

On the Brink of Collapse: Cogitating Nigeria's State of Anomie in Soji Cole's *Embers*

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Abstract

*This paper discusses and contributes to the debates on the myriads of challenges that have put the Nigerian state on the threshold of collapse. The paper avows that lack of good governance and purposeful leadership remains the bane of the Nigerian nation, just as it identifies terrorism, insecurity, displacements of people, rape, corruption, joblessness, loss of faith and moral piety, crass materialism, and hopelessness as some of the indices of misadventures that have dotted the nation's historical trajectory. These issues which have been variously discussed by scholars with an attempt to portray and expose them form the preoccupation of Soji Cole's *Embers*, as a testament to the continued engagements of Nigerian playwrights with the country's woes. The choice of *Ember* is informed by the fact that there is a dearth of scholarly research on the play. Using the sociological approach and adopting a content analysis method, this paper examines some of the critical governance challenges facing the Nigerian state and their implications. For this purpose, therefore, we have deliberately adopted the Marxist Literary Criticism particularly as it aligns with the revolutionary temper Cole proposes. The paper concludes by interrogating Cole's prescription that there will be no meaningful end to a cesspool of corruption and mis-governance until Nigerian masses embrace violent, social revolution to effect a social change, thereby freeing the country from further unwarranted exploitations by a few to the disadvantage of all.*

Keywords: terrorism, corruption, leadership, (mis)governance, revolution.

1. Introduction

Since its independence from the British on 1st October, 1960, Nigeria has continued to be bedevilled by myriads of challenges that have defied many proffered solutions, just like the case of many other formerly colonised African nations. In fact, the nation has remained a victim of venal and power drunk leaders who have failed to give the “nation the needed creative force to move forward” (Olowonmi 2008, p. 57). This fact has made it impossible for the country to experience real sustainable developments, which would have guaranteed it an enviable position among the commonwealth of developed nations. Issues of underdevelopment, corruption, poverty, epileptic power supply, incessant worker’s strike, electoral fraud, and compromise of the judiciary and other law enforcement agencies, among others, have, consequently, formed part of the nation’s dark history.

But then, the country, in recent time, has experienced a high level of disregard for the sanctity of human lives occasioned largely by the nefarious activities of Boko Haram insurgents and Herdsmen which have left thousands of people dead in their wake, with millions of people rendered homeless, thereby making them forced occupants of the various Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDP) camps set up in the country. This is aside the fact that properties worth trillions of naira have been destroyed. For instance, in the *Vanguard* dated August 8, 2017, Yerima Saleh (the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Resettlement, Borno State) disclosed that about 1 million houses and public structures were destroyed by Boko Haram insurgents in the 27 Local Government areas of Borno, in addition to the destruction of properties worth over N1.9 trillion within six years.

According to the Amnesty International (AI), Boko Haram attacks, farmers-herders conflicts and armed banditry mainly resulted in the death of 894 people in 2017, while not less than 1,813 persons were murdered across 17 states of the federation since January, 2018 (*The Guardian* 29 June, 2018; *Daily Post*, 29 June, 2018). Of course, the realities of the Nigerian state have not escaped the curious lens of many intelligentsias, analysts, human rights activists, writers and even journalists who have made (and are still making) conscious efforts at identifying the root causes of the nation’s multi-faceted failures despite its abundant natural and human resources.

One major factor which has often been held responsible for the nation’s woes is leadership failure. In fact, quite a number of Nigerian scholars have written in support of this stance, unequivocally revealing in their writing the impunity with which successively led governments in the country have wantonly looted the nation’s treasury, even as they are bereft of invaluable ideas that can move the ship of the country forward. This is aside using the machinery of the state to suppress any dissenting voice. Aiyede (2005, p. 299) has particularly made reference to the type of politics and statecraft practised by Nigeria’s post-independence leadership, describing it as ‘prebendal’, ‘neopatrimonial’, ‘predatatory’, ‘praetorian’, ‘spoils politics’, and ‘myownization of power’, among others.

