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Social Movement Strategy, Reflectionism and Modern African Drama

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Abstract:

*Critics of modern African plays that appropriate social movement strategy have concentrated on the revolutionary ethos and functionality of them without particular attention paid to how these plays use social movement strategy to reflect and examine the various socio-political problems in Africa. This paper interrogates how modern African drama employs social movement strategy to reflect and reflect upon the socio-economic problems in Africa. Bereket Habte Selassie's *The Devil in God's Land* is used to explicate this trend. It is discovered that the appropriation of social movement strategy enables the play to interrogate the socio-political problems in more revolutionary manner; that the play reflects the socio-political problems in Eritrea and that the literary elements and techniques used assist in the reinforcement of the social movement adopted. The paper concludes that the appropriation of social movement strategy in African drama would serve as a conscientization process that can jostle African people to work together to create a just and developed continent.*

Keywords: Social movement strategy, modern African drama, socio-economic environment, collective heroism, reflectionism

1. Introduction

Modern African drama is functional and it reflects and reflects upon the socio-political problems confronting the African people. Researchers like Wali 1963, 1973; Irele 1979; Osundare 2000; Quayson 2007; Okome 2008; Adedola 2010; Chinweizu *et al* 2016 have argued for the functionality of drama. The drama is influenced by the socio-political environment from which it is created and it also endeavours to influence the African society. Obadiagwu insists that 'African drama is a tool to affect changes in the environment' (112).

The drama combines beauty with teaching and protests against various anomalies within the African society. This is why Joseph (2013) has insisted that:

Africans do not separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty itself, African writers... use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to the society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the community it helps to build.

In the same vein, Ngugi (2007) asserts that African drama 'gives a view of (African) society from its contemplation of social life, reflecting it mirror-like, but also reflecting upon it, simultaneously'. If these are characteristics of African drama, the approaches of the playwrights to align with these differ. While all the protest plays from Africa interrogate the socio-economic problems by way of examining these to jostle Africans to new realization, the early protest plays like those of Wole Soyinka, Tewfik Al-Akim, Athol Fugard are convenient with creating major characters who are at the centre of the actions of such plays. Bero is central as character in *Madmen and Specialists* by Wole Soyinka (1986). The Mendicants, downtrodden characters in the play, representing the suffering masses, are made to complain and express their sordid situation without putting up any effort to confront the main characters who are responsible for their impoverishment.

However, more recent modern African plays employ the social movement strategy to interrogate the socio-political problems. In essence they adopt collective heroism in which there are confrontation between the oppressed and the oppressors. The plays in this category are written by playwrights like Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Bereket Habte Selassie, Magi Williams, Nawal El Saadawi. Critics of modern African drama like Osundare 2000; Quayson 2007; Ngugi 2007; Breytenbach 2007; Asagba 2008; Okome 2008; Adedola 2010; Chinweizu *et al* 2016 have concentrated on the revolutionary ethos and the functionality of these plays without much attention paid to their appropriation of social movement strategy in their attempts to reflect and reflect upon the various socio-economic problems confronting the

African continent. This paper interrogates how modern African drama employs social movement strategy to examine the socio-political problems in Africa. To do this Bereket Habte Selassie's *The Devil in God's Land* is analysed.

2. Appropriation of Social Movement Strategy in Modern African Drama

Social movements usually emerge in response to cultural and socio-political issues within societies. They are usually engaged in by a section of a society, corporation, and other organisations, that feels being oppressed or cheated. They involve collective actions in which a people who feel it is being oppressed makes claims against others. Even though there is no single consensus definition of social movements (Opp 2009), Diani (1992) posits that nearly all definitions of social movements share three criteria: (1) 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and, or organisations,' (2) 'engage in a political or cultural conflict,' and (3) 'on the basis of a shared collective identity'.

In the modern world, engagement in social movements has become one of the civilised ways of seeking justice where there is perceived injustice or the pressing for things that would be beneficial to the generality of people or even humanity. The main issue about social movements is change. Social movements may be embarked upon to cause change or to resist change. In line with this, Little and McGivern (2019) postulate that

social movements are purposeful, organised groups striving to work towards a common goal. These groups might be attempting to create change (Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring), to resist change (anti-globalisation movement), or to provide a political voice to those otherwise disenfranchised (civil rights movements). Social movements create social change.

In Africa, social movements have been used to create or resist change. The types of social movement appropriated in Africa ranged from reformative movements, which are mild and do not involve armed struggle (a good example is the recent workers strike in Nigeria to raise national minimum wage from N18,000= to N30,000=), to radical movements which may involve violent resistance. Radical movements were used in Africa, especially during the Arab Spring and the struggle to free African nations from colonialism and apartheid. On the struggle for independence, Talton (2019) describes the radical movements embarked upon by Africans in Portuguese colonies, South Africa and Kenya thus:

In these territories, violent resistance brought colonial rule to a close. It was guerrilla warfare in the case of Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya (1952 – 1960) and Zimbabwe's war of independence (1965 – 1979); it was all-out war in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau (1961 – 1974), and South Africa colony of South West Africa (Namibia).

The strategy of social movements has a process. The process starts with *emergence* and terminates with *decline*: Emergence Coalescence Bureaucratization Decline (De la Porta 150, Christiansen 2, Macionis 84). Modern African drama has appropriated social movement strategy and its processes. Right from the anti-colonial days, social movement strategy has been adopted in modern African drama. In West African region, plays that appropriate social movement strategy include Hubert Ogunde's *Strike and Hunger* (1945), *Tiger's Empire* (1946), *Bread and Bullet* (1950), Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon* (1979), *Flamingo* (1986), *Afamako-the Workhorse* (1986), *Circus of Freedom Square* (2010), *Ajantala Pinocchio* (2011), Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002), Dauda Enna's *Banquet of Treachery* (2012), Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1982); Ifechi Jane Odoe's *Edge of the Brink* (2016); Akanji Nasiru's *The Rally* (2018), Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said It* (2016); Elaigwu Ameh's *Sweet Taste of Shame* (2014).

