literature, traditional African theatre had been functional and utilitarian. Though improvisational, traditional African theatre drew its materials from the cosmology, social and collective history of a people. The plays of Duro Ladipo, Hubert Ogunde and Kola Ogunmola (from the Yoruba axis) were largely unscripted and improvisational. Scholars and critics have described (in separate publications) the contributions of the trio in the development of Nigerian theatre, particularly from Yoruba extraction.

Owing to the fact that most plays of this period were improvised, many of the plays in the Ogunde tradition are lost today because they were not properly scripted. The very few that are transcribed include Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso*, *Eda*, *Oba Moro*, *Oba Waja*, *Moremi* and Kola Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* and *Ife Owo*. Of all the plays of Duro Ladipo, *Moremi* was the most popular with regular performances on the stage and television. The subject matter and themes of the plays of these doyens of African (Yoruba) theatre were largely drawn from the myth and history of the people.

The establishment of the University College, Ibadan, in 1948 enhanced the emergence of literary theatre in English. With the use of a "foreign" tongue (English), theatre was far removed from the majority of Nigerian audience that had much facility with their indigenous languages. Besides, the story became textualised and the performance became institutionalised. The reasonable number of Nigerian audience saw this as a way of excluding them from the theatre. The emergence of literary theatre in English put the country (Nigeria) on the world map of theatre through the laudable contributions of ace playwrights such as

James Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, J.P Clark, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande and Ahmed Yerima. The literary theatre (from script to performance) was well thought of, more organised and polished in plot than the traditional Nigeria theatre that was largely characterised by improvisation.

The playwrights of the modern tradition envision different ideologies that tend towards the attainment of the notion of nationhood. Through their engagement of historical events and epochs in their various literary texts, the playwrights, explicitly or by implication, entrench the notion of nationhood in the minds of their audience. Nationhood, in this paper, is taken to mean the sense of believing in one nation in a multiethnic society. Nationhood in Nigeria is believed to be unity in diversity, in the multiethnic and multicultural setting of the country. With this, individuals in the country are expected not to prioritise ethnic loyalty above the national loyalty. Nigerian playwrights are therefore expected to underplay the thematic thrust of ethnic loyalty in their literary texts. For the realisation of sustainable nationhood in Nigeria, individuals should always put others and the nation first in their thoughts and actions. The principle of nationhood guides the leadership style of Harcourt Whyte in *Hopes of the Living Dead*. He puts the well-being of others before his. This is shown in his speech while addressing the fellow inmates in the lepers' hospital:

HW Now, I want everybody to remember this. We all are part of this land. We are not fighting the people. We are fighting for the people. We are fighting for the simple things which everybody wants. The strong or the sick; Fulani or Ijo; man or woman; Yoruba or Ibibio: old and young; Hausa or Urhobo; rich or poor, Kanuri or Ibo: everybody wants one thing in life. We all want to go to sleep at night in peace, and to wake up in the morning with trust that there will be food for the stomach, a good day's work for the hands, and a roof over the head to return to. Who is the madman here who does not want just these? Let the person raise up his hand.

(*Hopes of the Living Dead* 58)

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By utilising the resources of history in their texts, Nigerian playwrights also present the notion of nationhood through individual or collective heroism. In this paper, history is taken to be a discursive link between the past and the future through the present. The journey to the future of a nation depends on how the crises (political, economic and social) of the past are managed. The sense of history of a nation can make or mar the attainment of sustainable nationhood in a country characterised by multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity.

