FEMINISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY IMPULSE IN SOJI COLE'S *EMBERS*: A CASE FOR SOCIAL REGENERATION

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Abstract

There is a seeming gross insensitivity of the Nigerian government to the plight of the many victims of Boko Haram who go through serial abuse, torture, and exploitation in both the Sambisa forest and the IDP Camps. This paper crucially examines the consequences of the Boko Haram mayhem on the female, particularly, young school girls. Deploying Feminist and Marxist theoretical paradigms, this study examines the painful experiences of Cole's female characters as victims of the Boko Haram activities in Embers. Data for this study is collected primarily through a content analysis of Soji Cole's Embers, and secondary sources that include essays and books, both print and online. The study reveals that in the face of the heinous practices as seen in the play, the female victims suffer double exploitation - both in the hands of the Boko Haram terrorists, and their supposed 'rescuers' in the IDP camps, who randomly exploit these girls sexually. Another finding of this study is that there is a growing suspicion that some Nigerian politicians indirectly sustain the 'dirty business' since it avails them the unwholesome opportunity to further exploit the victimized school girls. The paper also reveals that the society - enabled by patriarchal structure - significantly

contributes to the nightmares of the female group. It is therefore the dramatist's perception that the experiences of the female characters as reflected in the play remain a microcosmic representation of the larger experiences of the colossal Boko Haram victims in Nigeria. The study finally concludes by noting that the female group can synergise to combat their exploitations through a necessary revolution to regenerate their human essence, and engineer social recuperation.

Introduction

From time immemorial, women have always been relegated in the social, political and cultural affairs of their immediate environments. African social setting has often created significant gulf between the male and female groups when outlining the social responsibilities and rights of these groups. It is the irrationality in this gulf that significantly informs and enforces the marginalisation and socio-cultural exploitation of the female group by its male counterpart. In the traditional set-up the woman becomes an easy prey to socio-psychological exploitation and irrational harassment which are the hallmarks of her predicament (Acholonu, 1994, p. 45). At the basic familial sector, there is a strict and clear-cut distinctive polarity in the roles each of these groups is allowed to perform. Naturally, the male child has always had the unguarded misconception that domestic chores are basically made for the girl child. Worse still, in the traditional African society, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria, the girl child is equally denied certain privileges, like western education. The idea behind this is the conception that the girl child will eventually end up in a man's bedroom and kitchen. These girls therefore become disposable items in the hands of their male counterparts who are socially, politically, economically and culturally empowered over them by their society (Oriola, 2017, p. 107). The girl is only allowed domestic and matrimonial socialization, often christened the "rudiments of life". This group continues to be derogatorily misrepresented in the scheme of things. They are not even allowed to lend their voice in issues considered socially imperative. They

are not allowed to hold socio-political posts, implicitly suggesting they lack the supposed ingenuity and the potential to make shrewd judgment. Even in the religious domain, there has been a conscious reference to the Biblical injunction which deters women from heading a religious body. As Abrams and Harpham (2012) point out, the society…is male-centered and -controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophic writings to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm… and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination. (p. 122)

It is against the foregoing that "Feminism" was conceived, formulated and developed. This concept is centered on the emancipation of women from the socio-cultural, economic and political impediment their patriarchal society has placed on them. By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative while by contrast the female is perceived as "systematic opposition to such traits" and thus has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 122). Feminism therefore, is a struggle by this maligned group to extricate themselves from the shackled life which they are forced to live. In this study however, feminism shall be adopted not from a radical perspective but from the liberal stance that identifies women as important members of the society whose opinion and effort can contribute immensely to social progress and national development. To the woman this is achievable when given the freedom to explore her world, thus:

The freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined roles; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely to actions [for feminism] … demands the acceptance of women's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity, and

does not depend on the other relationships in her life. (Hooks, 1981, p. 194)