There are so many other plays in this category from the West African region. Apart from Hubert Ogunde who uses his plays to attack the orientation and workings of colonialism, all the other playwrights use their plays for conscientization purposes to move the African people into collective actions against oppression, repression, impoverishment by the neo-colonial rulers in Africa who collude with foreigners to cause problems for the masses and retard the social, political and economic progress of Africa and its people.

In Central Africa, social movement strategy is employed in modern African drama. The plays in this cohort include Bole Butake's *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (2013); and plays of Bate Besong like *Beasts of No Nation* (2003). These plays adopt social movement strategy to condemn and fight internal colonialism, corruption, bad leadership and so on.

East African region is as vast and dynamic as West African region in the appropriation of social movement strategy in drama. The leading dramatists in this region who adopt social movement strategy include Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo in the collaborative play titled *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1990); Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii in *I Will Marry When I Want* (reprinted 2005). Other playwrights include Ebrahim Hussein in *Kinjeketile* (1972), Desmond Phiri in *Let Us Fight for Africa* (2008); Mukotani Rogyendo in *The Barbed Wire* (1977). These playwrights use social movement strategy in their plays to conscientize the people, to galvanise the oppressed to rise against their oppressors, and to condemn corruption and the class stratification of the society. Kerr (1997), writing about the creation of Ngugi's, *I Will Marry When I Want*, informs that

the whole play creation process was not really that of a conventional literary text. By June 1977 the Ngugis had written a draft of *Ngaalhi Ka Ndeenda* (I Will Marry When I Want) which had the stamp of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's characteristic pre-occupation – class conflict, the seduction of a woman as a metaphor for exploitation, and the comparison between the struggle against colonialism and the post-independence struggle against neocolonialism.

In Southern African nations improvised plays, performed drama texts, dramatised songs have been used for struggle against colonialism. Many of these employ collective action or social movements in their plots. Musical plays like *Sarafina!* by Mbongeni Ngema (the musical drama was turned into a movie) uses social movement strategy: students in a secondary school rise against oppression of blacks in apartheid South Africa. Andrea Beach, in an online review of the film version of the musical, emphasizes the necessity for social struggle today. He posits that the musical play is 'about how to achieve social justice and about how oppression and rebellion are sadly as relevant today...' Southern Africa nations,

because of their similar experiences and their armed struggle against agents of colonialism and apartheid, adopt social movement strategy in their dramatic works, whether improvised or written. In the sixties, Southern African nations like South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe formed alliances which involved military training and assistance.

The alliances were possible because of the similarities in the nations' socio-political experiences. African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), South West People's Organisation (SWAPO), Zimbabwe Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) entered into military alliance (Dreyer 59-60). Of the alliance of South Africa freedom fighters with those of Zimbabwe, Oliver Thambo, quoted in Thomas (1995) recalls:

We have had political relations with ZAPU, and these developed into relations at military level, until we were in position to fight together. This close alliance is first of its kind one can recall in the liberation movement. In no previous instance has there actually been fighting by freedom fighters drawn from different territories.

Thus, the use of social movements as a tool for liberation and freedom is common to Southern African nations. This has influenced many of the dramatic activities from the region because 'Drama imitates men in action' (Dada 1994:44).

In different refugee camps in Southern Africa, plays with the orientation of struggle involving the appropriation of social movement strategy and history were produced for the purposes of conscientization, education and entertainment. Examples of such plays are *Soweto Flowers Will Grow*, a 'trilogy... created by Masantso Phiri and the Tikwiza Theatre in Lusaka (1977-9)' (Kerr 235); and *Freedom in Our Own Lifetime*. This play adopts collective heroism motif common with plays that appropriate social movement strategy. According to Kerr, 'the sense of collectivity also applied to the characterization (in the play) since the play presented 'the story of a people' (235).

Today, there are so many playwrights from Southern Africa. Notable among them are Athol Fugard, John Kani, Mbogeni Ngema, Olando Mendes, Michael Usi, Innocent Banda, Magi Williams and so many others. Their plays 'were written with relevant themes of oppression, exploration and exploitation in its relative theme of corruption (buttressing) the debilitating effects of colonialism.' Many of their plays have appropriated social movement strategy. Such include Zakes Mda's *Fools, Bells, and the Habit of Eating* (2002) and Magi William's *Kwa-Landlady* (1998).

Northern Africa, like other regions of Africa, experienced colonialism with its resultant disruptions of people's culture, philosophy, social and political life. Modern African drama in the region reflects, and reflects upon, these cultural and socio-political anomalies within the region for the main purpose of their rectification. Most of the modern literary works from Northern Africa are mainly written in French and Arabic (languages of their colonial masters), very few in English. Some of these works have been translated into English. According to *Encyclopedia.com*, 'North African writers convey their ideas (mainly) in French and Arabic in a variety of literary genres.'

Important playwrights from the region include Tewfik Al-Hakim, AbdelKader Alloula, Jalila Baccar, Tayeb Saddiki, Nawal El Saadawi. North African region is noted for protests against bad leadership, corruption, authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism and other vices. One notable protest in this line is Arab Spring. With this, it is expected that modern North African drama should contain protest plays as drama records the actions and interactions within the society that produces it. Some of the protest plays appropriate social movement strategy. One important playwright from the region whose protest plays, seven of them, stand out is Nawal El Saadawi. Her plays *Isis* and *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting* (translated 2009) adopt social movement strategy.

The survey has indicated that both in real life situations and in drama and literature social movements are used as means of insisting on, or resisting, changes. Social movements have been appropriated in all the five regions of Africa and modern African drama has reflected this. All the six plays selected for analysis in this study have used one form of social movement or the other.

3. Reflectionism: Modern African Drama and Its Socio-Political Environment

Reflectionism is a term used to point to the assumption that literary works reflect the societies in which they are created. It is assumed that literature or art generally, reflects the society. Literary works tell stories. In fact, stories are essential ingredients for literature. The stories used by literature are directly or indirectly derived from the society. Terry Eagleton (2002) explains that

the question of partisanship in literature is bound up to some extent with the problem of how works of literature relate to the real world. Socialist realism's prescription that literature should teach certain political attitudes assume that literature does indeed (or at least ought to) reflect or reproduce social reality in a fairly direct way.

