

# Nigerian Drama and Performance: The Aesthetics of Revolt in Tunde Fatunde's *Oga Na Tief Man*

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**Abstract:** *The lens of scholarship on Nigerian drama spans across its nature, scope and ideological commitment. The focus of this study is to simply take Nigerian drama as a committed art, a situation where art is focused on an aspect of reality with the aim to pass judgment. Therefore, the paper focuses randomly on some of the basic aesthetics of revolt in Fatunde's Oga Na Tief Man to show how the playwright advocates for a revolution of the masses against the ruling elites with the aim of bringing capitalism to an end and thereby establish a classless society. The result of the study shows that drama will continue to play an integral role in the daily struggle of an average Nigerian. Hence the conclusion that drama in Nigeria should eschew from luxury and be totally committed to the plight of citizens in their attempt to develop the nation further.*

**Keywords:** *Aesthetics, Nigerian Drama, Performance, Revolt*

## 1. Introduction

The motif of this essay is the understanding that revolution is a universal occurrence. Revolution has been experienced in different parts of the world at different historical periods. Revolutionary changes are often sought for in social, economic, cultural, and political structures of a society. Ayi Kwei Armah gives a perspective on revolution and communism and argues that:

There have been numerous revolutionary movements and countless insurrections in history, whether this be the history of Africa, Asia or the Western continents. Maji Maji, Hau Hau, Mau Mau are only the garbled names uncomprehending observers have given to some of Africa's recent insurrectionary movements. Such movements, wherever in the world they occur, tend to become communistic when the revolutionary momentum they generate is married to the ideal of universal justice (497).

Although Armah's view goes the way of achieving communism through revolution, which is not the intention of the present essay, there is a sense in which his submission on achieving the ideal of universal justice through revolution is apt and fresh.

The evolution of Nigeria as a nation state has been marked with many social and historical dimensions. The 1914 amalgamation brought together the Northern and Southern protectorates as Nigeria. The implication of this is that people of distinct cultural backgrounds and histories were merged in principle in terms of their relationship to the center while maintaining their cultural distance. This merger has produced a plethora of relationships as well as several attempts to interpret the destiny of such people and Nigeria itself. The interpretation has often produced a number of results that are either kind or unfair to humanity including the nature of colonialism on the country, the Nigerian Civil War, Military dictatorship, corruption, nepotism, the question of the Niger Delta, and recently the Boko Haram insurgency, among others. The writer cannot be isolated in this interpretation process since the image of the society which he/she is a part largely plays out in his/her writing, just as Eustace Palmer corroborates that "Literature generally evolves out of a people's historical and cultural experience" (2).

Every writer writes from a particular ideological stand point through which his/her attitude to life is revealed. By this means, the writer shows what he/she is accepting or rejecting. This tendency is summed up as ideology, aesthetics and protest which cover the attitude of the writer to the economic, social, cultural, religious, political and even educational lives of a people. Together, these concepts interplay in the daily struggle of the individual, class or group to show the opinion, belief, or doctrine that guide his/her or their conduct, appreciation to nature, and choices. In relation to the arts, ideology, aesthetics and protest combine to show the myth, belief and doctrine as well as those principles that guide and or underlay a work of art and express the objection, opposition, disapproval or dissent of the artist to certain societal standards. Hence, the tenor of this essay is that art, in this regard drama, is a means to achieving revolution as a panoramic survey of aesthetics of revolt in Tunde Fatunde's *Oga Na Tief Man* indicate.

## 2. Aesthetics

The concept of aesthetics calls to mind two things: philosophy and theory. By philosophy it implies dealing with the beautiful, that is, sense perception which will further imply "the systematic study of all the fine arts, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial" (Abrams and Harpham 4). The philosophy of aesthetics as developed by French writers during the later part of the nineteenth century has the view that:

...a work of art is the supreme value among human products precisely because it is self-sufficient and has no use or moral aim outside its own being. The end of a work of art is simply to exist in its formal perfection; that is, to be beautiful and to be contemplated as an end in itself (4).

Going by the above notion, aesthetics will then be viewed from a formalist perspective where art exists for its own sake without recourse to society.

However, aesthetics could also be viewed as "the theories and unspoken imperatives that govern literary creations of...writers – imperatives that could be pinpointed as certain constants that are decipherable as recognizable features" (Nnolim 86) of a particular people or age. In other words, Nnolim, by taking aesthetics from a theoretical dimension, implies the attempt to "decipher the well-spring" (86) of the writer's inspiration – "what it is that 'kicks ling in the stomach', as it were and following this, what it is that emerges when the finished work fulfils the artist's intention" (86).

