

Kalangu

Journal of Language and Literary Studies

Federal University of Lafia

Vol.2 No. 1 2021

pp. 143-153

**Interrogating Hegel's Levels of Consciousness as Factors of
Change in Femi Osofisan's *No More The Wasted Breed***

Promise Adiele (Ph.D.)
Department of English
Mountain Top University
Ibafo Ogun State.

ABSTRACT

Change as used in this study is the realignment of social structures to achieve a new reality. Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel was a German philosopher and theorist whose idea of change is encapsulated in the dialectic. Femi Osofisan is a Nigerian playwright whose idea of change is sustained by the dialectic. However, while Hegel's view of change through the dialectic is idealistic, Osofisan's conception of change through the dialectic is practical. There are divergent views among scholars and critics regarding a more potent, viable process of change, whether idealistic according to Hegel or practical according to Osofisan. This paper establishes that both processes of change are intricately interwoven, therefore can be reconciled. The change which takes place in Osofisan's *No More The Wasted Breed* is subliminally embedded in the three stages of Hegel's Consciousness, Sense-Certainty, Perception and Force & Understanding. In utilizing the rich potential of Hegel's dialectic, the paper portrays that all the characters in the play embody the attributes of Hegel's Consciousness in accordance with the roles assigned to them by the playwright. Given that the characters' experiences are mediated by the three stages of Hegel's Consciousness as mentioned above, they become agents of change to a degree which informs their social and economic awareness. In this way, this study proves that both Hegel and Osofisan's methods of change provide a unified paradigm for the understanding and appreciation of change.

Key words: Change, Dialectic, Sense-Certainty, Perception, Force & Understanding

Introduction

A critical study of Osofisan's drama shows that the process of change develops from the daily protocol of the human psyche. On the other hand, Hegel's idea of Consciousness explains the different stages of change in the individual mind in its quest to acquire knowledge. The foregoing immediately establishes the relationship between Hegel and Osofisan's idea of change. This study focuses on Hegel's Consciousness and its various dynamics in the development of the stages of change in Osofisan's play, *No More The Wasted Breed*. Given that drama as a genre of art provides a platform for dialogue where the minds and convictions of the characters are revealed, it provides a suitable platform for Hegel's ideas of Consciousness to flourish. The foregoing assertion is valid because "the highest form of artistic representation is drama.

The reason is that unlike ancient Greek sculptor or modern painting, for example, drama uses the most comprehensive of artistic mediums – the moving and speaking human body engaged in dramatic action". (Bates 2010, 24) It is "the moving and speaking human body engaged in dramatic action" which provides the avenue for various ideological musings to be enacted and recreated. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) encapsulates the entire process of mind development and the various stages the human mind must undergo in its upward striving for the acquisition of knowledge. In this case, knowledge is understood as man's recognition of absolute truth regarding his existence, environment, and circumstance. Beyond his documented

philosophical contributions, Hegel bestrides the intellectual world with a host of ideological provisions which are interdisciplinary.

The totality of Hegel's influence in the humanities is underscored by the observation that "Hegel's influence goes far beyond philosophy and literary studies. He gave new direction to anthropological studies; he has been credited for much that is found in the teachings of Christian Science; his influence on the thought of Karl Marx is common knowledge." (Paolucci and Paolucci 2002, 6) Instinctively, the world is reminded that "Hegel acknowledges the importance of "historical" reason whereby the interpreter and subject matter are both conditioned by this place in history. He also pays attention to the historical situation of the interpreter which may be very different from that of the author". (Thiselton 2009, 216) According to Thiselton, Hegel establishes a connection between the interpreter of a text and the historical moments which may be different from what is presented by the author. In this way, the interpreter at any given time is the master of his art so that different interpreters can produce different but useful perspectives of a text. With this Hegelian position in mind, one is empowered to interpret a text using available historical moments different from what the author presents.

