

Language and Radical Aesthetics in Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*

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Abstract

*Language is a habit and expression of thought in dramatic creativity. Nigerian playwrights have used language with varying styles to project their visions and ideologies of dramatic creativity. Olu Obafemi, a Nigerian playwright, has used the resources of language to present his dramatic vision and ideology. Tenets of Marxism are adopted to critique Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*. This paper makes the choice of Marxism considering the radical aesthetics in the play which is characterized by social and economic stratification between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. With Marxist reading of the play, this paper establishes that the topicality of the theme and subject matter of the play affords it the opportunity to collapse the past and the future into the present of Nigerian society. Obafemi's dramaturgy is consistent with Marxist conception of literature and theatre as revealed in his adoption of Brechtian style of epic theatre. The success of the play lies so much on its language, characterization and plot to project radical aesthetics within Marxist theoretical focus.*

Keywords: Olu Obafemi's plays; Marxism and Nigerian Drama; Language and dramatic creativity.

Introduction

Olu Obafemi, the winner of 2018 Nigerian National Order of Merit, is a creative writer, essayist, literary and theatre critic. He has published sixteen creative texts across the genres of poetry, drama and prose. His main poetry collection is *Illuminations: Songs, Dances, from the Belly of Time* (2009). His plays include: *Night of a Mystical Beast* (1986), *The New Dawn* (1986), *Suicide Syndrome* (1986) *Naira Has No Gender* (1993), *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* (2003), *Ogidi Mandate* (2010) and *Running Dreams: Tales from Many Nations* (2015). He has two major works of fiction: *Wheels* (1997) and *The Mysteries of God* (a translation of D.O. Fagunwa's *Adiitu Olodumare*.) published in 2012. From the catalogue of Obafemi's creative works, this paper avers that he is more of a playwright than a poet and a novelist. This observation informs the focus of this paper in the examination of the playwright's use of language to envision his radical poetics in *Suicide Syndrome*.

Of all the plays of Olu Obafemi, this paper makes the choice of *Suicide Syndrome* for two reasons. The first of the reasons is the relevance and topicality of the play's subject matter and themes to the contemporary socio-political realities in the country though it was first published more than three decades ago. The play was published during the regime of the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (1985-1993) particularly at the time of the austerity introduced by the administration in consistence with International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) recommendations. This period was notorious for corruption, inequity and economic marginalization of the masses. The second reason is the observation that the play has not attracted more scholarly attentions in spite of its relevance and topicality.

Abdullahi S. Abubakar and Ibrahim Olayiwola Ajao's "power structure and inter-generational struggle in OluObafemi's "*The New Dawn and Suicide Syndrome*" (2015) critiques the plays from the perspectives of power relations and generational confrontations between the young and the old. The critics did not examine how the playwright used language to achieve his radical poetics in the plays. The critics are of the view that "the socio-political organization of Nigeria is aptly portrayed by Obafemi in *The New Dawn and Suicide Syndrome*" (2015, p.377).

Sola Afolayan and Ade Adeseke's "the aesthetics of alienation in modern Nigerian drama: a Marxist reading of Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*" (2012) discusses how the socio-economic stratification of post-

colonial nations marginalizes the masses from the common wealth. With Marxist theorization, the critics aver that “Obafemi set (sic.) out to exteriorize what he calls “deprivation and absurdities that afflict the have-nots” in the Nigerian society where there appears to be that economic imbalance” (2012, p.114).

Mabel Ewrierhoma’s “the wounded women: a feminist analysis of OluObafemi’s *Collected Plays*” (2001) criticizes the characterization of women in *Nights of a Mystical Beast*, *The New Dawn* and *Suicide Syndrome* from feminist perspective. The critic discusses the status of women in the plays and how the characterization has advanced the plot of the plays. While concluding her paper, the critic opines that “the female proletariat in Obafemi’s plays is besieged by social inequalities—entrenched by government programmes. But they do not sit idle, thinking of manna from heaven, like the women in *Suicide Syndrome*” (2001, p.82). The deduction from Ewrierhoma’s conclusion is that women in *Suicide Syndrome* are not proactive and that they quickly resign to fate.