Aesthetics refers to those set of principles that are concerned with the nature of beauty and how it is appreciated. Specifically, aesthetics calls to mind those principles or tenets which underlay the work of a particular artist or an artistic movement. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness.

As a critical term, Childs and Fowler explain aesthetics in three phases the first being aesthetic pleasure. According to them, Kantian defines aesthetic pleasure as:

That which is disinterested, the result of perceiving something not as a means but as an end in itself, not as useful but as ornamental, not as instrument but as achievement. To perceive it so is to perceive its 'beauty' (if it turns out to have any). Such beauty, being the counterpart to use or purpose, which largely depend on content, must spring from formal qualities, as must the special pleasures its perception gives rise to. Non-moral, non-utilitarian and non-acquisitive, this is the purest of the pleasures, the one least exposed to bias from areas outside the work of art (and therefore the one most appropriate for defining what 'art' is (3).

Closely associated with aesthetic pleasure is aesthetic appreciation. Thus, whereas aesthetic pleasure emphasises one's "experience of the work, which may be mistaken, untutored or injudicious"; aesthetic appreciation emphasises "the characteristics of the work, and implies a critical assessment of their 'beauty'" (3). Both presuppose aesthetic attention. Unless a work is regarded in the way indicated above – for what it is, not for what it is up to –, Childs and Fowler submit that:

Its aesthetic qualities, if any, are likely to go unperceived. For this reason works where the subject, or manner, deeply involves the reader are less likely to give aesthetic pleasure or to prompt aesthetic appreciation than those that encourage aesthetic attention by formal devices that lend aesthetic distance (3).

These writers conclude by saying that aesthetic perception is a blend of aesthetic pleasure and appreciation resulting in aesthesis of composition, complementarity and condensation.

Goring Paul, Jerry Hawton and Domhnall Mitchell explain aesthetics in relation to art and other natural phenomena. For them aesthetics is simply “the theory of what is beautiful in a work of art, and also the name given to that discipline or tradition of study that seeks to isolate the principles behind the beautiful – both in art and in natural phenomena” (201).

Paul de Man applies the term “aesthetics ideology” to deconstruction to describe the “seductive” appeal of aesthetic experience, in which, he claims, “form and meaning, perception and understanding, and cognition and desire are misleadingly, and sometimes dangerously, conflated” (qtd. in Abrams and Harpham 3-4). In de Man’s view, the concept of the aesthetic came to stand for “all organicist approaches not only to art, but to politics and culture as well” (4). The experience of literature, he argues, “minimizes the temptation of aesthetic ideology to confuse sensory experience with understanding, since literature represents the world in such a way that neither meaning nor sense-experience is directly perceptible” (4). Abrams and Harpham support de Man by linking aesthetics to sense perception and the systematic study of “all the fine arts, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial” (4).

For Habib, literary aesthetics should not be regarded in the context of “art for art’s sake”, that is, a situation where art exists as an end to itself or to be enjoyed for its own sake. The idea behind such expressions is that “literature must be free from any specific moral obligations, or political purposes: its primary purpose is to give pleasure” (127). This critic advanced his explanation of aesthetics in the views of Kant and Hegel. According to Kant:

When we make aesthetics judgment, we make a judgment about the form of an object (not its content as given through our senses); the object’s form gives rise to pleasure because it exhibits a harmony with our cognitive powers, namely our understanding and imagination. We then call the object “beautiful” and our ability to judge the object by such a pleasure is taste. An aesthetic judgment is not a judgment of cognition; it does not refer to the object and gives us no knowledge of it. It refers only to the perceiving subject, to our self and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure. It tells us only about how we, as subjects, are affected by our mental representation of the object (qtd. in Habib 130).

Hegel’s aesthetics are closely associated to his philosophy of history. He sees art in the same context as religion and philosophy, both as modes through which spirit is expressed. Like Kant, Hegel sees art and beauty as “a realm that belongs to “sense, feeling, intuition, imagination” (qtd. in Habib 137). True art must be free, and independent from other disciplines and should reconcile “the worlds of sense and intellect, nature and thought, the external and the internal” (qtd. in Habib 137).

Kant and Hegel have refused to align literature to religious, moral and social dimensions. Such notion will not be pursued in this essay. The essay applies aesthetics as historical, political, cultural, economic and social nuances of Africa that are reflected in African drama. Aesthetics will be viewed as a recast of these nuances within the African landscape which focus on colonialism, neo-colonialism, and post-colonial issues because “African literature cannot be subjected solely to aesthetic appraisals in the face of economic deprivation, political instability, alienation which are positioned against the oppression, ravaging the continent of Africa” (Obafemi 123).