CONSCIOUSNESS

Hegel provides a systematic process of Consciousness as a form of knowledge which is separated in three different categories, **Sense-certainty**, **Perception**, and **Force & Understanding**. This he does in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to him "the knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is. Our approach to the object must also be immediate or receptive, we must alter nothing in the object as it presents

itself. In appreciating it, we must refrain from comprehending it". (Hegel 1979, 58) Although Hegel's language of delivery is abstract and difficult, we are able to deduce that his concern regarding the development of Consciousness as a form of knowledge is predicated on the unmediated appreciation of an object in its purest form without any form of adulteration whether intellectual, religious, cultural or even psychological. This standpoint in the process of Consciousness is what he calls *Sense-certainty*. On *sense-certainty*, it is important to note that "knowledge is the direct sensory awareness of some object that requires no assistance from the mind". (Lawhead 2002, 364) Perhaps, Lawhead's submission describes the position and responsibility of the senses in acquiring knowledge in its purest and truest forms. It is important to note that the word 'direct' in the quote above conveys a notion of independence of the senses in its acquisition of knowledge.

Sense-Certainty

In *sense-certainty*, our experience or encounter with any object or event should be free from such external factors like religion, intellect, previous experiences, and any form of external intrusion so that a pencil remains a pencil, a lie remains a lie, murder remains murder and daylight remains daylight. In this way, we are certain that darkness in the sky is a major characteristic of nightfall just as brightness is a major characteristic of day time:

Sense-Certainty immediately appears as the richest kind of knowledge,
indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth for which no bounds can be found,
either when we reach out into space and time in which it is dispersed,
or when we take a bit of this wealth, and by division enter into it.

Moreover, Sense-Certainty appears to be the truest knowledge for it has not
as yet omitted anything from the object but has the object before it in its

perfect entirety. (Hegel 1979, 58)

Sense-certainty first validates the immediate appreciation of darkness in the sky as the presence of nightfall. Although, there may be other interpretations of darkness in the sky besides the coming of nightfall, for example, if the beholder is mentally deranged or in a dream/drunken state. *Sense-certainty* maintains that it is only when we have interpreted darkness as a characteristic of nightfall that we are better positioned to move to another level of consciousness. This also applies to brightness and daylight. To crime, if we experience a crime, say, theft, our experience of the act must not consider other external factors why the crime was committed. *Sense-certainty* maintains that stealing, in our first experience of it must be understood as a crime against humanity. Murder must be seen as such. To go beyond the borders of this act and begin to examine such factors as reasons for the murder negates the principle of *Sense-certainty*. Drops of water from the sky are first and foremost, a sign of rainfall. If a government is changed, it is either because an election has taken place or a coup has taken place or a king has died. If a woman's stomach is distended, she is pregnant. If a baby cries, he is in pain or discomfort. If a man is poor, he has not worked hard, and success must be seen as an evidence of hard work.

In a way, Femi Osofisan's dramaturgy and artistic currents share a lot with the creative bent of German playwright, Bertolt Brecht. Commenting on Brecht, Richard Gilman observes that "his interest in the self-centred on its apprehensible, one could almost say, "reportable" qualities, not its mysteries, and particularly on its behaviour in social and objective contexts." (1987, 195) Like Brecht, Osofisan shows a remote commitment in locating the self, the individual as a focal point in creation in relation to his immediate world. For Osofisan, the individual has the capacity to determine his fate rather than depend on spiritual abstractions for relevance and advancement.

This much is demonstrated in his play *No More The Wasted Breed* which is regarded by many critics as Osofisan's rebuttal to Wole Soyinka's earlier play, *The Strong Breed*.

Beyond rebutting Soyinka's play, Osofisan creates a different identity over the relationship that exists between men and the gods and posits that men should be masters of their destiny and reject any ill fate bestowed on them by gods and mythical images. Osofisan's plays are better understood in their immediate social context. 'Social' in this context means all human platforms which accommodate different activities without stratification. Commenting on the relevance of 'social' as a contextual paradigm for drama, Molly Anne Rothenberg remarks that "it is assumed to have an independent existence with its own properties and powers, while at the same time being the most general feature of all human activity". (2010, 15) It is this social context that gives *No More The Wasted Breed* a pride of place in Osofisan's oeuvre.

In interpreting *No More The Wasted Breed* at the level of *sense-certainty*, we immediately consider the bubonic plague which afflicts the people of Egure community in its isolated form as only a form of epidemic. In dealing with the human reaction against the epidemic, Osofisan explores the hearts of the characters, their inner minds, and their emotional state to reveal a hidden but subtle aversion for supernatural powers and their sometimes destructive tendencies. This method is justified by the observation that "writers are the engineers of the human soul". (Nnolim 2010, 33) By exploring the soul of his characters, Osofisan is able to establish the hidden tensions of their hearts which galvanizes the actions in his plays. Characters in Osofisan's drama are elastic in projecting the playwright's convictions. This is because the "character is the proper centre of the ideal artistic representation, because it unifies in itself the aspects previously considered, unifies them as factors in its totality". (Hegel 1987, 236) It is from Saluga, a character in the play that we appreciate the nodal tension in the land perpetrated by the gods.

