

## STYLE AND THE REALIZATION OF COMMITTED DISCOURSE IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *FROM ZIA WITH LOVE*

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If there is any African literary critic who has enjoyed much critical attention and fame, it is Nigeria's Wole Soyinka whose creative versatility is globally recognised. A prominent feature of Soyinka's writings is his concern with social issues. Indeed, in very subtle but ingenious ways, he punches and pounds at the conscience of society through his various works. In his creativity also, Soyinka shows competence in and command of English - the Second Language of his country Nigeria. He also exhibits familiarity with his culture and attempts with much effort at projecting the folkways and beliefs of his native Yoruba people. As would be expected, this combination of the modern and traditional in his art, has earned Soyinka praise and acknowledgement from many critics, and condemnation from others, those especially who claim to find elements of obscurantism in his writings. To this last group, Soyinka says, that rather than being inscrutable, his writings are artistic manifestations with "a lot of experience" and interest in social issues.

Obscurity is not a virtue in poetry or in any work of art. People say I have confessed that I set out deliberately to mystify my readers and audience. But they cannot point to any evidence or declaration in favour of obscurity. The fact is that there are degrees of luminosity in any work, my poetry inclusive. A lot of experience goes into a work of art and all a critic needs to do is work harder and arrive at the fullest meaning of the work.<sup>1</sup>

A notable quality of Soyinka's works is their social relevance. Whether based on the Yoruba world view as *A Dance of the Forests*<sup>2</sup> is, or on history as his *Death and The King's Horseman*<sup>3</sup> (which is based on events which took place in Oyo, an ancient Yoruba City of Nigeria in 1946), the writings focus on, and relate to humanity - man in society. Elder Jones observes that most of Soyinka's thematic preoccupation "are concerned with the factors of man in his environment, the struggle for survival; the necessity for sacrificing if man is to make any progress; the role of death even the necessity of death in man's life"<sup>4</sup>.

Soyinka's commitment to his society stated in his adoption of Ralph



Waldo Emerson's words (as a preface to his *Nobel Address*), is: "I will stand here for humanity"<sup>5</sup>. This humanity extends beyond Nigeria and Africa. It represents the world of the underprivileged, the oppressed, a society and a world that faces decay in the face of advancing yet corrupting civilization and modernity. Humanity is also Africa, battling to wrest itself from the grip of dictatorship and racial injustices perpetrated by the elites, the military, the rich and the morally depraved. Soyinka's commitment is to restore sanity in society as is evident in his skillfully composed play *From Zia with Love*<sup>6</sup>.

This paper is aimed at scrutinizing the themes of this play - *From Zia*.... It is also an inquiry into the style, how meaning yields itself to style to bring to focus Soyinka's aesthetic commitment to both arts and to society. To discuss this, it is important that we treat other issues first:

*The artist as a committed member of society.* The word "commitment" is definitely an obtruse term that has received different interpretations from various critics. For many African critics like Ngugi, commitment has revolutionary connotations. The committed writer Ngugi thinks, ought to be a freedom fighter, who through art, battles against the oppressive forces in his milieu. Such a writer Ngugi asserts, "responds with his total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. The writer himself lives in and is shaped by history."<sup>7</sup> The committed writer, could resort to a variety of strategies, including propagating violence since "violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust social order is criminal, and diminishes man"<sup>8</sup>.

Critics who are not so vehement as Ngugi in their call for revolutionary exploits, see the writer as a very committed person with a vision of change, a message to his fellow countrymen and women, while his art is the instrument of reconstruction. M. Okolie describes the committed writer as a priest, soldier and healer of society. "As a priest, he denounces the ills of the society, moral decadence and corruption. As a healer he brings hope to the hopeless, joy to the afflicted, justice to the down trodden and as a soldier he transforms his pen into a sword battling against social injustice"<sup>9</sup>. These roles of the artist according to Catherine Acholonu transcend being a freedom seeker to a teacher, prophet, and a voice for his people. "In short he is the conscience of the society. He is the soul of the people, he must possess a deep insight"<sup>10</sup>.

If these are the qualities of a committed writer, then our artist



in focus - Wole Soyinka more than qualifies as one. As Soyinka himself attests, "the artist has always functioned in his society as the record of mores and experience of his society, and as the voice of vision in his own time"<sup>11</sup>. Like all committed artists, Soyinka has always held up to society a picture of itself. Like the ritual healer that sweeps the filth of society to the centre of town and calls the people to see their dirt, the artist brings together the history, experiences, and the entirety of life of his society to public view, and hopes that by seeing its life so glaringly through his mirror (the literary work), society would get rejuvenated.

