

National Consciousness and Multiculturalism in Ododo's Dramaturgy

by

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Abstract

This paper deploys the literary methodological mode of research to investigate national consciousness and multiculturalism in Sunnie Ododo's dramaturgy, and holds that his dramaturgy reflects national consciousness in a multi-cultural Nigeria, and affirms him as a nationalistic playwright. The base of this assertion is that his plays harness Nigerian ethnic diversities that assist national development in light of the crucial need for stability and equity in Nigeria. Hence, this paper also highlights Ododo's aesthetic value for adequate development and revitalization of multiculturalism in the context of national unity, and in the preservation of multi-ethnic identity.

Keywords: National, consciousness, Multi-culturalism, ethnic, Dramaturgy

Introduction

One of the most essential feelings and philosophies that set a country in constant motion towards freedom and progress is national consciousness. National consciousness embodies good governance, accountability, progressive leadership and followership. It is sense of pride and identity displayed by a nation's citizenry particularly its political leaders, its literary statesmen and its religious leaders. National consciousness is displayed in sports, in scholarship and in many other sectors of the human society. It manifests in form of movements founded by patriotic group of people, social and literary critics to combat oppressive governments, retrogressive forces, philosophies, policies and human conducts that bring down the progress and dignity of a country.

National consciousness points to awareness of nationhood. Frantz Fanon defined national consciousness as 'the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people' (119). Allen (1994) notes that consciousness is the state of being conscious, that is, the physical and mental state of being awake and fully aware of one's environment, thoughts and feelings (288). National consciousness implies a state of being that is spiritually, physically and mentally conscious of one's environment and the necessary feeling of bonding that goes with such awareness. To be nationally conscious is to identify with the spirit and aspirations of the nation as one soul in possession of one destiny and one identity (Geoffrey O. Ozumba 149).

We now turn to the concept of Multiculturalism, a concept which points to ethnic, cultural, linguistic and historical pluralism of a given society. In *Towards a definition of Multiculturalism* by Caleb Rosado the point is made that:

Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society(3).

Rosado further argues that Multiculturalism also entails *acknowledging* the validity of the cultural expressions and contributions of the various groups. This is not to imply that all cultural contributions are of equal value and social worth, or that all should be tolerated. Some cultural practices are better than others for the overall betterment of society (4). The point has further been expressed that:

Multiculturalism is simply a national life in which different cultures drawn from ethnic nations that are original to a nation exist. Multiculturalism expresses ethnic diversity, accommodation and tolerance. It is a folk concept in Nigeria which acknowledges ethnic pluralism and the need for collective progress. Multiculturalism as a term has its historical roots. "Multiculturalism" came into wide public use in the West during the early 1980s in the context of public school curriculum reform. Specifically, proponents argued that the content of classes in history, literature, social studies, and other areas reflected what came to be called a "Eurocentric" and male bias. Few if any women or people of colour, or people from outside the Western European tradition, appeared prominently in the curriculums of schools and colleges in the United States. This material absence was also interpreted as a value judgment that reinforced unhealthy sexist, ethnocentric and even racist attitudes (Gregory Jay 1).

Multiculturalism has its own demerits, it promotes acculturation, assimilation and ethnocentrism which violates human rights an even attempt to murder historical truth. Hence in Nigeria what is operational in the guise of multiculturalism is critical multiculturalism. It preserves constitutionally and through recognition distinct ethnic groups with no vision to amalgamate them as one culture. It allows different cultures to exist side by side in a nation. Gregory Jay notes that multiculturalism critiques the former culture of white supremacy, a culture of legalized bigotry and discrimination, and so advocate an emphasis on the separate characteristics and virtues of particular cultural groups (3) when cultural diversity is a feature of the society as a whole, including all the various ethno-cultural groups, it is called Multiculturalism (John W. Berry 7).