Eagleton (2002) however warns about 'cruder formulations' of the idea that literature is a mirror of the society because this will suggest a passive mechanistic relationship between literature and society as though the work... merely registered what is happening there'. Thus, when reflection is used in the relationship between literature and society, it does not mean that literature is like a mirror put in an angle to society. Literature mirrors life or society in a special way. It is a kind of mirror that reflects, comments, and interrogates the happenings in the society. Bertolt Brecht (1964) argues that 'If art reflects life, it does so with special mirrors'.

Modern African drama reflects, and a reflection upon, the African society. The drama has been influenced by the various occurrences within the African space from the advent of colonialism to the present. The themes and concerns of Modern African drama are to a large extent dictated by the African socio-political environment. It is in consideration of this interaction between drama and the socio-political environment that produces it that Ogunjimi insists that 'literature (drama) as a discipline attempts to depict man and his environment within a creative mode' (5); and Lukacs (1962) affirms that a writer is the 'son of his own age'. The Modern African drama conveys 'the thought, world-view and identity

of the people (Africans) who form the characters and whose place (Africa) forms the setting of (the) literary work' (Ojaide 2010:8).

From the time of oral tradition, African literature (drama) has been reflecting the ethical and moral viewpoints of the African people. The moonlight stories and dramatic rituals in African tradition are meant to teach and inculcate the ethical standards of the society. Immoral activities and inhuman treatment of others noticed in the society are reflected in the oral literature for the purpose of discouraging such activities so as to pave way for a harmonious and orderly society. Just as of old, modern African drama reflects and reflects upon the various ethical imbalances like corruption, impunity, ill treatment of women and so on, in the African society. The plays of Wole Soyinka, Athol Fugard, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nawal El Saadawi, Bole Butake and many others from the regions are influenced by the various moral and ethical lapses within the African environment. Characters like Kioi, Jezebel in Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want* (2005); Kasa, Nibidi in Sowande's *Flamingo* (1986); Jayeola, Otun in Nasiru's *The Rally* (2018) are presented as morally bankrupt. Their idiosyncrasies are ridiculed and condemned because such have upset the ethical and socio-political balance of the society. Thus, modern African drama reflects the African world view which emphasizes on social cohesiveness. The health of the community is important and must be upheld. This African viewpoint is philosophically expressed in the words of Mbiti that 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' (108 – 109).

The contact between the white colonialists and the African people engendered cultural dissonance. Many Africans who got European education became confused trying to harmonize European and African cultures, just like the personae in Okara's 'Piano and Drums' who ends up in confusion stating 'And I lost in the morning mist/of an age at a riverside keep/ wandering in the mystic rhythm/ of jungle drums and the concerto' (27). Here, the jungle drums symbolise African culture and the concerto represents the European culture. African plays like Joe de Grafts's *Through a Film Darkly* (1970), Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), Ngugi's *The Black Hermit* (1963) and *This Time Tomorrow* (1977) reflect the issue of clash of cultures as it affects Africans.

Modern African drama is also influenced by Africans belief in supernatural powers. According to Ojaide 'The mystical nature of the African worldview is copiously reflected in modern African literature' (47). Plays like Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* (1973), Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971), Ebraim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1972), Bole Butake's *And Palm Wine Will Flow* (2013), Nawal El Saadawi's *Isis and God Resigns at the Summit Meeting* (2009) reflect the spiritual and mystical lives of the African society.

Apart from issues of corruption, bad leadership, African worldview which are reflected in modern African drama generally, there are other socio-political issues which are more pronounced and unique to the regions of Africa. In East Africa, land issue has been the site for various conflicts even during the colonial period. Odgaard, writing on the issue of land in Tanzania, opines that 'the vital importance of land issues to social and economic development in Africa is unquestionable' (5), and Kagwanji postulates that in East Africa the issue of land ownership has been the major cause of conflicts between ethnic groups (4). The issue of land is especially important and crucial in East Africa, and this is reflected in modern East African drama. For instance, both Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *I Will Marry When I Want* (2005) and Ebraim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1972) reflect, and reflect upon, the issue of land in East Africa.

In South Africa, apartheid and post-apartheid trauma within the society remain the focus of the literature from the region. Most of the plays from South Africa address race relations, immanent violent crimes, and power. Taylor, in an online article titled 'How South Africa Theatre is Changing in the Post-Apartheid Era,' describes South African drama as 'an art form of fierce political engagement... the plays... fearlessly tackle issues of race and power.' The socio-political environment of Southern Africa and South Africa has influenced the dramatists to write and produce plays that focus on race issues, corruption, crimes, power relations. The plays of playwrights like Zakes Mda, Athol Fugard, Walter Armitage, John Kani, Gibson Kente reflect, and reflect upon, the socio-political issues in South Africa.

In Central African region, the Anglophone drama reflects issues like corruption, totalitarianism, oppression of the minority by the tribes that are in majority. Of Anglophone Cameroonian literature, Otu *et al* opine that the literature 'is preoccupied with the collective predicaments of the Anglophone minority in Cameroon' (82). Plays like *And Palm Wine Will Flow* by Bole Butake (1990), *Black Caps and Red Feathers* by John Nkemngong Nkengasong (2001), *Beasts of No Nation* by Bate Besong (2003) are informed by the socio-political environment of Central Africa.

In North Africa, the sociopolitical environment dictates the themes and foci of drama from the region. Modern African drama from the region is written or presented mainly in Arabic or French. Some of the plays have been translated into English language. *Encyclopedia.com* explains that 'North Africa writers convey their ideas in French and Arabic in a variety of literary genres'. Modern North African drama focuses on the effects of colonialism, fundamental Islamic religion, feminism, corruption, bad leadership, totalitarianism, sit-tight regimes. These themes are suggested by the socio-political environment of the region. Notable playwrights from the region include Tewfik Al-Hakim, AbdelKadet Alloula, Jalila Baccar, Tayeb Saddiki, Nawal El Saadawi. Saadawi's *Isis* (2009) focuses on the issue of totalitarian leadership, religious fundamentalism, social struggle, and the oppression of women.