In Soyinka's writings, this theme of change seems quite prevalent though covertly portrayed. His efforts at exposing society's foibles and indirectly advocating a change of attitude is expressed more forcefully through drama more than the novel or poetry. Soyinka's plays *The Lion and The Jewel* (1995), *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1960), *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973), *Opera Wonyosi* (1977) and lately *From Zia with Love* (1992) are amongst his numerous writings that concern themselves with social issues in an evolving society where avarice has led many to mortify their consciences in the bid to gain social recognition. Thus, Soyinka's plays are not mere creative texts they are imbued with message for society.

### ***Soyinka's Plays as Social Discourse:***

All literature is basically a form of discourse, a composition in which communication and interaction is enhanced between the writer (the addressee) and his readers or audience (the addressees). Drama itself, which is Wole Soyinka's major literary genre is, a kind of speech act. It is a composition in dialogic form through which the playwright causes his actors to 'speak' on issues that he would not ordinarily be free to comment on. Through the play, the artist 'does things with words' as J.L. Austin would suggest<sup>13</sup>. By carefully selecting his words, and creating characters that are fictitious yet highly representative of members of his society, the artist creates a world on stage that mirrors reality. To define Soyinka's play therefore as forms of social discourse is to see them as mediating relationships between the society and the artist. This is because it is a form of communication, an instrument of self-expression for the artist who shares his ideology of life, his hopes, expectations and talent with those around him. This might be for the purpose of entertaining the readers or audience, and for teaching, informing and thus causing some form of social change to take place. The literary work as a speech act therefore, has some perlocutionary effect on those that come in contact with it. This may work especially through satire.



Soyinka seems to possess a wit in the utilization of satire to inform, and advocate for a new attitude by Nigerians and indeed all his readers and audiences (where such plays appear on stage). This reason for his choice of satire seems quite obvious. As a sub-generic manifestation, satire aims at subtle criticism of issues that interest the writer. Through it, the artist veils his anger, shields his mockery at, and dissatisfaction with the society he is addressing or mirroring. It is through satire that social weaknesses and folly are censored. Thus, for writers like Soyinka, this artistic form becomes a whip for scourging the erring society into reshaping itself. Soyinka himself acknowledges this fact when in an interview, he confirmed: "I think satire requires to begin with a very strong feeling about something"<sup>13</sup>. That "something" that initiates art is the theme or the message the writer wishes to impart to his audience. In *Trials of Brother Jero*, for instance, Soyinka warns about the pretentious and exploitative practices of alazons who appear as men of God to exploit the gollible. In *Opera Wonyonsi*, it is the theme of waste among others. While *From Zia with Love* treats the issue of hard drug trafficking as an international business among corrupt nations and governments.

It is from this perspective of art as communication that we evaluate Soyinka's *From Zia*... as "an utterance on stage," a dramatic communication that employs verbal utterances and paralinguistic language to push across its message to society. In the hope perhaps, that society will decode the meaning that is transmitted. Because a play is a social discourse, its functionality cannot be overlooked. Femi Osofisan, insists on this functionality of literary art. He argues (when asked why he prefers to write drama) that, the dramatic medium is the most relevant of all the genres. He insists:

"When you have a message, the dramatic medium is far more immediate, particularly when you write the kind of things I write which are immediately relevant, you can achieve an immediate result through the medium of drama. Again, take the problem of language. How many people will read a Novel? Whereas when you are in the theater, the linguistic apparatus is more vast, you can talk through gestures, mimes, and music"<sup>16</sup>.

Osofisan's view is further articulated by Biodun Jeyifo who believes "... more than the other literary arts, drama deals at a highly concentrated, more intense level with the contradictions of social existence"<sup>16</sup>. Ideally therefore, as a speech act, drama is according to Spencer and Clages" the most expressive and useful instrument for the edification of a nation, and the barometer which marks its



greatness or decent”<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Amadi also illustrates the relevance of theatre which he says has been used in various societies of the world. Drama, he posits, “... entertains its spectators while at the same time educating and sensitizing them into a new realization of their sordid situations and existence. “There is, “Amadi argues, “hardly any drama that is not purposeful and functional”.<sup>18</sup>

While the general and more obvious opinion is on the functionality of drama, Soyinka cautions about usefulness. For him, entertainment and not only the functional role of drama counts:

Now let me say that my first duty as a playwright is to provide excellent theatre, in other words, I think that I have only one commitment to the public, to make sure that they do not leave the theatre bored. I don't believe that I have any obligation to enlighten, to instruct, to teach, I don't possess that sense of duty or didacticism... I believe that my first duty is to provide excellent theatre for the audience. But inevitably, it is just common sense to say that one cannot just write about nothing<sup>19</sup>.

