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A New Historicist Reading of Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*

Olusọla Ọṣọ
University of Lagos

Abstract
Various literary theories have been employed in the analyses of several African dramatic texts in previous studies on African drama. However, few of them have adopted New Historicism as theoretical framework despite the manifest presence of several tenets of New Historicism in many African dramatic texts. This paper is a New Historicist reading of two acclaimed African dramatic texts, Francis Imbuga's Betrayal in the City and Tewfik Al-Hakim's Fate of a Cockroach. Foucault's discourse theory and Stephen Greenblatt's subversion-containment dialectic are adopted as analytical models for the study. The paper examines the power relations and power struggles among the characters in the selected texts, the subversive incidents and characters in the plays, and how the subversions are contained in the texts. The study highlights the prevalence of power struggles in every stratum of the African society and argues that New Historicism theory deserves a greater application on the analyses of African literary texts, especially African dramatic texts than presently obtains.

Keywords: New Historicism, African drama, Power relations, Power struggle

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Olụṣọla Ọṣọ, PhD
Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria
Phone: +23408038341039; E-mail: ooso@unilag.edu.ng

Introduction

Literary theories typically provide the theoretical frameworks of many literary researches**.** As theoretical frameworks, they enable the researcher to accomplish particular research goals and objectives. They help navigate the research so that the research article or thesis does not become what Adams and White (1994, p.565) refers to as a "mindless theoretical wasteland." They should not only be suitable for the study but should address issues which are of urgent currency to the society.

Remarkably, there has been a paucity of studies in African drama which are grounded in New Historicism. Kikelomo Owoeye (2011), Moffatt Mayo (2014), Njoki and Ogogo (2014), and Sophia Otaria-Apoko (2016) exemplify the few studies on African drama which employ New Historicism as theoretical framework. Owoeye (2011) in "Gender Issues in Ola Rotimi's Drama" critically evaluates Ola Rotimi's three major tragedy plays: *The Gods Are Not To Blame, Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. She decries the noticeable gender imbalance and the relegation of women to the background in these three plays. Moffatt Mayo (2014) examines Wole Soyinka's tragedy, *Death and the King's Horseman*. He explores Soyinka's background, relates this to the play, and draws a parallel between the playwright and the character of Olunde in the play. Njoki and Ogogo (2014) critically evaluates Athol Fugard's social vision in four of his plays: *The Island, Blood Knot, Hello and Goodbye,* and *Master Harold and the Boys*. They interrogate how the plays effectively communicate the playwright's vision. Sophia Otaria-Apoko (2016) privileges cultural context and history to explore the struggle for sovereignty and nation building in Ola Rotimi's historical play, *Akassa You Mi*. The paper unravels the power play and the resultant rupturing of relations between the British (represented by the Royal Niger Company) and the natives of ancient Nembe Kingdom of the present day Bayelsa State. These previous studies have overlooked some of the crucial assumptions of New Historicism. This study is a new historicist reading of two African dramatic texts, Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (1976) and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach* (1973).

New Historicism and Its Application to Literary Texts

The New Historicists aim simultaneously to understand a literary work through its historical context, and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature. Lynn (1998, p.10) opines that New Historicism seeks to find meaning in a literary text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era. Veeser (1989, p. 2) records that it is a literary theory that developed in the 1980s primarily through the work of the renowned literary critic, Stephen Greenblatt who coined the terminology.. Another major proponent of New Historicism is Michel Foucault. In the introductory part to New Historicism in their book *Modern Literary Theory*, Rice & Waugh (2001, p. 253) states that:

> Probably the most pervasive influence on new historicist practice, however, is the work of Foucault. His writings have consistently shown how so-called objective historical accounts are always products of a will to power enacted through formations of knowledge within specific institutions.

New Historicism developed primarily as a reaction against New Criticism theory that dominated literary studies during the early to mid-20th century. The practitioners of New Criticism theory would explore the formal, literary qualities of a literary work of art, but would overlook the historical background of the literary work, and the socioeconomic and cultural contexts surrounding the literary text. To the New Critics, every text is a self-contained entity which can be analysed without any reference to any extraneous material. Louis Montrose, Hayden White and Catherine Gallaher are some of the other proponents of New Historicism.

New Historicists concern themselves with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. According to Abrams (2005, p.124), "these critics focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority reflected in a given work." Montrose (1989, p.18) proffers an explanation on the *new* attached to New Historicism. In his

comparative analysis of New Historicism and the older historical criticism, he avers that:

> The newer historical criticism is new in its refusal of unproblematized distinctions between "literature" and "history", between "text" and "context", new in resisting a prevalent tendency to posit and privilege a unified and autonomous individual-whether an Author or a Work-to be set against a social or literary background.