Reflecting on the activities of the various ‘emergency-leaders’ Africa is cursed to have, Thiong’o (1993, p. 65) regrettably posits that Africa’s “independence did not bring about fundamental changes... (as the) age of independence had produced a new class and a new leadership that often was not very different from the old one.” Jones (1988, p. 60) lends

his voice when he describes African leaders generally as “Popular leaders (who) quickly became slaughterers of their own people; privileged persons (who) grew indecently rich on their nations’ resources while the nations themselves along with the mass of their people grew poor and more miserable.” In Taiwo’s view (1965:160), “Our politicians are corrupt. They think little of the common people but to make themselves powerful and rich. They make promises during elections to gain the support of the people but once voted in, they think only of themselves....”

Canonical texts like Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, Wole Soyinka’s *Alapata Apata*, Femi Osofisan’s *Who’s Afraid of Solarin*, Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*, and even Adamu Usman’s *Sieged* are some of the texts that poignantly foreground leadership failure in Africa, in general. Achebe (1983, p. 22) has particularly expressed his concern for the Nigerian state in his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, submitting:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenges of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.

Achebe’s submission re-echoes some of the expressed and/or suppressed views of millions of Nigerians and even Africans as a people. Undoubtedly, Africa has suffered untold hardships in the hands of perennial looters masquerading as “heaven-sent leaders” whose sole interest is in milking their nations’ resources for selfish aggrandisement, while the continent continues to experience backwardness of monumental proportion. For Nigeria, neither independence nor the return of democratically elected leaders to the corridor of power after sixteen years of uninterrupted control of the state by the military has yielded expected developmental dividends. Instead, the nation is trapped in the throes of escalating but avoidable terrorist acts of Boko Haram insurgents, as well as Herders’ carnage across the country. These are in addition to other socio-political challenges that daily trouble the nation, thereby pushing the nation to the threshold of collapse.

Although, a number of Nigerian scholars are now turning their attention to exploring the remote and immediate causes of the upsurge in the activities of Boko Haram terrorists, as well as the sudden rise in Herders-Farmers conflicts in the country, many Nigerian critics are yet to embrace the need to critically engage Soji Cole’s *Embers* as a Nigerian play that explores the state of anomie the nation has been plunged into in the light of these recent realities, especially within the context of other issues that perennially plague the nation. Efforts are, therefore, made in this paper to examine Soji Cole’s *Embers*, using the sociological approach and adopting a content analysis method. Among other things, the paper interrogates what Cole believes is needed to cause the desired changes in the country. This paper will, in section two, analyse Marxism as its theoretical base; section three will examine method of data analysis adopted by the author for the paper; section four will focus on Cole’s exposition regarding the level of many challenges that have put the Nigerian state on the edge of collapse and their effects on the nation’s inhabitants. The paper concludes in section five

by suggesting a holistic, multi-dimensional approach to the conundrums that threaten the nation's existence/survival.

2. Theoretical Framework: Marxist Literary Criticism

The focal point of this discourse is anchored in Marxism which advocates “a classless society, based on common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange” (Barry, 1995, p. 156). Specifically, Marxism had its root in the views and teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as demonstrated in their jointly written *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 in which class struggle is identified as the driving force behind history, with the anticipation that it will result in a revolution in which capitalists will be overthrown by workers who will take control of economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government for fair distribution (Dobie, 2012, p. 85). Concerning the ideals of Marxism, Trainer (2010, p. 2-3) states:

... in any historical period dominant and subservient classes can be identified. Inequality in wealth and power was of fundamental moral concern to Marx. Some groups come to dominate others and to win for themselves a disproportionate share of the society's wealth, power and privileges. The ultimate goal Marxists aim at is a classless society, i.e., a society in which all enjoy, more or less equal wealth and power.

Habib (2011:208) has drawn attention to six underlying principles of Marxism, particularly an appraisal of capitalist exploitation, a materialistic conception of history, the division of labour based on the model of superstructure, and economic base, conception of ideology, and adaptation of the Hegelian dialectic. Both Dobie (2012, p. 92) and Aliu (2003, p. 332) have pointed out the importance of the notion of ideology in Marxist discussions, as it deals with “a belief system produced by the relations between the different classes in a society, classes that have come about because of the society's modes of production” (Dobie, 2012, p. 92). In Aliu's (2003, p. 332) view, ideology denotes a partial representation of social reality to serve definite purposes. In the case of capitalism, the partial representation of social reality manifests in the way capitalists appropriate surplus value for the workers.