None of the previous studies (most especially those which are available for the use of the present writers as at the time of writing this paper) discusses Obafemi’s language aesthetics and its contribution to the attainment of the ideology of the text (radical poetics). The focus of this paper, therefore, is on the use of language to project the playwright’s ideology as inferred from the dialogue of the characters and stage directions. This venture is based on the view that “no literary criticism can surpass its language”.

Language Aesthetics in Obafemi’s *Suicide Syndrome*

With the understanding that dramatic creativity goes beyond what is said, this paper adopts Marxist language ideology in the interpretation of *Suicide Syndrome*. This is because the plot and artistic verisimilitude of the play reveal its focus on Marxist ideals of radical poetics. This argument is based on the fact that the aesthetics of what is said can only be realized on the pages of the text and on-stage during performance through how the playwright has used language to attain the aesthetic and ideological visions of the play. Overtly or covertly, Marxist ideologues such as Gareth Stedman Jones in *Languages of the Class* (1983), Perry Anderson in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983), Bryan Palmer in *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (1990), Peter Ives in *The Grammar of Hegemony* (1997), *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (2004) and *Gramsci’s Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (2004), Umberto Eco in *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1995) and Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) have critiqued the use of language to establish/deconstruct social class and hegemony. The aggregate of their views is that language is generative and advances as human consciousness of their socio-economic status grow and develop with civilization and revolution.

Olu Obafemi, one of Nigeria’s famous playwrights and a contemporary of Femi Osofisan, subscribes to the above view about the power of language to delineate class differences with the presentation of his radical poetics in *Suicide Syndrome*. Though he uses English language to express his thought in the play, he reveals his bilingual competence in the use of English and Yoruba languages with his lexical choices and syntactic structures. In fact, “the language use in the text was seen as embodying the unconscious signature of the author” (Akwanya, 2005, p.145). The author’s unconscious signature, as found in the text, is credited to his consciousness of the inherent and explicit social malaise in the Nigerian society.

The playwright, with his “poetic license” (the freedom a poet [and by extension, a playwright] has to choose his language, subject matter and theme of his/her without any fear or intimidation) to vent his anger on the social injustice and socio-economic stratification which subsist in the playwright’s environment. The use of the poetic license by the playwright is predicated on Perry Anderson’s opinion that “words are free” and “cost nothing to produce” (Akwanya, 2007, p.44).

With the use of language in the play, Obafemi liberates the play from the tyranny of interpretation by drawing his linguistic resources from the popular culture (songs, proverbs, local idioms, customs and

traditions) of a people. Besides, the playwright breaks the monotony associated with the use of English language in dramatic text with the use of pidgin and Yoruba indigenous language. This creative use of language is used in characterization and delimitation of each character's roles which assists readers and critics to evaluate the social, educational and economic status of the play's characters. The use of language of each of the characters in the play reveals the overall ideology of the playwright as a person with concerns for the plight of the masses and for egalitarian society devoid of social and economic stratification in any guise. This paper offers this view with the use of language of some characters in the play with reference to the dialogues of the 1st Worker, 2nd Worker, 3rd Worker and the (new) Director. These characters reveal the unconscious signature of the playwright with his radical poetics on governance, inequity, stratification and other socio-political malaise which put the masses at the receiving ends. The opening of the play betrays its Marxist ideology which is disposed to the use of immaterial culture such as drama and theater to expose the obsession of the bourgeoisie to absolute control of economic resources of the country. The (old) Director's speech at the opening of the play indicates the elitist and bourgeoisie disposition to the lives of pleasure and fantasy. This argument is predicated on the nature and use of language of the Director while declaring the end of his play. The following excerpt shows this:

DIRECTOR: (To the audience). Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. That is the end of the play. As you can see, the lovers are reconciled. And they will live happily ever after. Thank you. (*Applause from the audience but resentment shows from the workers' sector*)
(*Suicide Syndrome*, p.104)

