

MAINSTREAMING DRAMATIC DIALOGUE  
IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION:  
AN APPRAISAL OF AHMED YERIMA'S *DAMI'S CROSS*  
AND J.P. CLARK'S *THE WIVES REVOLT*

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**Abstract**

*The need to mainstream quality dramatic dialogue towards conflicts resolution has over the years been implored by playwrights as an important mechanism. This integration has helped in reshaping the society towards attaining a free, just and egalitarian society devoid of endless restiveness in all spheres that have hindered quality development of the nation. To demonstrate this however, this study finds meaning in Ahmed Yerima's *Dami's Cross* and J. P. Clark's *The Wives Revolt*. In both plays, the two playwrights have critically presented the relevance of dramatic dialogue in conflicts mediation. This of course, informs our discourse that drama as a whole have the potential to mediate between groups and proper solutions that will help bring about social transformation in the nation.*

**Key words:** Mainstreaming, Dramatic dialogue, conflicts and resolution.

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## **Introduction**

Every society of the world depends majorly on dialogue to resolve the conflicts and tensions that always ensue as human interact and engage with one another. Writers throughout the world have used the instrumentality of dialogue as a major tool in their creative works towards making positive statements that can help change the world as well as expose, inform and resolve nagging problems confronting the society. Notable playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Tor Iorapuu, Irene Agunloye, Tess Onwueme, and Ahmed Yerima among others have used the dialectics approach in their dramas to question the status quo and proffer solutions to some of the disturbing issues confronting the society. It is evident that the relevance of dramatic dialogue in transformation theatre, theatre of the oppressed, community theatre and theatre organizing have been instrumental and fundamental in resolving tensions permeating the society and working out proactive measures for societal betterment.

This medium called “dialogue” has since the creation of the world made concerted efforts in purging off so many ills that have hindered the growth and development of the society. It has been used as a transformative medium that calls for responsible and responsive leadership and followership. It has helped to purge and stabilize many repugnant and repulsive societies of the world. For instance, United Nations, European Union, African Union, Civil Society Organisations such as UNDP have over the years been

interfacing through dialogue to bring about peaceful coexistence in various societies across the world. The ongoing dialogue in Syria, Yemen, Israel and Palestinians among others is a good example where dialogue is being used for peace. The phenomenon has encouraged participation and community based actions that provide an egalitarian society. Interestingly, most of these participations and community based actions are often done consciously by writers most especially playwrights to ensure an understanding in addressing people's most pressing needs, linking both practitioners, community and academic knowledge to mobilize and equip the people towards striking dialogue for peaceful coexistence.

This paper however, seeks to draw interference from the carefully created dramatic dialogues in Ahmed Yerima's *Dami's Cross* and J.P Clark's *The Wives Revolt* as committed plays that have used dramatic dialogue to amplify the voices of the voiceless and subsequently resolving the conflict raised therein.

Bivens and Taylor avers that:

...dialogues have suggested ways in which democracy can be experienced and practiced in the daily process of teaching and learning and even how the activity of conversation itself around these issues can be part of a transformative process or those involved (21).

The above assertion agrees with the notion that indeed, dialogue is a major instrument in the hand of the writer, in preaching social change and calling for the resolution of conflicts that arise as a result of dissatisfaction from members of the society.

### **Dialogue and Social Transformation**

Dialogue is the bedrock of society's reshipment, the church makes use of dialogue in preaching the gospel, the mosque equally makes use of dialogue as its medium of reaching out to the people. In our schools and homes too, dialogue serves as a sensible needle used in addressing all issues be they conflicts, resolutions or instructions. What this means is that dialogue is holistically a mechanism that social critics and change actors of the globe use in advocating social transformation in all areas of livelihood.

Agreeing with this perspective however, Freire admits that ...the oppressed are not marginals...living 'outside society', they have always been inside the structures which made them beings for others. The Solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression but to transform the structure so that they become beings for themselves (48). Here, Freire is emphasizing the vitality of dialogue in resolving nagging problems. What this implies is that through these diversionary roles of dialogue, we are informed of how to think and what to do for the betterment of the society.

Again, it means that for social transformation to occur, conflicts can be resolved through careful negotiations (dialogue). Corroborating, Iorapuu posits that:

Immediately after the 2007 elections, YARAC started work in Benue and Plateau states with grassroots youth groups around issues of leadership and good governance. The aim was to build grassroots social movement for good governance ... community organizing focus group discussions and using soccer and theatre to engage with the young people through dialogue (158).

The basis of Iorapuu's statement lies in the fact that quality dialogue can go a long way in transforming the society. His opinion cuts across several methodological pedagogies that can be adopted by various agents such as (YARAC) in order to actively engage with the people (youth) so as to promote harmonious co-existence and bring about the desired social change which playwrights (writers) seek in their works.