Nigeria is a multicultural society, a society that depends on the positive cooperation of its ethnic nationalities for survival. This means that national consciousness is both ethnic and national. It is a country in which ethnic nationalism competes strongly with national nationalism. Because of the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian federation, ethnic platforms stand out as veritable sources of contestation and negotiation for a better deal. Politicians derive benefits and ascend to positions of trust and responsibility from the ethnic viaducts. Ethnic consciousness is the consciousness of ethnic nations not the consciousness of the Nigerian nation. What is meant by national consciousness in this study is simply national consciousness: The consciousness of the Nigerian nation state.

Scholars like Mbaku John, Pita Agbese and Kimenyi Mwangi are of the view that ethnicity is the cultural characteristic that connects a particular group of people to each other. The concept is rooted in the idea of societal groups, marked especially by shared nationality, ethnic affiliation, religious faith, shared language or cultural and traditional origin and background. Ethnic groups as “human groups (other than kinship groups) held together by the belief in their common origins, provides a basis for the creation of a community” (61). Here the emphasis is placed on a set of beliefs not biological traits (race) or objective group characteristics (religion, language). However, ethnicity can be seen as referring to differences in language, religion, colour, ancestry and culture to which social meanings are attributed and around which identity and group formation occur (Nagel, 443).

Literature and National Consciousness

The most important literature all over the world is the literature that breeds socio-political, cultural, and economic consciousness. This declaratory statement is born out of the fact that such a literature brings change and progress to human life. The form of a literary piece or how a literary work says a thing may be interesting but if such a work is denied the promethean impulse and fire it cannot be part of societal consciousness.

In Nigeria, drama came into flowering since the 1960's. the major and well known dramatists include Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Kole Omotosho, Bode Sowande, Tunder Fatunde, Wale Ogunyemi, Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme. Others are Olu Obafemi, Bode Osanyin, Ben Agbeyegbe, Akanji Nasiru, Segun Oyekunle, Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze and Sam Ukala. Nigeria is a multicultural nation state blessed with very fertile creative artists. It is an African country with the largest number of creative artists who are dedicated to national integration, peace and stability. The writings of Nigerian dramatists have political temperament and embody the question of national consciousness. This means that we cannot separate politics from literature of Nationalism. This perhaps is the reason Charles Nnolim clearly pontificates that:

The broadest terms as political any literary endeavour in which the author's concerns with public themes and public welfare are predominant; especially any themes that extend beyond concerns of the individual self and embrace the collective destiny of nations or the masses. Politics enters literature at those times when the fate or destiny of peoples or classes are locked in the death-throes of survival, when continuity in a people's way of life is threatened; when alien forces by way of military forces or colonial invasion endanger a people's future or make that future uncertain; and, in our body politic, when the vultures of corruption descend to devour a people's cherished ethical religious or moral values (6, 7).

Nnolim's reflection on the literature of nationalism is in tandem with the postulation of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* where he wrote that when "the native... turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, and a national literature (179). A true literature of any society is that which fights on the side of national consciousness. Binebai notes that:

National drama has solutions to the problems of the nation not the problems of the economic buccaneers and political imps. Between the dramatist who writes as a voice of vision for the oppressed and the dramatist who writes to celebrate the feelings, ideology, philosophy and psyche of government who is the true apostle of national development? In a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic continent like Africa and nation state like Nigeria, any drama or theatre that is configured to improve the condition of the people falls within the range of national development. (96).

Nigerian playwrights have long concerned themselves with dramas that deal with the challenges of national unity as a result of the centrifugal nature and ethnocentric struggles amongst ethnic nationalities that make up the nation. Their plays have evolved a critical response to these experiences. Drama and theatre are fundamental and veritable cultural instruments which have enormous potential and power of engagement. Drama goes beyond its traditional aesthetic capacity to the prosecution of its utilitarian function where it demonstrates great power of social edification and revolutionary conscientisation. Olu Obafemi succinctly captures this when he points out that:

The potential to utilize the theatre to positively mediate the human, political and economic conditions of our people. I believe that it is the frightful awareness of the potential of arts. (especially the theatre) to mobilize the laboratory consciousness of people against state falsehood that politicians and apologetic state agencies show greater reluctance across the world especially the world of the southern hemisphere (21).

