HISTORICITY AND GENDER HEROISM IN OLA ROTIMI’S HOPES OF THE LIVING DEAD

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ABSTRACT

The intercourse of history and Drama is an age long phenomenon. On one hand, the evolution and the various developmental stages of drama find expression in history. On the other hand, historical occurrences provided and still provide raw materials for drama. Historically, women have been represented in drama since the beginning of literary tradition. Aristophanes (410 BC) represented Greek women, reflecting the strength and weakness of women and more importantly the role of women in nation building. Shakespeare and Webster portray women substantially in their plays. Nigerian playwrights are not left out in the scheme, as they employ the instrumentality of history to dramatise traits of legendary Nigeria women and thus preserve their heroic deeds for the prosperity of posterity. This paper interrogates the interplay of history and gender heroism in Ola Rotimi’s play, Hopes of the Living Dead. The framework for this discourse is “Stiwanism”, the African expression of feminism. The paper argues that Ola Rotimi, in a bid to celebrate African women does not create a fictitious personality with fabricated legendary deeds, but falls back on history to showcase the legendary and heroic nature of African women. History, therefore, enhances the tangibility of gender heroism as dramatised by Ola Rotimi in the play. We conclude that, in Hopes of the Living Dead, Ola Rotimi employs history to unearth the past, thereby reconstructing the present and taking a peep into the future about what is expected of the African women as leaders and co-workers in social and political re-engineering.

KEYWORDS: Historicity, Gender, Heroism, Intercourse, Stiwanism, leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The representation of gender in literature is an age long endeavour. It dates back to the beginning of civilisation as evident in several Egyptian Mystery Plays, and plays of ancient Greece and Rome; Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides and, of course, Aristophanes feature various women characters in their plays to reflect their strengths, weaknesses and more importantly their roles at crucial moments in national development. The Peloponnesian War was at its peak, claiming lives, eradicating national peace and therefore inhibiting growth and development when Aristophanes
wrote one of his most popular plays. *Lysistrata*, to underscore the centrality of the woman in resolving serious national issues such as war, while other playwrights of his time, Sophocles and Aeschylus have equally created powerful strong characters who show strength of character and a rational disposition in moments of crisis, it must be noted that Aristophanes was the first to truly project the woman as a force to be reckoned with in moments of great crisis that threaten the continuity of the race in his play. He gave the world one of the finest examples of women of great leadership qualities, in the person of the eponymous heroine of the play *Lysistrata*. While the men were killing themselves in a senseless egoistic war, Lysistrata, concerned about the wanton loss of their husbands and sons, with great and exemplary leadership qualities mobilizes the Athenian women to deny their husbands sexual pleasure and compel their men to end the war. Though, there were pockets of weak women, the collective Will of the women achieved the goal of restoring peace into the land. As mentioned earlier, Aristophanes was not alone in his positive portrayal of women in Athenian drama as Euripides used women positively in several of his plays to reveal the role of women in the social, economic and cultural developments of his time in plays like *The Trojan Women, Women of Troy, The Suppliant* and many more.

Also, Shakespeare and Webster portray women substantially in their plays. Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Rosaline in *As You Like It*, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Beatrice, Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra and Desdemona are characters whose roles in the various Shakespearian plays resonate. Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Vittoria Corombona* exhibit individualistic traits rather than that of an object of other people’s sexual desires. Of note is their deconstruction and reconstruction of the conventional views about the chastity of women. Women representation in African drama is noteworthy. Writing about the phenomenon of the heroine in the Arab literature, Nawal El Saadwi (1980), posits:

> Among the male authors I have read, both in the west and in the Arab world, irrespective of the language in which they have written or the region from which they have come, not one of them has been able to free himself from the age-old image of the women handed over to us from an ancient past, no matter how famous many of them have been for their passionate defence of human rights, human values and justice, and their vigorous resistance to oppression and tyranny in any form. Tolstoy, with his towering literary talent and his denunciation of the evil of feudal and bourgeois Russian society, when speaking of women found nothing better to say than: ‘woman is the instrument of the devil. In most of her state she is stupid. But Satan lends her his head when she acts under his orders. (521)