It is also worth noting that quality dialogue as often presented in literatures of all kind will help to redefine the history of a people and reshape their lives simultaneously. Empowering people and bringing about social change through the instrumentality of dialogue as a major tool for conflict resolution can only be achieved if the masses are adequately equipped with the issues that bother on

their welfare. It is in the light of the above premise that Fung and Wright elucidate thus:

While empowered participatory governance shares this focus on persuasion and reason giving with all accounts of deliberation, its practical focus departs from many treatments that depict discourse as the proffering of reason to advance pre-given principles, proposals, values, or policies. In these experiments, deliberations almost always involve continuous joint planning, problem solving and strategizing... participants usually enter this discursive arena to formulate together such means and ends. They participate not exclusively to press performed agendas or visions, but rather they expect that strategies and solution will be articulated and forged through deliberation and planning (18).

The substantial focus on the discussion process is a way in which societies, groups and communities forge new currents in developmental process as a result of valued and responsible dialogue which cannot be discussed. The power of deliberative process as asserted by Wright and Fung connotes that indeed, the power of dialogue is many layers and every strata of the society uses the medium in their developmental process. This is undebatable based on the subsequent fact that dramatists and of course writers in

politics and other businesses of nature's existences, fall back to meaningful dialogue as a parameter for solving problems and making useful policies that will enhance the progress of every nation.

Again, to better the lot of any given society, quality dialogue provides the space for engagements in rational reasoning that will advance the society and bring forth social transformation. The asinities of debunking dialogue ought to be shoved aside and individuals incorporated in decision-making process. When this is done, it will spark the fire of transformation thereby enhancing social change. People are often times not happy when relegated to the background and denied the opportunity to actively participate in matter that has to do with their welfare. It is in the light of the foregoing that Merrifield posits that:

Citizens believe that a good society is one which they can participate in public spheres to make their own contribution towards the public good... they want to be heard and consulted on a regular and continued basis, not merely at the time of an election. They want more than a vote. They are asking for participation and inclusion in the decisions taken and policies made (4).

What this means is that neighborhood inclusion in policy formulation and of course constant consultations with the people

will provide a better platform for social transformation. Literatures have played a vital role towards this dimension, writers/playwrights through their dramatic dialogue provide the background through which literal cultures and political educations are given to the masses and at the same time given them a voice to be able to get involved in decisions that affect them.

A dumb rating further on the indispensable role of dialogue in conflict resolution and management through creative writing, Achebe, in his book "A Man of the People" creates a sensible dialogue which is meant to empower the masses and spark the valves in them. In the lines of Odilia one of the characters in the novel who feels the pains and the denial of so many privileges his people have gone through over the years from chief Nanga who pumps money to the people only during election to win their votes says:

Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who has started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wish for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths (2).

Odili's dialogue as masterly created by Achebe is an indication to justify the fact that the power of dialogue in literature is significant.



In the above speech, the writer, through Odili, wants the masses to understand human nature as epitomized in the character of Nanga. The reason is not farfetched from the fact that the masses are made to clearly see the structures of politics and of course, never to allow the sauce that comes out of the treachery of bad leadership engulf them.

Owueme provides a striking dialogue through Wazobia a lead character in her play *The Reign of Wazobia* thus:

Daughters and sons of Ilaa, for centuries men  
have ruled and misruled us... time blinds like  
rain, knows no king. Time has come for you to  
hear some home truths. That we have kept quiet  
and observed your excesses... your excesses  
these long seasons do not mean we lack the words  
nor do we lack power to curb male excesses  
(150).

The above dialogue overtly shows the potency of dramatic dialogue in reaching ends and resolving concerns. The women are not happy about the injustice done them in the society. Against this backdrop, Wazobia the lead character is dogged in her resolve through her explicit lines that empowers the women. At the same time, the women making processes in their community. This accentuates the potency of dramatic dialogue in conflict resolution

Wazobia further says “I do not see any reason why women and youths must be kept away from matters of state concern. Matters of state affects them as much as they affect chiefs and princes” (148). The above lines amplify the thrust of our discourse whose major concerns is to use dramatic dialogue as a means to resolve nagging issues. Wazobia's cry in the play is given a second thought and the women are given the slot to partake in the decision making process. Wazobia herself is made the king amidst men just because she has been able to assert strong will and the resilience to fight the plight of the women.

In a nutshell, dialogue serves as the mechanism that conveys every activity of human existence. Without dialogue, there would not be existence. J.S Styan as cited by Yerima remarks that:

For dramatic dialogue has other work to do before it provides a table of words to be spoken. In the absence of the author, it must provide a set of unwritten working directions to the actor on how to speak its speeches. And before that, it has to teach him how to think and feel them. The particularity of a play requires this if it is not to be animated by a series of cardboard stereotype (83).

The above statement shows the multi- dimensional role of dramatic dialogue either to an actor, the playwright and the conflicts it addresses.