Montrose's afore-stated explanation attempts to clarify any form of confusion that the word *new* in New Historicism might generate. New Historicism is decidedly not "new" in the real sense of the word, as the majority of the literary critics who flourished between 1920 and 1950 explored literary texts' historical contexts and based their interpretations on the interplay between the literary texts and the historical contexts, such as the author's life or intentions in writing the work.

A significant difference between the earlier historical criticism and New Historicism is the newer variety's emphasis on analysing historical documents with the same intensity and scrutiny given foregrounded passages in the literary works to be interpreted. For example, in reading Femi Osofisan's historical play, *Morountodun* (1982) which was inspired by the Agbekoya uprising that took place in parts of Yorubaland in the Western part of Nigeria between 1968 and 1969, a New Historicist would pay as much attention to the historical documents and accounts of the period when the play was published as to the details of incidents and language in the story itself. The historical documents would be read to ascertain prevailing cultural attitudes about the Agbekoya uprising. In addition, the New Historicist critics would also typically compare the prevailing cultural attitudes about this issue today with those of the times in which the story was written. In a similar vein, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's award-winning novel and literary masterpiece, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) illustrates a literary work which lends itself to a New

Historicist criticism. It was based on the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970, a war which rocked the foundation of the country, culminating in the tragic death of millions of Nigerians, especially of eastern extraction. The wound inflicted by the brutal war has not completely healed till today. In using the New Historicist approach to analyse *Half of a Yellow Sun***,** the critic would delve into how Adichie has interpreted the events of the Nigerian Civil War, and what the interpretations reveal about the author; that is, in what ways do prevailing cultural attitudes about this issue today affect the writer's style. The New Historicist critics might also typically compare prevailing cultural attitudes about the issue which serves as the background of the story with those of the times in which the story was written.

Another significant tenet of New Historicism is its concern with examining the power relations of rulers and subjects (DiYanni, 2004). Many New Historicist critics assume that texts, not only literary works but also documents, diaries, records, and even institutions such as hospitals and prisons are ideological products culturally constructed from the prevailing power structures that dominate particular societies. Reading a literary work from a New Historicist perspective thus becomes an exercise in uncovering the conflicting and subversive perspectives of the marginalised and the suppressed. These issues will be investigated in the analyses of the selected drama texts.

Unlike critics who limit their analysis of a literary work to its language and structure (notably formalist and deconstructive critics), the New Historicists devote a great deal of time to analysing the literary texts and the non-literary texts from the same time in which the literary work was written. They subject both the literary texts and the non-literary texts which must have influenced the writing of the literary texts into approximately the same measure of scrutiny. The New Historicists give equal critical weight to analysing the ways in which literature and historical texts negotiate social and political power. The literary text is not prioritised or privileged in new historicist essays. As a literary theory, therefore, New Historicism demonstrates how literary works of art reveal historical truth, and how

writers subjectively communicate their artistic judgment. New Historicism frequently addresses the idea that power propels most human actions. Therefore, New Historicism seeks to find examples of power, and how it is dispersed within the literary text. Power is a means through which the marginalised are controlled, and the thing that the marginalised seek to gain. New Historicism seeks to locate "sites of struggle", to identify just who is the group or entity with the most power.

Finally, for New Historicist critics, history does not provide mere "background" against which to study literary works, but is, rather, an equally monumental "text" one that is ultimately inseparable from the literary work. This inevitably reveals the conflicting power relations that underpin all human interactions, ranging from the modest interactions with families to the large-scale interactions of social institutions.

While New Historicism is the theoretical framework of this study, Foucault's discourse theory and Stephen Greenblatt's subversion-containment dialectic provide the analytical models employed in the analyses of the selected texts: Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*. At this juncture, each of these analytical models will be discussed.

Foucault's Discourse Theory

Foucault's discourse theory stresses power relations as expressed through language and behavior and the relationship between language and power. It is based on the theories of the celebrated French philosopher and postmodernist, and one of the proponents of New Historicism, Michel Foucault. To Foucault, power is not exclusively class-related but extending through the society. Abrams (2005, p. 218) posits that "Foucault argues that power is not merely physical force but a pervasive human endeavour determining our relationships to others." Power is also not necessarily bad since it can be employed productively. Power, to Foucault, is essential to a just society. All people exert a certain power over us insofar as we defer to their needs and desires.