SALUGA: ...Food supplies are short, the fishes have fled, all the plants have rotted away. And on top of all that now comes this plague that is eating away the children. (38-41)

Saluga's remarks above paint a picture of the tragic situation in the Egure community. As the first stage of Hegel's Consciousness, *sense-certainty* adopts an unmediated understanding of the incidence as a phenomenon of existence intricately associated with humanity. Every living thing, at one point or another, experiences a failure in optimum function due to a variety of reasons most of them bordering on lack of care, but among human beings poor hygiene or inadequate nutrition. Sickness or plagues among human beings in many parts of African are attributed to many factors among them, the intervention of the gods when humans fail to offer sacrifices of propitiation. Although a further reading of the play reveals the immediate cause of the boubonic plague ravaging the community, our understanding of the situation at the level of *sense-certainty* precludes all other factors surrounding the plague, thereby restricting our knowledge of the situation to just a general sickness.

There is sickness in the land, the people are dying and the natural consequence in the prevailing situation is to seek a cure. This informs Togun's effort in consulting the priest of the inland waters to seek a solution to the ailment that threatens the life of his son. Our knowledge and awareness of the boubonic plague in the land, if restricted to its purest form at the level of *sense-certainty* will provoke a desire for a change in the form of a cure. However, if our knowledge is mediated by such extraneous factors such as the cause of the plague, its spread and counter spread, this will ultimately derail an effective response for a change in the form of an immediate cure. Sickness at the level of *sense-certainty* must be understood as a natural phenomenon. This can be caused by such factors as poor sanitary conditions, climatic change or bodily response to climatic changes. In Africa however, sickness could be caused by supernatural forces such as the

gods who may be angry with the community for what they did or did not do, for example, the case with the Egure community. Given our interpretation through the prism of *sense-certainty*, the sickness that besieged the Egure community is only a natural occurrence and it is only when it is understood in this way that a change in the form of a cure can be pursued.

Although knowledge at the level of *sense-certainty* has been criticized as too elementary and basic, it offers insight into a child-like innocence that is not mediated or adulterated by multifaceted aspects of other forms of knowledge. With the foregoing analogy, *sense-certainty* embraces the human and supernatural interaction in this way: If there is a disruption of cosmic harmony, humans by their nature will respond to achieve change by consulting the supernatural domain. It is either the supernatural essence assists humans and offer help or they repudiate humans and leave them to suffer. This short summary is what Osofisan projects in his play. Although the introduction of Saluga brings a new dimension to the human/supernatural interaction, it becomes a turning point for victory on the side of the humans.

Perception

The Second stage in the analysis of Consciousness as a process of knowledge acquisition and experience is *Perception*. According to Hegel, “Perception...takes what is presented to it as a universal. Just as universality is its principle in general, the immediately self-differentiating moments within perception are universal”. (1987, 67) In *Perception*, the occurrence of objects and our experience of them must be viewed as possessing universal properties and not as being exclusive to culture, environment, and our personal opinion of them. Universality therefore is a cornerstone of *Perception* so that the human faculty or the senses at once relates its experience as plausible across the divide of humanity. A few examples will suffice here. Darkness as a

characteristic of nightfall must be understood as a universal phenomenon capable of taking place in any part of the world. Light, as a feature of day must be seen as a universal manifestation of daylight. There is a sense in which some experiences can only relate to culture, geography, and history.

Perception collapses the boundaries of mediation and extends the frontiers of universal comprehension and application of knowledge. The question that naturally arises is this. Does every human experience or occurrence have universal properties? *Perception* maintains that even in situations where experiences appear to have a cultural background, we must strive to relate it to a universal dimension. The appearance of masquerade, a cultural phenomenon, must be related as having the possibility of occurring anywhere in the world where human beings inhabit. Robbery, natural disaster like landmines, volcano, earthquake, must all be seen and understood as universal occurrences with the potential to occur anywhere in the world.