Thus, aesthetics in this essay will precisely imply writers’ account of Nigeria’s history and focus on humanity and how they have been able to do so. It implies that the Nigerian dramatist owes his or art a strong obligation, a commitment to a historical and social aim so that literature becomes a force for change as Nnolim points out that a literature of a people must be “... a part of a social situation and must be approached primarily as a mode of collective belief and action” (1). Literature as an expressive art captures human experiences. This draws the fact that appreciations of literature must pay “adequate attention to the role of experiences in forming and shaping the people’s expressive art and recreation of the beautiful” (Nwaiwu 43). Hence, aesthetics in this essay refers to those principles or tenets which underlay the work of a particular artist. This essay, employing aesthetics from the theoretical framing of Nnolim, will then look at the way this creative dramatist- Fatunde-

“view and express [his] universe and the result of what [he has] viewed and so expressed” (86) in the text under review.

### **Nigerian Drama and Social Commitment**

Arising from Nnolim's framing that a work of art must be a part of a social situation and must be approached primarily as a mode of collective belief and action, this essay applies socialist realism to foreground the commitment of Nigerian drama to the cause of the masses.

Commitment has been seen by Adereth as a situation where the artist “becomes aware that the real nature of his art is to focus attention on an aspect of reality and thus, invariably pass judgment” (qtd. in Egede 45). This is in concordance with Achebe’s view on genuine commitment in arts. He argues that true or genuine commitment is:

... a sense of obligation or a strong attachment to a cause. When we speak of a writer’s commitment we mean his attachment to a particular social aims (sic) and the use of his writing to advance these social aims. This, of course, implies a belief that literature can and should be used as a force for social change, and a writer has a responsibility to do so (qtd. in Gbileka’a 51).

Nigerian drama over the years has become a useful tool for the portrayal and actualisation of the Nigerian dream of liberation, celebration of cultures and the actualisation of a friendly landscape as well as the projection of the Nigerian worldview in general. Through drama, people become conscious of the happenings within their localities. Therefore, by engaging drama with certain tasks, Nigerian dramatists have ensured that the cultures, politics, economics, social and religious life of the people which together constitute their historical process, are captured in their works. Ker affirms that “our literature is the fullest record which we have of our aspirations, our analysis of our mistakes and how we have faced them” (32)

A people's imaginative or creative art, therefore, must be “...part of a social situation and must be approached primarily as a mode of collective belief and action” (Nnolim 1). It must be, in the words of Emenyonu, “an imaginative creation of a people’s account of their social, cultural, political and economic perspectives at a given time and place” (qtd. in Nnolim viii). In furtherance of this role of Nigerian drama, Chinweizu et al. submit thus:

African literature [drama] and its criticism should not be divorced from the masses, that the language should be within the ken of the average reader that the subject matter should deal with every life and realities of the people and that our literatures should not divorce themselves from the participatory nature of earlier orature (qtd. in Nnolim 29).

In other words, the concern or preoccupation of Nigerian creative drama is socialist realism or what Achebe labels “the burning issues of the day” (qtd. in Ngugi 7), which Chinweizu et al. tag “political *engagement in literature*” (254). wa Thiong’O elaborates on this concern thus:

All art aims to evoke; to awaken in the observer, listener or reader emotions and impulses to action or opposition. But the evocation of man’s active will requires more than either mere expressions of feelings, striking mimesis of reality, or pleasing construction of word, tone or line: it presupposes forces beyond those of feeling and form which assert themselves simultaneously and in harmony with emotional forces, fundamentally different from them (7).

Obiechina’s observation gives a class dimension to the literature. He states that the Nigerian creative artist, ...should have a special allegiance to the down trodden in the Nigerian society, to the socially handicapped, to the women, the sick; all those who are not able to fight their own battles. The writer should put on his armour and charge into battle in defense of the defenceless. It is my view that the writer in Nigeria of today has to take his position against the oppression of the people, all forms of brutalities, all unwarranted violence against the masses” (qtd. in Nnolim 223).

The commitment of the Nigerian creative dramatist implies emphasis on the political life and landscape of Nigeria evoking images that clearly portray the worldview of Nigerians and their relationship with themselves

and the outside world. Nigerian creative dramatists must show a way out of the socio- economic, political quagmire, and the general insecurity created by the way the country has been structured.