Power is not exclusively class-related; it extends throughout society. It permeates every fabric of the human society. Foucault's discourse analysis may, for example, look at how holders of authority use language to express their dominance, and request from those subordinate to them. Foucault (1972, p.32) opines that all political movements are interdependent. According to him, the varied manifestations and hierarchies of power are controlled by the organization of ideas and control of knowledge. Foucault (1972, p.40) posits that discourse, knowledge and idea formation are limited and regulated by social forces and relationships of the moment. It is these forces that maintain established power structures, political and social order. To Foucault, these principles of power relationships and social order or balances are constructed in different societies of every historical period by institutionalising what is or what is not "truth" or "knowledge."

Power relations and power struggles will be given adequate treatment in this study. Foucault (1998, p. 276) makes an incisive comment on power relations:

> Power relations are rooted in deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted "above" society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. In any case, to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible- and in fact ongoing.

The import of Foucault's statement above is that power relations are endemic in human society. We are so immersed in them that we tend to take them for granted. Power relations can be between a husband and a wife, a gynecologist and a patient, a lawyer and a client, an anthropologist and a local community, a Chief Executive Officer of a company and his employees, a lecturer and a student, etc. Power relations deserve closer scrutiny than it presently enjoys.

Stephen Greenblatt's subversion-containment dialectic

Subversion and containment is a concept in literary studies introduced by Stephen Greenblatt in his 1988 essay, 'Invisible Bullets'. It has subsequently gained a wide currency in New Historicist and cultural materialism approaches to textual analysis. The central idea in Stephen Greenblatt's subversion-containment dialectic is that, in order to sustain its power, any durable political and cultural order not only to some degree allows, but actively fosters "subversive" elements and forces, yet in such a way as more effectively to "contain" such challenges to the existing order (Greenblatt,1988, p.55).

New Historicism is primarily concerned with the ways in which social power relations are embedded in language. Recognising the textuality of history, critics agree that a range of texts, including literature, may generate subversive insights. They, however, maintain that any potential for real subversion will be undercut and contained by the text itself. This crucial principle of New Historicist thinking emphasises that ultimately there is no space in literature for effective resistance to authoritative social power. All texts will eventually contain and undermine their potential for subversion by submitting to and reinforcing the dominant social thinking of the day.

New Historicist Reading of Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*

On 5 July, 1969, Tom Mboya, arguably the architect of modern Kenya was assassinated outside Chaani's Pharmacy on Government Road (now Moi Avenue). Up to this day, neither the real assassins nor his sponsors are known. Mboya was only 39 years old when he was gunned down on that Saturday morning. Self-educated Mboya rose to prominence on the strength of his organizational genius, fearlessness, and oratory skill. He is today famous for his Mboya Students Airlift programme that took a generation of East Africans to colleges in the United States. But Mboya was a man of many firsts-a young man in a hurry, as he was once dubbed by *Time Magazine*. At only 27, he became the president of the All Africa People's Conference, the precursor body of the OAU, unanimously elected by the delegates of Nkrumah's Accra.

Our interest in Tom Mboya's widely-reported 1969 murder is sparked by its consistency with Kabito's murder, Doga and Nina's murder, and, to a lesser extent, Adika's murder in Francis Imbuga's play, *Betrayal in the City.* The gripping play was Kenya's entry for the 1977 Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC'77) in Lagos, Nigeria. The play is set in a fictional African country named Kafira in the post-independence era. During this period, the African masses experienced disillusionment with the high level of corruption, irresponsibility, financial rascality, nepotism, and ineptitude of their leaders, whom they had so much hope, following the independence of the African countries from their colonial masters. Kafira, in the play, is an independent African country headed by the despotic leader, who bears the generic name, Boss. The country experiences political upheavals, and the citizens are mired in hopelessness and disillusionment, largely as a result of an oppressive, dictatorial government of Boss. Kafira is a symbolic representation of a number of African countries which have experienced dictatorships. Social evils such as corruption, nepotism, arbitrary arrests, and assassinations are rife in Kafira. In the play, a demonstration is organised by concerned students of Kafira University to protest against the influx of expatriate specialist workers. This results in the untimely and tragic death of a student, Adika, who is shot dead by a police officer, Chagaga. After Adika's funeral, Mosese, a lecturer is arrested for criticising the government's actions.