Sunnie Ododo is one of the most influential new generation playwrights in the drama and theatre circle of Nigeria. He is theorist, a trans-discursive writer and poet. He is a winner of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) literary prize in drama and has contributed to the practice and theory of drama and theatre. His dramaturgy powerfully captures the subject of multiculturalism and national consciousness. A theme which cuts across his drama *Hard Choice* (2011), Libretti: *Return from the Void* and *Vanishing Vapour* (2012) and even his poem collection, *Broken Pitchers* (Kraft 2012). Ododo is a writer with great passion for national consciousness. His creative imagination is tranquil and follows the course of the fundamental laws of nature. He stands up for the cause of national consciousness in a multicultural setting like Nigeria and asserts his identity as a national dramaturge in a world of fading moral values and diminishing collective identity. In the proceeding paragraphs I shall subject to critical investigation the subject of national consciousness and multiculturalism in Sunnie Ododo's dramaturgy.

National Consciousness and Multi-Culturalism in Ododo's Dramaturgy ***Hard Choice***

Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* is one of the most effective dramas on national consciousness that recently came out of the creative vineyard of Africa. In this drama Ododo put to debate the significance of multiculturalism represented by two major ethnic groups in Nigeria, Ibo and Yoruba. The multi-cultural nature of the Nigerian nation state has for a long time brought about ethnic rivalry and it is the reason for ethnocentrism, discrimination, oppression and ethnocentrism. These negative influences on the Nigerian polity are vividly condemned in *Hard Choice*.

Ododo sets out to first of all show the benefits and strength of a multi-cultural or ethnically plural society. The Ibo kingdom of Emepiri was militarily assisted by the King Iginla led Yoruba kingdom of Igedu two decades ago when Emepiri kingdom was about to be annexed by Tanaka warriors. In appreciation of the monumental assistance offered by the Igedu Warriors, Eze Okiakoh gives out his daughter's hand in marriage to Prince Oki of Igedu kingdom. These are cultural and social practices that unite a plural society. Ododo in this drama dramatises his call for the appreciation of cultural diversity, tolerance and the formation of a new society where critical multiculturalism stands side by side with uncritical multiculturalism. The argument by thinkers of Emepiri Kingdom against the interethnic marital union between princess Azingae and Prince Oki is fuelled by the fear of losing Emepiri kingdom of the Ibos to the Yoruba Kingdom of Igedu. These are very strong and even emotion laden views, traditional opinions that hinder interethnic marriages in Nigeria. It is the defense and preservation of ethnic sovereignty and critical multiculturalism that the like of Chief Ubanga unite with Queen Amaka of Emepiri kingdom to abduct the royal crown of King Iginla on the wedding ceremony of Prince Oki and princess Azingae. The resolution of the conflict in the drama dictates the direction and judgment of Ododo in this conflict of ethnic differences and intolerance.

In the characters of Eze Okiakoh and Princess Azingae Ododo's voice of national consciousness and celebration of multi-culturalism as practiced in Nigerian is heard loudly. Eze Okiakoh has a sense of ethnic tolerance and diversity of culture. He is a prototypal character who represents national conscience and who sides with the clamour for national integration. His acceptance and clamour for interethnic marriage in the drama attests to his endorsement of the new world to emerge after his exit from the throne. Despite the opposition from his people Eze Okiakoh has this to say at the wedding ceremony of his daughter:

Love that binds and unites shall be your companion always. The freshness and purity of the morning dew shall be the sustaining tonic of this new home. The sweet-soothing spirit of our ancestor will forever abide by you two. God Himself shall be your guide. Like the butterfly and flower, so shall the fragrance of your romance attract peace to our different kingdoms. And there shall be no regret in coming together. So shall it be! (p.12).

