Dramaturgy of Social Relevance and Conflict Resolution: A Dialectical Study of The Wives Revolt by JP Clark’s

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Drama arguably stimulates change in the society through its ability to modify human minds and through the harmonisation of human impulses. It uses images easily identifiable by the members of the society and presents it before the society, provides a dramatic experience of the social realities bedevilling the society and thus creates awareness and consciousness. Some of the issues drama of social relevance addresses includes conflict resolution, security issues, and community development among others. This paper explores the efficacy of JP Clark’s The Wives’ Revolt as a veritable tool for the resolution of conflict in the Niger Delta. Clark in this play advocates for a non-violent form of protest as a workable alternative towards the resolution of conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta. The cauldron of contradiction that characterises the movement for the emancipation of the people of Niger-Delta does not only negate the actualisation of the emancipation goals. Violence has turned the agitation of the people of the Nigeria Delta area of Nigeria out of many years of environmental havoc; the collapse of their eco-system and economic crisis into serious conflict. Vendetta and gratification have eaten deep into the fabric of this society and nothing is being done in terms of the emancipation of the natives at the grassroots who suffer high profile effects of the destruction of their eco-system through oil spillage. This paper uses the peaceful suggestions Clark makes in The Wives’ Revolt as pointers or viable alternatives for the simulation of change and resolution of conflict not just in the Niger-Delta but other parts of Nigeria suffering from any form of violent crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The resolution of conflict through non violent approach evidently is the best form of conflict resolution. Conflict resolutions based on bloodshed and terror, and violence and bedlam often times appears to be very short lived, that is if conflict is ever resolved through violence. The masses especially women and children, in the creeks of the Niger-Delta have been suffering for many years, the pains, loses and other havoc cause by violent form of conflict resolution. In fact resolution of violent forms of protest. The approach to which conflict arising within a society is resolved is pivotal to how long the peace in the society lasts. Conflict appears to be a reoccurring phenomenon in many human societies. Clark reorganises the conflict inherent in the Nigeria Delta area of Nigeria and therefore creates a drama of social relevance to resolve and agitate for a resolution. The Wives’ Revolt by JP Clark is a drama that depicts non violent forms or approach to the conflict resolution bedevilling the Niger Delta society. In the play Clark presents non-violent forms of conflict resolution to settle the saga.
orchestrated by the men, through the sharing formula they have unilaterally adopted in sharing the compensation money the oil company operating in their locality gave the entire society. The men have without consultations with the women share the money into three parts – one portion to the women, another to the men and the third to the elders. The elders exclusively consist of men of which no woman no matter how old and powerful could belong to. The women in agitation for their right adopt non-violent forms of conflict resolution as approaches for settling the imminent conflict arising in their society.

This paper is confronted with the challenge of answering the question of how can aggrieved people hold their peace in the face of marginalisation and provocation and also at the same time seek for a non-violent approach in agitation for the rights or emancipation. It is in view of this that this paper aimed at evaluating these non-violent forms of conflict resolution inherent in the play as workable alternatives capable of simulating change and also hoist the awareness and consciousness of the people of Niger Delta. Some of these non-violent forms of conflict resolution include negotiation, “walk out” or self impose exile domestic strike and economic disempowerment. The research methodology adopted for this research is qualitative since the analysis is based on the primary material; The Wives’ Revolt. The play captures one of the major challenges confronting the oil rich Niger-Delta and also at the same proffer solution for resolving some of the long lasting issue militating against the emancipation of the Niger-Delta.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Again, it should be noted that the women and men who are citizen Niger Delta are the bonafide owners of the crude oil resource which has been explored for the comprehensive benefit of the Nigerian society, over a half century. In other words, these women as represented by Clark in The Wives Revolt having their male counterparts who live and suffer same environmental havoc caused by the exploration of oil on their land get even more than them from the oil proceeds are highly unacceptable. This deprivation of some of the right of women creates anger and emotions are bottled. These women over the years had bottled anger of various sorts. They have had to contend with oil pillage leading to environmental havoc and degradation which have made life unbearable for them and yet there are lots of discrepancies between their asses to the wealth when compared to that of their male counterparts. The consequent effect is the outburst of their accumulated grievances. It is based on this standpoint that the study also adopts the psychological theory of aggression by R.J Rummel as stated in his book Understanding Conflict and War. Rummel opines that aggression is a consequence of our frustrated goals, desires, needs and drives. The intensity with which we desire a goal, the degree with which frustration blocks our desires and the history of our frustration presumably predicts of our aggression. This aggression comes in form of resistance, struggle, civil unrest etc (7).