The implication of the above is that writers have presented women in their works, only that in this case those male writers she had read had presented women from the stereotypical perspective. But is this the case in Ola Rotimi’s *Hopes of the Living Dead*? We shall answer this question in the course of our argument below. El Saadawi tells us of how North African male writers have presented women. According to her, Tewfik El Hakim won himself the title of ‘enemy of women’ due to his negative portrayal of women in his *El Robat El Mokadass* (The Sacred Book). Taha Hussein showcases an often repeated Arab proverb ‘shame can only be washed away by blood’, by allowing the slaughtering of Hanadi by her uncle over the matter of virginity. The murderer gets away, celebrated as a defender of family honour and the one who is responsible for
dishonouring the girl goes scot free of blame. Naguib Mahfouz, like others, in the opinion of El Saadawi, also depicts women characters negatively. Notable West African dramatists like, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Ama Ata Aidoo, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Akinwumi Isola and a host of others have represented women in various ways in their works. Women representation in drama continues and so is the interest of scholars in their theoretical analysis and appreciation of the various ways women have been represented in dramatic literature. Our search light, in this paper, focuses on seeing women through the lens of Ola Rotimi with particular attention on his *Hopes of the living Dead*.

Scholarly interest in the representation of women in dramatic literature has come a long way. This underscores the importance of women in the society. Different cultures define and determine the place and functions of men and women in their society. Writers may choose to simply reflect the status quo, express their individual opinions about it or create an avenue for further academic discourse on the subject matter. One question that readily comes to mind is, “what is the right approach to female representation? This question further generates other questions, should representation falsify historical facts, distort cultural realities thereby communicating falsehood and propagate deception? Or should the portrayal of women represent historical antecedents factually for the prosperity of posterity? Should art reflect life as it is so the society can see itself the way it is or subjugate the facts for selfish aggrandizement and parochial ideology? Ogunleye (2004) evaluating Isola’s malecentric, one dimensional and distorted depiction of Efunsetan Aniwura in *Efunsetan Aniwura* concludes:

…we do not need to besmirch our past to be able to learn from it. There is a need for the self-definition of the African woman, and negative historical stereotypical portrayal such as that in Isola’s *Efunsetan Aniwura* erodes self-confidence. Xenophobia of this type does not encourage the young female of the species to have a sense of self-worth; neither does it provide positive models for emulation. (310)

Ogunleye (2005) opines:

The whole essence of art then should be to reflect and affect society. The religious, social, moral and political pulse of the society can usually be felt in its artistic manifestations. Today, we have an insight into Baroque, Medieval, Elizabethan, Romantic and other civilizations through the extant art of such distant periods and cultures. From such works of art, we see a conscious attempt to reflect and affect the society. Art then transcends mere aestheticism. (129)

By extension, Ogunleye is of the opinion that arts aught not damage history, falsify actuality or propagate deception to showcase egoism or groundless ideology as this is detrimental and unproductive. In this paper, we examine the extent to which Ola Rotimi in his *Hopes of the Living Dead* has exhibited fidelity to the essence of fair and productive arts.

Our present preoccupation in this paper is to provide an interrogation of the interplay of historicity and gender heroism in Ola Rotimi’s *Hopes of the Living Dead*, and to argue that *Hopes of the Living Dead* reflects life via the representation of contemporary social, political and
economic issues, as well as makes prescriptions about the image and position of women in society.

THE CONCEPT OF STIWANISM

The history of feminism is as varied as its various types, brands or strands. This is why this philosophy has undergone and is still undergoing critical examination as women all over the world domesticate it to reflect their peculiar state and agitation. To ensure that the struggle for women emancipation is adequately recorded, for instance, various women in every field of life are interrogating the past to ask where and when women began to fight for their rights as human beings. From the Greek era where women are seen as belonging to the private and men to the public, through the medieval period to the 20th and the 21st centuries, women have been agitating for self recognition devoid of their biological sex. While feminism is a fit-all term for these agitations, African women and women of colour have broken away from the dominant Euro-American feminist confines to advance other “isms” that capture their philosophical, cultural and political agitations. As Berteke Waaldijk (1993) argues that:

Inspired by the idea that women in all ages had in common the fact that they were women, studies of every period, every region, every class and every ethnic group can examine the way in which women gave meaning to their existence, looked after their interests and aimed for change. Research into women’s culture has contributed to the historical documentation of difference among women. This perspective within women’s history shifted from women as victim to an understanding and (re)appraisal of their roles. (20)

One of such attempts at examining women and their place in society is, Stiwanism. Stiwanism is one of the many African expressions of Feminism. In the African context there are several expressions of feminism such as “Womanism”, “Motherism” and “Stiwanism”, For Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), feminism finds expression in what she calls Stiwanism. In order to give feminism an African face, Ogundipe-Leslie opines:

I have advocated the word “stiwanism,” instead of feminism, to bypass the combative discourse that ensues whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa. The creation of the new word is to deflect energy from constantly having to respond to charges of imitating Western feminism and, in this way those energies, to avoid being distracted from the real issue of the condition of women in Africa… “Stiwa” is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. This new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges imitativeness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular, white Euro-American feminisms which are unfortunately, under siege by everyone. This new term “STIWA” allows me to discuss the need of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women. (550)
Stiwanism, therefore, expresses the African version of Feminism. This is appropriately mentioned here as the pivot of our discourse is Africa. As a theory it is the expansion of feminism into philosophical dialogue. It scrutinizes female's societal responsibilities, pedigree, wellbeing, and female gender intricacies in all human endeavours. Stiwanism like feminist theory stimulates a critical evaluation of the place of women in the society, analysis of gender disparity and the general advancement of the interest of women.

THE MAN, OLA ROTIMI

Late Professor Olawale Gladstone Emmanuel Rotimi who is popularly known as Ola Rotimi was a prominent playwright, theatre manager and artistic director. He was a method actor, a resourceful choreographer, an ingenious designer, a talented music curator and a profound theatre theorist. His theatre career spanned over thirty seven eventful years covering the period between 1963 when his first play To Stir the God of Iron was produced and 2000 when he bowed out to join his ancestors. His plays, theories and directorial style influenced African theatre during his time and have influenced and continued to influence this generation. He continues to be a reference point in the academia all over the world. His plays are studied as literature and have been staged severally within and outside the continent. His literary and dramatic concepts and styles continue to shape academic minds.

He was born on April 13, 1938 in Sapele, a town in modern-day Delta State of Nigeria. His father was Samuel Gladstone Enitan Rotimi a Yoruba steam-launch engineer who was also a successful director and producer of amateur theatricals, and his mother was Dorcas Adolae Oruene Addo, an Ijaw drama enthusiast (Internet: Accessed 30 May 2014) He was raised in an atmosphere of rich cultural diversity, by theatre inclined parents. A development that was later to dominate the thematic preoccupations of his artistic productivity. He began his educational career at St. Cyprian's School in Port Harcourt in 1945 up to 1949. He attended St Jude's School, Lagos, from 1951 to 1952 and the Methodist Boys High School in Lagos. Thereafter he travelled to the United States in 1959 to study at Boston University, where he obtained a B.A. in 1966. He obtained an M.A. from Yale School of Drama, where he got the merit of being a Rockefeller. He got married in 1965 to Hazel Mae Guadreau, also an alumnus of Boston University and a musicologist.

Ola Rotimi’s theatre career dates back to early 1960s with the production of his first plays, “To Stir the God of Iron” which was produced in 1963 and Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again which was produced in 1966 and published in 1977, both of which were staged at the drama schools of Boston University and Yale, respectively. He shunned the comfort of the Western world and returned to Nigeria in the mid-1960. He produced his play Our Husband has Gone Mad Again in November/December of 1966 and at the Assembly Hall of the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). He staged his play “To Stir the God of Iron” which was later retitled “Cast the First Stone” in lecture theatres of the same institution. Ola Rotimi founded the Ori Olokun Theatre which was resident at the Ori Olokun Cultural Centre, Ile-Ife and was formally opened on the 6th of June, 1968, and became the rallying point for art lovers and attracted local and international audiences (15). He taught at the Universit(y)/(ies) of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and Port Harcourt. Due partly to the political conditions in Nigeria, Rotimi spent much of the 1990s living in the Caribbean and the United States, where he taught at Macalester College.
in St. Paul, Minnesota. He later returned to Ile-Ife, joining the Department of Dramatic Arts of Obafemi Awolowo University where he lectured till his demise (Internet Source: Accessed 30 May 2014).

