Drama, ethnic interests and national restructuring in Emmy Idegu's *Beloved Odolu Kingdom* and John Iwuh's *Birthright*

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Abstract
Nigeria is a multiethnic nation. The country is made up of about 250 ethnic groups, each with its own geographical location, culture and belief system. As a result, Nigeria has been plagued with problems such as ethnic rivalry, nepotism and tribalism since the nation's amalgamation in 1914. The aforementioned challenges have created political, tension and attendant breakdown of law and order across the country over the years. Drama serves as a tool for national restructuring by objectifying and addressing social realities in the society. The paper therefore, uses the instrument of content analysis of the qualitative research methodology by delving into the selected plays for the study and analyzing their contents in relation to the issues. The result reveals that drama is one of the most potent facilities for the integration of diverse interests for national peace and development. The study concludes and recommends that drama should be used to address ethnic motivated problems that have been bedeviling the nation.

Introduction
There is no gainsaying that Nigeria is blessed with immense human and natural resources that can make the country one of the most successful countries in the world. Before the oil boom, Nigeria was amongst the world’s leading exporters of agricultural products like cocoa, rubber, groundnut, cotton and skin. In 1956 oil was discovered in Oloibiri, modern-day Bayelsa, Nigeria making the nation one of the oil producing countries. Apart from petroleum, Nigeria has other natural resources such as coal, limestone, lead, zinc, iron ore, tin and many others. But the question remains, with all these wealth why is Nigeria still rated amongst the ranges of those with high level of low standard of living, with decaying structures? A 2018 World Bank report relays that almost 50% of Nigeria's population (around 100 million people) are living below the international poverty line of $2 a day, and with unemployment rate of over 20%, Nigeria is by all accounts the country with the highest poverty index anywhere in the world. The reason for this situation is not hard to explain. One of the major factors that are responsible for Nigeria’s problems is ethnicity. Apart from Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani, there are over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. Since the Northern and Southern Protectoretes in 1914, the people have been particularly obsessive with ethnic background instead of harnessing their diversity for national development. Politics, provision of basic amenities, and every other thing that are done in the nation have an ethnic related issues undertone. The controversial zonning policy of the country's leading political parties, recurring secessionist rhetoric, the bureaucratic concept of 'federal character'. Musa, Salifu and Imam Muhammad Jibril asserts that “Each of these ethnic groups, from studies over the years, struggles for its interest and achievement; leading to the issue of ethnicity, which is the brain child of tribalism and threat of national distingnation in the country”. Chinua Achebe further states that:

The social malaise in Nigerian society was political corruption. The structure of the country was such that there was an inbuilt power struggle among the ethnic groups, and of course those who were in power wanted to stay in power. The easiest and complex way to retain it, even in a limited area was to appeal to tribal sentiments (50).
The mentioned social structure which has over the ages led to economic, social and political problems in the country. Drama amongst many other means has been used to foster national unity in Nigeria. Drama plays a very huge role in Nigerian society. It is a tool for social transformation. It reflects the issues of different degrees as they concern the nation. These issues, according to Musa, S and Imam, Muhammad Jibril”can either be social, political and economic which are unavoidable… artist employed the analysis of the societal problems as an effective weapon in raising the consciousness of the people towards the nation’s ethnic, social, political and economic problems” (113).

It is in the light of the above fact that this paper decides to interrogate how drama has been used over the years to address issues of ethnicity in Nigeria with the sole aim of restructuring the country. The paper intends to investigate how some Nigerian playwrights like, Emmy Idegu and John Iwuh through their creative prowess have addressed this issue in their artistic works.

Theoretical framework
This study adopts social integration theory as its theoretical framework. Social integration refers to a pattern of human relations in society. It is a way through which people of different backgrounds relate and interact within the society. Musa and Imam observe that,

Social integration also refers to a process of largely agreeing on a shared system of meaning, language, culture and like. This doesn’t mean there aren’t any differences, but that we are kind of agree to live together and, at least to an extent feel part of a larger community. Increased in social integration helps reduce conflict in society, and it can help us feel more concerned to our community (110).