Playwrights and the Burden of History

The imaginative use of history within the gamut of literature is not novel. Classical and English writers such as Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Seneca, William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and T.S. Eliot, to mention but a few, have used history in their plays and other creative literatures. In Nigeria, the practice is not nascent. Implicitly or explicitly, writers have always made use of different forms of history (social history, political history, cultural history etc.) in their literary texts. It has been observed by Sesan (2011:88) that:

Every writer is a writer in history, but the questions are whose history and for what purpose. One of the reasons for historical documentation, preservation and propagation is to forge a nondisruptive link among the unborn, the living and the dead. There is no nation nor continent in the world that has no history or historical period. •

The complex and dynamic experience of Nigeria makes history inevitable in national (re)-orientation because time past and time present have a co-habitation in time future. The continuity and survival of any nation usually depends on the attitude to history in any of the oral mode, written mode or film medium. The significance of history in sustainable national development informs its varied forms of textualisation. Dramatists and playwrights are not found wanting in the documentation

of history. Through pragmatic criticisms, it can be said that history plays transcend mere recollection and documentation of the past. It is rather an apocalyptic projection into anticipated future events. Soyinka, for instance, in his play, *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), has projected into the bleak future of Nigeria due to the factors of anarchy, social and national insecurity, chaos, ethnicity and fratricidal wars. In another study, Sesan (2009:181) has observed that:

Soyinka, in his play, *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), foresaw the state of anomy in the country. The gathering of the tribes in the play is a representation of euphoria of independence celebration by the major and minor ethnic tribes in Nigeria. The symbolic use of "half child" in the play states the uncertainty and unpredictability of Nigerian future. Almost five decades after independence, human capital development in the country is still below expectation.

Soyinka's play, *A Dance of the Forests*, engages in the harmonisation of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of Nigeria and how the notion of nationhood and true federation of states are being threatened.

Layers of history are endless in the production and textualisation of literary discourses, social discourses and cultural discourses such as film, proverbs and lineage poetry. This situation justifies why history becomes the pre-text and/or hypertext in the volume of plays produced in the country and across the African Continent. Thus, history becomes the collective property of writers of imaginative literature and other performers. In the making of a play and other literary texts, history is not a monolithic entity. It yields rather to the psychology of the writer and the end to which the play is to be put. This is why it is not uncommon to see the same history serving as an informing text of two different plays. For instance, the history of the 18th century war between Ijaye and Ibadan informs *Ijaye* by Wale Ogunyemi and *Kurunmi* by Ola Rotimi. The two playwrights

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nevertheless make different social statements in the course of the play development and its resolution.

The moribund state of the study of history in Nigerian schools makes history plays and other literary texts significant for continuity and posterity. History naturally emerges as a major site for cultural contestation as the sense of history of a people shapes their sense of accomplishment and self-esteem (Okunoye, 87). This view is evident in Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* as in the character and characterisation of Titubi, the spoilt daughter of Alhaja Kabirat. After the (un)conscious recollection of Moremi's history, Titubi is resolute in her decision to become another history in the history of struggle and resistance. With her resolution to embark upon the mission, Titubi sees herself as history.

TITUBI: You taught me her story, mama. When I was still too young to understand. But I've never forgotten: Moremi, the brave woman of Ile-Ife, who saved the race. Now, when I wear this necklace, I feel a passion deeper than any passing vogue. It is as if I have become history itself (*Morountodun*, 20).

The recollection of Moremi's achievement by liberating Ile-Ife from the Igbo marauders empowers and enlivens Titubi's strength. This shows the significance of history in the course of human journey towards the attainment of collective goals. We can actually achieve true federation of states and have sustainable notion of nationhood if we critically examine the thorny parts of our history. The significance of history in the making of man and society is given in the poem below:

Man made history
And
History made man
What we do today

Is history tomorrow.
(Sesan, (2013): *Moral Poems for Children*)

Moremi's history of patriotism and nationhood of centuries ago does become a template for modern historical discourses of patriotism, heroism and nationhood.

A poor harmonization of the past and the present is a precursor to discontinuity in future. In Nigeria, there is a disconnect between the socio-political realities and the historical understanding of the past actions, events and personalities. This lack of sustainable historical understanding among the leaders and the entire citizenry becomes a clog in our unending search for true nationhood and admirable federalism. Intra- and inter-ethnic violent conflicts and wars, religious crisis, military and unhealthy political rivalry characterise Nigerian federation and notion of nationhood. The cord of fraternity and brotherhood is snapped during various fratricidal and genocidal wars recorded in the past. What is oneness and nationhood when brothers engage in fierce wars against one another in avoidable conflicts? In Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, the logicity of war against one's brother has been questioned. It is a wasteful and senseless venture in the opinion of Balogun Ibikunle, as reproduced in the excerpt below:

IBIKUNLE: Battles...I have seen many, my brothers. Ogunmola calls me coward! As Balogun of this land of Ibadan I know too well the horrors of battle, my brothers. And I know too that, of all battles, the battle against one's own blood-brothers the agony of war brought upon one's own brothers, is most horrid and heart-breaking. Ogunmola calls me a coward? Marriages and festivals which we here in Ibadan have had in common with our brothers, the people of Ijaiye have made us one blood. He calls me coward. Who here in Ibadan has no brother in Ijaiye either by direct line of blood or by marriage? Osi, son of Osundina! How many blood-branches do you have in Ijaiye? (*Kurunmi*, 50).

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The aftermath of the said war was the wanton destruction of lives and property and the severance of filial and social bonds among kith and kin. The sense of brotherhood was negatively affected at the end of the war.

Like the Ibadan-Ijaiye War, the Nigeria-Biafra War was a battle of brothers who were up in arms against one another. Some condemnable political events such as thuggery, vandalism and gross electoral misconduct as well as ethnic nationalism of the Northern and Eastern Nigeria, military coups of January 15 and July 27 of 1966 served as catalysts for the Civil War (1967-1970) that the country witnessed. Osofisan (1998a:12) is of the opinion that since the January 15, 1966 Coup, Nigeria has been in a state of anomy. He writes:

From that moment, it seems, we signed our covenant with anomy. That primitive shedding of blood, which we applauded – foolishly now, in retrospect – was to be the opening prologue to a series of catastrophic events which would after usher in the Age of Terror, which has now set upon us, and from which there seems to be no immediate possibility of reprieve. Certainly since that red dawn, violence, callousness and a rampant and predatory cannibalism have become our common, defining traits.

The sense of nationhood is often threatened in the atmosphere of terror, anarchy and absolute insecurity. The catastrophic effects of the civil war on the psyche of individual Nigerians have been recorded in different genres of imaginative literature. To achieve a realistic national reintegration which is a forerunner to the attainment of nationhood, all Nigerians, irrespective of socio-religious or political affiliations, should be involved directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly, in the affairs of the nation. In a true sense of nationhood, there should be collective heroism as against individual heroism. With collective heroism, everybody will have a sense of belonging and involvement in the good,

the bad and the ugly affairs of the nation. The consequence of collective heroism is comfort, national security and fulfilling life for all. While addressing the fellow inmates in the lepers' hospital (in the speech quoted earlier), Harcourt Whyte encourages them on the need for concerted actions to achieve better life for all. Through oneness and collective action, the lepers are able to achieve their goals of comfortable and decent life. For a true sense of nationhood, every Nigerian should have access to basic necessities and amenities of life.

Nigeria's threat to nationhood is internally-generated and externally-motivated. Foreign powers, for selfish political and socio-economic gains instigate violent political crises to enthrone and/or dethrone political leaders through coups as well as civil disobedience. Coups and internal strife have been initiated, financed and sponsored by Europe and America. All these violent conflicts have really endangered a true sense of nationhood across Africa. In *A Play of Giants*, Wole Soyinka has expressed his displeasure with European and American interests in African politics, which are both questionable and egocentric. This displeasure is shown in the following dialogue between Professor Batey and the 2nd Russian:

BATEY. (*Studies them both for a while*). Isn't this interesting? You sustain this man in power for years with most sophisticated weaponry. You train his secret service and condone the so-called acts of suppression against his own people. Yet in your hearts, you despise him.

2nd RUSSIAN. Yes, a common butcher. We knew him. We had close studies of him sent regularly by our men, not just Western reports. But in any case, we did not create him. The British did. They sustained him in power, backed by the Americans. Then they disagreed. The pupil had more than mastered the game of his masters. So we stepped in to fill the vacuum. I admitted to you, Mr. Professor, we are pragmatists. (*A Play of Giants*, 55).