Like in other regions of Africa, West Africa drama is influenced by the socio-political environment of the region. The drama reflects, and reflects upon, the various socio-political interactions within West Africa. From the volume and quality of dramatic works produced in West Africa, one could infer that the region is the hub of modern African drama, at least in the Anglophone modern African drama. Banham in an online article titled 'African Theatre' opines that 'Nigeria stands out in the continent for the figure and range of its theatre.' Wole Soyinka's plays like *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *Jero's Play* (1963), *The Road* (1965), *Madmen and Specialists* (1972) are influenced by the socio-political issues within Nigeria and West Africa. *Madmen and Specialists* (1972) is a response to the Nigerian civil war. The play's universal application rests in the fact that it condemns war because it can turn good and creative people into evil. Other playwrights

from the region include J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Tess Onwueme, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, Serif Easman.

A more recent type of African drama is the revolutionary drama. Its handling of socio-political issues in Africa is more radical. The playwrights 'take imperialism seriously,' condemn the 'new profiteers that allied with imperialism.' They 'go beyond just explanation and condemnation,' and 'take sides with the people in the class struggle in Africa' (Ngugi 1993:63) and according to Okome,

the drama rejects completely individual heroism and focuses on immediate social and political issues of the (African) society. It is clearly committed, and this commitment is towards the toiling masses of the people living below poverty line. It seeks by dialectical opposition, to redirect collective consciousness for positive change.

These indicate that the more recent strand of modern African drama, usually referred to as revolutionary or radical drama, is more people oriented. It is directed towards the positive change of the African society. In place of the individual heroism of plays by Wole Soyinka, Serif Easman, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, the early plays of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Twefik Al-Hakim and others, the revolutionary drama in Africa employs collective heroism which necessitates the appropriation of social movement strategy. Notable playwrights who have engaged in the writing of revolutionary drama include Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Tess Onwueme, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ngugi wa Mirri, Desmond Phiri. All the selected plays for this study fall within this category of revolutionary drama and they all employ collective heroism and social movement strategy.

4. The Socio-Economic Environment of *the Devil in God's Land*

The socio-economic environment has impacts on the production of literary texts. Every literary text has a story to tell. The relator of such story is influenced by various happenings within his or her immediate society. A good consideration of the environment of the writer and his or her writing is necessary in an attempt to understand why the writer writes what he or she writes.

Unlike what obtains in *Then She Said It* by Tess Onwueme where the name of the setting is concealed through a clever play on word, the setting of *The Devil in God's Land* is clear and straight forward. The setting of the play is Eritrea. It is an Eritrean play. It is the history of Eritrea carefully modified using poetic license. All the major experiences of Eritrea like colonialism under the Italian hegemony; internal colonialism under Haile Selassie's Ethiopia; the liberation war from Ethiopia, independence; boarder crises between Eritrea and Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti; and the nation as a failed state under a totalitarian government that has been in power since 1993 are focused in the play. The writer has already warned, in his preface, that

This is a play based on contemporary history of a particular place and people. This kind of particular history provides a point of departure for the writer, as the raw material, so to speak, but is not itself exactly history... Like most works of literature based on reality and using that reality, this play involves critical evaluation of historic events, expressly or impliedly making value judgments. In making such judgments, the proverbial poetic license would exonerate the writer from blame... The historical background of the play is a new nation emerging from a bloody war of liberation; and a population faced with a government that betrayed its trust.

All the issues from colonialism to self-governance, which props up totalitarian government in Eritrea involve unequal power relations. When there is unequal power relation between groups in a socio-political set up, there are bound to be popular struggle or social movement where the less privileged demand for fair share of wealth and power from the powerful block. So, the appropriation of social movement in the text to highlight the various postcolonial problems and the suffering of people under various hegemons is appropriate.

Many people, organizations and writers, have passed comments on Eritrea. Almost all the comments are negative. From these comments it is easy to garner information about the socio-economic environment that necessitates the appropriation of social movement strategy in the play. In reality, the harsh socio-economic environment would necessarily create sites for popular struggles and movements. Both Human Rights Watch and United Nations Human Rights Council reports for 2019 paint grim pictures of authoritarianism and suffering of the people. Human Rights Watch reports:

For two decades, President Isaias Afewerki used the absence of peace with Ethiopia to justify authoritarianism. Forced conscription into 'national service' was prolonged indefinitely... political opponents – anyone who questions Isaias rule – are jailed indefinitely without trial often incommunicado. Political parties and nongovernment organizations are also prohibited; elections, a legislature, and an independent judiciary are all not permitted... some religious groups are forbidden altogether... Implementation of a constitution... was deferred indefinitely.

In the same vein, United Nations Human Rights Council states that:

Eritrea is a highly centralized, authoritarian regime under the control of President Isaias Afewerki. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), headed by the President, is the sole party. There have been no national-level elections since an independence referendum in 1993. Human rights issues included reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings; forced disappearance; torture; arbitrary detention by the government; harsh and life threatening prison and detention center conditions; political prisoners; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly and association; severe restrictions on religious freedom; limits on freedom of internal movement and foreign travel... inability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; corruption, restrictions... forced labour...

All the postcolonial problems pointed out in these reports and other comments on Eritrea are creatively expressed in *The Devil in God's Land*. As a text that appropriate social movement strategy, characters are divided into two main groups which are diametrically opposite to each other. The first group is made up of the social movement participants. They are poor, impoverished and they are at the receiving end of the pains and panics resulting from the activities of bad and wicked leadership in the land. In the power play within the socio-political set up, they are almost invisible. The other group is the movement targets. The fulcrum of this group is Boss who is the president of the nation. All the activities of the group are centered around the president. He gives orders which must be obeyed and to have a different opinion from his is to fall out of the group, with all privileges withdrawn, and deliberate wearing of a toga of dissidence. This is punishable by imprisonment without trial, 'disappearance' or death.