Aggression and civil unrest must not be characterised with violence, terror and bloodshed. Protests and agitation for the ones right can be made and achieved without the use of violence. It is upon this framework that the rationale of this paper is defined.

Negotiation as a Non-Violent Form of Conflict Resolution in The Wives’ Revolt

In The Wives’ Revolt, Clark presents the patriarchal system in the community of Erhuwaren that perpetuates the subjugation and marginalisation of women economically, sociologically,
psychologically and otherwise. The women of Erhuwaren adopt a non-violent form of conflict resolution as a means for negotiating their ways out of several years of oppression and marginalisation. The desire by the women of the land to take bold steps towards their emancipation is orchestrated by the unfair formula their male counterparts adopted in sharing the oil compensation money given to the entire community by the oil companies operating in their communal lands. The men have decided without consulting the women and shared the money into three; one share to the elders, another to the men and the last quarter to the women. These women reject the sharing formula and demand an equal share of the money since the elders getting the third part are still part of men. To weaken the economic powers of these women, frustration their goals and to also stop them from taking action against this dehumanisation, the men placed a ban on the rearing of goats, a domestic animal reared by these women. The rearing of this domestic animal forms the backbone economy of these women’s source of income. Mfaga Modom and Asen Marcellinus capture and explain the situation thus “...women not being allowed to own property as seen in the banishment of the goat, which are owned and reared by women, their domestic value not also appreciated in the play, the elders of the society deciding an unfair and unequal share of the compensation money from the oil company.” (168)

These women saw the need to negotiate their way out of this marginalisation and dehumanisation yet they never adopted violence rather the created an avenue for peaceful dialogue which will consequently lead to a lasting solution to the conflict. They made initiations for a peaceful dialogue between them and the men. The men failed to utilise this non-violent approach of conflict resolution as initiated by these women. They remain resolute to their decision of perpetuating the patriarchal system. During the meeting, the president was seen sleeping and faintly comes awake in between the meeting when awakened by his young attendants only to node his head in agreement to everything the men say, neglecting the opinion of the women. This is obvious in the following lines of Koko. “Oh, yes, so we did. But did your most respected leader recognise our individual rights to speak? Oh, old age can really be a curse. Did you see him sliding off into sleep in the middle of the proceedings then, when nudged awake by his young attendant, how he nodded vigorously to everything you men said?”(Clark 9)

Clark uses the character Koko to represent the voice of the women and Okoro her husband to represent that of the men in the play. The following conversation that ensures between them is a clear indication of the women use of negotiation as a non-violent form conflict resolution to negotiate they way out of dehumanisation.

Koko: You have your free women from the streets all the time, anyway; when have you ever waited for us to ban you from our beds before seeking comfort and company elsewhere? Our menstrual or pregnant condition used to be the excuse in the good old days but not so now

Okoro: I’m not going to be drawn into that old trap of an argument and be picked up by the tail like some wet rat out of a sewer. Oh, I should have known I would have nothing hostility and criticism from my own wife when I come home after doing a day’s job for which I have had nothing but praise from everybody outside.

Even though, Okoro refuses to listen Koko further reminds him that their decision to ban the goats is based on the testimony of two, three idle men in the town who spend
all day bragging about their great ancestral past and then return home too drunk to see the women they are beating” (Clark 5). The women will not therefore give up on their quest despite the refusal of the men to listen. Here Clark advocates the efficacy of resolving conflicting through dialogue. Through Koko, the women begin the process of dialogue. She declares that: “Life is going to be so much worse, if you don’t listen to us women while making your laws…” (14). She goes further affirms the position of women: “Oh just repeal that law, and give us our fair share of the money…” (14). All these explanations by Koko show the level of wickedness and oppression the women have been through in the hands of their male counterparts. The banishment of goats and unfair sharing of the money only becomes a stimulant, propelling these women to let out accumulated grievances and long bottled emotions.