The drama in question is committed to evaluating Nigerians and reflects the “characteristics and the dynamic imperatives of the [Nigerian] experience” (Nnolim 86). It is an art committed to the Nigerian aesthetics, that is, “the theories and unspoken imperatives that govern the literary creations of modern [Nigerian] writers—imperatives that could be pinpointed as certain constants that are decipherable as recognizable features of African literature” (86).

This aspect of the discourse which is brought to a head with the views of Chinweizu et al. and Sanchez suggest the need for commitment among Nigerian creative artists and in Nigerian art. Chiweizu et al. state succinctly that “the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assumes a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writing....Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory upon the artist” (252).

The imaginative drama of Tunde Fatunde in *Oga Na Tief Man* is reviewed on these premises, and in accordance with Sanchez’s own submission that “every society gets the art it deserves both because of the art it favours and because artists create art in relation to the kind of relation they have with society” (112). The dramatist selected for analysis shows sufficient public concerns and relate to the Nigerian experience. As the conscience of society, the playwright focuses mostly on the plight of ordinary citizens caught up in a society dominated by variegated leadership problems, and economic challenges, and capitalism. In this regard, Olu Obafemi summarises the intention and effort of Fatunde and his colleagues in the following words:

The development of a revolutionary approach to art and theatre among young Nigerian writers reveals a growing radical tendency. This development manifests itself in the young playwrights' commitment to the employment of the revolutionary potential of theatre to sharpen social awareness, adopt an alternative approach (socialist) to the obsolescence they find in the body politic of present day Nigeria, and presenting recipes for social change. The remarkable point of departure between this young generation of dramatists in Nigeria (Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kole Omotoso, James Iroha) and their predecessors (Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark) is the formers' conscious ideological commitment; their conviction that social change could come by the playwrights' ability to raise mass awareness to a positive revolutionary alternative to social decadence.

### **Aesthetics of Revolt in *Oga na Tief Man***

Central to Fatunde’s *Oga Na Tief Man* are characters who are caught in the firm grip of the strictures of society. Often times these characters appear brilliant in terms of what they need to do to survive but circumstances do not permit them to actually survive. Hence, the ideological clash between these characters and society is critical and vicious. The implication of this is stern psychological and ideological polemics within the super structure of the same society. The drama of Fatunde focuses on the ideological struggle of characters who must come to terms with their present while also interpreting their history. For this playwright, drama goes beyond a reflection of society to being a product of the ideological dialectics between the author and society as represented by the characters. Hence, the revolt of these characters is symbolic of the revolt of the masses against the ruling elites with the aim of bringing capitalism to an end and thereby establishing a classless society.

The play opens at God-Dey Buka, an eating house for workers from Chief Alao's biscuit factory. Topical issues of politics, economy, religion are often discussed by these workers. This is where we meet Mama Ekaete, Ekaete, Biodun, Osahon, Papa Ekaete, Umar, Alhaja Alao, Alhaji Alao, Comfort, and Akhere, as well as other characters. The conversation that ensues in the buka sets the tone and atmosphere of the play. The scenario at the buka is brought to a head with Ismaila, the son of Alhaja Alao and Alhaji Alao threatening to take his parents to court for wanting to punish Akhere who is accused of stealing.

The incidents of the play continue at the palatable home of Chief Alao where Justice Kanayo and wife come visiting. The atmosphere in this setting is more relaxed compared to the one at the buka. In atmosphere three the play proceeds to the High Court of Justice where Comrade Akhere is to be tried for stealing some provisions and food items from SUNSHINE SUPERMARKET belonging to Alhaji Alao. All the characters in atmospheres one

and two are present in court. At the end, Akhere is convicted and taken to jail even though his comrades assure him of eventual justice as in the words of :

Umar: Comrade Akhere, we workers go do everythin to free you from prison. Make you no worry. E go good. E go better. We go win. You no go stay long inside prison (Fatunde 55).

Oga Na Tief Man is built on the themes of exploitation, poverty and corruption. It is written in the category of Estate Literature. This type of literature which was an innovation of Jill Mann deals with issues of the social class. Often regarded as estate satire and or complaint literature, it examines society by grouping its people based on their social class, status and occupation. Hence, the two classes are identified clearly as the upper and lower classes. It is also a typical example of Marxist Literature which believes that the bourgeoisie are exploiting the proletariats. It believes also in the collective revolutionary consciousness of the masses. In this play, the revolutionary violence of the masses is used to counter the reactionary violence of the oppressor.