With the funeral over, Adika's brother, Jusper kills Chagaga in revenge, and throws his body into a river. Jusper is later arrested for the offence. Two soldiers, Jere and Mulili are sent to Adika's home to prevent his parents from holding the customary shaving ceremony in his wake. On arrival, they find Nina and Doga, Adika's parents, preparing for the shaving ceremony. Confronted by the situation, Jere decides to allow Nina and Doga continue with the ceremony, but the second soldier, Mulili firmly disagrees. The two soldiers quarrel, leading to Jere's arrest, and subsequent incarceration. Due to the impending visit of a foreign Head of State, Boss decides to have a play staged by prisoners as part of the guests' entertainment. Mosese and Jere are therefore approached and requested to participate in the play. Boss's right hand man, Mr. Tumbo approaches Jusper, asking

him to write a play, which is later acted by Jere and Mosese. A prisoner falls ill prior to the rehearsals, and, therefore, Boss offers to step in. He later orders his guards to give him their guns to be employed as props after realising that the props were not ready. With the aid of the real guns, the actors challenge Boss and his cronies in a cleverly crafted coup. Jusper takes the gun, and kills Mulili. The play ends with Nina and Doga's ghosts mourning their son.

Mulili, a government officer and a cousin to Boss, is portrayed as inhuman, insensitive and callous. His callousness is seen when he kills Doga, Nina and Kabito in cold blood and boasts of it. Kabito's assassination, which is similar to Tom Joseph Mboya's aforementioned murder is as a result of one of the several instances of betrayals which run through the play. Mulili, a malicious character, is an incorrigible betrayer. He betrays Kabito, a government official, by saying that Kabito has complained that Boss has robbed him of his milk tender and has clobbered the economy comatose. He hides millions in foreign countries, and attempts to rape Regina, Jusper's girlfriend. Kabito is murdered as a result of the betrayal. A spectre of disillusionment haunts Kabira. Doga and Nina have become despondent after their son has been shot dead during the university riots. Their other son, Jusper has seemingly become demented following his brother's death. Nina concludes that the authorities have robbed them of all they had and blinded them. Mosese is disillusioned by the state of things in Kafira under Boss's leadership. He points out that the political leadership of Kafira has destroyed all the hopes that the citizens had of a better independent Kafira. The collective sense of disillusionment is captured by Mosese, when he says:

> It was better while we waited. Now we have nothing to look forward to. We have killed our past and are busy killing the future. (Betrayal in the City, 28)

He no longer believes in the biblical promise of the poor inheriting the kingdom of heaven. It is now illusory. Jere does not mince words over his loss of faith in humanity. He carries the bible to prison to explore the possibility of its restoring his faith in humanity:

JERE*: Then, I said to myself If they take you in, carry a Bible with you might restore your faith in humanity.* (23).

He only gets some fulfillment out of acting Pilate's story. Jere argues with Askari over the issue of freedom. He tells him that the outside of his cell may as well be the inside of another. The import of this is that Kafira stifles freedom, and those who think they are free are not. Even the youths are not spared of the disillusionment, as captured by Jusper:

JUSPER: *The younger generation can only be spectators at most. We'll never have the opportunity to join in that nation-building* (41).

When Regina tries to stop Jusper from wearing the red gown, which she says makes him look dangerous, he tells her bluntly that, like everyone else in the streets, her fighting spirit has deserted her. This underscores the spectre of disillusionment which haunts Kafira. After Kabito's murder, reality dawns on Tumbo and Nicodemo that their days are numbered as government officials. Tumbo says:

We have no choice, like caged animals,
We move but only inside the cage (62).

He says the elimination of citizens has become so rampant that one is not so sure of seeing the next day.

Atheism in relation to religion is one of the major specific concepts evident in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*. Atheism is the belief of the non-existence of God. In the play, Mosese demonstrates his disbelief in a supernatural being when he questions Jere about his beliefs. He tells Jere that he does not believe in certain biblical verses which made no sense. He also questions Jere on the number of people who have set their eyes on the kingdom (heaven) and its colour. Jere identifies himself as a believer. He informs Mosese that he taught religious knowledge before he joined the army. Owing to his religious beliefs, when he is arrested, he carries a bible with him to prison so that it might restore his faith in humanity. He and his fellow prison inmates act the story of Jesus and Pontius Pilate which he feels is in

tandem with their present situation. In the opening act of the play, Doga and Nina overly demonstrate their religious side at Adika's grave. They show this by kneeling in front of their son's grave, and singing a religious song and later praying.

Remarkably, Imbuga portrays the prison as a place of rebirth in *Betrayal in the City*. In the play, Jere, Mosese and Jusper are imprisoned for going against the laws and leadership of Kafira. Jusper is imprisoned for murdering Chagaga. He is later released after undergoing rehabilitation at the prison cells. Jere is imprisoned for going against the orders he was given while Mosese is imprisoned after being found in possession of a kilogram of opium in his car. Both Mosese and Jere are offered amnesty. During the dialogic encounter between Jere and Mulili, we learn of another prisoner called Mustafa who had escaped from prison through the help of Mulili. The leadership of Kafira use imprisonment as a form of punishment to those who oppose his policies. This is a clear indication of misuse of power by the leadership of Kafira that is hell-bent on using force on its citizens to adhere to the laws and rules imposed on them by the dictatorial regime of Boss.