Given that an ideology dictated by the dominant class functions to secure its power, thereby serving the interests of those in power who are determined to convince people that the ideology is a proven, reasonable, universal and natural worldview, “Marxism works to rid the society of such deceptions by exposing the ideological failings that have been concealed” (Dobie 2012: 92). Trainer (2010, p. 9) has underscored Marx's stance regarding the impossibility of any major social change without a revolution, considering that dominant classes will not voluntarily give up their wealth, power and privileges, unless they are forced to do so, “and this might have to involve violence”.

Apart from the political experiences of its founders, other influences on early Marxist thinking include the work of German philosopher, Hegel. Among the proponents of Marxist criticism, with differing views, are Jürgen Habermas, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Louis Althusser, Lucien Goldmann, Pierre Macherey, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Bertolt Brecht, Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin, Fredric Jameson, V. I. Lenin, Antonio Negri, and Lev Trotsky, etc. Currently, Terry Eagleton and

Fredric Jameson are two of the best-known Marxist critics (Dobie, 2012, p. 86; Habib, 2011, p. 234).

Dobie (2012, p. 85) noted that Marxism was not in any way designed as a method of literary analysis, even though its principles have been applied to literature. Barry (1995, p. 158) and Habib (2011, p. 210) have equally indicated that Marx and Engel never presented a systematic theory of literature or art; instead, it has emerged as a series of responses to concrete political exigencies, even as Habib (2011, p. 210) points out that “Marxist aesthetics has been characterised by a persistent core of predispositions about literature and art deriving from Marx and Engel themselves”. But then, the main principle of Marxist literary criticism is that the nature of literature is conditioned by the social and political situations in which it is produced and a writer’s social class and its prevailing “ideology” majorly influence what is written by a member of such class (Barry, 2005, p. 158). Marxist literary criticism is, thus, designed to promote literature that helps in dismantling bourgeois superstructure and ensuring egalitarian values.

In the Marxist’s view, literature must examine social realities, making the populace aware of social ills and sympathetic to action that will wipe those ills away. It must expose the bourgeois’ overt and subtle machinations in social reality in order to sensitise the masses so that they can be empowered to overcome them. Hence, Literature which can be described as Marxist in orientation has been tagged radical literature, especially as it sees the world as being in a state of constant confrontation between two completely opposed and incompatible classes: the oppressed and the oppressor. It entirely supports the cause of the former with the definitive goal of bringing to light the essence of the struggle of the working class (the masses/the proletariat), adopting the class orientation and all the essential task of revolutionary transformation of the society.

It is, therefore, not uncommon for Marxist literature to protest about inequality in human society, with the aim of raising the conscious level of the masses, urging them to come together to reject injustice, oppression and alienation, thereby resisting their unfavourable treatment and overthrowing unfair systems (Dobie, 2012, p. 93; Aliu, 2003, p. 330, 340; Anyadike, 2001, p. 318). Dobie (2012, p. 92-95) has listed the following as part of the questions that guide a Marxist critique of a text:

Who are the powerful people in the society depicted in the text? Who are the powerless people?... why do the powerful people have their power? Why is this power denied to others?... how many different social classes do the characters represent? ... does the bourgeoisie in the text, either consciously or unconsciously, routinely repress and manipulate less powerful groups?... what are the tools they use?... does the work of literature advocate reform or revolution, either overtly or obliquely?... does it criticize repressive systems?

3. Methodology

Soji Cole’s *Embers* has been purposively selected for our analysis in this paper. The choice of the play is informed by the fact that there is a dearth of academic research on it, especially from the Marxist’s perspective. Using the sociological approach and adopting a

content analysis method, therefore, this study intends to examine the playwright's preoccupation, not only with regards to the superfluous despoliations of the nation's wealth by the leaders to the disadvantage of the masses and other attendant challenges that dot the nation's historical trajectory, but also the culpability of the masses in bringing the nation on its knees, believing that the play perceptively captures the realities of the modern Nigerian state.