The exploitative posture of Alhaji Alao, and his wife, Alhaja Alao on the biscuit factory workers is disgusting. The implication of this is excruciating poverty. This is made worst by the corroboration of the corrupt judicial system represented by Justice Kanayo, an ally of Alhaji Alao. The first atmosphere of the play foregrounds the exploitation and its ugly consequence of poverty. In this atmosphere, we meet Papa Ekaete, a retrenched worker of Alhaji Alao's factory who has been reduced to a truck-pusher; Ekaete, his daughter, an Engineer by training who merely assists her mother to sell food at God-Dey Buka for lack of a better job; Biodun, Osahon, Umar, Akhere, all of them retrenched workers of the said biscuit factory. These characters are united in the agony of injustice, corruption and exploitation but Mama Ekaete is worst hit:

Mama Ekaet (She shakes her head many times): Ekaete my pikin, you no offend me. I just de think about something wey dey worry me. See my head, na so so white hair don full am. Look my shin, e be like de skin of frog, ogoro im broda after I don begin de old small small. See my hands, e don strong kakaraka kitchen knife don cut am so tay blood no de inside my two hands again. i don dey cook chop for many many years. Weda e rain oh! or e no rain I dey wake every 4 o'clock in the morning. den I go sleep very late for night. You know sey you be my last born. I get six pikins. Na you be de only pikin wey go school pass primary school. De remaining five children de Lagos and Kano dey work as boy-boy. all of dem be poor people. Den, I dream last night sey I go soon die (6).

The long quotation aptly summarises the level of poverty and hardship of the oppressed citizens. It also foregrounds the emotional and psychological state as well as the hopelessness which makes them contemplate death.

Oga Na Tief Man also shows the effect of the economic system on the masses. The play foregrounds such social problems as inequality and argues that it is an abnormality for some people to enjoy while some people remain poor. The play creates a consciousness against this inherent injustice in the socio-political system and notes that when poverty and hardship push one to the extreme, crime becomes inevitable. This is the fate that befalls Akhere, Biodun and Osahon, the retrenched workers of Alhaji Alao's Unity and Peace Biscuit Factory (UPIBAF). These three characters revolt through crime because their source of livelihood has been cut-off by the powerful, wealthy but heartless Alhaji Alao alias Money Miss Road. Of the three, AKhere's predicament is worst. Comfort, the sales girl at Sunshine Supermarket reveals Akhere to us in her conversation with Alhaja Alao:

Comfort: Ole, ! thief! barawo !make una catch am.

Alhaja Alao: Komfort wetin dey happen?

...Ehen, Komfort why you dey pursue dis man?

Why you dey call am tief? Wetin e tief?

Comfort: Dis yeye man enter supermarket. E take two tins

of milk, one packet of sugar, one big bread, one big

Omo, one big bar-soap.

When I tell am make e pay, e sey im never get salary for eight months.

E come dey run away with all de things wey e carry.  
Na im I begin pursue am, sortey we come reach here  
(Fatunde 20-21).

The scenario in the above conversation depicts the predicament of an ordinary worker in a capitalist society. Akhere, having been left without salary for eight months, and eventually retrenched, is left with no hope of feeding the family, and to show that he steals for mere survival is to consider the items at stake: milk, sugar, bread, and omo. His reply when confronted by Alhaja Alao confirms this:

Akhere: Na true Komfort talk. Madam, I be worker for de biskit faktori wey belong to Chief Alao. Chief tell my leader here Umar sey im go give us back we job. Madam i beg country hard. I go pay you when I get job. My family dey suffer. Na condition cause krayfish back to bend. No be so god make am.

Furthermore, the play shows the distinction between the powerless conscience confronting the conscienceless power. Powerless conscience refers to the masses who are powerless but have the conscience to identify what is good or bad; whereas the conscienceless power are those who have power without conscience. Those with conscienceless power laugh first but those with powerless conscience laugh last and best. The powerless conscience are represented by the agitating workers led by Umar and Ismaila, while the conscienceless power are represented by the Alaos, the Kanayos and so on. The implication of this division is that those in the first group do not have access to the means of survival while those in the second group live in affluence, are oppressive and absolutely corrupt. However, the powerless conscience live in the hope that is expressed by Ismaila in the following words:

Ismaila: ...One day go come for this kontiri wher workers go seize power, all una houses and money wey una get with wayo wayo and koni koni, workers go seize them. We go use both de court and any other thing for this society to make sure sey workers government go come for this our obodo Nigeria. Papa or no Papa, Mama or no Mama-everything must to change for good (34).