Despite the outburst of emotions, these women controlled their accumulated grievances very well and will not in their agitations adopt violence because they know that the struggle will not only succeed in liberating them alone, but also provides a platform for the redemption of future generations to come. No wonder Salami Irene describes this struggle based on non-violent protest in The Wives Revolt thus “... not a fight mourning the patriarchal dominance but, rather, they resolve to fight a battle, the success of which they believe will impact on their future generations positively” (424) what this women seek therefore is to through negotiation over throw male hegemony which has created viable platform for the existence of a capitalist society and therefore perpetuates oppression. The men refused to listen to the voice of women. These women in recognition of the danger that will herald their failure to achieve their goals through dialogue quickly explore the next available option for of non-violent form of conflict resolution.

A similar situation of the dramatic action inherent in Clark’s The Wives’ Revolt is evident in the incidence that occurred at the National Political Conference Reform (NPCR) of 2005. The Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo eventually acceded to the calls for a national conference when on 21st February, 2005 he inaugurated what he called the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) under the Chairmanship of Justice Niki Tobi (Rtd). The demands for the Convocation of a sovereign national conference have been part and parcel of the agenda of democracy movements across the Nigeria nation for a long time especially during the days of military absolutism (Tenuche 37). The demand was eventually accented to under the led Olusegun Obasanjo democratic administration of 2005. During this conference the representatives from the Niger Delta made laudable efforts; sought through dialogue to negotiate their ways out of severally years of economic exploitation and environmental pillage. It appears that their submission received little or no attention. The representatives from this region just like the women in The Wives Revolt realise that this negotiation will not in any way improve the lots of their people. Without any show of violence, or chaos, these representatives sought for an alternative means through which they can express their pains. They walked out from the conference. This is the same approach the women of Erhuware community resorted to when during the meeting between them and the men, the president developed deaf ears to the submission of these women but nodes in agreement to everything then men have to say. This can be seen as the prophetic essence and manifestations in Clark’s play

Unless one has become part of humanity, one cannot even faintly fathom the pains, sufferings, the unjust indignations thousands and millions of natives of the oil
rich Niger Delta especially the women and children as represented by Clark in *The Wives Revolt* are daily made to endure. An understanding of the level of dehumanisation suffered by these victims will obviously, make one appreciate the non-violent form of conflict resolution adopted by these women in agitating for an egalitarian society. It is therefore apparent that just like the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) of 2005 failed to yield a result so did the conference between the women of Erhawaren and their men failed in its purpose to yield a tangible result. The failure of the conference did not make the women to give up on their pursuit for freedom neither did the failure National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) dissuade the representatives and the entire people of Niger Delta from agitating for a green environmental void of degradation and also a fair share from the revenue generated from the oil that is been pumped out from the veins on daily basis. The play in this capacity could also be conceived as a reflecting the social realities bedevilling the oil rich Niger Delta and also a veritable tool for the stimulation of change in the society.

―Walk Out‖ or Self Impose Exile as a Non-Violent Form of Anarchism in *The Wives’ Revolt*

The failure of the women of Erhuwaren to reach a compromise with their male counterparts through negotiation and dialogue did not make the women to give up on their dreams and movement for their emancipation. This is obvious in the following lines of Koko “The law you have passed is bad, unfair and discriminatory, being direct against women because of our stand. We will not accept.”(7) These women in their quest to establish themselves in the political and economic domain of their society also stage “walk out” or self impose exile. They headed and settled in the enemy’s territory; land known for is its filthiness.