Soyinka's comment here seems to place him on the fence between commitment to art, and to social issues or “didacticism”. Whatever his opinion, the fact remains and as is quite evident, that his writings are socially-based and possess functional attributes. Thus, the plays cannot be said to be only for pleasure or entertainment. They have messages which are skillfully and forcefully transmitted. The argument Robert Escarpit makes which we accept, is that “Every writer has a purpose, message, and an audience whom he addresses”, since “a thing is never entirely said; unless it is said to someone”<sup>20</sup>

Though Soyinka's view is that concern for the audience's complete entertainment is a positive goal for an artist, it should not take precedence over the need to “speak” to the society. Osofisan argues for both, accepting the fact, that, “theatre is principally for entertainment”... But he adds, “at the same time, our own particular social situation at this particular moment dictates the type of theatre that we do”<sup>21</sup>.

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SOYINKA'S *FROM ZIA*...

Soyinka's play *From Zia* is a publication that highlights the unspeakable criminality amongst the ruling class especially the military, who outwardly claim to be social messiahs, but are covertly the perpetrators of crimes. With a vibrant satirical tone, the play exposes the vexatious corrupt trend in government circles both national (Nigerian) and international. The thesis of the play seems to be that the trade in hard drugs is an international one that concerns



not the ordinary citizens of countries like Nigeria, but government officials and businessmen who conceal these drugs in 'diplomatic' crates for their international exchanges. In a typical Soyinka style, the play intensifies action to push through the message of injustice, and lack of equity and stability in government's policies on human rights. It also tackles the non existence of concern by Nigerian governments about the condition of the nation's cells. We are informed by the playwright himself that "the play is based on an actual event which took place in Nigeria, in 1984 under the Military rule of Generals Buhari and Idiagbon". There is a warning though to the audience and readers of the play that "however, it is an entire product of the imagination, and makes no claim whatever to any correlation with actually". (P.V)

The fact that an incident in time prompts the writing of *From Zia* shows that the playwright is conscious of the social issues around him. He seems, through this play, to be making a response to the historical realities of his time. This interfusing of the historical and the fictive, makes the performance by Soyinka's characters more than a stage enactment. The play is therefore like a replication of what goes on in the society outside the theatre - a social discourse indeed.

*From Zia...* is cast in a peculiar style where there is a theatrical performance by the characters who themselves are acting on stage. It is a play within a play. Soyinka's characters are prisoners who have their own 'government'. It is the cell inmates, that cast a play in which they re-enact what goes on in the society. The success of this presentation is that the characters have freedom within the confines of their imprisonment to speak out against government, tell their own stories of woe, inform us about their involvement with drugs and the role of government officials in the drug cartel as well as recast the reasons for the prisoner's respective incarceration.

The cell government is cast in the image of a military regime. The weaknesses, and foibles of the military are exposed so glaringly. The irony in the portrayal is that the prisoners act out these roles so well, yet, the prison officials are not aware that such a theatre is in existence. The action comes on and off swiftly behind the backs of the prison officers -the Superintendent, Aremu and other Prison Officers. Major actions in the play take place in the General cell where the fourteen characters portray a military state with commandant Hyacinth as the Head of State. Hyacinth is assisted by six State Ministers for Labour, Agriculture, Water Resources, Home Affairs, Information and Culture and Education respectively. It is through



these Ministers that information on the state of affairs in the Amorako (cell) Republic comes to the audience. Besides the key officers of the state, we have Hyacinth's A.D.C., the Director of Security, A student, some trustees, Sebe Irawe, a business tycoon, a woman, and a wing Commander who is Sebe's friend. Miguel Domingo, Detiba and Emuke are Prisoners in cell 'C' who do not take part in the dramatization that goes on in the general cell but are the unfortunate sufferers of the cruelty of their fellow prisoners.