Emile Durkheim was one of the early theorists in the field of social integration theory. He introduced the theory in the late nineteenth century; specifically, he explored the theory in 1892 in a book entitled The Division of Labour in Society. Durkheim believed that society is a product of collective consciousness of the people and social integration. The task of binding people of different backgrounds together is not an easy one as people who share a common religion, work together, and spend leisure time together can still go against one another as a result of prejudice. For this reason Durkheim came up with different kinds of social integration ideologies which he referred to as solidarity. With these ideological views, Durkheim was of the opinion that society exerted a powerful force on individuals. People’s beliefs, norms and values make up a collective consciousness and this collective consciousness is crucial in explaining the existence of society. It produces society and holds it together. In a similar manner, the collective consciousness is produced by individuals through their actions and integrations. Society is a social product formed by the actions of individuals that then exert a cohesive social force back on individuals. Through their collective consciousness, Durkheim argued that human beings become aware of one another as social beings, not just animals. He further stated that any society that fails to achieve integration will face a problem known as anomie. Social integration theory therefore, is suitable for a study of this paper because it focuses on the ethnic related problems in Nigeria with the aim to suggest workable solutions to the problem for national development.

The concept of drama
Drama is a representation and presentation of man's actions, societal events and human experiences in general. It is a form of art that presents stories through the dialogues and actions of the characters. It can equally be seen as a genre of literary art which is meant to be presented on stage before an audience. Sam Inyanda and Atule Egwu assert that, Drama like prose, fiction, utilizes plot and characters, develops, arouses emotion or appeals to humour, and may be either escapist, or interpretative in its dealing with life. Like poetry, it may draw upon all the resources of language including verse. However, drama has peculiar characteristic to itself. It is written mainly to be performed, not read (50).

Like other art forms, drama is not created in a vacuum. Drama is a product of the society. It draws its information from the society, analyzes the information and presents them to the same society in the form of entertainment but enveloped with life changing lessons. For one of the major values of drama is seen in its ability to correct social ills. Amirikpa Oyigbenu posits that: “Drama possesses redeeming social values and enormous responsibility to correct the ills of the society” (77). Bamidele, L. also supports that “Drama, serves as a criticizing agent. This implies that drama engages in perfection of human society be it social and political” (15).

In Nigeria for instance, drama has been playing important roles among the people. During the nation's pre-colonial days, drama served as one of the major aspect of the people's life and culture. Drama in this context comprises communal events in the forms of masquerade performance, myths, rituals institutions and festivals which actions, and messages were framed to guild the society to towards the right direction. Nkosi submits that:

Traditional forms of drama can only be comprehended in their mode of functioning within the framework of ritual, religious festivals, and other ceremonial activities; seasonal changes, harvesting, birth, initiation, marriage and death, have all been occasions for dramatic performance of one form or another (174).

Colonial experiences gave birth to another form of drama known as modern Nigerian drama. This form of drama is variably different from Nigerian traditional drama; it involves written texts, a more organized form of stage for performance and theme that centres on most recent issues confronting the the nation; issues such as imperialism, cultural clashes and a host of others. According to Amirikpa:

The movement from the traditional ritual masquerade festival theatre to the modern theatrical art form has been informed by a number of factors such as the advent of colonial rule, the introduction of western education, incursion of Christianity and Islam, and money economy which promoted material values and morality of old. The move was to dismiss indignity everything African as heathen and barbaric. European values systems were foisted upon the newly educated elites who were made to denigrate their African heritage… (44)

Nigeria has been enveloped with problems like ethnicity, nepotism, corruption and many others since the nation got her independence on October 1, 1960. These problems and their negative effects such as political and tribal.
motivated violence are the issues that informed the thematic preoccupations of modern Nigerian drama over the years. Modern Nigerian drama like Emmy Idegu's *Beloved Odolu Kingdom* and John Iwuh's *Birthright*, and many others have addressed socio-economic and political realities of the nation for positive transformation and development.

**Brief about the selected plays**

*Beloved Odolu Kingdom* is one of Emmy Idegu’s plays. Emmy Idegu hails from Odolu, Igalamela Odolu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. Currently, the playwright lectures at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Calabar, Nigeria. He is an accomplished author who has published a number of plays amongst which are *The Legendary Inikpi* (1994), *Omodoko* (1998), *The People’s Choice* (2000), *Touch Man*, (2007), *Ata Igala the Great* (2008), etc.