The ideological contest between Eze Okiakoh and his opponent who go up against the possibility of an alien prince ascending the throne of Emepiri kingdom is captured vividly in the following dialogue:

Chief Ubanga: The Eze, I'm sorry for all of these. Our action too was precipitated for the common good of our people. Even though you overruled my position, I still maintain that the betrothal of the Princess to Prince Oki would indirectly throw our kingdom into slavery (p. 37).

Eze Okiakoh: And the only way to protest against my decision is to organise the theft of a royal crown of another kingdom? Does it occur to you that, that alone can bring a serious curse upon our kingdom forever? All crowns are ancestral properties linked to the divine centre of celestial realm that God himself superintends. When you invite hardship upon the very people you claim you want to protect, can God forgive you? No, He would move to set things right; and when He moves, who can stand? No one, or can you? (p. 37).

Chief Ubanga: I'm not persuaded your highness. The gods and God will never approve that an Igedu Prince becomes the King of Emepiri kingdom. Unfortunately, you're the only one who thinks otherwise just to keep faith with some unguided promises made behind your council of chiefs. This is a state affair and not a domestic one. Besides, it wasn't my idea. Yes, we planned a protest, but abducting the crown wasn't part of the plan (p. 37, 38).

Eze Okiakoh: If I may ask, whose idea? (p 38)

The new world which is to come from the marital unity of the princess and prince of Emepiri kingdom and Igedu point to Ododo's imagination of Nigeria as a country that should make progress even in its ethnic and cultural diversity. In Eze Okiakoh, princess Azingae and the foundation of the resolution in *Hard Choice* Ododo imagines and reconstructs a new plural society symbolic of Nigeria where the forces working against its workability as a multicultural entity is crushed. Thus giving birth to the Nigeria of his dream which has been eluding the nation for generations running. Both in terms of character creation, thematic rendering and plot ordering *Hard Choice* emblematises national consciousness in a multicultural milieu. Princess Azingae is a character that bears the heroic mark of sacrifice.

She represents national leaders who embrace denial of the self for the general good. In life there are people who live for themselves, there are others who live for themselves and for others and there are people who live essentially for others. This last class of people are very rare and they are the first rate humans. Princess Azingae belongs to this category. If a nation must move forward no matter where it is situated, no matter its plurality status it required leaders of Princess Azingae type who sacrifice for the emergence of a new world. Most African nations are not making progress because they do not have the Azingae type of leaders. Ododo in his drive for national liberation created a character of the Azingae model to demonstrate his robust idea of national consciousness. Azingae represents a leader who sacrifices her life and comfort to erect a new world of multi-cultural sensibility and sensitivity. *Hard Choice* is a protest tragedy that owes its success to the pedagogic death of Princess Azingae. She displays patriotism and nationalism against the wishes of her mother by condescending to carry the burdens to the gods of Emepiri kingdom to avert war and save lives. When Prince Oki persuades her to escape with him she says:

It's too late Prince Oki. Can we really escape from our shadows? No. The life of your father, the King of Igedu Kingdom, and that of the entire people of Emepiri Kingdom are enmeshed in this weird atmosphere. It would only take a life, my life, to save them and you want me to walk away? (p.46, 47).

In response Princes Oki asks further:

Prince: What then happens to me?

Princess: Please don't be selfish. In due season, the sun and the moon shall fuse together for celestial edification. My love, my heart yearns for a new world devoid of acrimony and rancour amongst kingdoms. As I paint that world with my blood, you stay to animate it for all to enjoy... Kiss my feet and bid me farewell... (p.47).

Princess Azingae's tragic death is a death of heroic nationalism in a multicultural society. She decorates prince Oki with her coral beads to reaffirm the vision they both share. This vision is to unite the two kingdoms so that a new world may sprout. Ododo's proverbial words spoken by princess Azingae that "in death life is found and in life our dreams are secured" creates a deep impression of his sense of nationalism in which sacrifices are made for good things to happen. In *Hard Choice* the playwright creates a bold picture of national consciousness in a plural setting and sermonises that intolerance, ethnocentrism, or ethnic selfishness, individual egocentricity or greed should be sacrificed for the emergence of a new and better multicultural society where peace and justice shall reign.