### **TENOR OF DISCOURSE:**

The casting of roles (tenor of discourse) in *From Zia...* can be seen as operating on two levels - Firstly, there are the prisoners who are serving jail terms for one crime or the other. It is these criminals who perform roles as characters in the simulation of a typical African country where there is a military government headed by commandant Hyacinth. Secondly, the dramatization by the prisoners presents us with prototype individuals, an Eternal ruling council and a country - the Republic of Amoroko where the military are in charge. Much of the satirization in *From Zia...* is on this imaginary republic.

A unique feature of this play, which shows Soyinka's literary skill, is the manner in which the role of the prison characters is neatly interfused with their roles in the Amoroko Republic. For instance, some of the prisoners like Commandant Hyacinth, the student, the three inmates of cell 'C' among others, are all in jail for their involvement in some hard drug deals. Through them, facts filter to the audience about the drug trade in Amoroko Republic itself.

The role played by "commandant Hyacinth" is very crucial. Before his prison term, this character had been a dramatist. We are told that "he was trained by the late Herbert Ogunde himself, but what was several years ago." (p.17) Hyacinth seems to possess the talent to act out this role as a military dictator very effectively. With a criminal record as an impersonator and fraudster, he claims to be an expert criminal and dramatist - hence, the title "Oga Versatility" (p.17) which he earns from his fellow prisoners. He claims also to have been educated in the act of criminality. He describes his pre-prison days as "Undergraduate times". The word "undergraduate" is given a new semantic connotation by him. While true undergraduates go to Universities to acquire knowledge that make them useful citizens to society, the criminal studies to destroy the social system. For instance, the commandant tells us to "ask the police". Because



When they booked me for my very first impersonation, over thirty years ago, I fooled them into locking up the innocent person in my stead - that's how good I was. Anyway, those were in small-time days. Undergraduate times. (p. 17)

"Commandant Hyacinth's imprisonment seems to have been earned for involvement in a cocaine deal. This information, is released by the chorus the other prison inmates who warn Hyacinth not to compare himself with the great satirist and performer, the Maestro, Hubert Ogunde who earned imprisonment through acting political plays. Hyacinth is told "Oga Sah, I beg, no to same thing o,. In own different, Baba no dey carry cocaine o", Ogunde na political prisoner", ....". (p. 11-12).

As head of the Amoroko republic, commandant Hyacinth is a vicious character. He is described in the most unbecoming way. He represents the typical African dictator who not only commands authority, but is also power drunk. He is "cell commandant and commander-in-chief of Amoroko", (p.11) has "a slightly conduct" (p.1) and is a "burly scare faced figure" (p.1). He expressed himself through "violent screams" and (p.23) often becomes "increasing violent" (p.10) and "explosive". (p. 9). At other times, he "leaps up and presses his face against the bars" (p. 21).

As a true military dictator, the commandant orders his assistants to punish other inmates at will. Miguel, Emuke and Detiba as well as the youth are inflicted with wounds and go through excruciating experience on the order of the commandant.

He is also selfish, and utilizes every opportunity to bolster his ego. For instance, he insists on being considered first in all things. Where he is not favoured, he bends rules to suit himself. For instance, when roles are to be cast on the play that takes place in the cell, the decision by all inmates to have characters choose roles in alphabetical order is flouted by Commandant Hyacinth who insists on being first by dropping the 'H' in his name so that it sounds like an 'a':  
His claim?

We run a democracy here you see.

So everything is done by alphabetical order.

We begin with "A", so I came first... (p.18)

From this statement, there seems to be an obvious conflict between the collective will of the people "we", of a democratic set up, and the personal wishes of the 'I' dictator. The person deixis "we" and 'I' appear deliberately employed to contrast between what should be and what is. The collective pronoun "we" of solidarity, shows



that the people of Amoroko are not in control as shown in the action of the prisoners who are subdued by the over assertive 'I', voice of power, so often employed by the Commandant. On another level, the "we" pronoun refers to the army. The irony is that the "we" is used by the military regime that run what seems like a democracy but is fraught with dictatorial tendencies.

The introduction of the *Wing Commander* in the middle of a conversation with Sebe is quite significant. The Wing Commander plays a major role in the evolving drug scandal that involves the entire Eternal ruling council which he is a member. It is through him that so much information comes to us about the drug business between his country and other nations of the world. To the commander, it seems drug deals are big deals and countries which are engaged in such deals belong to the "Big League". He says to Sebe apparently in reaction to a comment by the latter that:

Those were kindergarten days, Chier Peanut pickings. This is our introduction into the Big league, and if we don't act big, we shall loose our membership. Fifty kilograms of prime grade cocaine is not chicken feed. Countries have gone to war for less. (p. 72).