In *Betrayal in the City*, Francis Imbuga makes a veiled reference to his nationality, Kenya, specifically the regime of Jomo Kenyatta, who retained the role of Prime Minister after independence was declared in Kenya on 12 December, 1963. He ruled Kenya from the period of independence until his death in 1978. Imbuga wrote *Betrayal in the City* during the period of Jomo Kenyatta's reign as Kenyan President. Jomo Kenyatta's policy was that of continuity and gradual Africanisation of the government, keeping many colonial civil servants in their old jobs, as they were gradually replaced by Kenyans. Kenyatta was re-elected unopposed in 1966, and the following year had the constitution amended to expand his powers. He consolidated on his power. Nepotism characterised his regime, as he placed several of his Kikuyu tribesmen in most of the powerful state and security offices and positions. State security offices harassed residents, and were suspected of complicity in the spate of murders of prominent personalities deemed to be threats to Kenyatta's regime. These include Pio Gama Pinto, Tom Mboya, and J.M. Kariuki. At a point in time, he

turned Kenya to a one-party state, banning the only other political party, the Kenya People's Union. In writing *Betrayal in the City*, Francis Imbuga must have been largely influenced by the regime of Jomo Kenyatta as Kenyan president. Jomo Kenyatta ruled for fifteen uninterrupted years (1963-1978). The playwright exposes some of the atrocities perpetrated in Kenyatta's regime in the play.

Foucault's discourse theory has a number of views on power. One of these is that power is the ways in which a dominant group exerts its influence over others. The play amply demonstrates how power permeates every fabric of the society. Boss, by virtue of his position as Head of State of Kafira ordinarily and constitutionally has power over the people of Kafira. However, he abuses the power relations between the rulers and their subjects by his dictatorial style of leadership. A coup is staged against him at the climax of the play. Those in the positions of authority speak in peremptory tone; they use language authoritatively. The characters in the positions of authority use language to express their dominance, and request obedience and respect from those subordinate to them. This is evident in the opening scene of the play when two soldiers, Jere and Mulili, on Boss's order come to ensure that no hair shaving ceremony is held by Nina and Doga in memory of their murdered son, Adika. The soldiers, especially Mulili, speak in peremptory tone to the bereaved couple. According to Mulili, the stopping of the customary hair shaving ceremony is "in the interest of peace." (9). The peremptory use of language is also demonstrated by the prison warder, Askari, during the detention of Jere (a political prisoner) and Mosese (a university lecturer). Like Jere, Mosese is persecuted for criticising the government. Boss is another character in the play who expresses his dominance with his authoritative use of language.

Power, according to Foucault, does not repress; it invites people to speak, to assess and articulate themselves. Jere and Mosese demonstrate this in the play. At every opportunity, they vehemently express their disenchantment and opposition to the unabashedly corrupt, dictatorial government of Boss. While in prison cell, detained for allowing the head shaving ceremony to go on, Jere proves to be vocal and articulate, answering Askari without fear. Jere, who sees

reason in standing by Nina and Doga, learns that the arm of the law is to suppress the majority and support the minority**.** Mosese's arrest and detention is as a result of his being in possession of opium, as official evidence shows. He alleges that there is no iota of truth in the opium allegation, and he is arrested for speaking his mind during the burial of one of his brave students who was killed. Mosese raises the lid on the question of independence. Using a biblical allusion, he says:

MOSESE: *That is why I don't believe in such crap as the last shall be the first, and blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the Kingdom of heaven! For years we waited for the kingdom, then they said it had come… It was an illusion* (27-28).