To Return from the Void

This is a musical drama which takes an historical evaluation of the multi-cultural nation state of Nigeria from the colonial epoch to present times. The musical cord of the drama is spiced with dance and drama. *To Return from the void* narrates aesthetically in dance and song, the question of leadership and governance after independence. The drama which is set in the imaginary country of Dentarea symbolically captures geographical Nigeria, a multicultural nation with key ethnic nationalities, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo at the driver's seat. These groups are represented by Dankwushi, Awotoye and Nneka names which remind us of the leadership tussle between Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello or Tafewa Balewa, historical figures and statesmen.

The symbolism in this drama begins from the title *To Return from the Void*, there is also Danterea, Mother earth and her children Dankwushi, Awotoye and Nneka. *To Return to the Void* is an iconic metaphorical indicator that historically presents the extent Nigeria has come as a nation. Mother Earth typifies the Nigerian nation made sick by neglect and denial of healthy growth and pride. Mother earth recounts the history of colonial subjugation and exploitation. The history of Nigeria during colonialism, the struggle for decolonisation, the postcolonial era, the military rule and the post military era is narrated in one giant breath by the drama. In all these phases of existence, there seems to be no difference between the political and economic regimes of the colonial masters and the new national leaders drawn from the three groups and their acolytes. Issues of exploitation of the masses, economic cannibalism, corruption, election rigging, ethnocentrism, nepotism and sectionalism continue to destroy the political destiny of the Nigerian nation. The Character Bulldozer, a voice of reason, voice of conscience and voice of wisdom, is like a social gadfly, he represents the class of nationally conscious social critics who condemn and warn the people's blind and dangerous support for the already corrupt and criminal minded leaders of the majority of the group.

Political leadership failure, corruption and the dramatization of ethnicity in national politics has led to the emergence of the military in governance. In their words:

Military Leader: Fellow Dentarians. In consequence of the ethnicity chaos, disorder, mismanagement and misappropriation by the political leaders. The absolute military force has taken over. It has come to our notice that the country is drifting politically, economically and socially as a result of the myopic sight of the political leaders. From now on, all parastals are hereby dissolved. A special task force has been put in place to take care of your needs. However, all international agreements remain intact, and it is important to note that our country is a sovereign state; therefore, all external interventions will be vehemently resisted. All airports and seaports are hereby closed till further notice. Dentarians are advised to go about their daily businesses, peacefully. Long live the Absolute Military Force; long live Dentarians (p.50)

No doubt, the children of mother earth are the greedy leaders, the economic buccaneers, the vampires, pirates and political imps like Lejoka Brown in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has gone Mad again* and Chief Gomogomo in Christine Odi's *Destined to be*. The nation under these famous ethnic leaders refuses to be a nation because of ethnic interests. Nigeria is symbolised in *To Return from the Void* as a nation disunited by unity and united by disunity. The unity of Nigeria was psychologically abused and bruised. Thus ethnic nationalism sells more than national interest in the Nigeria socio-economic and political markets. Not even military incursion salvaged the situation.

Ododo in this musical drama critically portrays and treats power struggle amongst the three ethnic nations and how this has brought poverty and misery upon the Nigerian masses. The power play amongst the big ethnic groups resulted in the takeover of government and governance by the military with no solution in sight. Ododo holds ethnic politics especially the leadership tradition of ethnic leaders responsible for the numerous socio-economic and political imbroglios the nation is facing hitherto. *To Return from the Void* is a literary voice of a nationalistic playwright who is concerned about how to move Nigeria forward. The drama clamours for a new multi-cultural tradition in which the people that populate Nigeria will live together in peace and harmony. The author presents a picture of diversity management for the promotion of peace and national reconstruction. His philosophical drift in this music drama is aptly captured in the words of Ibrahim Gambari in a lecture titled "the challenges of Nation Building: the case of Nigeria." He states

Nation-building is about a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. Nation-building is therefore about building an intangible thread that hold a political entity together and gave it a sense of purpose (3).