The poverty and squalor represented by the 'Buka' setting in Atmosphere One is contrasted by the riches, wealth and affluence of the Alaos symbolised in their palatable home in Atmosphere Two. Also, the setting brings together the powers that be, those who are in the upper echelon of the superstructure otherwise regarded as the bourgeoisies. They control the economy, politics, the judiciary and lord over the masses. The conversation between Justice Kanayo and Alhaji Alao buttresses the point:

Justice Kanayo: Well why I no go thank you. No be you help my wife deposit one million dollars for my private account for London-England. You know sey e no easy to carry naira to oversea (24).

Alhaji Alao: Justice Kanayo na Allah and Mohammed you for thank. you know sey I get 15million dollars import licence to buy chemicals and spare parts for my biscuit faktori. But i come use the money import holy white sand from Mecca becos I get DE contract to build one big mosque. Dis importation of holy white from Mecca and everything patapata, come to about 5million dollars. 5 million dollars from 15 million dollars how much remain? (24).

The conversation reveals the true nature and character of the class of those represented by Justice Kaayo and Chief Alao. Corruption, contract racketeering and sabotage to national development are revealed in the conversation. Among these people, religion is easily a tool to fool, manipulate and to incite the masses. Hence, diverting money meant for the well being of the citizenry to import holy sand from Mecca is a clear way of hiding under religion to steal and embezzle. The matter is made worst when those who represent justice are in the forefront of the quack mire just as Justice Kanayo:

Justice Kanayo: ... You fit use your money do anything you like. All these editors wey dey talk pata-pata like typewriter dem pen go put dem for trouble. Dem never know libel law (26).

This statement is disgusting and Ismaila, the son of Alao reacts accordingly:

Ismaila: My lord, you know sey, dis 15 million dollars wey my Papa dey talk sey na him money... (Shouting)... Dis money no be my papa money money at all at all. Na government Bank give am loan to buy raw materials for im biscuit faktori. See now workers dey suffer becos e dey drain our economy (26).

Those who represent the conscience of society and speak for it are often seen as deviants, stubborn and disrespectful. Ismaila faces these allegations from his father for standing up for justice since Justice Kanayo has left such responsibilities in pursuit of ill wealth.

Those who control the wealth of the nation, however they do so are often seen to be stronger and more powerful. More so, they influence and control the justice system and policies that must favour them. Hence, they appear to be at the winning angle, at least for some time, until systematically, and through revolutionary means, they could be displaced. Thus, if Justice Kanayo who is an ally of Alhaji Alao and through whom he has benefited so much including the gift of a million dollar recently, is to preside over a case involving Alao and Akhere, what else would we expect? To what extent can we argue for or against such a case? Who has the financial might to fight him? Therefore, even Barrister Ismaila, his son who knows and have evidence of the father's shoddy deals cannot win the case for Akhere. The hope of those who are denied justice is again rekindled in the thoughts of Ismaila which are repeated for emphasis:

Ismaila: I no get time for una. One day go come for this kontiri wher workers go seize power, all una houses and money wey una get with wayo wayo and koni koni, workers go seize dem. Den una yanga go finish. We go use both de court and any other thing for dis society to make sure sey workers government go come for dis our obodo Nigeria. Papa or no Papa, Mama or no Mama- everything must change for good (34).

This underscores the revolutionary reaction to be expected in order to change the course of things and to eventually dislodge the few who are milking the country dry at the expense of the vast hungry majority. Ismaila's posture is a real threat to the unrepentant capitalists such as his father and the latter's reaction corroborate our view aptly:

**Alhaji Alao:** I know de thin' wey dey worry you. Se you wan bring socialist govment come dis kontiri. Dat no go possible lai lai becos my friends wey dey gofment get gun and we sef get money. Any-way, after dis court case, call me bastard if i no go make difficult for you. Idiot! Common lawyer wey you be na im you de shakara for. I go teach you lesson (34).

The strong point of Fatunde's revolt to the social order is his choice of Pidgin as a language of communication. This brand of language as used in the play is carefully delineated according to classes. The essence of communication, and the overall aim of mobilisation is the application of a common language understood by the vast majority of the deprived masses. Ezenwa-Ohaeto corroborates that "Communication is at the core of literature and pidgin literature demonstrates the essence of this communication through the utilization of relevant literary devices" (44). He further notes that "the light heartedness or humour in pidgin English literature, the apparent danger that pidgin poetry slides into the worldview of the man in the street, and the view that in terms of communication pidgin literature is overtly accessible" (44).