HISTORICITY AND GENDER HEROISM IN HOPES…

Just as women have been represented in literature generally and dramatic literature specifically through the ages so has history been a fertile source for dramatists. The twin disciplines of drama and history have at their very core, the examination, documentation, interrogation and portrayal of man’s actions or inactions at given times in his cultural, political, and spiritual evolution. Little wonder, then, that dramatists and other literary producers have engaged with historical events and personalities to create enduring artistic pieces that sustain such events and personalities in the consciousness of generations. While these artistic works do not equate historical accounts, they have, by their very nature and purpose, the ability of keeping these events fresh in the minds of peoples across generations. Based on the fact that dramatists and other literary/creative artists find history as a veritable source of inspiration, it behooves the critic to examine literary productions derived from history with appropriate critical idiom. One of these idioms used in the interrogation of such literary materials is Historicity. According to one scholar “Historicity is the historical actuality of persons and events. ” (Wandersee, 1992: Internet). This means being actually part of history and not a historical myth, fabrication or legend. In other words historicity is synonymous with historical actuality, authenticity and factuality (Harry, 2006: 95). That Ola Rotimi is a master in dramatic reconstruction of history is eloquently affirmed by Olu Obafemi; “Ola Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi are perhaps the closest dramatists in English to the traditional performing arts in Nigeria be it in terms of the use of oral tradition and history” (1996:89). Azeez, (2012) writing on the fascination of Nigerian dramatists for historical materials as sources of inspiration for their works with particular focus on historical war dramas notes that;

…while novelists have privileged the events of the civil war, dramatists saw great potentials for drama in the wars of the 19th century. But the events that have served as great creative materials for the dramatist have been the Yoruba wars of the 19th century. A number of dramatists saw historical accounts about these wars as reference points in the understanding of conflicts that have engulfed the Nigerian nation in contemporary times. Some of these plays include Bode Osanyin’s Ogedengbe, (2000), Ola Rotimi’s, Kurunmi, (1971), Wale Ogunyemi’s Kiriji (1976), and Ijaye (1997). (130)

It is interesting that Ola Rotimi is, more often than not, interested not only in historical events but more importantly, in historical personages and their actions as leaders of their people at critical times in their lives. This is evident in his treatment of such historical personalities like Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi in Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Kurunmi the eponymous hero of the play, Kurunmi and Ikoli Harcourt Whyte in Hopes of the Living Dead. While most critics have concentrated on these male characters to the neglect of his female characters, this study examines the role and portrayal of Hannah, one of the major characters in the play to argue that women
possess equal qualities as their men counterparts to rightfully place them in positions of leadership. It reveals how Ola Rotimi deconstructs gender stereotypes, myths and shibboleths in his construction of Hannah as a heroic character. Of all the multi faceted semantics of gender, our employment of this term here is to denote sex, and in this case the feminine gender. Heroism denotes the acknowledgement and celebration of heroic deeds, which means the exhibition of courageous, selfless, purposive and managerial traits which ordinarily may not be accomplished by a regular people. As such “gender heroism” here stands for heroic deeds of a female. This paper evaluates the interaction of history and gender heroism in Ola Rotimi’s play, *Hopes of the Living Dead*, a play based on historical events in the life of a group of lepers who are faced with societal stigmatization and governmental neglect during the colonial era in Nigeria.