The determination of these women to achieve an egalitarian society where both male and female will be socialized equal and allow free access to the wealth of the community through non-violent means cannot be over emphasised. It is in view of this that Salami recounts the historical deeds of Egba market women in the 1940, which forced Egba king to exile. The course which was championed by Fumilayo Ramsom-Kuiti, madam Tinubu of Lagos who for a long time with fellow market women prevented colonial administration from taking over Lagos and the Aba women’s riot of 1929. The efficacy of the non-violent approach taken by these women is made obvious in the following lines of Okoro.

Okoro: Anything would have been preferable to this. To exile themselves in enemy territory! They have delivered us naked to our enemies to sing our shame.

For the first time Okoro considers the implications and impact and also the further damage the lingering crisis will cause if not addressed. Clark in his advocacy for an egalitarian society in his play *The Wives’ Revolt* could be conceived to have suggested a “walk out” approach as a viable form of non-violent approach in achieving peace in the oil rich Niger Delta. *The Wives’ Revolt* is a drama that paints a portrait of action with extrapolative colour, precise clarity, systematic and clinical precision; an emblematic image of the age long economic dislocation suffered by the Niger Deltans leading to the consistent holler for self determination and resource control. The “walking out” of the women of Erhuwaren on their men is likened to the failure of the South-South people’s agitation for a significant derivation formula at both the committee level and the floor of the general house. This is precisely the point that packaged Clark as a prophetic dramatist. Clark also gives cerebral political attention to the play by
highlighting truths about injustice and human rights violation by the political class in their bid to secure peace. The change of the thinking and beliefs by the men of Erhuwaremen about their relationship with women, their wives and the need for both genders to be equally treated is a normative social reconstruction position proposed as an honest contribution to the regional identity struggle, national peace and stability (Binebain and Odi 80)

The approach of non-violent form of conflict resolution adopted by these women in agitating for their rights could be said to be in line with Akachi Ezigbo postulation of snail-sense feminism. In her postulation Ezigbo is of the opinion that the women in fighting for the right should not use violence action and extreme force but rather should just like the animal snail though without fists, fin or wings is able through patient and gentle approach negotiate its way through various storms and obstacles, climbing fences and mountains without getting crushed, the women should adopt the snail sense in their agitation.(28) The non-violent walk out is therefore in conformity to this the snail-sense feminism.

More so, the dramatic action in the play could be likened to the non-violent and peaceful protest of the Warri Women in August 8, 2002 The Warri women felt they could provoke social changes in a much more spectacular manner. The youths had made attempts in the past with little result. The men were perceived to be eternally compromising because of the greed for money. Thus, the women of the Niger-Delta took the historic decision to re-enact the historical deeds of the colonial Nigeria women and stage a protest. The women were not just agitating for financial compensation for several years of environmental spillage by the oil companies. They were not just asking for amenities or that modern infrastructure to be installed in the Niger-Delta to enhance the quality of life and facilitate daily living. They were asking more fundamental questions and especially questioning the social responsibility (if one existed) of oil companies to the host communities. (Jike 207)

The Vanguard Newspapers editorial of August 26th, 2002 also provides an insight into the nature of the protest and also authenticates the validity of this incidence. According to the editorial, the protest was unique because of its being an all women affair. In spite of its rarity, the points of these women on total neglect of the area in terms of provision of social amenities and creation of jobs for their sons and daughters cannot be faulted. Without equivocation, the women have the right to ask questions on why they should continue to be denied these amenities of good living even though resources for sustaining the company and the host nation are being derived from oil explored from these areas (6).

More recently, the Vanguard newspaper also on the 8th of January, 2014 reported another non-violent form of anarchism by the women of south-south area of Niger Delta, Bayelsa precisely in agitation against the Shell Oil Company operating in their land. According the report, hundreds of half-nude women in Peremabiri community in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta, staged a protest against non-implementation of an existing agreement by Shell. The women disrupted movement of workers into the oil platforms and boat houses operated by Shell in the area, alleging non-implementation of the memorandum of understanding Shell entered into with the community. The protesting women tied red cloth to block the entrance to the oil platform located within the community. They further alleged that Shell had failed to redeem the two-year-old promise to replace a faulty community generator, renovate existing community school and provide potable
water for its host community. Some of the women carried placards with various inscriptions such as “Shell: Give us Light”, “Implement MoU or go”, “We need water, Light, School for our children” among others.