The play is the record of the horrendous activities of the movement targets and the reactions to these by the movement participants. The people complain about the totalitarian use of power by Boss. The mourners at the burial of one of the victims of abuse of power by the Boss complain thus:

A Mourner: Manna was a hero and these bastards denied him a hero's funeral.

Another Mourner: Manna was a freedom fighter with an outstanding record. Yet he is denied this last rite. Even in death, they deny us God given rights. May they burn in hell.

A Third Mourner: Amen! In the kingdom of the Almighty Boss rights are defined by might, not law (63).

This depicts the use of naked power by the movement targets. The people are treated like slaves. It also indicates the movement participants' defiance. They are now complaining openly at a burial even in the presence of the policemen, the terrible watch dogs of Boss. This is an indication that the social movement is moving away from the emergence stage to the coalescence stage.

Akin to the use of absolute power in the nation is the issue of detention without trial. So many people who fall out of favour with Boss and those who express dissension are detained without trials. Yikalo, one of the student activists, says that '...the leader of our university student's union is also detained and held for months without charge' (13), and Prisoner confront Boss on his detention over charges of treason without trial. He asks him:

By the way, if you believe in the fabricated lies, the mantra of 'traitors... traitors' why don't you bring us to face a trial in court? That is what is done in civilized societies... You don't have a shred of evidence to support your ridiculous charge of treason (77).

One other socio-political problem in the nation that may be responsible for popular struggle is the attempt of the totalitarian government to weaken and impoverish the people by taking over businesses that belong to the people. Desta at a meeting inform Idris, a big businessman who supported the nation during the liberation struggle, that the government wants seventy-five percent of his businesses. He insists:

Idris, we have called you to make a business proposition. We don't need to waste time, so I'll come straight to the point... We want to acquire seventy-five percent interest in your import export and your construction businesses. We can discuss the terms of this acquisition and the management and other administrative questions (22).

And to tell Idris that the decision is final, and that Idris has no say in it, Desta says '... if you don't, you may lose everything, ... Do you get it now?' (23). According to various reports like those of Human Right Watch and United Nations Human Rights reports cited above, so many businessmen and women lose their businesses this way. This is one of the serious postcolonial issues in many African neocolonial states. To the presidents or rulers seeking absolute powers, wealth must be controlled because it is a form of power. This also is a site for social movement.

One other problem with totalitarian rulers in many African postcolonial states is the restrictions on freedom of speech. This is especially true with Eritrea the setting of the play. The press is gagged, and journalists and critics are jailed without trial. Aster, talking about the situation of ordinary people, says: 'They may not shout it from the rooftops, but they talk among themselves in hushed voice.' (5) And insisting on the past when there were freedom of speech and people could ask questions, Aster, again, says: 'We used to ask hard questions during the struggle, you know. It is only in recent years that we have been muzzled...' (11). Now, secret police and informants are around to report or pick anyone that says anything that is contrary to the decision of Boss or the sole party. Yonas complains that 'How can we organize when the secret police are everywhere spying on us?' (13).

Furthermore, one important postcolonial problem in Eritrea is the abuse of women and their rights. Women are used as ordinary tools or booty. This is also common in patriarchal societies and in totalitarian states. In Eritrea young boys and girls are expected to go for national service at Sawa. The girls are misused, abused and raped. Saba, who was at Sawa says regrettably:

The arrogant behaviour of some of the commanders in Sawa and in the war fronts that I observe is an aspect of militarism. Women in particular who are under the command of such people are vulnerable and subject to rape and other forms of degradation (12).

And to Boss, raping, and maltreating, women is not a bad thing. The following dialogue between him and his chief security point to this direction:

Andu: Our secret agents have been trailing her sister. She is a university student who has done service at Sawa, and is highly critical of the Sawa military commanders.

Boss: Why? What does she say?

Andu: She talks about rapes in the camps and in the trenches. She speaks of forced pregnancies.

Boss [*With an ironic twist in his voice*]: Well, what else is new! I send a thousand women and they come back doubling their number... (109).

Boss himself rapes women. He tries to seduce and rapes Sister Delores, one of the people detained without trial, in the prison cell. The following stage direction describes how he tries to do this:

...he graps her and tries to pull her skirt up over her head. As she resists, he grabs her underwear, trying to pull it out, succeeding to take it below her knees exposing her private parts... As he relaxes and gently holds her by the waist, she caresses his groin. This rouses him, he takes off his trousers, tears her underwear off her, pushes his knees between her legs and leans forward to rape her (115).

Boss also lures and rapes beautiful housewives and has many children from such negative activities. He is so powerful that the husbands of such women dare not complain or confront him. He assists Amaz's husband to go for further studies outside Eritrea. He uses the opportunity of the man's absence to lure the wife to a hotel where he rapes her. The woman has a baby boy by him. Amaz tells Aster and Senai:

You see woizero Aster, some of your *tegadelti*, especially those at the very top have become loose donkeys who prey on all young women they lay their eyes on and find ways of luring them to hotels and sexually assaulting them. I was a victim of such assault. The result was my third boy (52).

Furthermore, a socio-political problem that is rampant in postcolonial nations in Africa is betrayal. This too affects Eritrea. The nation and its people are betrayed by leaders who take over the nation after the liberation struggle. People's hope that everything will be all right after the agitation for freedom is dashed. They are disappointed and disenchanted as their liberation from Ethiopia only brings to them more sorrow and pains. The war of liberation veterans, at a secret meeting at a cemetery, express their regrets and disillusionment over the betrayal of the nation:

Senai: You know, I feel one with those of our comrades who are interred here. I feel a sense of community with them. We have sacrificed so much to help liberate our country and I feel betrayed. Although I am alive, I feel close to the dead in my sense of loss. Don't you?

Other Participant: I do.

Senai: It is a crippling feeling. It leads one to despair and regret. Was it worth squandering our youth for and scarifying our families? What does the future hold for us and for the country?

Other Participant: Aren't we meeting here to provide an answer to that question?