The title of the play, 'Oga Na Tief Man' translates: 'our boss is a thief' and sets out the revolutionary tone of the play. Alhaji Alao is a business man and the owner of many industries, supermarkets, and an importer of many kinds of goods and services. Yet, those who work for and under him wallow in abject poverty and want. He is corrupt, influential and a manipulator of the justice system.

Agreeing that language is an arbitrary conventional means for the organisation and transmission of thoughts, ideas, and feelings is to corroborate Osahon whose thoughts are given below:

Osahon: (Suddenly): Umar, wait. I don be worker since I be fifteen years old. I no go school. We no sabi oyinbo. Na pidgin English we sabi. E beta make we get our own workers paper for pidgin English. I beg make you translate for pidgin English wetin you dey read now now. My people, se I talk well? (14).

Thus, the choice of pidgin is to conform with the majority who are either semi-literate or are complete illiterates. This thought is also emphasised by Ismaila in the court that:

Ismaila: My lord, my client cannot speak imported English language. You will agree with me that over the seventy percent of Nigerians especially our working people also cannot read and write in imported Queen's English. My lord, you will also agree with me that because of the economic and social injustice in our country, millions of people in the like of Comrade Akhere cannot read and write in English language. My Lord, I am



pleading on behalf of my client and my other witnesses for the state that they can if they wish express themselves in pidgin English since everybody including my lord speaks and understands pidgin English (35).

Akhere corroborates Ismaila when he responds to a question:

Akhere: Oga se I talk sey I no dey hear big big grammar (37).

The choice and use of language also reveals the collective struggle of the characters. They refer to themselves as comrades. There is a sense of leadership and followership beyond the boundaries of religion tribe. The workers are united in their struggle for equity since the hardship of injustice does not recognise tribe and religion. The names of the characters depict a sense of collective revolution since they are carefully drawn from different tribes of the country.

A good symbol of the revolution is God-Dey Buka which is where the struggling masses meet. This is where the key issues that affect them are also discussed. The buka typifies the nature of the proletariats and what to expect from them:

God-Dey Buka is a eating-house for workers. This buka is rented by Mama ekaete. The landlady of this buka is Alhaja Alao, the wife of Chief Alao who owns a biscuit factory...The major costumers of God-Dey Buka are workers from Chief Alao's biscuit factory. Religion, economics, politics, are usually discussed in Pidgin english with Mama Ekaete participating actively in the discussions. Papa Ekaet who was working in Chief Alao's facotry has been retrenched along with other workers. He is now a truck-pusher, transporting with his old truck , cooking fire-wood. Ekaete, his daughter, is a chemical engineer who has been searching for a job after graduating from Nigerian University for the past three years. Meanwhile Ekaete helps her mother to prepare food at God-Dey Buka (5).

This contrasts sharply with the setting is Atmosphere Two where the rich are found which is described as "a relaxed atmosphere" (24) with good music. The two settings collapse into one in Atmosphere Three (the court room) where the two classes symbolised by justice and injustice clash:

Everybody comes into the court room. Comrade Akhere is handcuffed and led into the courtroom by armed policemen. There is almost a confrontation between Barrister Ismaila Alao, on one hand and his parents on the other hand. The three of them meet face to face (33).

Marriage also takes centre stage in this play. It is typical in Africa for the children of the wealthy to marry within the circle of the rich. This is deliberately done to maintain the 'integrity' and social status of the family. Often times such marriages are arranged by the parents without the consent and knowledge of the children. In other cases, one of the children, mostly the girl may be aware, or may have shown some desperation resulting in her parents making out plans to fulfil her desires. Thus, whichever method is adopted, there is a moral question to be raised about the choice, taste and the fundamental rights of the children. More so, most marriages contracted through this process do not stand the test of time since the two partners may not have courted enough to have full knowledge of each other.

Drawing from the above issues, Fatunde is aware that his society is foregrounded in religious bigotry, nepotism, corruption, and unhealthy political rivalry. Yet, these are issues that affect the ordinary person on the street. In other words, religious and ethnic sentiments do not affect those who orchestrate them, they affect those who are powerless and who do not have any means of influence. Yet, those who orchestrate the evil do so to gain political and economic power in order to consolidate their absolute control of the powerless. Thus, in this play, it is obvious that religion and tribe unite the two classes in two distinct ways. For the poor, the only religion and tribe they understand is injustice and poverty which must give way to justice and equal opportunities. For the wealthy, religion particularly is used for hypocrisy and corruption as in the words of Alhaji Alao:

Alhaji Alao: ... You no sey I get 15 million dollars to import licence to buy chemicals and spare parts for my biscuit faktori. But I come use de money import holy white sand from Mecca becos I get the contract to build one big mosque...where de sons and daughters of Mohammed go de pray to Allah de Almighty. Mosque and even sef church better pass bisikit faktori. Prayer better pass bisikit (42).