The language of the above excerpt shows that the Director is convinced that he is satisfied with the reception the play has achieved among the elites and bourgeoisie class. This paper's argument is informed by the mixed reactions from the audience after the performance of the said play. The playwright's use of contrast in the stage direction after the Director's speech points to the audience's mixed reactions. Words such as "applause" and "resentment" show the contrast in the perception and reception of the just concluded play by the bourgeoisie class and the proletariat class as represented by the workers. The elite and bourgeoisie groups as represented by Diplomat, Alhaji and Professor do not see anything wrong in the type of the play that the (old) Director has just presented to them. This is evident in their use of language with some expressions such as "wonderful" (as said by Diplomat), "very good" (as said by Alhaji) and "this is exquisite" (as said by Professor). These characters use language as a representation of their Olympian heights. These members of the bourgeoisie class "strive to use the language in their own interests, to impress their own special lingo, their own special terms, and their own special expressions upon it" (Stanlin, 1972, p. 11). They do not attach any significance to the altercation of the members of the proletariat class such as 1st Worker, 2nd Worker, 3rd Worker and the (new) Director who propose a new play which we present the socio-political realities of the class stratification. The reactions of the workers to how the old play of the bourgeoisie class ends are reproduced below:

1ST WORKER: Never mind. Just give us a real play. About us, about now, we don't want a dream play, a fantasy. A rich man's dope.
2ND WORKER: We don't want an escape. We want a play about hunger, about overcoming austerity, finding jobs, paying rents and levies.
3RD WORKER: Not a millionaire's lullaby. We want a play about overcoming hunger, about overcoming starvation, about food, about finding rice and essential commodities.
(*Suicide Syndrome*, p. 105-106)

The language use of the proletariat reveals a chasm in the social and economic relationship between them and the bourgeoisie class. The expressions such as "a rich man's dope", "we don't want an escape", "about overcoming austerity", "a dream play" and "a millionaire's lullaby" show the class consciousness of the proletariats through the mechanisms of language. The language use of the workers is confrontational and reactionary. They (the proletariats) want a play which will tell the true stories of their lives. With the use of

language to present class difference between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, this paper avers that the play does not present a common language (though it is primarily written in the English language) of the two classes. Rather, the play presents what Stalin refers to as “class language” (12).

The playwright reveals the use of class language with pidgin and indigenous language (Yoruba) particularly in the composition of the songs used by the workers in the performance of their new play. In the context of Nigeria’s linguistic ecology, pidgin is considered “a marginal language used among Nigerians to facilitate communication needs in certain interaction contexts” (Balogun, 2013, p.91). While addressing the audience on the need for the new play, the (new) Director uses Nigerian pidgin to ensure that he communicates properly with all members of the audience irrespective of their educational and socio-economic status. The use of pidgin by the (new) Director in this first instance is an indication of his radical disposition to inequity, marginalization and social stratification in his society. After the first instance of using pidgin as medium of communication, he (the New Director) uses normal English expressions. Considering this situation, this paper is of the view that the playwright uses language as a mechanism of manipulation to attract, retain and sustain audience’s attention in the course of the performance of the play. The performance aesthetics of the pidgin used by the New Director can be appreciated with the appearance of the play on a theatre stage.

The use of Yoruba in the composition of the song aims to serve some aesthetic and communicative purposes. The songs have metaphorical and connotative meanings which significantly contribute to the language and radical aesthetics of the play. Michael Foucault’s idea of “discursive formations” as described by Akwanya to be “what one may unveil at the instance of reflection; to this extent it may require a prior analysis of the text at a formal level” (2007, p.197) contributes to the contextual and intertextual references of the song’s language to the marginal representation of the masses in the play. This marginal representation of the masses is counter-productive because of the uneasiness and insecurity which it breeds at the private and public lives of the people. The text of the song is reproduced below:

<i>Ogede n baje</i>	Banana rottens
<i>Won lo n pon</i>	They say it’s well
<i>Ile aye n daru</i>	Society disintegrates
<i>Won lo n dara</i>	They say it’s well
<i>Ebi n pomode</i>	The child goes hungry
<i>Won lo n yo</i>	They say he is filled.
<i>Iyan n jawa</i>	There is famine
<i>Won lo dara</i>	They say it’s well