Aim/Objective of Study

This paper is aimed at critically evaluating the lot of the female folk, particularly the girl child in the face of the heinous terrorism that has ravaged the peace of the society with focus on the Boko Haram sect. First, it considers women as a group that suffers several exploitation and marginalisation within their immediate environment. This paper is significantly aimed at exploring the cruel experiences of young Northern school girls (who are representatives of the larger female group in the nation) both as members of the exploited gender in their social environment, and as the primary victims of Boko Haram incessant attacks through a critical exploration of Cole's play, *Embers*. This clearly manifests in the dramatist's choice of characters: Talatu, Memunah, Idayat, and Atai, who are basically from the Northern Nigeria. Finally, the paper is also aims to interrogate the ability of the young girls to square up against the society and confront their imposed human condition and all mannerisms of injustice meted to them through a revolutionary, irrespective of the damning consequence.

Research Questions

Ideally, every research work is geared toward addressing significant questions that would contribute to scholarship and also proffer solutions to certain social problems. This paper therefore seeks to proffer answers to certain implicit questions as: Why does the African society generally seem to flourish on patriarchal lines and how does this structure exacerbate the cause of the female group? Why are women, particularly young girls the primary target of the Boko Haram terrorists? Is there any political underscore to the Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria? Do the female folk further contribute to the exploitation of their gender? How can the oppressed and exploited female group circumvent their social condition?

Statement of Problem

The problem of terrorism in Nigeria has become a new normal, and as such, continues to receive prompt literary attention. Currently in

Nigeria, there are various strands of terrorist activities: The Unknown Gunmen massacre, the Fulani Herdsmen carnage, Niger Delta insurrection, EndSARS bloodbath and the ultimate Boko Haram genocide, all of which leave the nation in a state of frenzy. The activities of these groups bring about untold hardship, incessant abduction, fear, restlessness, tension, restiveness, rancour, loss of property, and astronomical death tolls in the nation. The problem of Boko Haram has continued to debilitate and plague the development and social wellbeing of the nation, creating spite and acrimony among members of the society. Notably, these terrorist groups have been established on cultural, ethnic, social and political trajectory. Boko Haram terrorism which is the focal of this study largely thrives on tribal lines as it domiciled in Northern Nigeria. It appears government lacks the courage and willpower to completely exterminate this deadly terrorist sect. However, part of the problem as this paper would reveal is that there a conceived suspicion that some political authorities benefit from the Boko Haram activities in Nigeria. Again, part of the problem this paper tends to study is the issue of displaced integrity and human dignity of the plethora of young school girls constantly abducted in broad day light in Nigeria and forced to go through serial tortures of rape, hunger, and often, death.

Methodology

This paper adopts a content analysis methodology where the researcher bases his argument on the interpretation of the chosen text, Soji Cole's *Embers* from the theoretical perspectives indicated. These perspectives are feminist and revolutionary paradigms. The paper thus interrogates *Embers* in relation to the exploitation of the girl child on the one hand, and how the exploited female characters confront the powers that instigate against their being on the other hand. Through constructive and objective analysis, the paper intends to evaluate Boko Haram terrorists, soldiers and government officials' dirty dealings and how such dealings are made to bear on the psyche of the girl-child, using the perspective of Soji Cole's *Embers*.

A Feminist Interrogation of Soji Cole's *Embers*

As a matter of fact, impulsive feminist writers tend to confront the oppressive and exploitative cultural, political and social system that debases the womanhood. Through their writings, these writers agitate for a society that offers an equitable social condition to every gender. It is in light of this that feminism postulates that woman's essential worth stems from her common humanity, and does not depend on the other relationships in her life (Hooks, 1981). The idea is that the life of the girl child does not basically or necessarily depend on the influence of the male folk. Thus, women should be allowed to stake their mark in the social and political progress of their society since they are bona fide members of that society. Feminist writers generally have a common cause in their writing- the revitalization of the significance of the female gender and a rejection of the inferiority society and men place on them. There is indeed the need to abate the obnoxious laws fashioned against the womanhood by destabilizing the patriarchal social structure, and in essence offer women a proper sense of belonging.