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In this ugly global politics that affects the true sense of nationhood, Africa and the Arabian Peninsula have been the worst hit.

These playwrights make use of history in their texts to espouse some significant past and present social realities. This is done with varying attitudes. Femi Osofisan, in *Morountodun*, for instance, makes use of the myth and history of Yoruba nationality to preach the "gospel" of nationhood through the character of Moremi of Ile-Ife and Titubi respectively. The playwright, Femi Osofisan, suggests at the end of the play, that most crises that threaten the realization of nationhood can be averted if dialogue is allowed. This situation is seen in the dialogue of the director at the end of the play.

DIRECTOR: Oh, you're still there? I suppose you'd like to know how the story ended? [*He walks back a bit. The actors go on about their business, unconcerned.*] Well, the old man was right. Marshal and his men did not come back. It was, you'll admit, a suicidal mission?... In the end, peace came, but from the negotiating table, after each side had burned itself out...
(*Morountodun*, 78-79).

The above shows that the playwright sees war as senseless and wasteful. War of any kind retards progress and militates against oneness which is needed for the attainment of nationhood. The overall attitude of Nigerian playwrights to history is the justification of history to maintain continuity and to adjust from the inactions of the past that may mar sustainable development and nationhood. Soyinka, for instance, in the *Play of Giants* generalises the history of African problem to bad leadership and foreign intervention in the internal affairs and politics of African countries. The problem still persists in the contemporary African countries. Nigerian playwrights, therefore, have different motivations for the use of history in their texts. One the basic motivations for using history in play texts is to right the wrongs of the past for better conditions of living in the present and the future.

Psychoanalysis and New Historicism: A Practical Discourse

A literary text has an open-ended discourse. This is possible because of different theories that are available for textual analysis and interpretation. A text (literary, social and cultural) impacts on the psyche of individuals that have contact with it. Our level of consciousness is raised from the latent message and meaning derived from a text. In his discussion of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud gives the tripartite structure of the human psyche as the id, the superego, and the ego. The id is an unconscious part of the psyche. The imbalance among the three components of human psyche may bring about chaos and anarchy. The id, which can be a negative force in the human psyche, gets moderated through the morality of the super ego.

In *Kurunmi*, the war has a catastrophic end on the Yoruba nation. Lives were lost and property destroyed, Kurunmi, the war general of Ijaiye lost all his children to the war. In his level of consciousness, he saw the futility of the war. He blames his failure at the battle on his proud and laments as follows:

KURUNMI: When a leader of men has led his people to disaster, and what remains of his present life is but a shadow of his proud past, then it is time to be leader no more. (*Drinks poison from calabash bowl.*) (*Kurunmi*, 93).

Kurunmi has failed to ensure oneness of the Yoruba nation because of his haughtiness and blind determination to uphold tradition. As an Aare Ona Kakanfo (the war generalissimo), he is expected to knit the Yoruba nation together. The realisation of his failure comes too late when the harm has already been done. His death is not heroic as he wants us to believe. Kurunmi is nobody but an example of a megalomaniac leader with egocentric attitude to protect personal honour to the detriment of the masses and the nation. This is seen in his address to Abogunrin and Mosadiwin. Even when death stares him in the face, Kurunmi does not want to see himself humiliated. He says:

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KURUNMI: My curse upon you both, If my body stays here for the vultures of Ibadan to peck at. My curse upon you and your seeds for ever, if my skull serves as drinking-cup for Adelu. In the River Ose, where my honour was buried, there will you also bury my body. You will dam the river, and deep in the sand of its bed, you will hide my body. Then you will let the river flow again forever, over the oneness of my body and my honour. Go now and ready yourselves.

(Kurunmi 93-94)

Even at the point of death, the pride of Kurunmi does not desert him. From his death speech, it can be deduced that Kurunmi does not want to admit defeat like the proud warriors of the Nigerian Civil War. The catastrophic civil war ended with the Federal Government's pronouncement: "No victor, no vanquished." The pronouncement is hypocritical to give the false impression that Nigeria is still one, united nation.