In this statement the use of time deixis signifies a kind of contextual reference to the state of events in Amoroko at the time of the conversation between Sebe and the Wing Commander. The contrast between the time co-ordinate deixis indicated by the use of the discourse exclusive determiner "those were" and the inclusive determiner "this is", shows a change in temporality between the days of innocence when the military was not in control over Amoroko, and the present when they have launched the country on a level where hard drug issues are treated as trivial. It appears from the above statement by the Wing Commander that before the advent of the military into government, the country was poor and survived on "peanut pickings". The metaphor "peanut pickings" and "chicken feed" are carefully chosen to highlight this contrast.

*Sebe Irawe* is the social prophylactic whose machiavellian principle is encoded in his belief that "man must wack" (p. 43-4). This idea that the end justifies the means is so clearly exhibited in Sebe's attitude to life, corruption and criminality. He represents the true socialite who commits all kinds of crimes in order to maintain his status. He is very popular especially among the rich who know him "from Badagry to Ilorin and even down Eastern side Cameroon border" (p.36) Sebe seems to be a king - pin among the criminals.



It is he that a woman approaches when a sister of hers is declared missing (6.33-4). The Wing Commander recognises Sebe's criminal potentials hence consults him occasionally. Sebe is even described as "a schemer" (6.47) who can direct the military on how to get about the discovery of the missing "diplomatic bags". (cocaine). To get around his "business" effectively without being caught, Sebe becomes a multi-religionist - a Muslim, Christian, Bhuddist, Traditionalist, and is, "everything you like and none of them at the same time". He explains to the Wing Commander that "I went, to Saudi, I went to Jedda on pilgrimage, but it was strictly a business pilgrimage" (p. 47-48). The satirical comment here appears to be that most businesses are carried out in the guise of religion.

Besides these, Sebe kills at random. For instance, he promises the Wing Commander that he would kill the youth and confirms that, "Sebe does not waste time" (p. 54).

Incarcerated in prison, the youth exposes a lot about Sebe. It is Sebe who teaches the youth how to "earn some really big money" through cocaine (p. 69). Sebe's deals with the youth started when the latter was his trusted courier. He often sent young people to steal jewellery, moto tyres and even spare parts from their parents (p.69). Sebe also who features as a contact between the military and the men of the underworld. He says to the Wing Commander:

I am just a conduit pipe commander, I have never pretended to by anything else... I am a middle-man. I don't launch pirates against sea-going vessels...(p.73 & 74)

It is not surprising that Sebe exhibits these attributes. His names suggest his vicious nature. He explains to the youth that the name Sebe means "deadly snake" "Irawe" is a traditional word for "leaves". Putting these two names together, Sebe describes himself as the dangerous snake that hides unseen under innocent leaves. He is the snake that bites and kills the unsuspecting victim. "My kind of Sebe" he explains, "doesn't wait for you on land. It waits in the water underleaf. Over leaf. Under lake. Over lake. Under seas, overseas ... Over seas ... Over seas. (pp. 37-8).

The reiteration of the contrasting prepositions "over" and "under" are to emphasis the realm of Sebe's operations. His domain is beyond ordinary human interaction. He is either too deep in the seas to be reached or too high above it. Quite expectedly, his hidden activities are seen in the way he entices the Wing Commander to an early death on the road where the latter is told that some sacrifices



are to be done in the appeasement of the god Esu. These various clandestine activities carried out by Sebe are only for one purpose - survival. As Sebe himself acknowledges, he is one of the "miserable dreg of society who merely try to earn a dishonest living". (p. 47)

Major Awam on the other hand stands out as a concerned soldier who though in charge of security, is quite conscious of, and tries to inform the other members of the Eternal ruling council about the plight of the citizens. He shows concern for the detainees, (p.10) makes no arrests and detention as instructed by the commander-in-chief, and for this reason is disliked and treated as inexperienced.

The satiric jibes of this play are directed at the social structure in most African countries. Prominent amongst the institutions exposed are the military, the police, the country Nigeria itself, represented by Amoroko, and even the prison services. The country is metaphorically presented as a ship on navigation to freedom and democracy but "the (water) hyacinths are still a hazard to navigation" (p.5). These hyacinths are everywhere. They thwart the progress of the ship at all ends. Looked at symbolically, the hyacinths are the military represented by commandant Hyacinth and his men. The name Hyacinth is both symbolic and referential. The commandant even recognise this and boasts: "That's why everybody calls me Hyacinth, so what?" Here, meaning operates at two levels. On the denotative level, it literally means that there are obstructive weeds on the seas which the prisoners see from their cells. On a connotative level, the military is indicted for stalling the wheel of state progress.