In a bid to find lasting solution to leprosy, Dr Ferguson, an English medical doctor, experiments with a group of lepers he brought together and put on admission in Wards G and H, General Hospital, Port Harcourt. Events take a drastic turn when it became apparent that the government had lost interest in the experiment. The situation became unbearable when Dr Ferguson returns home and the government instructs the lepers, who had grown in number from that initial sample, to vacate the hospital premises to their various villages. Not having anywhere to go, they beg, appeal and beseech the authorities, all to no avail. Realizing that the Government was bent on flinging them apart, the lepers organize themselves and put up an orchestrated struggle to resist being scattered and to press home their demands for a place of their own, where they would be independent and be able to take care of themselves and exist meaningfully with the hope that someday there would be a cure for the dreaded disease that make them the wretched of the earth and the living dead.

This dramatic account, as mentioned earlier, is an actual historical occurrence, the characters are not fictitious, at least the main characters. Hannah was a historical figure and not an imaginative creation. The Ferguson experiment which forms the pillar of the drama was an actual historical phenomenon, the location; General Hospital, Port Harcourt, is an actual geographical location. The lepers’ struggle for emancipation and the complications thereof all took place in history. It is in the crafting of the play that the playwright’s creativity manifests. This being the case, Ola Rotimi, like in some of his other plays borrows from history and faithfully with an intricate dramaturgical creativity turns history to drama. This is historicity at play.

Ikoli Harcourt Whyte spearheads the struggle while Hannah, the lead female character in the play is second in command. Ola Rotimi presents Hannah as the back bone of the struggle. She exhibits lofty idiosyncrasies and leadership qualities that are uncommon and which distinguish her as a super hero of the struggle. She was the first to notice Ikoli Harcourt Whyte’s strange behaviour when he abruptly ends the choir rehearsal and headed out for an undisclosed destination. She does not take it for granted and is not intimidated by the seeming docility of the men around to probe into what the matter is. Rather, she breaks loose from the rest of the group and goes after him. The following dialogue ensued between them:

**Hannah:** Sir…Sir…eh… (Addresses him in Kalabari Language) Mi bibiri be ye fate? (Meaning is that all for the evening?)
H.W.: (Without turning, he also replies in Kalabari) Ibite Mingba ba lasaki (meaning: That will be all. We may continue to morrow). (Happening 1: p 2)

Here, Hannah exhibits enviable traits of compassion, alertness and sensitivity. She realizes that something is wrong, but does not show disappointment in the unceremonious abrupt abortion of the choir practice. She does not ask in a confrontational manner why Harcourt Whyte should truncate the choir practice without explaining to the group. Rather she inquires with a tint of euphemism and asked as calmly as possible, if that was all for the day. Even when Harcourt Whyte responds in a rather offhanded manner without turning to her, an act that may be interpreted as being snubbed, she doesn’t show any iota of hurt. This is an uncommon display of maturity which most men cannot boast of. Seeing that Harcourt Whyte is not in the mood to give details of what led to the unusual stoppage of the choir rehearsal, she decides to trust his judgment and does not nag about it. Realizing that the group needs some form of explanation, so as not to dampen their morale; she goes back to them and calmly puts their minds at rest without rocking the boat. Her countenance is deadpan and she swiftly takes charge of the group ensuring that nothing goes out of hand.

It takes her bold initiative to spur Court Clerk (a male character in the play) on, to ask what the matter was. The member of the chorus, Court Clerk, CC for short, approaches her and asks:

CC: (To Hannah) what did he say?
Hannah: Says that’s’ all for this evening.
CC: (More puzzled) Where is he going? (Takes off after Harcourt Whyte)
Ikoli…Ikoli…Harcourt…(Happening 1: p 2)

Hannah calmly douses the anxiety of the group. She is an altruistic person always putting the collective well being as priority. When it is discovered that Mallam is sick, she promptly offers him quinine to treat his malaria. She is an all-around sensitive, diligent, eager and determined-to-help person. Being very caring and detribalized, she ensures that Mallam, who is Hausa, is well taken care of. She offers Cati hot tea and a generous portion of milk to combat his cold (p 80). She speaks a couple of Nigerian languages, making her a patriotic Nigerian who despite her own but wants others to be comfortable and throughout the play exhibits a keen devotion to the general well being of the others. These traits are lacking in most Nigerian politicians and leaders today. A lot of them are self-centered, greedy, without focus and heartless and this is significantly responsible for the abysmal state of socio-political, religious and economic doldrums Nigeria is experiencing presently.