Senai: Imagine, the older generation expected the children to reap the benefits of the liberation, but their children have been cheated of their heritage. They are wasting away in the trenches (27).

People in the nation, the veterans inclusive, feel the pains and disillusionment. They complain bitterly about the betrayal of the nation by the post-liberation government. Aster says in regrets that: 'We gave of lives, our professions to the so-called cause of liberation. And look where we are confused, helpless in the face of brute force and lawlessness' (45).

Post-independence disillusionment of African people is well documented in African literature. This is the expression of socio-political commitment by the literature. According to Kehinde:

African writers have an enduring propensity for social and political commitment. Their texts mostly reflect and refract the socio-political events in their societies. Initially, African literature was a tool for celebrating the heroic grandeur of the African past; later it was used for anti-colonial struggle. Presently, it is being employed as a veritable weapon for depicting the postcolonial disillusionment in African nations (228).

Thus, disillusionment is the cause for many popular struggles and social movements in Africa. When the leadership is selfish and over domineering, the people have the tendency to complain and may later come together in collective actions against such leadership. This is what happens in *The Devil in God's Land*. The veterans and the people go underground to plan how to remove the leadership. Fat Man refers to this when he enthuses that 'Even if they arrest us... they will have to arrest half of the adult population that is organised in the underground movement' (108). This is an indication that most of the people are members of the underground movement waiting to strike at any opportuned moment to remove the movement target, Boss.

Again, another serious socio-economic problem in Eritrea which is reflected in the text is bribery and corruption. The president is in control of everything and every aspect of the nation. United States Human Rights Councils in its 2018 report lists corruption as one of the main problems in Eritrea. Whatever you need you must bribe to get it. Some people bribe their ways out of problem with Boss. Chuchu is a good example. He gives bribe to soldiers and other people in government so that the government would remember his generosity and spare him if it wants to arrest people in his category. Camp Leader calls Chuchu's bribe 'an insurance policy'. He says:

Chuchu is a shrewd operator. What he is doing in all these seemingly generous gestures is buying an insurance policy in case of a future showdown. He showers selected officers and men in strategic places with gifts of beer and other goodies (70).

Corruption in the land has led to severe economic situation for the people. While Boss and his selected and subservient officers commandeer the wealth of the nation, the people wallow in abject poverty. Workers' salaries are poor. Talking about recent increase in rent in government quarters, Aster says: '...they are now asking for a sum that we could not afford if we only depended on Senai's miserable government salary' (7). Unfortunately, with the low salary paid to workers, the cost of living is very high. Senai explains this by saying, 'We are all feeling the effects of a rising cost of living. The question is what is being done about it' (43).

Furthermore, two major political problems in Eritrea are sit-tight leadership and lack of multiparty democracy. Many African nations have experienced these at some points in time. The present president of Eritrea has been in the position for all the postliberation years. Eritrea has been liberated from Ethiopia since 1993. Isaias Afewerki who became the President has favoured totalitarian dictatorship. Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has remained the only political party allowed to exist in the nation. All oppositions are frustrated or killed. Wikipedia summits that:

Politics in Eritrea takes place in a framework of a single-party presidential republican totalitarian dictatorship. The president officially serves as both head of state and head of government. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice is the only political party legally permitted to exist in Eritrea. There have been no general elections since its official independence in 1993... Since the National Assembly last met in 2002, President Adewerki has exercised the powers of both the executive and legislative branches of government. ...In September 2001 the government closed down all the nation's privately owned media, and outspoken critics of the government have been arrested and held without trial... In 2004 the U.S. State Department declared Eritrea a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its alleged record of religious persecution

This report and those of Human Rights Watch and United Nations Human Rights Council earlier cited paint grim picture of totalitarianism, wickedness of government operatives and suffering of the Eritrean ordinary people. The situation is a good site for social movements as the suffering people have the tendencies to react, sometimes violently, against their oppressors.

Most of the problems affecting the people and the wickedness of the maximum government in Eritrea are reflected, and reflected upon, in the text. And it is the existence of these that the appropriation of social movement strategy becomes appropriate. In the play, Boss or President is presented as totalitarian who does not listen to advice. Anyone that suggests reform or good governance gets into trouble with him. Idris is being punished for daring to advise Boss on tolerance and good governance. The punitive measure for this is the destruction of his business and life. He tells his tormentors:

I also know why you are pushing me, squeezing me out of my business ventures. Your boss has told you about our attempts to counsel tolerance, reconciliation and good governance. He has not forgiven me for initiating the move. He ordered you to squeeze me, didn't he? (42).

For the ordinary people every day in the nation is a nightmare. Fellow Prisoner, one of the people jailed without trial, voices out in regrets: 'Well, we are living a nightmarish existence. At least you woke up from yours. When will we wake up from this daily nightmare?' (89).

The text also reflects upon the absence of multiparty democracy in Eritrea. The only party legally allowed in the nation is People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). The Boss has total grip and control over the party. It is used as a tool for further oppression and repression of the people. The party is described as an evil place where the future of young people is destroyed. To the people, it is a good tool of terror used by the president. For Saba, PFDJ is a place where young girls are raped and destroyed. She warns Askalu about going for the national service organized by PFDJ. She tells the others 'That is all the more reason why we must save her from the clutches of the scheming cadres of PFDJ' (15). To Yikalo, PFDJ is a place where young people are used, destroyed and left in the cold. Yikalo, one of the university students, describes the members of the party thus: '...these people are users. They suck you like a lemon and throw you away as soon as the juice is finished' (16).

The National Assembly too is a tool of terror in the hands of the president. Aster tells Senai, her husband, and an involuntary member of the National Assembly, that

For heaven's sake be yourself, for once! That man does not care about the rest of you, and you all do whatever he orders you to do. You behave as if he owns you. He may own your pockets, but he does not own your souls, you know. Why are you people acting like cattle being taken to the slaughterhouse? Why can't you protest? What has happened to Eritrea's manhood? (5)

At the instigation of the president the National Assembly takes a decision which charges the former leaders of the liberation struggle with treason. The leaders are arrested, jailed and 'disappeared' without any trial. Sister Delores angrily tells Senai that '...And what your National Assembly did on February 2, is contrary to decency and unworthy of a true *tegadalai*...' (48).