It is on the premise of the foregoing that Soji Cole's *Embers* receives feminist interrogation. Significantly, every activity in the play, from the outset to the end centres on the experiences of the female captives of the dreaded Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria. The girls in the play are Cole's microcosmic representation of women in the larger society. Cole's thematic preoccupation is that everything within their environment is made to work against the female folk. In *Embers*, all the major characters: Talatu, Memunah, Idayat and Atai are female, and experience series of exploitations and marginalisation at different stages of their development. Their pains are socially induced. In consideration of this social structure, Simon (2010) observes that "the women predicament is worsened by patriarchal structure which further underpins the female's growth and development… As the "weaker-vessel" or "weakened vessels" to borrow Akachi Ezeigbo's expression… they are often trampled upon and at other times rendered voiceless by the machination of patriarchy and culture in order to keep them in check" (p. 158). It is the egocentric and chauvinistic tendencies of

the male group, enabled by patriarchal social structure that makes this group irrational, irresponsible, "unfeeling and inhuman especially in dealing with their women-folk" (Acholonu, 1988, p. 219). This patriarchal structure is significantly practiced in the Northern part of the nation. Set in Northern Nigeria, *Embers* reflects the inimical experiences of young girls who are either abducted by the terrorists, or forcefully taken from their parents with pittance as dowry payment. Acholonu further notes that feminism "bemoans the ruthlessness of the traditional system which [dehumanises the woman and,] corrodes [her] ego, depriving her every human dignity and reducing her to the state of utter hopelessness" (p. 220). Notably, all the female victims of Boko Haram in *Embers* are members of the ethnic clime. Women are therefore conceived as individuals whose relevance only manifests in procreation. Gender inequality, particularly widely shared patriarchal notions about social roles and the "place" of women in (Northern) Nigeria is evident in the manner in which Boko Haram sources for women (Oriola, 2017, p. 105).

Cole's creation of female characters as major, if not the only victims of terrorist attacks in the play, is simply deliberate. It is the dramatist's conscious observation of the girl-child as a major target of the Boko Haram banditry in Nigeria. The play offers a cerebral exploration of the political connection of the Boko Haram activities in the nation. The dramatist highlights the general injustices the (female) characters are subjected to. As can be seen in the play, the girls' plights did not begin in the Sambisa forest, or the IDP camp. Rather, their exploitation as females has been made to bear on them right from their homes by their male counterpart and the patriarchal society to which they belong. Throughout the play, the girls are in constant opposition with the forces that not only seem to subdue, but also to consume them. According to Penny and Erna (2006), gender and social division in favour of patriarchal norms has often led to the female gender marginalization and exploitation, thus:

The state of war … waged between men and women all over the globe, producing neither winners nor losers, but much conflict…a high incidence of sexual harass-ment, domestic violence directed at women, and many other types of discrimination… Women are victims of virtual horror stories… and denied of the simplest human rights. (p. 219)

The age long patriarchal system where the girl child is denied western education partly manifests in the play. Talatu tells us that it is even useless to have her enrolled in school. We are made to understand their economic condition when she narrates, thus: "I was not enrolled in school then. It was useless. Nana couldn't afford it. Although, even before she died I was the only child living with her. My two brothers had gone into the big cities to become almajiris. When Nana died, life became the school I had to pass through" (*Embers*, p. 7). Following her mother's death, life becomes more cruel to her. She suffers exploitation even in her uncle's house. Recollecting her inauspicious ordeal, Talatu narrates thus:

Things we don't expect sometimes come around to jinx our happiness. Had I known, I would have sought my independence early enough. Rather, I was waiting for life to treat me with sympathy after the death of my mother. My mother's brother came to take me quickly to his home and that was where the life of slavery began. He used me. He used my body too. His first son also raped me. I was battered. And at such a young age too. (*Embers*, p. 8)