The text of the song, through its language aesthetics, adds more to the radical aesthetics of the play. The song underlines the primary concern of the playwright – an exposition of the rottenness of the system and passivity of the masses to react as and when due. The song achieves this goal of exposition and correction of the vices of the society through the use of metaphor, parallelism and anaphora. The song reveals the general atmosphere in Nigeria particularly in the 1986 era of austerity in the country’s history. In 1986, the military government of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida introduced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which altered the economy of the country in relation to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) of the country. With this situation, lives became unbearable for many Nigerians. Despite the fact that the majority of Nigerians suffered from economic hardship, some Nigerians had the feeling that Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was the best economic policy for the country. The song text, therefore, is a metaphorical representation of the 1986 economic policy which imposed untold hardships on the majority of Nigerians. This paper forms this metaphorical link between the song text and its historical context by attributing semantic property to the transcended metaphor within a given historical matrix. In this line of thought, this paper subscribes to Paul Ricoeur’s view that metaphor is “a momentary creation of language, a semantic innovation which does not have a status in language as something already established, whether as a designation or as a connotation” (1978, p.174). In consistence

with Ricoeur's description of metaphor, this paper establishes the fact that the song-text has no preconceived interpretation. The designation of radical aesthetics it assumes is connected to the consideration of the pre-text and post-text of the overall play's actions.

The language use to reflect polarity in the society underlines the Marxian orientation of the text. The playwright presents two different human societies with varying socio-economic features. The first society suffers in the midst of affluence while the second society enjoys affluence in the midst of austerity. The playwright's use of language aptly reveals this situation, particularly through the speech of Director. At the end of the third movement and during the transition to the fourth movement of the play, Director addresses the audience as follows:

My friends, that's what goes on in a house governed by hunger and poverty. Conflict, pain a restless run of questions and half answers. Answers drummed into stomachs of straws and hollows. But what happens on the other side of the same life; where people 'kill' themselves from lack of want? A domain of usury and fripperies, bloating and comfort. Untouched by the insecurity of hunger, unemployment and starvation?

(*Suicide Syndrome*, p.118)

The playwright's use of inversion and rhetorical questions reflect Marxist ideologies of linguistic representation of bipolarity in stratified societies. With this linguistic representation, Obafemi has made clear his radical aesthetics of the play through the parameters of language. He achieves this through the use of contrast and antithesis to present the two opposing classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat. With the careful selection of words and phrases such as "stomachs of straws and hollows", "a domain of usury and fripperies", "Untouched by insecurity of hunger" and "a house governed by hunger and poverty", the playwright subtly presents background information for the play's motivation. The overall linguistic forms of the play reveal the Marxist orientation of the text. The playwright, through the mechanism of language, overtly expresses his displeasure with class and economic stratification of his immediate society – Nigeria. His attempt, in this regard, perhaps, aims at detaching the language from dialectical materialism of the bourgeoisie class and to make his play more accessible to the masses as indicated at the beginning of the play. Obafemi's use of language in the above excerpt and in the whole of the play is consistent with Humboldt's (1999) conception of *energia* in Marxist linguistic discourse. While reviewing the conceptualization of Humboldt's *energia*, Peter Ives (2004, p.90) is of the view that *energia* is the "inner linguistic sense and spontaneous expression of people (as both individuals and collectives)". The playwright has used language to express his pent-up anger (as an individual, thereby, raising the collective consciousness of the masses) in the socio-economic matrix of his country. The language of the play is simple and accessible unlike the elitist language of some of Wole Soyinka's plays. The reason for this linguistic outlook of the play, perhaps, is connected to the artistic vision and ideological orientation of the playwright. The simplicity of the language of the play does not affect the depth of its thematic concerns within Marxist specifications that a writer (in the instance of this paper, a playwright) should be bold to maintain a stand while representing life in a society characterized by socio-economic stratification.