The relation of events or objects as universal properties in human experience creates a stable thought which will abolish any form of bias. *Perception* rejects stereotypes. If a man has told a lie, he committed the act because he is a human being and not necessarily because he is from a particular region often associated with lying. If a man has committed rape, therefore, our *Perception* of the act should be appreciated from a universal perspective and not from a narrow prism. If drops of rainfall take place, it must be understood as a universal phenomenon and not because a particular region has a preponderance for much rainfall. Murder, riot, child birth, celebrations, funerals, accidents, and a totality of human experience must be understood and appreciated from a universal perspective. This is the main focus of *Perception* as a stage of Consciousness.

Osofisan's recreation of the deadly bubonic plague in the Egure community serves multiple purposes but the most important is to initiate an inevitable interaction between humans and gods. This conveys the understanding that "in the symbiotics of Yoruba theology, however, the gods yearn for reunification with the humans who first conceived them and are tied to humanity by a common fallibility and reciprocal needs". (Wright 1993, 13) Accordingly, the relationship and eventual interaction between humans and gods is inevitable as both can't do without each other. However, the mind, in its quest for knowledge and at the level of *Perception* only recognizes sickness or plagues in their universal spectrum.

In a broader perspective, the evidence of the deadly bubonic plague at the level of *Perception* can be interpreted as a cause and effect situation where each time humans are confronted by such life threatening challenges, they promptly seek solution. This is a universal practice and must be understood as such. In the play, through the dialogue and exchange between Olokun and his wife Elusu, it is revealed that the entire Egure community is suffering from an epidemic due to their failure to propitiate and offer sacrifice to Olokun, goddess of the inland waters. The solution is a human sacrifice through a carrier ritual to assuage the goddess of the sea. Through this kind of ritual, humans lubricate the continuum between them and the gods through which good life is guaranteed. "Through this inviolable connection, the carrier ritual is usually part of a process through which the community discharges its misfortunes and renews its allegiance to its founding, protective orisa." (Richards 1996, 15) This singular scenario is immediately viewed at the level of *Perception* as a universal occurrence with the possibility of taking place in any part of the world where humans inhabit. History is replete with humanity's suffering and punishment as a result of a failure to offer sacrifice and lubricate the continuum between the physical realm and the supernatural realm. This kind of punishment towards humanity is recognized by many

cultures, religion, and creed around the world. It occurs in a residual form and with this in mind, the events of *No More The Wasted Breed* are immediately accorded a universal platform, divested of any sectional interpretation. .

Force and Understanding: The third and final stage of Hegel's Consciousness is *Force and Understanding*. This stage examines the law-like forces that attract the various components of an object together binding them in eternal unity. Terry Eagleton critically observes that "Hegel will dexterously combine concrete and abstract, sensuous and spiritual, negating the former terms only to reinstate them at a higher level" (1990, 143). This Hegelian idea of the inevitable conjoining of opposites after what seems to be a protracted contrariety is upheld by *Force and Understanding*. While in unity, the mind examines the interplay and interaction of these various components, their tensions, relationships and complementary dispositions. It is only when the mind has appreciated any object constituted in this way that it can show a good understanding of that object in relation to the external world. For the force of attraction to be effective, the various components to be attracted together must have dissimilar properties or qualities. They must be items which are contradicted to each other. When the mind identifies these opposites and contraries, it then goes further to relate their eventual unity to the force that bound them together. Once the force has achieved its main objective, it emphasizes these opposites in unity as they are continually realigned in a new relationship where they determine humanity's impulses, reflexes and reactions towards their environment.

No More The Wasted Breed in many respect resembles Wole Soyinka's play *Death and The King's Horseman*. Death through human sacrifice has existed from time immemorial as many cultures, religion, and tradition recognize and make room for it. The Holy Bible, a literary compendium for the Christian religion, recounts how the patriarch Abraham was asked by God

to sacrifice his only son Isaac. “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering, on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you”. (NKJV 1982, 11) According to the Genesis book of the Bible, Abraham, a friend of God, obeyed the divine instruction and went to the mountain to sacrifice his only son Isaac.