The dedication to this song drama and *Vanishing Vapour* further establish the nationalistic vision of Ododo's dramaturgy. He states that the work is dedicated to all Nigerian heroes past, whose labour still vanishes in vain, may their spirits strike still all negative agents against progress and let veiled void yield to clear vision that indeed, the pain of yesterday becomes today's Gain (7).

This dedication summarises tersely the national consciousness the libretti dramatize. In most works of literature dedication contains the principal vision and the driving force behind the creation. This is exactly what Ododo has done in the publication of the two libretti.

The rhetorical centrality of Ododo's drama is the survival of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Nigerian state where national unity and progress of the masses should not be denied by centrifugal forces of ethnocentrism. He advocates a national life force in which national harmony, peace and progress are built from the perspective of critical multiculturalism or ethnic differences. In the drama, the children of Mother Earth are advised by spirits and given a clue to restore the failing health of Mother Earth, Nigeria but this is ignored by the disagreeing children. The song of Mother Earth which emphasises to Return from the Void and which conveys the instruction to the children not to celebrate ethnic division in politics of national interest is the solution to the attainment of National consciousness and the realisation of a formidable multicultural nation.

In this song dramatic text Ododo holds the ethnic leaders who parade as national leaders across the historical phases of Nigeria's existence responsible for the socio-political and economic woes of the country, hence, leaders who subject the masses to poverty, frustration and disorientation are put under critical reflection. This implies that Ododo is a true Nigerian in artistry, philosophy and practice. His national consciousness and defence of the Nigerian multiculturalism is not in doubt even outside his literary works. For long he has proven to be a Nigerian linguistically. He is a polyglot, who speaks and understands many Nigerian languages including Hausa, Yoruba, and Epira etc. The big picture of stomach federation placed over and above psychological unification of Nigeria as practiced by the narcissist ethnic leaders is condemned in strong terms by Ododo with the following words of Mother Earth and children:

To return from the void
Stop sowing among thorns
Let love be bore aloft
To return from the void
Let common sense prevail
In all your actions
And your goals you shall reach.

Children: Let common sense prevail
In all our actions
And our goals we shall reach (p.58)

Ododo in *To Return from the Void* is represented by the voice of Mother Earth. It is the playwright who is speaking through mother earth to Nigerian leaders to sink ethnocentric attitudes, greed and sectionalism to realise the genuine dreams of the Nigerian founding fathers.

Vanishing Vapour

I set out deliberately to give this dance drama a political interpretation in view of the fact that the subject under investigation is political. This position is authorised by the fact that a work of art means more than what a writer intends it to mean. As the negation of practical life, [art] is itself praxis, and indeed not simply on the basis of its genesis and the fact that, like every artefact, it is the result of activity. Just as its content is dynamic in itself and does not remain self-identical, in the course of their history the objectivised artworks themselves once again become practical compartments and turn toward reality. —Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 241) Thus my critical appraisal of the text, *Vanishing Vapour* runs along the line of deconstruction. Hiding behind his culture like most of the noticeable Nigerian playwrights, Ododo's dance drama, libretto, *Vanishing Vapour* dramatizes an Epira creation myth. In this narrative Anataku loses a very vital secret power of life called Irakwo to a woman known and called Aze. Demonstrating faith in Aze his wife, he asks her to collect the gift of Irakwo from Ohomorhi a spirit being. But Aze is persuasively trapped to join the circle of evil creatures to which she loses the Irakwo. Aze becomes a formidable member of the evil circle of witches and begins to seductively recruit other women into witchcraft with a command to unleash havoc on the society. But the men deploy the secret powers of another spiritual weapon Ireba to fight against the powers and atrocities of the evil coven.