Many of the characters in the play engage in power struggles and fractious power relations. When the two soldiers, Jere and Mulili, are sent to Adika's home to forestall the holding of the customary shaving ceremony, they engage in a power struggle. While Jere decides to allow Nina and Doga to carry on with the ceremony, Mulili stoutly refuses. Act Two: Scene One of the play is devoted to how a committee plans the state visit. The scene illustrates the power struggles in the play. Kabito is incensed with Mulili's inclusion in the committee. There is a deep-seated power tussle between Mulili and Kabito. Kabito's anger is borne out of the fact that Mulili bullied his way into getting the university milk tender which apparently Kabito was keen on getting. There is no love lost between these two characters. At the meeting, their differences play out, degenerating into the use of swear words:

KABITO: *If he doesn't get me first, I will get him* (52)

Kabito tells Mulili to his face: "*You are the people who choke Kafira*" (56)

Nicodemo, a government official, is not favourably disposed to Mosese's inclusion among those acting for the state visitor, as he was the one who planted the drugs (opium) on Mosese. Mulili convinces his cousin to twist the arm of the university administration

to rescind the contract given to Kabito. Rather than focus on the issues of the visit, the committee members are interested in the perks they have to take home, as expressed by Kabito:

KABITO: *The tree climber begins from the bottom, not on the top. May we not be told our terms of service Are we being good citizens?* (53)

The meeting is prematurely adjourned due to a scuffle which ensues between Kabito and Mulili. The power struggle between Kabito and Mulili assumes a dangerous dimension as Kabito is brutally killed, following Mulili's report of him to Boss.

There are a number of subversive characters in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*. Jere is a subversive character. He goes against the President, Boss's orders and allows the poor couple, Nina and Doga to do the final ritual for their son. Jere's subversive proclivity is foregrounded in his detention. Unlike other detainees, he has no modicum of respect for the prison warder, Askari. Mulili is another subversive character in the play. He calls into question the ideology of a soldier's obedience to his boss. Mulili tells everybody who cares to listen that Boss has never been his cousin or could only be a distant cousin. He says there is absolutely no reason why Boss should not be killed. He then proceeds to enumerate Boss's ills such as high handedness, ruining of the economy, ruling for too long, and killing of Kabito. Mulili is undoubtedly the leading perpetrator of corruption in Boss's regime.

New Historicist Reading of Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*

Tewfik Al-Hakim's popular play, *Fate of a Cockroach* is one of the celebrated Egyptian playwright's plays that conform to the theatre of the absurd in Egypt. In the play, Al-Hakim satirically creates the cockroach characters as a symbolic representation of the political disillusionment with the revolutionary regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser who ruled Egypt between 1956 and 1970. According to historical accounts, Gamal Abdel Nasser was troublesome as a student, always running into troubles with his school teachers, some of

who were British. He participated in a series of anti-British protests. He graduated as a second lieutenant in a Royal Military Academy after leaving secondary school. Nasser gained national prominence on July 23, 1952 when he and 89 other Free Officers staged an almost bloodless coup d'etat, ousting the monarchy. He became the Egyptian President in 1956. On attainment of the position, he announced the promulgation of a constitution under which Egypt became a socialist Arab state with one-party political system. He introduced Islam as the official religion of the country.

Admittedly, Nasser made a number of notable accomplishments while in office. The operation of the Aswan High Dam, the partially successful campaign against corruption, and women empowerment are some of these accomplishments. However, on the flipside, Nasser's regime was characterised by the making of Egypt a police state, the strict censoring of the communications media, the nationalising of major newspapers, the stifling of democracy and the gathering of political enemies into concentration camps in the desert. The regime was grossly unpopular with the masses.

Al-Hakim, arguably the major Egyptian dramatist and cultural figure during the period of Nasser's regime and in the decades that follow, tries to capture this in *Fate of a Cockroach*, a play which vividly portrays man's lack of control over his own fate. The attempt by man to control his fate, invariably, leads to an obsession with attaining knowledge and power. The quest for knowledge is symbolised by the character of Savant in the play. This quest culminates in danger, as it lands King into the bottom of the bathtub. The cockroach king's perilous plunge into a cavernous bathtub is the climactic end of the opening act of the thought-provoking play. B.M. Ibitokun (1995:8) x-rays the character of Savant thus:

> The portrayal of the Savant is the dramatization of the demise of scientism and rationalism. His inquisitiveness and knowledge bring woes to the world just as our insatiate knowledge for science and technology lets loose on our heads an avalanche of miseries. We are still at it.

The devastating consequences of World War 1 (1914-1918) and World War 11 (1939-1945) were still fresh in human memory when *Fate of a Cockroach* was published. The wars, which showcased the drawbacks of scientific and technological inventions, culminated in the tragic death of millions of people, and the wanton destruction of property.