Unknown to the people of Egure community, there is a force located in the cosmic universe which subliminally pulls them together to the gods. It is this kind of force in creation which constantly pulls opposites together that underlies Hegel’s idea of knowledge at the level of *Force & Understanding*. According to Hegel, whenever opposites occur in a text or even in daily experience, our understanding and appreciation of them must be rooted in their unseen, inevitable relationship made possible by a force that constantly pulls them together. It is only when opposites are so joined in this kind of reciprocal relationship that we can appreciate more their qualities and inner constituents. This is because the understanding and appreciation of any phenomenon can only be absolute when it is juxtaposed with its opposite. For example, the properties and qualities of black as a shade of colour can only be appreciated if it is placed side by side with its opposite colour white. Capitalism as an economic mode can only be understood if it is compared to socialism.

Hegel argues that opposites cannot remain permanently apart because human consciousness and knowledge at the level of *Force & Understanding* will always endeavour to reconcile their differences by joining them together. Therefore, our understanding of Osofisan’s *No More The Wasted Breed* shows two opposites inevitably drawn together by their complimentary properties which they seem unaware of. We can safely contend that Hegel’s *Force & Understanding* as the last stage of human consciousness strives to locate the inevitability between opposites and demonstrates how they cannot do without each other. This reciprocal relationship can be located

within the sphere of humanity or even within animist realms and platforms. However, whenever *Force & Understanding* pull opposites together, there is always an object that stands as a unifying factor to reconcile their basic differences.

Conclusion

From the analysis above, change is an inexorable attribute of humanity. However, the contentions and debates about the more potent process of achieving change are healthy but none should diminish the other. From the analysis given, the two processes of change, theoretical by Hegel and practical by Osofisan are as important as the other and both can effectively be utilized to achieve change. In trying to separate the two processes or argue about the potency of one over the other, the processes of change can be impaired. Change is a continuum. It will consistently acquire new paradigm, new vistas, and new methods where ever humanity subsists. By critically analysing Osofosan's *No More The Wasted Breed* with Hegel's levels of Consciousness, the study has proved that the theoretical and practical terms of change can conveniently cohere to provide a rhythm suitable for humanity. Overall, knowledge is an indelible accolade of change.

Sense-certainty therefore strives to promote firsthand experience in its purest form without any kind of mediation or interference. This is because a mastery of a firsthand experience in its truest form provides a positive platform from where other levels or stages of consciousness can develop. Without this firsthand initial mastery of experience in our quest for knowledge, the subsequent development of consciousness will be partial and harmful. At the level of *Perception*, the mind easily views Biokun's circumstance from a universal perspective without intrusion or mediation. Specifically, in *Perception* according to Hegel, the mind, in its quest to obtain

knowledge, after the infantile and child-like stage of *sense-certainty*, must accord universality to every event to be able to appreciate and understand it. Through *Force & Understanding*, it is revealed that opposites attract. We appreciate Osofisan's constant effort to demonstrate that there is a thin line between the realm of the supernatural and the realm of the physical and this consciousness runs through most of his plays.

Works Cited

- Bates, Jennifer Ann. *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*. New York: SUNYP, 2010.
- Camara, Babacar. *Reason in History. Hegel and Social Changes in Africa*. United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetics*. London: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990.
- Gilman, Richard. *The Making of Modern Drama*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1987.
- Hegel, George Wilhelm Freidrich. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. 1807. Trans. A.V Miller. New York: CUP, 1979.
- Hegel, George Wilhelm Freidrich. *Aesthetics, Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T.M Knox. New York: OUP, 2010.
- Lawhead, William. *The Voyage of Discovery. A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002.
- Nnolim, Charles. *Issues in African Literature*. Lagos: Malthouse, 2010.
- Osofisan, Femi. *No More the Wasted Breed*. Lagos: Longman Nigeria Plc, 1982.
- Paolucci, Ann, Henry Paolucci. *Hegelian Literary Perspectives*. Smyrna: GHP, 2002.
- Richards, Sandra. *Ancient Songs Set Ablaze, The Theatre of Femi Osofisan*. Washington: HUP, 1996.
- Rothenberg, Molly Ann. *The Excessive Subject. A New Theory of Social Change*. Cambridge:

Polity Press, 2010.

Thiselton, Anthony. *Hermeneutics*. Cambridge: Wm.Eerdmans, 2009.

The Holy Bible, New King James Version. Colombia: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

Wright, Derek. *Wole Soyinka Revisited*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.