The play, *Beloved Odolu Kingdom*, tells a story of a clannish and political conflict in Odolu Kingdom. Odolu kingdom houses about six clans: Desert, Middle land, Mountain, Riverside, Forest and Erosion clans. The play opens with the news of ill health of the king, a son of Desert clan who later joins his ancestors as a result of the illness. Constitution of the kingdom states that whenever the king is indisposed his second-in-command should take over the affairs of the land pending the time he regains his strength to carry out his responsibilities to the people. The constitution equally upholds that when the king dies, a credible citizen from any part of the kingdom should be crowned as the new king. Leader, the second-in-command to the king in the play is a son of Riverside clan. Amidst serious protests by the people of Desert clan, the rest of the clan gives their supports to Leader to take care of the affairs of the land while the king is indisposed. When the king joins his ancestors, Leader, among other contestants, indicates his interest for the throne, and with the full supports of majority of the clans, Leader wins the race. The people of Desert clan feel bad about the whole situation and lead a violent protest, resulting in destruction of lives and properties in the play.

John Iwuh who is the author of *Birthright*, is a Nigerian playwright, theatre personality, essayist, scholar, lecturer and an associate professor of scenography and performance aesthetics. He is the winner of ANA/DDC/JP Clark National Literary Prize for Drama, 2008. Apart from *Birthright*, the playwright has published the following works: *The Village Lamb* (2007), *Ashes and Daydreams* (2007) and *Spellbound* (2009).

*Birthright* is set in Obodonile. Obodonile is made up of many geographical areas amongst which are Ndi-Ala, Ndi-Ugwu, and Ndi-Nda. The land also houses several ethnic groups. Oil well which is the major sources of people’s wealth is found in Ndi-Ala. As a result of extreme ethnic interest and ethnic recognition cum political issues, Ndi-Ala starts agitating to pull out of Obodonile and become an independent land on its own. Obodonile's government refuses to allow Ndu-Ala to pull out and this situation leads to the war which destroys properties and claims many lives in the play.

**Ethnic interests and national restructuring in Emmy Idegu’s Beloved Odolu kingdom and John Iwuh’s Birthright**

Ethnicity has been largely identified as one of the major problems of Nigerian nation. The economic, social, policies and leadership of the nation are influenced by tribal sentiment leading to unhealthy rivalry amongst the nation’s various ethnic groups. This situation has over the ages enriched the nation’s history with violent events. Kalejaiye, P. and Nurudeen, A. posit that:

> Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, ethnic considerations in political,
economic, social and academic matters can hardly be avoided. Politics is ethnic oriented; ethnicism is more often than not the consciousness of President, Head of States, ministers, and those on national assignments. This has been one of the major causes of social conflicts in Nigeria, especially in a situation where this consideration do not favour the minority group. This social conflict in the form of violence resulting from destruction of lives and properties has been perceived in general as a major obstacle to the overall political, social and economic development of the country (252).

There is no gainsaying that the events, thematic preoccupations and other elements of the selected plays are built around the aforementioned Nigerian social realities. Simply put, the events in the plays are good examples of the happenings in Nigeria. For instance, like in Nigeria, Odolu Kingdom, is a plural society with its diverse clans blinded by extreme clannish recognition. In the play, the king is sick. For peace, stability and development, Odolu promulgates a law that when the king is indisposed, he should be duly represented by his second-in-command until the king is able and capable to rule again. This law with all sense of sane reasoning is for the good of all the people of Odolu kingdom. The continuity of the kingdom's growth and development are not meant to be paralyzed as a result of the king’s ill health, when he has a credible second in command like Leader to pilot the affairs of the kingdom until he regains his strength. But because Leader is not from Desert clan, 1st Elder who is the representative of Desert clan protests against the installation of Leader as acting king saying:

I speak both for myself and the clan that I represent here that it will never happen. We shall resist all the clandestine plans to usurp the throne from us… I say again, your plans will surely fail. We shall fight till the last drop of our blood to make sure all enemies of my people are brought to shame… (Idegu, 2013:28)

Amidst tension and huge amount of conflict, with the supports of majority of the clans, Leader takes over the affairs of Odolu kingdom. And when the king eventually joins his ancestors, an election is conducted and Leader again wins the throne with the support of most of the clans. The Desert clan who is -not satisfied with the outcome begins a violent protest that destroys many lives and property as captured thus:

There is absolute breakdown of law and order in the Desert and Mountain clans with massive uncoordinated movements of people… Heavy conflagration. Thick engulfing dark smoke. Fire engulfs some parts while banging, bashing, cracks and smashing permeate other areas. In the midst of these, voices of protest rage the entire atmosphere with more destruction of lives and property going on rather unabated. Many youths are seen with guns, bows, arrows, cutlasses, swords knives, sticks and other weapons causing reckless attacks to lives and properties. In this confusion, people are heard crying, wailing, weeping, groaning and cursing. Some run out of burning houses only to be caught and thrown back
alive into fire… (Idegu, 2013:67)

This is exactly the situation in Nigeria over the ages. A critical analysis of the events in the play, its characters and actions can show that the characters are the representation of what our Nigerian leaders are, whose prejudicial mentality have at one era or the other fueled ethnic and political crisis across the country. For Nigeria has witnessed many occasions of ethnic and political violence as captured in the play since the nation got her independence in October 1st 1960. Baum opins that:

Politics in Nigeria is characterized by ethnic cleavages. The political elites… prey upon the masses and use them as satellites to achieve their sociopolitical and economic objectives. This is done through orientation, indoctrination or violence using the masses on the already conceived stereotypes against their political opponents. Right from formation of political parties to campaign process and voting patterns, all tend towards ethnicity. As a result, politics in Nigeria is associated with violence and lack of accommodation (259-260).

In the same vein, Birthright uses the metaphor of Obodonile community to reflect Nigerian society. Like in the play, hostility and lack of oneness amongst Nigerian various ethnic groups are some of the major factors responsible for the avalanches of violent scenes across Nigeria over the ages. For instance, apart from other reasons, ethnicity and sectionalism made the eastern part of Nigeria, which comprises mostly of the Igbos, just like Ndi-Ala people in the play, prematurely seek for self-government rather than nationalism some years ago forgetting the fact that such motion can lead to nothing but national woes. As the situation has been explained in the play thus:

Sentiment, sentiment! Ndi-Ala wants government, not so? Government is death. Death is government. Each time you desire government then you desire death. Government is power: with it twin can clutch on the mother’s breast while other sucking the other. His twin will either fight or starves to death. What do we want, freedom or power? Either way it is war. Unfortunately, war is death. (Iwuh, 2016:21).

It is the lack of this knowledge amongst Nigerians like it has been mentioned that often results to crisis in the country. Sentiment of any kind is one of the major problems of a plural society like Nigeria. Durkheim believes that the only way to achieve peace in the society is to rely on one another. The society exerts a powerful force on individuals. People’s norms, beliefs and values make up a collective consciousness and the collective consciousness binds individuals together by creating social integration. It is in line with this ideology that Nigerian drama has been explored over the years towards the agenda of national restructuring. For example, the selected plays do not only discuss the issues of ethnicity in Nigeria, but also provide solutions to problems for national development. The playwrights use the characters, actions and dialogues in their plays to pass some information of higher national interest to the audience; some of such are captured as thus:

There is nothing under the sun that eyes have not seen. We are talking about the well being of the entire Odolu kingdom and some people are
still dragging us into the mud of clan dichotomy. A look at the face of a juvenile makes one think that he would never grow beards. Odolu Kingdom has grown beyond which clan anybody comes from before he can be our king. (Idegu, 2011:76)

Leadership is exercising authority with commonsense of the good of all. There can’t be progress without peace, and there can’t be peace without love. Who is your enemy? Is he who dresses differently from the way you do? Is he the one who speaks a language different from yours? Or is he the person who lives several miles away from your village. (Iwuh, 2016:24)

Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, Igala and the other ethnic groups in Nigeria should be allowed and given genuine equal opportunities to have a share in the nation’s politics, social and economic programs. The aforementioned ideas without doubt have the power to rehabilitate the nation's political structure which has been bedeviled with ethnic sentiments. Indeed, the dialogues can awaken the consciousness of the people towards nation building thereby providing solutions to the problem of instability resulting from agitations for equal opportunities.

Conclusion/Recommendations
This paper has to some extent established the fact that ethnicity is one of the major challenges facing Nigerian as a nation right from 1914 when the nation was amalgamated. The paper has also shown that drama has served as a powerful means of national restructuring over the years. It is therefore, imperative that plays like Emmy Idegu’s Beloved Odolu Kingdom and John Iwuh’s Birthright should be performed on stage across Nigeria and if possible, transformed into movies so as to pass the information contained in the text to Nigerians audience as this can restructure the country for better.

Works cited