In Act 1 of the play, a self-proclaimed king of the cockroaches squabbles with his consort while seeking a lasting solution to the perennial ants' problem. King has earlier explained to his inquisitive, disrespectful and pushy wife (Queen) on how the talents of his consort lead to their appointments:

QUEEN: *We know about your latents-the length of your whiskers. But what are your Minister's talents?*
KING: His consummate concern with proposing disconcerting problems and producing unpleasant news.
QUEEN: And the Priest, what are his talents?
KING: The completely incomprehensible things he says.
QUEEN: And the learned Savant?
KING: The strange information he has about things that have no existence other than his own head.
QUEEN: And what induced you to put up with these people?
KING: Necessity… (Fate of a Cockroach, 5)

On the existential nature of the play, B.M. Ibitokun (1995, p. 4) has this to say:

> Tewfil Al Hakim's Fate of Cockroach, with its symbolic terseness of the human estate, offers itself as a bold Yoruba paradigm of the drama of being. The title of the play itself is self-revelatory enough. Its metaphysical thrust is to be seen in its dramatization of man's warring duality: essence as emptiness and strivings to achieve self-plenum as existential counterpoise.

The nauseating nature of cockroach contributes towards its choice by the playwright to capture the emptiness of human essence. Its cumbersome shape, awkward look and gait, and excremental, nocturnal existence make it disgusting to human beings. Adil checks its meaning in the dictionary:

ADIL: *The cockroach or black-bettle is a harmful insect that, infests cloth, food, and oaper. It is often found in lavatories and has long, hairy horns or whiskers. It spoils more food than it actually requires as nourishment. It can live for about a year* (36).

Adil proves to be Al-Hakim's 'personified cockroach' as he finds himself captivated by the struggle of the King cockroach to climb up the slippery walls of the porcelain tub as well as connected to its persistent will to live. The cockroaches' world is a microcosm of the modern human society.

The parallelism in Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach* runs at the level of cockroaches and humans. The King and Queen cockroaches have a similar issue as the human couple, Adil and Samia, who wake up and launch into a heated argument. The argument is like a ritual that normally breaks up between the young, middleclass couple every morning. In both instances, the female has an upper hand. According to Foucault's discourse analysis, power is not exclusively class-related; it extends throughout the society. In the two dialogic encounters of the couples in the play (King and Queen; Samia and Adil), the women have upper hands. The discourse in both instances alludes to conflictive roles between the sexes which reflect the case of the roles of men and women in Egyptian society at the time. As afore-stated, it was a period when Egyptian women were accorded more rights than they previously had. King blames Queen trying to underestimate his power and worth, and for asking him to solve the age-long ants' problem:

KING: *Have you forgotten the characteristics of our species? We are not like those small creatures called 'ants', who gather together in their thousands on the slightest pretext.*

QUEEN: Don't remind me of ants! A king like you claiming you have worth and authority and you don't know how to solve the ant problem!
KING: The ant problem! Ah…um…
QUEEN: Ah…um…is that all you can say?...
KING: Do you want, from one day to the next, a solution to a problem that is as old as time? (4)

In a related development, Adil blames Samia for putting her interests and herself before her husband. He is angry with the fact that she always asks him to do extra chores at home:

ADIL: What are you talking about?
SAMIA: I'm telling you to occupy yourself usefully until I've finished having my bath.
ADIL: Occupy myself?
SAMIA: Yes, with anything, because I want quiet- quiet.
ADIL: Quiet? You tell me to be quiet!
SAMIA: Listen, Adil, turn on the radio.
ADIL: Turn on what?
SAMIA (turning on the basin tap): Turn the tap on.
ADIL: The tap? You want me to turn the tap on for you as well? But the tap is where you are.
SAMIA: I told you to turn on the radio. (29)

Samia is, indubitably, a domineering wife who has no modicum of respect for her husband. In Savant's opinion, the ants are inferior to the cockroaches as they are solely concerned with acquiring of food, the ants pose the greatest threat to the existence of the cockroaches. When a cockroach (Minister's son) slips onto its back, the ants immediately attack it and carry it away to be stored as food:

KING: *It grieves us, O Minister, to see your son borne off in this manner.*
PRIEST: May the gods have mercy upon him! May the gods have mercy upon him!
KING: It's certainly a most dignified funeral!
SAVANT: So it seems, although logic dictates that it should be

otherwise…(18).

Ironically, despite being seen as insignificant in the cockroaches' world, the ants play a decisive role in deciding the fate of the cockroach, who, all through the play, are at the ants' mercy, and cannot come up with a lasting solution to the ants' intractable problem. The cockroaches' struggle to live is a metaphor on man's struggle to stay alive and not to die. Nobody wants to die. Man's natural desire to stay alive is evident in Adil's fascination with the epic, ill-fated struggle of a cockroach to climb out of the bathtub. The doctor fully appreciates Adil's identification with the cockroach's struggle:

DOCTOR: You are interested in its struggle for life.
ADIL: This, then, is its voice, its pleading, its language which I can hear and understand.
DOCTOR: Certainly, it explains our being so interested in its struggle.
ADIL: Is that not what has kept me in front of the bath since early morning?
DOCTOR (looking into the bath) : It is in reality an entertaining spectacle (69).