The consequent effect of this protest is the immediate announcement by the spokesman of the Shell Petroleum Development Company, SPDC, Precious Okolobo, that the broken down generator has already be purchased. He said that SPDC has procured a new set that is being transported to the area for installation and commissioning. He said the set was twice the capacity of the bad one, and would be commissioned as soon as possible. This immediate response is an evident achievement of liberation of the region by the women. The efficacy of non-violent form of protest in conflict resolution in heralding the approach of a new dawn cannot be over emphasized.

Another social incidence in Nigeria where women came out in full force is the popular Aba Women Riot of 1929. Even though the women were not violent in their approach many of them were killed. The result of their agitation is paramount to the liberation of Nigeria from the shackles of colonialism. To this end okefor opines that “in 1929, the women of Southern Eastern Nigeria revolted against the British colonialist and burnt down British institutions. The British army attacked many of these women.” (74) Umoren describes this act of emancipation by these Igbo women as “a symbolic and tangible in the role women play in formulation of a nation and also in agitation for an egalitarian society void of dehumanisation, exploitation and operation.” (62) From the social realities which are obvious in the play, the use of non-violent form of conflict resolution therefore appears to be a social order in Nigeria. The oppressed and marginalised masses often times explore this viable alternative as a way to redeem their future, destiny and create a new lease of life for themselves and for future generations to come.

Consequent upon the action of these women, it is becomes obvious that they pursue a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The “walk out” by the women and the consequent effect of this walk out made the men to bring them back for a re-negotiation and settlement of the crisis. This singular action of the women brings the two warring parties to a point where both are willing to reach a compromise. The men did not only bring their wives home but also invested the compensation money wisely into education for the benefit of all and also share everything belong to the community equally between them and the women to forestall further occurrences, hired a team doctors to treat these women of the disease they contacted while on exile, revoke the ban on the rearing of goats, pay a reparation of fattened cow, the hundreds of tubers of yam, ten barrels of palm oil and other items required to pacify these women and involve the women in the governance of the society.

These women therefore through a non-violent form of conflict resolution achieve their goal for an egalitarian society. They acquired social, political, economic power just as their male counterparts do. This situation is very much similar to the situations inherent in the Niger Delta. To this end, Paul, Umolu thinks that this is the situation of the present day Niger Delta. For him the conflict usually involves two parties. “The cause and effect in the play as in Nigeria's real life situation today is the oil money and the burden men bore by the massive self exile of the women. Today Nigeria is in a nightmare because of the action or inaction of past and present leaders” (42)

These women through this non violent approach to conflict resolution are also
able to dismantle the existing patriarchal order in their society. One could therefore suggest that this movement by these women is obviously a feminist non-violent agitation since its objectives are deeply rooted in the dismantling of the patriarchal society. This patriarchal system as found in the play strives to weaken the economic and political powers of these women. The feminist goal is to usher in an integrated human society, one that is free of gender imbalance. The primary aim of feminism is to expunge from society all forms of male dominance, oppression, subjugation and marginalization of women in all aspects of human existence — social, political, religious, economic, intellectual and cultural, on the basis of sex (Yeseibo 137).

The abandoning for the domestic chores for the Men of Erhuwaren in the play by their wives and their frustrations becoming more compounded with the refusal of the old women and unmarried old girls to help out, made them to realise that the roles and importance of these women in their society cannot be over emphasised contrary to what these men believed abinito. A compromise on the patriarchal system becomes a difficult alternative but the men must let go to remedy the situation. To this end Umolu posits thus Clark explores in *The Wives' Revolt*, the colonial tendency of male chauvinism as a source of conflict. “The interpersonal conflict between the men and women of Erhuwaren is so artistically elongated in the play to portray this problem. The manner with which the conflicts generated in the play are resolved using non-violent form of conflict resolution is very commendable.

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