Classicism and Resistance in *Suicide Syndrome*

Classicism and resistance are recurrent issues in African (Nigerian) drama. This is connected to inequality in social arrangements along the dichotomy of gender, race, political and socio-economic power. This situation has placed a serious task on African (Nigerian) playwrights in the sustained representation of class issues and struggles in their plays. This is because no playwright who wants to court recognition and literary attention can afford to be neutral in the class struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this line of thought, Ngugi wa Thiong'O is of the view that:

... literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more

aspects of intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one of the either side in the battle field. The side of the people, or the side of the social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. (1981, p.i)

WaThiong'o's view is consistent with Marxist ideology of the significance of literature in class construction and validation. A literary writer (more specifically, a playwright) needs to set a clear vision of his artistic missions in a society characterised by class structures. It is important to reiterate here that Marxist theory, as inaugurated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, was "imported" to drama and theatre criticism by critics such as Bertolt Brecht and Lucien Goldmann. It should be noted that "the quintessence of Marxist aesthetics does not lie solely in its historical approach but in its revolutionary interpretation of history itself" (Gbilekaa, 1997: p.39). In language use, plot and the overall dramaturgy, Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* projects Marxist ideology in its radical aesthetics. Specifically, the play demonstrates Brechtian approach of epic theatre with the possibility of alienation effect (A-effect). For simplicity, "the concept of A-effect suggests that artists present larger than life performances before the audiences, while the latter are expected to suspend all forms of disbelief" (Sesan, 2018, p.18).

The first reference of the play's consistence with Marxist ideology and Brechtian epic theatre is its opening. A play has just been concluded and some members of the proletariat are not pleased with the subject matter and the end of the play. As a reaction, these proletariats resolve to have a play which present their problems in proper perspectives. The bourgeoisie class, however, do not see anything wrong in the conclusion of the play. They rather, praise the director of the play for a job well done. The following excerpt shows the nature of responses the director receives at the completion of his performance:

PROFESSOR: This is exquisite. (*They move towards the stage*) Congratulations (*climbs the stage*). Congratulations! Mr. Director. It is a well –made play. Not even Craig, Rotimi or Stanislavsky could have done better. An entertainment piece which relaxes our muscles like a soothing balm after a wound. A great delight.
(*Suicide Syndrome*, p. 104)

Professor's dialogue is a representation of elitist theatre of fun and pageantry at state and institutional events such as commissioning of projects, hosting of programmes and convocation ceremonies. The bourgeoisie class does not want a play that will confront them with the stark realities of classicism and reactions. To the likes of Professor, the just concluded play by the old Director is good. For instance, Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, a play which was commissioned for the celebration of Nigeria's political independence in 1960, was not allowed to be performed because of its exposition of congenital and systemic problems which will threaten the existence of the country in a very near future.

The elitist play by the old Director is against the expectations of the proletariat. They, therefore, poise to perform their own play which is different from the establishment play (a play which aims to maintain and sustain the status quo of socio-economic stratification) of the bourgeoisie class. This new play, in consonance with the overall dramaturgy of the text, adopts A-effect (as stated earlier) in the presentation of the chasm between the bourgeoisie and proletariat classes. To achieve this, the new Director says "however, don't dream that you are really one of them, because when the acting is over, you will have to be yourself again" (*Suicide Syndrome*, p.110). This caveat has bearing on the aesthetics and ideology of the play. This is because Brechtian theatre distances the audiences and the actors from the play through all the possible elements of drama such as language, plot and action. This distance helps in the sustenance of the radical aesthetics of Marxist plays.

The adoption of the epic theatre of Brechtian school does not affect the internal logic and thematic coherence of the play. Despite the detachment of the audiences from the actions on stage, they are able to

live through the whole actions because of the conscious awareness of their predicaments. The audiences do not laugh too much to forget their woes and they do not cry in order not to have the truth screened off their sight¹. The radical aesthetics of the play is sustained with characterisation, setting and dialogue with specific reference to the roles of the workers, the new Director and Mama. With the creative use of setting to establish the Marxist radical aesthetics of the play, Obafemi creates two different forms of environments: the crude environment populated by the proletariat and the refined area with the bourgeoisie class.