All the socio-economic problems which are extant in Eritrea, and the setting of the text are incubating ingredients for the starting point of social movements. As in the text, the people, led by the veterans, try to subvert the power and inimical activities of the government.

5. Mode of the Employment of Social Movement Strategy

Techniques and motifs are used to reinforce the social movement strategy employed in the text. The title of the text *The Devil in God's Land* gives the impression of two ideas just like the two groups in a social movement. If the devil comes to God's land, there is bound to be tension and disruptions. The author has used these two opposing ideas as a technique to introduce the reader or the audience to what to be expected in the text: strivings, struggles, and misunderstandings by two opposing groups existing in the same space.

In the text who is the 'Devil' and what is 'God's Land' and where is it situated? As a concept, the devil indicates the greatest evil that man is capable of. In other words, the Devil is equated with satan the opposite of everything good. He or she is the opposite of God, the greatest good and positivity. In the world of *The Devil in God's Land*, Boss or the president is the Devil because everything negative is attributed to him. Sister Delores tell him to his face that 'Do you know what you are? You are the devil incarnate' (105). His policies and activities are inimical to the development of the nation. He creates fear in the minds of the people. Deputy capture this when he is discussing with Camp Leader. He says '...we didn't spend our youth fighting only to be enslaved by fear, reduced to a bunch of frightened goons' (71).

'God's Land' is Eritrea. This is taken from ancient Egyptian records of trade expeditions to the Land of Punt which is likely to be around the place called Eritrea now. Punt is referred to as the 'Land of the God'. This is because the area was known for producing gold, aromatic resins, blackwood, ebony, ivory and wild animals (Shaw & Nicholson 231). So, like in a

social movement there are two opposing ideas, groups, or voices noticeable in the title: Devil and God's people. The popular struggle in the text is between the president (Almighty Boss/Devil) and good people of Eritrea. Because Eritrea is 'God's Land', the people acted together in peace and harmony until the Devil becomes the president. This is a creative use of ideas.

Another important technique used in the play is related to characterization. Both male and female characters are treated equally and with respect. There is no attempt to treat male characters as strong personalities and the female characters as weak. This is done to the extent that none can accuse the playwright of gender bias. This is unlike what obtains in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (2010) where female characters are relegated to the background or in Onwueme's *Then She Said It* where female characters are very strong and male characters are rendered almost invisible. Both male and female characters are made visible and strong in *The Devil in God's Land*. Both male and female characters fought for the liberation of Eritrea from Ethiopia and they are equally important in the postliberation struggle to free the nation from the grips of a maximum leader. Aster, Senai's wife, recalls her experience during the liberation struggle:

I was taken to Italy when I was young and went to school there. Then I joined the liberation struggle, and when I was in the sixth month of pregnancy carrying Askalu, I was given leave to go to Italy for the delivery because I had problems when I gave birth to Yikalo in the field (war front), three years earlier (7)

While there are strong male characters like Senai, Manna and the male war veterans who are outspoken and planning to destroy the wicked government in power, so also there are female characters like Aster, Sister Delores who are working in tandem with other strong movement participants to achieve the same purpose. In fact, the social movement is successful because of the strength of Sister Delores as a character. She puts her life on the line by confronting Boss. While he tries to rape her, she emasculates him by squeezing his testicles until they are destroyed. Although she loses her life in the process, but she achieves victory for the people of Eritrea. Zegonfo II, praises Sister Delores in her death:

And before I do that, I will tell the story of the heroic Sister Delores who squeezed the vital life out of the dictator before he choked her to death. Because of her heroic act, the dictator is now half the man he was. Long live the memory of our martyrs. Sister Delores is one of our martyrs. May her memory be revered forever (117).

Furthermore, a good technique is the creative use of history. The play is the history of Eritrea retold with the touch of creative ingenuity. All the important occurrences from the liberation struggle to free Eritrea from Ethiopia to the postliberation struggle to free Eritrea from the clutches of a monster totalitarian presidents and dictator are indicated in the play. The play is based on reality. The author in the preface to the play, writes:

...this play involves critical evaluation of historic events, expressly or implied making value judgments. In making such judgments, the proverbial poetic license would exonerate the writer from blame (iv).

All the postcolonial problems in Eritrea reported by Human Rights Watch, United Nations Human Rights, Amnesty International and others are interrogated in the play. Therefore, the author subtitles the play as 'An Eritrean Play.' With the technique, it is easier to locate the cause(s) of the social movement, and also the delineation of the opposing groups, the movement participants and the movement targets.

Yet another technique is the subtitling of each act and each scene of the four-act play. The playwrights write that he has 'added a phrase at the head of each act of the play, a phrase denoting the underlying theme of each act' (v). This is a departure from traditional play writing. Act one is subtitled 'A Fateful Decision.' This is where the man at the centre of the social movement, Senai, takes a decision to work and rectify the problems in Eritrea. He says 'It is time to be counted among those who have arisen to rectify the situation before it is too late' (6). Act two is subtitled 'Veteran's Dilemma'. Here, the veterans and other groups meet secretly to decide on best way and time to confront the wicked government. Act three is subtitled 'Anatomy of Political Terror.' Most of the negative activities of the government are highlighted. Act four is subtitled 'Sacrifice and Redemption.' Sister Delores' death is a kind of sacrifice for the cause. At the point of her death she helps to redeem the nation by emasculating the Boss.

The four acts with their subtitles correspond to the stages of development of social movement: act one corresponds with emergence stage when there is widespread discontent with the government. Act two corresponds to coalescence stage which is characterised by a more clearly defined sense of discontent. The third act corresponds to the bureaucratization stage, a point where coordinated strategy is necessary. With the readiness of the people, leaders like Senai, Zegonfo II, Sister Delores become the fulcrum of the struggle. Act four corresponds to the decline stage. A social movement must decline because of failure or success. In this act, sacrifice is made, and the social movement is successful. The tension in the land comes down.