This is an Ebira mythical narrative which explains the genesis of evil that parallels the Adam and Eve story in the bible. Eve is tricked by Satan to eat the forbidden fruit which she did and this is the genesis of evil. This implies that traditional Africa has archetypal mythical parallels that narrate stories existing in other cultures. The implication of this libretto is that gift of good given to a people is usually hijacked by evil forces to harm humanity. This mythical narrative has a political implication for Nigeria. Nigeria attained the gift of self-government after the colonial experience. Political power is a gift; an instrument of change and development. But it can be negatively or criminally appropriated to subject society to poverty, pain, economic terrorism and psychological frustration. The sacred gift of Irakwo is a symbol of power, power to positively affect the lives of the Ebira people. It then suggests that the gift of power can be positively or negatively deployed based on the philosophical and emotional drift of the holder of such power.

At independence the power of governance fell into the hands of home grown leaders but these leaders who are egocentric and ruled by persuasive evil forces and passion decide to use the gift of power negatively. They appropriate the power of leadership to bring pain, poverty and disharmony upon the Nigerian masses. Thus the women in *Vanishing Vapour* represent the forces of evil dragging Nigeria backward while the men that rose against the witches in the dance text embody the national forces that fight against, corruption, bad governance and all forms of evil bedevilling the Nigerian nation. The anti-witchcraft force in *Vanishing Vapour* includes strong voices in the democratic space of Nigeria, like civil liberties organisation, writers' community to which Sunnie Ododo belongs, religious institutions and human right activists. At independence Nigerian leaders ought to use the power of self-governance to better the lives of the Nigerian masses but up till now they choose to go the evil way. Nigeria therefore is a country caught in the rift between the forces of evil and good.

Although *Vanishing Vapour* is culture rooted and has a strong coating of cultural ornamentation of the Ebira tradition, its political message for Nigeria is very clear and loud. In this libretto, Ododo once again demonstrates a strong sense of national consciousness and love for his own country Nigeria, a plural society. Like *To Return from the Void*, *Vanishing Vapour* dramatizes the abuse of privilege and the wickedness of humankind which have been the bane of Nigeria's socio-economic and political development. Ododo presents his Ebira society as a microcosm of Nigeria in the dramatization of *Vanishing Vapour*. In this text poetic justice is achieved. Good at the end triumphs over evil forces. Anataku becomes the chief custodian of the Irapa after the defeat of the witches led by Aze, wife of Anataku. A high sense of national consciousness is displayed in the resolution of the conflict between the witches and the forces against their operation. The conflict in *Vanishing Vapour* is therefore resolved in the interest of the society which by imputation is the multi-cultural Nigerian nation. Ododo's narratives are imbued with very clear and upright didacticism. His dramaturgy constructs aesthetics of a literary style which deploys reflective rationality on the historical journey of Nigeria and the constant vanishing trend of good governance. The literary and dramatic exploits of Ododo helps us in appreciating the energetic correlation between nationalism and postcolonial literature.

Conclusion

The dramaturgy of Ododo makes no pretence about his voicing of national consciousness. It establishes him as a Nigerian dramatist with constant and consistent concern for national consciousness and his solutions to the efficacy of the Nigerian multiculturalism. From *Hard Choice, through To Return to the Void to Vanishing Vapour*, the theme of national consciousness was preponderate. The study discovers Ododo's idea of nationalism as a critical assemblage of political, economic, and cultural forces that make up a social formation which is beneficial to the masses in a multicultural setting. The Ododo's dramaturgy reveals spaces of ethnicity, multicultural discourse and national imaginary as a complex weave of political negotiation for the attainment of national consciousness. His dramaturgy is filled with persistent tropes and figures of nationalism that establish him as distinctive voice of national consciousness. More importantly, his dramatic text is a cultural discourse which informs and reforms his society. They present the historical destiny of the nation for reading. This implies that Ododo is comfortably situated in the loop of literary nationalism in Nigerian. His dramatic work is a liberating project against the melancholic national tragic experiences. There is no gainsaying that Ododo's dramaturgical force becomes part of an intellectual and artistic project of *critical* rationality motivated by a national consciousness that divulge, defies, reconceptualises and reconstructs the nation.

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