Amoroko is a country where anything goes. The military take over at will with no resistance from the citizens. Rather, "the very people" like the commandant argues, "pour out into the streets to celebrate our [military] take over of government". p. 10. Here the people are castigated for their naivety and gollibility.

Even though military governments are oppressive and criminal in nature, the playwright seems to be wondering why civilian administrators should adopt and exhibit such tendencies. For instance, Sekou Toure, a civilian president is said to have killed Diallo Telli the first O.A.U. Secretary-General (p.51). In Nkurumah's Ghana, some shedy deals were done by a government official who stole ship loads of cocoa, while in Uganda, "the one and only Idi Amin staged a coup to cover his ivory and diamond smuggling because Obote was to put him on trial when he struck" (p.75).

Satire on the military goes beyond a criticism of how military officials mismanage the economy of the republic, and how



ostentatiously they live. The "Eternal ruling council" headed by the commandant, is ridiculed for its non commitment to social welfare and the well-being of the citizens. A catalogue of the problems the citizens face are given by the ministers. These include the fact that there is an epidemic for which seven people have died in Katanga, Aburi, Soweto and Amoroko Local government areas (p.2). According to the Director of security, there is food shortage (p.4) and for this reason, "the natives are restless". The encroachment of the water hyacinths have also made navigation impossible and as expected, "the fisherman can't get at the fish" (p.5). Public transportation is lacking and there are "long queues after work in the broiling sun" (p.7). These seem not to be important issues to the council. In fact, Major Awam, is cautioned for sympathizing with the citizens. Issues that cause unrest are not addressed rather, like every military dictatorship, the council is busy fortifying itself against citizens who constitute a security risk:

On this council, Security means only one thing - counter-subversion, counter subversive talk counter rumour mongering. Counter incitement to subversion. And you have the powers to deal with all that (p.8)

The implication of this statement is that government wages a war against its opponents and critics who are seen as "subversive elements" and "rumour mongers". The headship of the Eternal ruling council does not revolve as seen in the commandant's grip of power. The word 'eternal' itself suggests the unending nature of the government.

In spite of its search for stability (which is echoed by the hypocritical sounding military voice which calls on people to wage a "battle Against Indiscipline" - BAI), the military is very corrupt. Even its slogan that without stability there can be no progress" (p.2) is a farce. Soyinka uses the military voice as an ironical medium to expose the deceit of the army. This voice identifies smuggling, nepotism, currency trafficking, drug trafficking and the like as unpatriotic acts that ought to be exposed (p. 24) yet these are the very acts that are perpetrated by government officials like the Wing Commander. There is in a military regime in which drug trafficking thrives. Sebe knows the double deals of the army hence he describes them as "master planners" of criminal acts and coups. (p.47) Governments are shown to be in big leagues where drug trade thrives and there is "cooperation here at the very highest level" (p.48). Though they renounce favouritism, military government make and bend rules to suit them. Sebe tells the Wing Commander that "...



we know how you people [the army] make and unmake laws to suit yourselves" (pp. 49-50). A good instance of this is when men of influence are left off police net. Emuke says that Domingo got preferential treatment in court, and was granted bail because he has "connections" (p.25) which are army links.

Like the military, the police is satirized for also being corrupt. Sebe informs the woman that the police are aware of the drug trafficking in the country yet do nothing about it. Rather, when there are problems like kidnapping, "people go to report to the police but the police don't even bother to open a file. They know your best bet is to come to us [the criminals]" (p.41). Sebe even exposes the fact that police bosses thrive on bribes from drug barons. He says that once in a while, a drug courier is caught simply because "... they have to make a scape goat here and there. When the Oga is appeased, things cool down again and we continue as usual". (p.42)

The visual presentation of the characters in the cell is most pathetic. There is no electricity hence the provision of a kerozine lantern and two candles. The prison itself is crowded with all types and grades of prisoners. There is no discrimination in the placement of "hardened convicts", "political detainee", "awaiting trial", the "disabled", "semi-crazed", the "eccentric" the "restless" and the "listless". All are squeezed into a general cell where there is "a large metal dustbin which serves the inmates as latrine." There are suspicious stains on the floor, the walls, and around the bin. The sign posted on the wall reads: ABANDON SHAME ALL WHO ENTER HERE: This graffiti is a semiotic code which speaks of the cell situation. It is inhuman and shameful. The cell superintendent as if suddenly aware of the situation, apologies to Domingo about the appalling state of the cell. In his explanation, he states:

We are short of the beds and other items...