4. A Homeland at War with Self: *Embers* and the Nigerian State

Soji Cole's *Ember* is a play that paints a dark picture of the Nigerian nation. Set in an IDP camp somewhere in the northern part of the country, the play centrally chronicles happenings in the lives of some young girls and an elderly woman (Talatu) who have become trapped residents of the camp due to the nefarious activities of the dreaded Boko Haram insurgents. The play, nevertheless, uses the Boko Haram onslaughts on people to interrogate other myriads of challenges confronting the nation, particularly with regards to the (in)actions of various individuals occupying positions of consequence in the land and how the acts of everyone have considerably pushed the nation to an edge of collapse.

Ridding on the event of April 14, 2014, in which 276 school girls were abducted by Boko Haram from Government Secondary School, Chibok, in Borno State, with not less than 112 of the girls still missing till date (Godwin, 2018), Cole creatively examines the attendant anguish that follows the girls' abduction, foregrounding the inhuman treatments the girls are subjected to, not only in the den of the terrorists but also in the various IDP camps set up by the government in the wake of the terrorists' attacks. Cole especially draws attention to how Boko Haram boys often rape captured, hapless girls before forcing them into illegal marriages that smack of callousness. Atai's experience in Sambisa forest gives one a peep into the condition of the abductees:

... It was hell. We were all stolen from our homes and schools and then dragged like priced cows into the forest. Then... we were forced to live with men we have never known in our lives... my... husband... had six women with him. I was the number four (p. 55-56).

Atai's experience is a microcosm of the various inhuman treatments that abducted girls in Nigeria go through in the hands of their captors. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government (whether past or present) has continued to play politics with the lives of girls in Atai's state and even seems unaffected by the terrible conditions of affected persons in the various towns and villages in the country. In fact, it seems insensitivity, callousness, and lack of urgency and value for the sanctity of human life made the Federal Government deny (or feel less concerned about), at first, the April 2014 abduction of the Chibok girls until the outcry of some concerned personalities rose to a crescendo and brought the extremist group's rampage to global attention, thereby forcing the government to take some decisive steps towards securing the release of the girls (*The Washington Post*, May 11, 2014). Regrettably, as it has turned out, close to half of the abductees are still in captivity, with some dead already, while a number of the released or rescued ones are rushed into motherhood (*The Guardian*, May 6, 2017). This is aside the fact that no fewer than seventeen of the parents of the abducted schoolgirls have since lost their lives due to trauma associated with the abduction (*The Sun*, April 16, 2018).

Undoubtedly, the palpable unfettered activities of the Boko Haram insurgents, despite the much trumpeted reportage of the decapitation of the terrorist organisation, made the group had the audacity to attack a government-owned secondary school in Dapchi, Yobe State, on 19 February, 2018, carting away 110 defenceless girls (Bolaji 2018). Although, the government of the day was proactive in securing early release of the newly abducted girls, albeit the death of five of them, what remains to be unravelled is the reason for the sudden withdrawal of troops from checkpoints and strategic positions in Dapchi community a few days before the abduction, and why the Nigerian Army failed to act on advance warnings about a possible attack by the Boko Haram insurgents hours before the abduction took place (Bolaji 2018; Abu *et al*, 2018). Also begging for answers is the reason why the Buhari-led Federal Government has failed to secure the release of Leah Shaibu who is still being held in captivity. The excuse given that the girl vehemently refused to be converted into Islam, unlike others, has merely further complicated the nation's quagmire along religious divides. This is especially important when one considers the claim and counter-claim that the Federal Government paid huge ransom to secure the release of other Dapchi girls (*Punch*, 16 August, 2018)

Cole, therefore, beams a searchlight on the government and its various agencies, particularly the Army, for their culpability in fuelling, rather than curtailing, the prevailing crisis. The Army, as portrayed in the play, is ruthless and debased. Apart from engaging in mindless killings without recourse to common sense and due process, they also abuse their authority by fondling with the hapless girls they are meant to protect, raping and using them as sex toys to satisfy their irreverent sexual urge, like the case of Soldier Bayero. Atai gives a vivid account of the brutish and scandalous nature of the Army and how they normally waste innocent lives in the name of fair judgement:

The soldiers... were stationed watching over the ruins of my village. They were angry... They said the Boko Haram Boys killed many of their fellow soldiers. They made me stay with them for five days. ... The horrors that I saw in five days were more frightful than the fiercest things I saw in Sambisa forest. The soldiers slaughtered any man that passed by the village. They didn't even wait to ask questions. Of the people who were lucky to still be alive and had returned to see their town; the soldiers killed the men, drove back the old women and kept the young girls to themselves... They took me to their commander. He had many women with him... After three days, he got tired of me... He gave me to another soldier. It was horror. They threatened to kill me if I ever mentioned a word to the people outside when I leave (p. 57-58)

As evident in the play, the IDP camp, set up as a place of refuge and succour to the displaced persons, turns out to be another camp of terror, full of depravity occasioned by the reprehensible and loutish behaviour of the army, the camp officials and the nation's politicians. Apart from the fact that the camp officials rape the girls and threaten them with foods and other supplies in a bid to have unhindered sex with them (p. 60), they equally steal some of the food supplies, leaving the displaced people with little or no food to live on (p.19). The politicians, on their part, not only loot the resources of the nation, but also sexually exploit the captured girls.

Cole indicts these leaders without moral fibre for their culpability in aggravating the sufferings of the displaced persons in their care. The IDP camp in the play is, thus, presented as a land covered with filth. Cole minces no word in seeing leaders at all levels in the land as the real culprits, while he portrays the Boko Haram insurgents and their victims as just pawns in their (the politicians') schemes. He especially avers that the Boko Haram terrorists are the creation of the state, inflamed by the lack they suffer and armed by the politicians for a selfish end. Tormented by the daily trouble being faced in the IDP camp, Idayat expresses her frustration, accusing the leaders whom she sees as the real Boko Haram:

... the hassle here is like being in captivity. How do we define a life of freedom when it bears all the signs of captivity? The real Boko Haram is here, not in the forest of Sambisa.... The Boko Harams are those Government people who brought ten bags of rice to the camp and announced in the news that they came with hundred. The Boko Harams are those Camp Officers who steal seven out of those ten bags of rice... the Boko Harams are those in uniforms whose job is to keep us safe here but drag out the girls every night to have a fill of their lusty... (irreverent sexual urge) (p.19-20).

Memunah particularly makes a mockery of those in government and their foreign allies for their deception and thievery, even as she also holds them chiefly responsible for their terrible state. During one of her discussions with Talatu and other girls, she lays bare the gimmicks Nigerian politicians often employ to gain cheap popularity from people and imprint on their impressionable hearts the so-called efforts being made to (re)build the nation:

Every day we hear the news of what people are bringing to the camps for us. The governor is coming tomorrow, and we have prepared another dance for him. He will get on the news again to announce all the things that he donated to the camp. The foreign aid team will come with their own supplies too. They will come with trucks full of goods and they will come to talk to us. They will take pictures with us- and with all the things that have been donated to the camp. The newspapers will show our pictures smiling like we have been instructed to do by the camp officers when the pictures were being taken. But then the store is always empty. The foods, the water, the drugs and even the mosquito nets disappear immediately their pictures have been taken. None of those things have legs! How did they walk away? The answer is simple. They took them! (p. 60)

Memunah's outburst of grief regarding their crunching state serves as a quick reminder and eye opener to the crypt of misery that the Nigerian state has been plunged by politicians—the kingfishers of pains—who delight in perverting the will of the polity, lubricating their fingers with the resources of the nation to the disadvantage of the ill-fated citizens who are often at the receiving end. Soldier 4 draws attention to this fact when he notes regrettably, "...the politicians decapitated the rest of the nation. The citizens are the victims. It is corruption that brought us to this point. Corruption everywhere!" (p. 68). Importantly, it has become a trademark of politicians in the country to embrace tribalism and

nepotism in the discharge of their duties; thus, robbing the nation of potentials that can meaningfully contribute to its developments.