Stephen O. Solanke (2014, p.200) avers that *Fate of a Cockroach* is a perfect play to illustrate the powerlessness of human beings in natural and uncontrolled human phenomenon. He suggests that in order to have freedom which an average human being craves for, a world of communality like that of the ants in the play should be created. Ndubuisi Nnanna and Ikechukwu Erojikwe (2015, p. 44) in their critical evaluation of *Fate of a Cockroach* argue, from the perspective of post-colonial literary criticism, that the recurrent reference to post-colonial disillusionment by many Anglophone African dramatists perpetuates a form of colonial mentality. According to them, *Fate of a Cockroach* provides us with a relevant material to analyse the alienated individual in a post-colonial society battling with the reality of collective depression.

Power struggle permeates the entire fabric of Al Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*. It can be seen both in the cockroaches' kingdom and among human beings. There is a noticeable struggle for power between King cockroach and Queen cockroach. Queen cockroach does not want to bow to King's authority. She always attempts to diminish his authority:

KING: Please-no sarcasm! I have an ever-growing feeling that you're always trying to belittle my true worth.
QUEEN: Your worth?
KING: Yes, and my authority. You are always trying to diminish my authority.
QUEEN: (even more sarcastically): You authority? Your authority over whom? Not over me at any rate-you are in no way better than me….(3)

All through the play, Queen demonstrates her unwillingness to bow to King, and respect him as husband. Peremptory tone is the hallmark of both King and Queen's speeches in the play.

At the human level, there is power struggle between the couple, Adil and Samia. Adil lives under severe psychological conflict with his wife, and cannot assert his authority. Samia has no respect for him, as they engage in power struggle over who has greater authority in the household. The ideal moment naturally creates itself for Adil with the emergence of the cockroach at the bathtub. He identifies with it and its struggle to be free. Even among the consort of Minister, Savant, Priest and King, there is power struggle. Each of them has an exaggerated idea of its importance. Savant, for example, believes he is far more intelligent than other cockroaches, and they need to acknowledge the fact.

Tewfik Al Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach* also lends itself to Stephen Greenblatt's subversion containment dialectic. Queen is, undoubtedly, a subversive character. After the Minister's announcement of his son's death, Queen asserts that a solution to the problem of the ants must be vigorously pursued with a view to nipping it in the bud. King says no solution exists. The import of this is that

King's significance is undermined as he cannot rise to the challenging occasion, and fulfil his official functions. Minister is another subversive character in the play. Throughout the play, the cockroaches' air of superiority prevents them from adapting the ways of the inferior ants and finding a permanent solution to the problem. Minister makes a suggestion in this regard:

> *Armies. They attack us with huge armies. Now if we were able to mobilize ourselves and assemble in great numbers we'd find it easy to attack them, to scatter and to crush them under our great feet* (9).

Promptly, King asserts his authority, rebukes the Minister's opinion, putting him in his proper place.

Another major instance of subversion in the play is demonstrated by Samia, who is portrayed as a stronger character than the husband, Adil. She tries to control him.This results in the psychological conflict between the couple. In her dialogue with Doctor, she states categorically that she believes she is stronger than her husband:

SAMIA: Of course, Doctor, go ahead!
DOCTOR: What's your opinion about your husband's personality?
SAMIA: In what respect?
DOCTOR: In respect of strength and weakness.
SAMIA: In relation to whom?
DOCTOR: In relation to yourself of course.
SAMIA: I ...I believe his personality to be weaker than mine.
DOCTOR; Does he know it?
SAMIA: Certainly (55).

Samia's subversion is later contained in the play, as her attitude changes from a bossy wife to that of a caring wife after the Doctor informs her that Adil suffers from psychological problems as a result of pressures of home, work and study which lead him to identify himself with the cockroach in the bath tub.

Conclusion

In this essay, two acclaimed African dramatic texts, Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach* have been critically examined with the lens of New Historicism theory. The essay highlighted various instances in the selected plays which can be employed to illustrate Foucault's discourse theory and Stephen Greenblatt's subversion-containment dialectic, the analytical models adopted in the study. Specifically, the power relations and power struggles among the characters in the plays, the subversive incidents and characters in the texts and the containment of these subversive actions and characters are discussed in the study. In its submission, the study stressed the compelling need for more studies on African literature, especially African drama, to be grounded on New Historicism theory.

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