I don't have to tell you, the prison is overcrowded. But the military command and security send everybody in here as if space is no problem. (p.23)

It is the ignored protest of the cell inmates and their annoyance with the superintendent and warders that seems to highlight further the dereliction of the prison. The prison inmates cry out to Hyacinth and the Health minister that they die of various skin diseases. In a most sorrowful way, they announce:



Oga, we dey die here O  
We done petition so tey  
we done tire. I tell you  
say we dey die one by one.  
- Every body skin here get  
crawl-crawl. De one; wey no get crawl-crawl,  
'e get beri-beri. De one  
wey no get beri-beri, e get  
Kwashio-ko...(p.21)

Similarly, in their conversation, Miguel, Emuke and Detiba compare Nigerian prisons to hell, and contrast these with American prisons where inmates are more comfortable, have games, libraries, can order food from restaurants and are allowed conjugal visits from their wives and fiances. The important point to note in their conversation is that in Nigeria, prisoners are ill-treated to please foreign governments who would never do similar dehumanizing acts to their own citizens. However, Prisoners themselves are not without blame. They maltreat each other as shown by the punishment Detiba and others receive from Hyacinth and his men. Detiba explains that in cell, "everybody goes through some form of initiation" (p.89). The cell itself is run like a military barracks with inmates hurried into a familiar formation" (p.16). Often the new inmates are "yanked" and "catapulted" about (p.13) while the older ones watch "dispassionately" as "a barrage of slaps" is delivered on others. Soyinka's choice of words here depict the inhuman treatment inmates receive from their fellows.

Through Detiba and Emuke Soyinka's authorial voice filters through to the audience. Detiba blames politicians for making room for the military to interfere in the act of government. Emuke says: "Politicians. Na politicians cause am?" Detiba replies: "They mess up. That's what leads the army into temptation" (p.6). Emuke injects what seems to be the playwright's point of view on the incessant army interruptions and coups which Detiba actually describes when he sees it as:

"Coups today, casualties right and left,  
executions tomorrow. The another  
attempt the day after" (p.16)

Through Emuke, the playwright argues against military rule and states his preference for democracy however volatile:



"Politicians na civilians. Make soja man change to civilians if e wan do gov'men'. Dem soja too, dey no de mess up? Dey all wan chop, das all. Anyway, for civilian mess and soja mess, give me civilian mess any time. At least civilian no fit do the kin dabaru nonsense wey put we for dis kin mess." (p.62)

A major success of Soyinka's *From Zia...* is the very skillful handling of linguistic elements. Choice of linguistic codes range from the standard English usage of literate characters like the suprintendent, the Wing Commander, Commandant Hyacinth, the Director of Security, Detiba, Miguel and occasionally Sebe who are all educated and exposed to Western standards of living. The adaptation of the Nigerian pidgin English is also quite tactful. Soyinka makes his less educated characters like the cell Commandant's, Ministers and other inmates of the general cell to speak in pidgin English with one another. This linguistic code allows the characters to effectively express themselves. For instance, Emuke is very vocal about the injustices in the country and he directs his criticism at the military. Once in a while, characters code-switch, changing their medium of discourse from standard English to Nigerian Pidgin English where they feel the latter will best convey their messages. For instance, when the cell commandant is addressing the members of his Eternal ruling, council, he speaks in standard English (pp. 2-11). At another time, (p.21) he addresses the warder and superintendent in Pidgin when the warder tells him to "shut up Hyacinth and get back to sleep", the commandant replies:

Shurup yourself you common fuckinrin warder! You think I dey talk to the like of you..." (p.21)

At a grapho-phonological level, most of Soyinka's characters pronounce the words of the English language with obvious indications of their illiterate status and the implication of interference of their respective mother tongues on the English lexemes. This shows clearly that for these characters English is only a secondary medium of expression. We notice that except Major Awam, whom the commandant dislikes for being a University product, (p.4) all the other ministers pronounce the word "Sir" as "sah" (p.2-7). The Agriculture Minister for example pronounces his portifolio as "agariculture" (p.5) while the commandant pronounces the word "shut up" as "shurup". (p.62)



Evidence of code-mixing also exist in *From Zia...* Soyinka adopts some Yoruba words and expressions to nativize the context of the play. Besides the traditional lexical items he uses, there are also pidgin expressions which are uniquely Nigerian: "Oga", (p.62), 'titoro' (p.44), "dabaru" (p.62), "Babalawo" (p.66), Oriki" (p.66). Allusions are made both to biblical figures and to Yoruba deities. He alludes to "Olokun", the Yoruba deity that guards the sea, and "Esu" the patron god. In quoting from the Bible, Sebe calls on the Wing Commander to "render, unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's" (p.80).