It is, therefore, not surprising that in a bid to keep body and soul together, many erstwhile honest and good people embrace outright falsehood, thereby joining the army of degenerates in the country. Soldier 4 succinctly captures the condition of such people when he remarks, “The good ones get corrupt too because their good is swallowed in the sea of violent corruption. That’s why the hardworking man in our country gets tired before the epilogue of his life” (p. 69). Such is the case of Soldier 3 who joined the army out of a genuine desire to serve the nation, but was never selected after writing the examination for the Defense Academy three times, and so had to join the Army as a recruit which constantly breeds frustration in him. But then he even had to cut down his age to get into the Army because, according to him, “I had to live... I had to survive. There was no other option. I was at home for more than five years without a job” (p. 63). Soldier 4 gives a corroborating rationale for joining the Army. He even confesses “I am only doing the job for the money. The pay is small but at least it is still something. I despise the profession every day” (p. 25).

In a way, Cole seems to infer that majority of the people that populate the nation’s Armed forces are frustrated beings who joined the Army out of necessity; hence, lack the required commitments expected of them, which would have significantly helped in the discharge of their responsibilities. It is, therefore, easy for Boko Haram terrorists to buy them off and make them work as their spies. Besides, the fact that many embrace the profession out of no choice and are further poorly remunerated by the government makes it seem unreasonable for any soldier to abide by the ethics of the profession and carry out any order given in accordance with the Army’s oath of allegiance. Corporal Okon’s (Soldier 1’s) open confession— when prodded that he must obey any order given in the Army— further accentuates this fact:

Which kain yeye order be dat?... No be say I like the job sef na work wey no dey town carry me come join soldier naw! I go come go obey one yeye order.... Na una dey do soja business. All those things wey we dey always tok if we dey go for operation say “I pledge to die for my country if need be”, me I no dey tok am o. Who wan die for this country (p. 70).

What kind of order is that... I don’t even like the job; I joined the Army because of the joblessness in the nation. Why will I then obey a foolish order.... It’s you that take the profession seriously. I don’t normally join you to take the pledge we normally make whenever we are set for an operation, “I pledge to die for my country if need be.” Who wants to die for this country? (p. 70).

It is, therefore, trouble-free for the nation to be pushed into the brink of collapse. As evident from the interactions of the various characters in the play, there seems to be no hope for the nation except a proactive measure is taken to salvage the country from total ruin. Cole’s proposition is a sweeping revolution to end the reins of corrupt leaders and set the country on a path of regeneration, even if it requires shedding blood. Memunah draws attention to this fact when she asserts, “Nothing can heal our country. Nothing. Unless we

destroy this system we will never regenerate. There is no future here until those who are leading us are completely destroyed” (p. 62). Talatu later adds her voice, noting, “I agree with Memunah... there has to be destruction... destruction of those who brought untold misery into your lives” (p. 81).

Cole is, nevertheless, quick in pointing out that corruption is not to be fought at the government level alone, but at all levels if the desired result is to be achieved. Talatu, thus, reprimands Atai for her treachery and alliance with the corrupt leaders, “Your generation has become part of the rot.... You follow your politicians to collect scrapes of leftover from their plates” (p. 84). Soldier 2 emphasises this point during her conversation with Bayero and Soldier 1:

... in our own little corner, we all contribute to this rot in the system because we are afraid. We enjoy the system because we feed on it. But let me tell you; your children will suffer for your silence and complicity... The government destroys the system. The police do. The army do. Teachers do. Traders rip off people. Churches join too. What will be left of the country for your children and mine? Carcass. I tell you; mere horrific carcasses! (p. 75, 76).

For Cole, the revolution the country earnestly needs to get on the right track does not necessarily require the accent of all but “the radical desire of a minority” (p. 68) who is determined to end the reins of the various parasites masquerading as leaders in the country. As it plays out in this drama, some of the Boko Haram terrorists and their allies in the Army and among the displaced persons surprisingly turn out to be the minority group that serves as an agent of change that effects the revolution which ends the reins of corrupt politicians, army officers, and camp officials. Even though innocent lives are lost in the bomb explosions that turn the IDP camp to a wreck, Cole seems to justify their action as necessary for the desired change, so as to give way to a fresh generation. The use of this unexpected minority group (with specific reference to the Boko Haram insurgents) for the revolution seems to suggest Cole’s belief that the change that Nigeria urgently requires can come from any group armed with the ideology of changing the status quo that has perennially put the nation in the catacomb of stagnancy, underdevelopment and failed socio-political system.