Mama and her two children are the representatives of the proletariat in the slum area. Despite that the breadwinner of the family (Mama's husband) is working, the family can hardly feed itself. Mama's husband works diligently but unfortunately what he earns for his hard work cannot sustain his family. They live on credit. Mama, like some members of the proletariat class, hopes that all will be right with time. The playwright introduces the radical aesthetics with the outburst of Mama's son who is no longer comfortable with the socio-economic stratification in their society. The following excerpt reveals thus:

SON: I mean, Mama. You, papa, my sister and me. We are hungry and poor. And papa. He works harder than a jackal. So hard I am always afraid to look at him returning from the factory, bent-double at the back. Yet, every time they drive us home from school for not paying our school fees, not buying our books. Our uniforms are tattered and thread-bare. Me and my sister, we each have a cup of gari once a day. (*Taking mama's hands, who is trying hard not to crack*). Tell me mama: who is that devil that keeps us in this condition?
(*Suicide*

Syndrome, p.115)

Mama's response to her son's question is that her children are different from the bourgeoisie's children. Her response is a reflection of the passivity and resignation to fate of proletariats in the contemporary socio-economic arrangements. Mama's characterisation in the play validates Karl Marx's idea that "religion is the opium of the masses". She is carried away by the opium of the religion by sermonising her children to accept their problems and suffering as divine. In Marxist ideology, religion is the superstructure that the bourgeoisie often adopts to indoctrinate the proletariat class into the lives of suffering and wants. To Mama, asking questions about their penurious situations is a blasphemy. She reminds her children that they are children of God and for this reason, they should always be grateful to Him in all situations. She admonishes her children thus:

MAMA: (*Now playing a philosophic game*). My children. It is evil to think like that. Evil. It is not good for children of God. It will make you hate humanity.
(*Suicide Syndrome*, p.116)

With characterisation and internal logic of the play, Obafemi "creates beings and things which constitute a more or less vast and unified universe" (Goldmann, 1975, p.40). With the vastness of the play's universe, the playwright collapses the past and future of Nigerian society into the present. This paper offers this view because of the current socio-economic realities of the country. Papa, in *Suicide Syndrome*, "works harder than a jackal" (p.115) but with little pay and no gratuity. Father's fate in the play is the fate of every proletariat (the labour force) in the contemporary society. Many states of the federation owed and are still owing labour force many months of salary arrears. The situation got worse in a state that religious institutions donate cash and material items to workers for them and their families to survive untold hardships brought about by non-payment of salaries. Even when the father is paid, "he gets too little money

¹This statement is rephrased from the production note when the play was first performed in 1986. The authors of this paper acknowledge NiyiOsundare's "Memories of Our Hope", a review of the premier performance of the play at the University of Ilorin.

for doing so much work” (*Suicide Syndrome*, p.114). This is also a reality in the country’s socio-economic matrix when some states pay half/quarter of the salary to the work force.

The socio-economic indices such as non-payment of salaries, dwindling fortunes of gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP), inflation and devaluation of naira are clear indications that the past and future of the country have been collapsed into the present. This paper offers the view with due consideration of dialectical materialism within the theoretical focus of Marxism. The country has not come out securely from the post-SAP (post-structural adjustment programme) era. The class and caste structures created in the SAP era are still present in the contemporary situation. This is because the bourgeoisie class in the country has surreptitiously instituted a generational empire that will always control the base of the country through the manipulation of the superstructure to their favour.

In consistence with Marxist radical ideology, the proletariats make efforts to dislodge the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, they do not have the state power to achieve their goals. The only thing at their disposal is the use of protest and petition to interrogate the inequality, stratification and injustice in their society. Thus, the historical materialism of Marxism is the struggle of the proletariats against the exploitative practices of the bourgeoisie. Eagleton (1981, p. vii) re-echoes Marxist philosophy as follows:

Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggle of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression.