The play captures Hannah as fearless, daring and one who doesn’t condone injustice regardless of who it is being meted to. She confronts the intimidating, officious and over ambitious Matron who had come to harass the group and truncate their fun. Everybody, including Hannah, quietly obeys the Matron’s instruction in apparent respect to constituted authority, but when the punishment the Matron meted on the group, that they freeze in their various dancing position till the Senior Medical Officer arrives to see them for himself, became unbearable, Hannah throws caution away to the astonishment of the Matron and other inmates;
The scenario above reveals Hannah as a true leader who is willing to lead her people against any force of oppression. Her courage, frankness and daring spirit shocks the Matron, symbol of oppression that she could not utter a word. Hannah releases her fellow inmates from their pain by speaking to the conscience of the matron. She stabs her with the power of her eloquent speech that because they have leprosy does not make them less than human like the Matron and SMO. It is worthy of note to say that while fellow inmates, especially male inmates could not confront the Matron, Hannah does and, by action reveals that leadership is not based on sex. Also, she fills the position of Harcourt Whyte, the man that they all see as their leader.

In another instance, Hannah reveals that she is analytical, perhaps, more than most other inmates. When the SMO finally arrives, she responds confidently and truthfully to his questions. She tells him that they were, indeed, singing and dancing. Here, again, she embodies the virtues of a true leader, honesty and courage. Having nothing to fault her, the SMO resorts to threat and warns them that “Things may not be the same by this time next month”. While this threat is lost on other inmates, it isn’t lost on her. She is the first to see the subtle threat and danger that the group may face in coming weeks. (Happening 1: p. 12). After the SMO and Matron have gone and others are numb, she is the one that queries, “What did they mean by that: “things may not be the same by this time next month””. This question is what spurs other inmates to begin to think about the danger that they may face in the coming weeks.

She is a die-hard and determined person with a right sense of judgment and ready to go the extra length in pursuance of the ideal. She is resilient, dogged and resolute. She is dependable, forthright. When the struggle for their survival begins, she remains a force of unity. She settles quarrels between the inmates and reminds them of their common state regardless of tribal and religious sentiments. She resolves the quarrel over Catechist’s bed by telling the two inmates fighting over it not to go near the bed. One important thing to note here is that, none of the men contests her decision. This reveals that they all see her as a true leader and are, therefore, ready to comply with her decision, including Harcourt Whyte. (Happening 1, p. 24). In the face of total confusion and seeming hopelessness, especially when they are to write the officials in Lagos to
draw attention to their plight, Editor, exasperated by the complaints of Court Clerk, and tears the letter already written into shreds, Hannah is the one who rises to the occasion as a leader:

**Hannah:** Tfeea! Crack-up, crack-up, crack-up! Only six weeks since we started struggling on our own. Already, crack-up! (Directly to Editor) You should be ashamed of yourself!

**Editor:** (Truculently) Why should I be? Go on—tell me: why should I-

**Hannah:** (Indicating the generality of the inmates with a slow sweep of the arm) That’s why... look at them... l-o-o-k... silent faces of fishermen, the faces of farmers...the faces of beggars... all silent faces.

**Editor** : (Turning away) A-a-g-h-h

**Hannah:** It’s no ‘a-a-g-h-h-h’ business, brother. Turn around and look at the faces of the majority. I dare you to. Listen to what those silent faces are saying. You can’t? then let me tell you, brother they’re cursing… You hear? Cursing us: the book people. You are supposed to lead them. Supposed to save them, and save ourselves too. Not so? We have seen the light. Breathy spittle of contempt). Tf-e-e-e-e-a-a-a-a! (Happening II, p.26)