At the end of Ibadan-Ijaiye War, Yoruba nationality never remained the same again. Similarly, after the Nigeria-Biafra War, Nigeria has never remained the same again. Instead of the expected federal nationalism, what the nation continues to witness after the civil war is ethnic nationalism. On this, Oriaku (2005:97) is of the opinion that:

Nigeria is not more united than it was in the pre-war years and in the Nigerian context nationhood has continued to be defined from the perspective of the interests of ethnic groups. This tendency has encouraged ethnic solidarity and worked against the cohesion of the Nigerian 'nation'.

The war has had negative impact on the psychological dispositions of Nigerians with ethnic or tribal diversities to the notion of nationhood.

In *Hopes of the living Dead*, all doubts of incapability are dispensed with. Through unity, perseverance and sincerity of purpose, Harcourt Whyte is able to lead his people towards the attainment of victory, by placing the collective well-being of the group over individual, personal interests, and

taking their destiny in their hands. This is demonstrated in the position of Harcourt Whyte in the following statement:

HW No! No! Rejected. For long, we depended on people outside – yes, the Whiteman, the missionaries, the black Givers-of-alms. (*Mimicking.*) “Beggars, here take...take...” When suddenly they withdrew their help, confusion gripped us, ripping us apart. Well, we’ve since learnt our lesson. We must depend on ourselves. There is no going back on that! (*Hopes of the Living Dead*, 112).

The success of Ola Rotimi in *Hopes of the living Dead* is recorded in its utilisation of the tenets of collective unconsciousness to create collective heroism. This collective heroism is achieved through the proactive leadership of Harcourt Whyte. For true national federalism and the sense of nationhood, every individual should be seen as a key player in the national affairs. Shaka (194) attests to this change in Ola Rotimi’s disposition in *Hopes of the Living Dead*, as against his previous historical plays:

Unlike his earlier historical plays in which he examined the leadership question within the framework of traditional concepts of leadership and followership, thereby creating decadent and reactionary heroes with individual consciousness, in *Hopes...*, his concept of leadership has now become radicalized, embracing a collective mass struggle in which ordinary working men and women are heroes. This is a radical departure from his usual tendency of viewing leadership as a prerogative of the aristocracy in which the only competent players are the Odewales, the Kurunmis and Ovonramwens of this world.

Collective heroism results from collective action which is the catalyst to the realisation of sustainable nationhood.

New Historicism is a relatively recent theoretical movement that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s for the interpretation and analysis of

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history texts. As a result of the less-than-objective interpretation of the past, history becomes a text rather than a series of empirically verifiable events (Dobie 177). History as text makes the proliferation of history plays and fictions possible. History plays go beyond mere excursion into the past, attempting to provide a link between the past and the future, and to re-examine the past misdeeds and mistakes for positive future actions. This is to ensure continuity and to socialize individuals in their cultural and historical contexts.

History occurs within the time frame of 'then, now and later'. Playwrights and other writers of historical works are therefore expected to demonstrate considerable level of dexterity in the fusion of style, form and content of historical works. In *Morountodun*, Femi Osofisan has been able to achieve this by psychologically and culturally presenting Titubi within two historical epochs in Yoruba history – the legendary bravery of Moremi and the factual Agbekoya uprising. It can thus be said that the characterisation of Titubi in the play is informed by mythical, legendary and psycho-historical elements as well as the burning urge for heroism and adventurism. For Titubi, the whole arrangement begins as a play where it is possible to move in and out of a character.

When Titubi is gripped with fear, she engages in psycho-historical invocation of the Moremi figure to strengthen herself for the upcoming task, as shown in the following excerpt:

SUPERINTENDENT: [*Applauding*] You'll live, woman. Very, very good. Even I was impressed. If you can remember all that, you'll make it. **TITUBI:** [*Unmoved*] Thank you.

SUPERINTENDENT: Well, all that remains is for me to wish you good luck. [*He offers his hand. She does not take it.*]

TITUBI: Goodbye. [*He looks at her for sometime, in silence, and then goes out. TITUBI walks slowly round the cell.*]

They are already outside, he said. They'll soon be here! I ... I am afraid, suddenly... [*Pause*] No! Moremi was not afraid! [*Snaps her fingers backwards over her head.*] Fears go away!