In *Suicide Syndrome*, Obafemi maintains consistence with Marxist philosophy as observed by Eagleton. He does this with the protest of the proletariats: Mama, Son, Daughter, Workers and Graduate. These individuals express their displeasure with the persistent social stratification in the country. Graduate’s dialogue is a sort of conscious signature of the playwright’s intention, particularly in the expression of the Marxist radical ideology. The following excerpt presents Graduate’s dialogue:

GRADUATE: Meanwhile levies go up. Pay - cut swells. Voluntary donations, endowment and development funds, remove our source of livelihood (*To the workers*). To stop all these extortions and deprivation. To remove social injustice, we the workers must join hands with the peasants in the rural areas and seize power from the few ... the ministers, the contractors in power.

(*Suicide Syndrome*, p.133)

Graduate’s dream is lofty and utopian. This is because the bourgeoisie class does not want to lose its socio-economic power. A person who has tasted power once, has a tendency to cling onto it (Srampickal & Joseph 2002). All that Graduate observes in the above excerpt were in the 1986 socio-economic realities of the country. Till today, nearly all the problems identified by Graduates confront the country. This situation validates this paper’s view that the past and the future of Nigeria have been collapsed to the present. This is so because the bourgeoisie class in the country regenerates and recycles itself in power and strategic positions.

The proletariat class (workers and peasants) in the country find it difficult to join forces to seize power from the bourgeoisie class. This is so because the bourgeoisie class, who is in control of the economic resources and politics of the country, has devised different means to infiltrate the ranks and files of the proletariat class. In the above excerpt, therefore, Graduate’s view cannot be materialised. What he suggests is a fantasy and not a reality in a society bedeviled with social stratification.

The conclusion of the play also validates this paper's view that the past and the future have been collapsed into the present. At the end of the play, the Director's address hints at the fact that the workers and the peasants have resolved to evolve a new social order that will remove social stratification. In the play, the Director says:

Ladies and gentlemen, we won't keep you waiting any further as you must be anxious to return to your employment, that is those of you who still enjoy the privilege of being employed. Workers and peasants now demand a new social order free from the oppression by a few. A new economic order free from unequal distribution in favour of those "haves" there. The overnight directors and thieving ministers. A new economy free from foreign domination and national saboteurs and errand boys. A new political order which caters for the need of the numerous mouths that eat salt and pepper. A system that prepares our youths to take their rightful places with promise, hope and opportunities. It is not going to be easy at all. Yet, it is not impossible. Only... this is drama.

(*Suicide Syndrome*, p.136)

The above excerpt is a true reflection of the Marxist ideology of the play. Since the time of political independence on October 1st 1960, Nigeria has not deviated from the master plan of the erstwhile colonial master – Britain. Successive governments in the country, implicitly or in expressed terms, have sustained the class and caste structures of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Like Obafemi says, through the voice of the Director, it has not been easy for the proletariat to evolve a new social and political order. This is because the bourgeoisie class deploys different strategies to out-smart the proletariat in their attempts to change the status quo of class stratification. Among these strategies in the contemporary political realities of the country is vote-buyingⁱ. With the phenomenon of vote-buying, it has not been easy for the proletariats to dislodge the bourgeoisie class that has been managing the base and superstructure of Nigeria's society since the time of political independence.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* prototypically displays great language aesthetics. The strength of such aesthetics at projecting the playwright's radical ideology is worthy of scholarly enquiry. Thus, the paper critiqued *Suicide Syndrome* with the theoretical apparatus of Marxism. The playwright's language and radical aesthetics are consistent with the tenets of Marxism which dissects the socio-economic problems in a stratified society. The language, characterization, plot and style of the play reveal its Marxist orientation. The play, in its attempt to expose the social stratification in Nigerian society, reflects the socio-economic realities of the country and at the same time, it offers some possible ways out. The play's style conforms to Brechtian tradition of epic theatre in which advocates the detachment of the audience and actors from the play's action. This approach contributes to the radical aesthetics of the play. Olu Obafemi's vision of the play is sustained through the appropriateness of the language to create specific characters in the play. The play's theme and subject matter are topical as they reveal how the past and the future of the country are collapsed into the present.

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