Some motifs are present in the text, which are related to social movement strategy. Because social movement involves group activities, some of these motifs are based on actions and reactions of one group over another or a representative of a group over a member of another group. One of the motifs is betrayal. The issue of betrayal runs through the length of the play. The major cause of social movement in the play is the betrayal of the people of the nation by the postliberation government. Men and women came together to fight and liberate Eritrea with the thinking that this would bring prosperity, good governance and happiness. Unfortunately, the unelected president that took over the governance of the new nation gives them the opposite of their expectations. The feeling of betrayal is captured by Senai in these words:

We have sacrificed so much to help liberate our country and I feel betrayed. Although I am alive, I feel close to the dead in my sense of loss... It is a crippling feeling. It leads to despair and regret. Was it worth squandering our youths for and scarifying our families? What does the future hold for us and for the country? (27).

Boss betrays the trust of his fellow former freedom fighters and the people of the nation. Human Rights Watch reporting on Eritrea writes:

leading members of the government who publicly called for substantial reforms including 'free and fair' elections were rounded up and detained. Mass arrests of journalists and perceived opponents of the regime... Since 2001, widespread systematic human rights violations have become routine, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, extrajudicial killings, and severe restrictions on freedom of expressions, freedom of worship, and freedom of movement.

Boss tele guides the National Assembly to pass an infamous resolution which charged the outspoken veterans with treason. These people are arrested, and no one knows their where about since 2001. Sister Delores refers to this when she says: 'What happened on February 2 goes beyond politics. It defies all morality. It is against common sense and an insult to the nation as a whole' (48).

Violence is another motif. This is immanent in the text. This is expected in some social movements, especially revolutionary or radical movements. The movement targets visit violence on the movement participants with the intentions to gain absolute power and to rule for life. People's businesses are taken over by the government, many are arrested and jailed without trial, many are killed, and the people live in fear. The determination of the people to confront the government and rectify the situation brings more violence. This leads to the arrest and torture of key movement participants like Senai, the killing of Manna, the destruction of families. Senai loses his freedom and his two children, as Yikalo and Askalu are killed. The torture and killing of Sister Delores are the sacrifice needed for the redemption of the nation. The people are 'confused, helpless in the face of brute force and lawlessness' (45).

Again, one other motif in the play is fear. Fear predominates the life of the people because of the perilous activities of the government. People are afraid to talk or move about in their own nation. The incessant killings, tortures, arrests and detention without trials, rapes, betrayals, forceful conscription into national service which is tantamount to enslavement have daunted the spirit of the ordinary people. Other Customer expresses the state of things in the land. He tells the others 'We are governed by fear. Fear is the governing principle. It is the biggest part in all the present mess' (12). Boss sends Amaz's husband to Italy for further study. While the husband is away Amaz's is lured by Boss to a hotel where she is sexually assaulted. This results in a pregnancy and the birth of a baby boy. When the husband returns and he is told about the situation, he never gets angry with his wife or talks about it to anybody. He shamefully accepts his wife and the baby because he is afraid of Boss. The dialogue below depicts this:

Aster: But what about your husband? Didn't he suspect that the baby was not his?

Amaz: Of course, he did. But when I told him who the father was, he kept quiet. So much for our heroic manhood!

This did not happen even during the Dergue's rule (52).

This indication of how fear is crippling the land.

Furthermore, power is a strong motif in the text. It is one of the main causes of the social movement in the play. It is what the movement targets have in abundance but used negatively. It is also what the movement participants want so as to redirect the cause of the nation for positive experiences for all and for the good of the nation. The postliberation president was not elected but became president through the goodwill of the important veterans who took him as one of their comrades. It is this idea of comradeship that he cleverly exploited to gain power. Convenor explains this: 'But we have discovered that the idea was used and exploited by those whom we trusted and who used it to gain power' (28). Having gained power, he turned against his fellow comrades. He becomes a monster because he wants absolute power, the power of life and death over the people. One of the participants at a secret meeting of the veterans refers to the president and his loyalists as 'those who betrayed us, who have high-jacked our revolution and our *democracy*' (28). So, the play is about the attempts of Boss to solidify his absolute power on the people, and the attempts of the people to snatch power from the maximum rulers.

Moreover, hope is another motif in the text. The struggle in the play is kept alive by hope and determination. The real movement participants are hopeful that their struggle against enslavement will be successful. Even while the future is bleak for him as a tortured prisoner, Manna still expresses hope. When his wife is allowed to visit him and she complains that she is being called names by their friends, Manna advises her:

Don't mind them. They have been brainwashed by government propaganda. When things change tomorrow, they will rush to come to apologize. This is the way things are. Just ignore them and keep your head high. All this will pass (58).

Zegonfo II also expresses this hope when he says 'I shall rise from the ashes... We shall all rise from the ashes' (2), and also when he is addressing a rally at the Hall of the Masses where he admonishes the people to consider their present suffering as a sacrifice from where would spring redemption, he encourages the people: 'Mind you, this is the sacrifice from which redemption will come sooner or later. There can be no redemption without sacrifice. Have no fear. Be bold, be valiant, be strong' (96).

The text adopts the radical and revolutionary social movement because the movement participants want a change of governments which eventually leads to armed struggle. They also want a complete overhauling of the entire system. Eventually the struggle leads to the death of many of the movement participants but eventually Boss is emasculated and flown out of the nation. Thus, the radical movement is successful.

6. Conclusion

This paper has interrogated how modern African drama has appropriated social movement strategy to reflect and reflect upon the various social and economic problems confronting the African space. Bereket Habte Selassie's *The Devil in*

God's Land is used to explicate this trend. The use of social movement strategy in the play has given it the opportunity to reflect the socio-economic environment of Eritrea. It has also given the play the impetus to consider the problems in more radical perspective. The literary elements and techniques employed in the play has reinforced the social movement adopted in the play.

The radical approach to African drama through the appropriation of social movement strategy can serve as a conscientization process which may eventually lead to African people coming together to create a just and egalitarian society.

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