Doubt and trembling, retreat from me!... [*She retrieves the Moremi necklace from the floor and looks at it.*] She was a woman like me. And she waited all alone, for the Igbo warriors. All her people went into hiding, but she alone stood and waited. I can feel her heart beating, like mine... But how lucky you were, Moremi! How I envy you! Look, I have only the dampness of these walls around me, to wish me goodbye. But you, you had the scent of the market around you. The smell of fish, The redolence of spices, sweet decay of wood, smell of rain-washed thatches, the tang of mud at your feet... ah Moremi! What were your thoughts at that lonely moment? Can I read your mind...? Maybe it would strengthen me... (*Morountodun*, 30-31).

To gain her courage for the risky task ahead of her, Titubi embarks upon the psychological migration into the soul of Moremi – her mythico-historical model in a similarly risky venture. This gives Titubi the audacity of hope in the success of her risky venture.

In history plays, fact and fiction co-mingle and the playwrights show this in the complication of their plot. The battle between the peasant farmers (Agbekoya) and the government is brought to an end through negotiation as disclosed by the Director.

DIRECTOR: Oh, you're still here? I suppose you'd like to know how the story ended. [*He walks back a bit. The actors go on about their business, unconcerned.*] Well, the old man was right. Marshal and his men did not come back. It was, you'll admit, a suicidal mission?... In the end, peace came, but from the negotiating table, after each side had burned itself out. Yes, that's History for you... But still, you must not imagine that what we presented here tonight was the truth. This is a theatre, don't forget, a house of dream and phantom struggles. The real struggle, the real truth, is out there, among you, on the street, in your homes, in your daily living and dying... We are actors, and whatever we present here is more artifice, assembled for your entertainment. Tomorrow the play

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may even be different. It depends. Some of the scenes for instance seemed to be...
(*Morountodun*, 79).

The above shows that there is a kind of disconnect between the 'real' history and fictionalised history, thus creating a lacuna in artistic vision.

Coercion cannot be used to ensure nationhood. This is the argument of Soyinka in *A play of Giants*, where he exposes the despotism of past African leaders like 'President for Life' Macias Nguema (late) of Equatorial Guinea, 'Emperor for Life' Jean-Baptiste Bokassa, of Congo Kinshasa and 'Life President' Field-Marshal El-Haji Dr. Idi Amin of Uganda. These historical figures used coercion to create the false impression of nationhood among their different nationalities. In *A Play of Giants*, Gunema, a representative of such leaders, reflects their views as follows:

GUNEMA. My subjects, they are very wonderful how they plot against Benefacio Gunema. When I look at each one of my ministers, or army officer, he know I am looking into the heart, into the very soul of his village. He know that I see through his head into the head of his wife, his children, his father and mother and grandfather and uncles and all his dependents, all his kith and kin, living or dead... yes, including the dead ones. It is he who must choose whether they lie in peace in their graves because, la culpa bili dad, the-guilt, it extends beyond the grave.

(*A Play of Giants*, 16-17).

The above situation may not encourage the spirit of nationhood among the citizenry. For sustainable nationhood, the national governments in Nigeria and other African countries should ensure participatory democratic governance, to enable the citizens see themselves as being more relevant in the sustenance and development of their respective nations.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of history in imaginative literature, particularly in the genre of drama. Four history plays – Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* and Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* have been employed for the study. With reference to the concepts of psychoanalysis and New Historicism, the paper examines how these plays can impact positively on our sense of nationhood. In this paper, history is seen as a text that promotes the making of other texts, in the different genres of prose, poetry and drama. The paper identifies proactive and pragmatic leadership, cooperation and altruism, as necessary ingredients for the attainment of true nationhood. No nation can thrive and be united in the atmosphere of chaos, anarchy and war. The psychological wounds of fratricidal wars are often indelible, and thus should be avoided to facilitate the emergence of a truly united nation.

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