It is important that the problem highlighted by Hannah here is still with the Nigerian elite who are expected to save the nation by educating the masses and confronting the government when bad policies are formulated or enforced. The discordant tunes of the elite, in a way, are responsible for the decay in the society giving room for corruption, graft, injustice and rape of the masses. Interestingly, on Hannah’s action of admonishing Editor, no one, not even Harcourt Whyte or Editor himself has a defence. This shows that Hannah’s leadership qualities obliterated parochial gender stereotype. Ejue, (2007) attests to this when he states that:

> Fundamentally speaking, Ola Rotimi’s characters are moulded in the most distinct manner- in moral force, integrity, reputation, yet still share a common trait, a trait that binds them together. Oftentimes, the bond is propelled by forces of collectivism. Indeed, these characters who stem from different social/cultural and political backgrounds still experience centripetal force pulling them towards achieving a particular feat. (210)

In the excerpt above, when the inmates are about to fall apart and lose their aim and focus, Hannah is the force that brings them back on track. This she does till the end of their struggle which ends happily.

Hannah’s personality is so towering that Nweke, one of the lepers, overwhelmed with her benevolent nature, exclaimed: “Sister, you will never marry…” (Happening VII : p77). When asked why he said Hannah would never marry, he explains that Hannah is too good to marry any one short of an angel and that since there are not angels around she has to remain unmarried. Funny
as this may sound, it is a sincere and genuine appreciation of the awesomeness of Hannah to the collective interest of the group and the individual well-being of members.

The eventual success of the leper’s struggle for emancipation was as a result of Hannah’s complementary role. When Harcourt Whyte is confused, forlorn and his strength shook, Hannah remained unshaken and provided Harcourt Whyte with the physiological impetus needed to reawaken his spirit and faith in the fact that victory would be theirs. (Happening VII, 90-91). Hannah specifically showcases gender heroism in this respect.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, this paper has critically examined Ola Rotimi’s portrayal of Hannah, the lead female character in Hopes of the Living Dead. Capturing his representation of women in this play, the way he does, affirms the claim, that there is panoply of fundamental societal issues from which a writer may choose. Ola Rotimi’s presentation of Hannah in Hopes of the Living Dead draws attention to myriads of domestic, leadership, social and political issues. It clearly indicates how Ola Rotimi feels about the complementary roles women should play for a healthy society to exist. It must be noted that Ola Rotimi’s portrayal of Hannah as a leader per excellence aligns with the roles that women have played under such circumstances as Toyin Falola and Fwatshak (2011) note:

Women played important roles as nationalists in colonial Africa. During the conquest and nationalist struggles against oppression and for independence, African women made enormous contributions by ‘organising rural resistance, cultural nationalism, religious protests, and political protests’. Women also wrote letters of protests, organised strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, and were involved as combatants where armed struggles were resorted to. (xvii)

It is therefore not surprising that Ola Rotimi portrays Hannah as a leader whose actions and views promote unity and focus. He seems to be telling his readers that a society where men recognize the strength of the woman is the truly health society. Also, implied is that a healthy society will ultimately engender a peaceful society and create an enabling atmosphere that will facilitate an enduring national consciousness. His positive and heroic representation of Hannah is a symbolic deconstruction of the parochial mindset that women are mere properties to be seen and not to be heard. He makes us wonder whether the problem that threatens the political terrain is not as a result of the inadequate representation of women in government. Is this not a signal that this nation has neglected the wisdom of women and is therefore missing it?

Ola Rotimi’s representation of Hannah in Hopes of the Living Dead is an affirmation that he sees women as partners in progress with men and that both sexes are created to complement each other. This representation reminds us of the 5th century Athenian Lysistrata who, understanding the inevitability of the female-male co-existence mobilized the Athenian women to shun the sexual advances of their men in order to compel them to end the Peloponnesian War. Little wonder then that Aristophanes resolved the imbroglio in favour of the women. Our society is plagued with area boys (Nigerian appellation for vagabonds), youth militancy and Boko Haram
(The Islamic fundamentalist sect terrorizing the Northern part of Nigeria) insurgencies and kidnapping. Perhaps, if women are given a conducive environment to utilize their potentials and play their role as we see Hannah do in the play, our society would be the better for it.

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