Justice Kanayo, a Christian is ready to marry his daughter, Uche to Ismaila, a Muslim from the Alaos. This, apart from justifying our earlier comment, is also a confirmation of religious hypocrisy. If the Kanayos and the Alaos do not share the commonness of class this would have been a rarity. And this is the point that Fatunde has mocked in this play. The following conversation involving Justice Kanayo, Ismaila, Alao and Uche buttresses our point:

Justice Kanayo: ... Na since Uche and yourself (referring to Ismaila) be only five years old. We don arrange am for long time ago. So make you no protest at all. Na marriage-by-arrangement (28).

And Ismaila continues to protest:

Ismaila: So before we sabi talk una don gree sey Uche and myslef go be husband and wife (29).

And then comes Alao's corroboration:

Alhaji Alao: Correct.

And then Ismaila's thought provoking question:

Ismaila: Why una think sey we fit be husband and wife?

And then comes Uche's desperation and pride:

Uche: (She moves towards Ismaila) Ismaila, you and me fit marry becos your papa and your mama get plenty money. And my papa as judge know people for government like your papa wey go give us contracts and our own kick-back go be like thirty percent . I wan work small and I wan plenty plenty money. I be suffer-head girl. Ismaila my darling, you go enjoy me well well. I go make you enjoy me so tay you no go want to go look for small small girls like some big sugar daddy dey do. (Everybody with the exception of Ismaila claps for her) (29).

And then comes Ismaila's shocker:

Ismaila: Una well done. Dis na my reply. Number one, marriage na de thing we man and woman go siddon discuss well well. Number two, before two people gree to marry, dem go don know dem-selves for many many years. Number three, for better marriage to last well well; and for happiness, understanding and love to dey for marriage e good make papas and mamas no decide who their pikin go marry. Number four, e good make de man and de woman like to do the same thing - that is, make dem get the same interest...Papa I no go marry Uche - full stop! American man say period (29).

With this, Ismaila opts to marry Ekaete, the daughter of the truck-pusher and a food seller aptly described by Justice Kanayo as candidates for hell for their level of poverty.

### 3. Conclusion

Socialist realism calls to mind the need for the artist or writer to commit his or her writing to the cause of the working class and the emergent socialist world. Such a writer would normally show the possibility of the world to change in favour of the working class. Works that conform to this approach adopt a materialist approach through which the aspirations of wretched of the earth are achieved by means of revolution. This assertion is made known to us first through Alhaji Alao who argues against Ismaila's stance " Se you wan bring socialist gofment come dis kontiri. Dat no go possible..." (34). The socialist realist writer aligns with the working class and their success is his or hers. Thus, in this regard the revolutionary intent of Oga Na Tief Man has been achieved once Ismaila opts to marry Ekaete. Thus, the idea that through revolution a classless society could be achieved is realistic in this regard. The expression by Justice Kanayo that " Make una no worry. E go good. Workers be yeye people. I go make sure sey government pass law wey go make dem no fit talk again" (32) is also indication that the revolutionary intent of the workers has gained momentum.

Furthermore, characters in this play are presented as symbols of the revolution. The proletariats are more in number, they are collective and are inspired by the intellectual leadership of Ismaila and the camaraderie spirit of Umar, Osahon and Biodun. The use of 'atmosphere' rather than the conventional act and scene is also noted. An atmosphere depicts the immediate circumstance of an individual and or group. Thus, the atmosphere of the play is tensed and unpredictable. There is also a generational shift in the play such that Ismaila takes the bold step of abandoning the footsteps of his father for a new way of life. Stealing in the play is regarded as a reaction

to injustice. Confrontation, violence and the protest also spiced up the revolution in the play. Therefore, it is the submission of this essay that drama will continue to play an integral role in the daily struggle of an average Nigerian; and that particularly, Oga Na Tief Man is in the class of How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney, Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon, Unity and Struggle by Amilcar Cabral, Violence and Contract by Festus Iyayi, Devil on the Cross by Ngugi wa Thiong'O, For the Liberation of Nigeria by Bala Usman as revolutionary manifestoes.

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