Lexical choices made in the play relate to the various representative fields referred to in this play. For instance, there is an in-group language (anti-language) amongst the prisoners, a language that is not understood by the other characters especially new inmates. Since the prison government is a simulation of the military government of the country, military registers permeate the text. For instance Military acts of seeking and granting permission are adopted: "permission to speak", "permission granted", "Your Excellency", (p.2), "Do carry on" (p.5), "Mission of redemption". (p.10)

There is also a language system among the drug dealers. These according to Sebe are "Passwords" (p.39) with which the couriers communicate. For instance, cocaine is called "stuff" or "package" (p.38) and is treated as "dipomatic consignments". Peddlers are called "boys" or "scouts" (p.46) while the money earned from drug deal is called "bread" (p.39). Drug peddlers who are either caught or killed while on business are called "missing goods". These are used to shield the identity of the drug community. The military seem to have a peculiar speech style when they are talking about civilians. They use semantically derogatory terms and invectives like "bloody civilians", "thieving politicians", "Extremists", "heartless prodigals", "Eunuch", "impotent", "incompetents", "Agitators", "bearded bastards", "garrulous egg-heads". (pp. 6, 10, 11, 51). These invective nouns and adjectives are used deliberately to emphasis the military's underestimation of the civilians' competence at handling state affairs. It also shows the dislike the military officers have for civilians, especially the educated ones. Some prison registers include:



"Local government"	-	Prison cell (p.13)
"Refugees"	-	Cell inmates
"Curriculum vitae"	-	Criminal record
"Common man"	-	Ordinary citizen
"Transit quarters"	-	a corner of cell for defecation
"Welcoming Committee"		Brutal prisoners

There is also the employment of proverbs mainly by Sebe who is a traditional Chief. For instance, in comparing the relationship between the military and drug barons Sebe says:

"Whatever food the frog has eaten,  
it is still the snake which digests  
it in the end". (p.54)

At another time he says:

"if the leaf sticks too much to the soap, it will soon start to froth on its own".

Songs are used in the play to diffuse tension. The characters sing and dance often, and through these anti-masque exhibitions or humorously grotesque dances, they pass on messages that are embedded within the lyrics of the songs. Such songs include song of the social prophylactic", "song of the diplomat" and "song of state assignment". There is also a poetic rendition titled "Ode to commodore Ayacinth" through which the prison inmates expose the corrupt leader of the military council. Soyinka adopts amphibology as a technique. He employs lots of ambiguity to encode meanings. For instance, in the conversation between Sebe and the women and between Sebe and the Wing Commander, we do not easily know that the topic of the discourse is cocaine trade. There also exist riddles through which meaning is encoded. For instance, Sebe talks about a Kotopo and another Kotopo republics respectively. In Kotopo a civilian (Alhaji ruled and gave few years of imprisonment. Soon, a General Kotopo takes over and decides to execute criminals. In this mixed state of confusion he says "everything becomes Kotopo-kotopo-kotopo and you find yourself in potopoto. (p.50) This riddle seems quite complex to unravel but shows the state of flux and confusion most countries find themselves during army take-overs.

## CONCLUSION

Soyinka's success in *From Zia...* is very evident. His commitment to art is seen in the careful handling of social issues and the aesthetic distance he upholds throughout the play. Historical facts and fiction are interwoven yet separated in context and style of presentation. The experience of most African states is objectified in this expert treatment of form so that the theatrical performance is



removed from the personal milieu of the playwright. Through this play, Soyinka has without doubt proven once more his status as a major, if not the most renowned of West African writers. He has, through *From Zia...* made himself relevant once more to his society by exposing social ills while at the same time showing astute commitment to aesthetic perfection. *From Zia with Love* can therefore be said to be Soyinka's exhibition of how literary discourse can be a realization of social commitment.

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