There is no denying the fact that Nigeria urgently needs a change or restructuring if the nation is to move forward and experience real sustainable developments in every area. Indeed, going by the actions and inactions of the leaderships the country has hitherto had, one can safely assert that the country is fast receding into oblivion, if urgent steps are not taken. But then, Cole’s prescription of a revolution as the option to enshrine sanity in Nigeria and redirect its future to a glorious path requires some (re)considerations.

To start with, Cole’s prescription gives an impression of absoluteness, without giving room for any alternative discourse that can possibly be employed to effect a change in the country and ensure a return to common sense. Particularly important to point out is the fact that Cole’s advocacy is for a blood-letting revolution, not a peaceful but ideology-based social revolution that prioritises, among other things, discussions and non-violence demonstrations on the part of the masses about the way forward for the nation. In fact, the manner in which the play ends seems to suggest that there is nothing worthwhile keeping in

the present; hence, the need for total destruction of the present in anticipation of the untainted future.

However, the blissful future envisaged appears like a mirage, full of uncertainties. First, Cole never gives us how the future will look like and the assurances that the new set of leaders to occupy the corridor of power will be better off. If anything at all, what is painted in the play is a bleak future demonstrated by the activities of the youths of today who are being groomed to take over from the current leaders. During one of his discussions with Soldier 3, Soldier 4 regrettably notes how the youths—the leaders of tomorrow—in the various higher institutions have already embraced thievery and other corrupt practices:

Even the ones who will replace our thieving politicians are there in the universities getting their training. They quote all the ideologies to sway their fellow students while they loot the student union funds and run after the politicians to get some more (p. 26).

It will, therefore, not be out of place to argue that rather than the playwright presenting us with blood-letting revolution as the only alternative to changing the status quo in the country, other possible options should have been incorporated into the play. One is even tempted to ask about the essence of a revolution if it will only (re)produce a new set of leeches feeding fat on the blood of fellow citizens. Perhaps, Cole could have emphasised some other essential actions that can be embraced to rescue the nation from possible collapse. Such actions could include reorientation of the youths to imbibe certain core positive values that can meaningfully impact on their lives and the society at large. Also, strengthening the judiciary system in the country for speedy and unhindered dispensing of justice without consideration for whose horse is gored could be another alternative. Similarly, ensuring corrupt persons are dully punished, and that the various arms of governance live up to expectation could be another act that guarantees absoluteness of the rule of law and protection of rights of everyone in the country.

The point being made, therefore, is that rather than the playwright proffering a one-dimensional revolutionary approach to rescuing the nation from corrupt-laden leaders and their attendant stooges, a holistic, multi-dimensional approach should have been embraced by the playwright in weaving his thoughts together,

5. Conclusion

So far, in this paper, efforts have been made to examine the myriads of challenges that currently plague the Nigerian state, particularly with respects to the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents. Using Marxism as its theoretical framework, the paper has examined Soji Cole's *Embers* as a Marxist text, emphasising significant indices of misadventures that have dotted the nation's historical trajectory. Some of them comprise lack of good governance and purposeful leadership, corruption, hopelessness, joblessness, loss of faith and moral piety, rape, crass materialism, insecurity/terrorism, and displacements of people, among others. The paper has further underscored the culpability of the government and its various agencies, particularly the Army, in fuelling, rather than curtailing, the prevailing crisis in the nation.

Cole's unmistakable submission in this play is that the Nigerian state stands the risk of experiencing total collapse except urgent measures are taken to set the nation on the path of honour and regeneration. Thus, he calls attention to the various issues that threaten the survival of the nation, even as he recommends revolution as a weapon in ending the reins of corrupt leaders and ensuring progress and sustainable developments of the nation. This paper, however, contends that rather than the playwright proffering a one-dimensional revolutionary approach to rescuing the nation from corrupt-laden leaders and their attendant stooges, a holistic, multi-dimensional approach should have been embraced by the playwright.

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