Even her fellow woman exploits her. At the earliest stage of her life, and coupled with the intricacies of her new environment, an unfledged Talatu generates wealth for her madam in Kano. She is forced into prostitution by the woman who pretends to protect her from indurate men and society, "…she said my name and beauty would attract prying eyes of men, so I need another name. I didn't know she was preparing me for the other trade… Yes. Satisfying the urge of men…" (*Embers*, p. 39). In an attempt to illustrate the pain Talatu goes through to survive during the period of the imposed promiscuity, Cole extrapolates with the work of a

blacksmith. He finds correspondence between the pains Talatu endures to be alive with the heat the anvil must experience in the blacksmith's furnace. As made to reflect in the play, Talatu's body bears the brunt of men's inordinate quest for sexual gratification. She must endure as her young and feeble body is the anvil of men's lascivious satisfaction. In a moment of retrospection, Talatu narrates her weird experience to the girls thus:

When life rages at you, you become dazed and lose every sense of direction. You don't understand how hard the life of an anvil is. The work of a blacksmith looks like art but you don't understand how much the anvil suffers. You get fascinated by the blacksmith making some rhythmic sound with his anvil; sending out sparks from the embers, plunging the red-hot metal into water and creating clouds of stream while the metal sizzles and cracks in response to change in temperature… But the anvil suffers. (*Embers*, p. 39)

Again Talatu recalls how her womanhood is exploited by Bayero, one of the soldiers in the camp. Ironically, these soldiers, charged with the clear mandate of protecting the (female) captives have turned to become their worst nightmares and fears. Edebor (2018) observes that "As evident in the play, the IDP camp, set up as a place of refuge and soccour to the displaced persons, turns out to be another camp of terror, full of depravity occasioned by the reprehensible and loutish behaviour of the army, the camp officials and the nation's politicians" (p. 51). Talatu's unconsummated experience with Bayero, the moment of her sexual arousal and abrupt abandonment depicts men's selfishness and illiberal attitude, as well as their insensitivity to the woman's emotional pride and desires. By extension, it portrays the dramatist's interrogation of government's insensitive and unconcerned attitude to the plights of the people. Given the circumstance of that incomplete amorous episode, and more so because she is human, we are bound to forgive Talatu for almost giving in to Bayero's overtures. We can even see some glimpse of joy when Talatu realizes she could still be sensual, having feared her body had gone frigid. As Talatu narrates,

It's been long. It's over a decade that I had the touch of a man. I thought I would be unfeeling. I thought I had gone frigid. But I was surprised that my body reacted… His eyes were becoming dilated… He started fondling my breasts…, gently. The hair on the whole of my body rose steadily… He took my breast out and slipped it into his mouth. I felt a gush of warmth run through my whole body. It was electrifying. On one side I hated what he was doing. On another, I was elated that my womanhood can still be tested… I just sat there. Still. Not knowing whether to show emotion or to remain unfeeling… I didn't even know when he unzipped his trouser. I didn't know how so many things came to be that night. (*Embers*, pp. 18-19)

The passage above shows the exploitation and denial women suffer in our societies. Recall that even before Bayero could get to main 'business' above, the 'beautiful episode' abruptly ended, almost before it started as "the sound of the second bugle stopped him" (*Embers*, p. 19). Part of the consequences of the terrorist exploitation, as well as those of the soldiers in the camps on the young girls remains the vulnerable and pitiable debased condition they are reduced to. It is disheartening that the girls begin to deviate psychologically, so much so that some of them 'thirst' for the bodies of their exploiters. Talatu is surprised that her old body could still respond to Bayero's fondling and almost relished their unconsummated amorous moment.

Cole essentially interrogates the activities of the politicians, Boko Haram bandits and the soldiers, in their general dealings with the female captives. The terrorists abduct these girls, serially rape them in the forests, the soldiers rescue them, rape them too in the IDP camps, while the politicians visit them; bringing them insufficient food and water, and also sexually exploit them in return. The politicians insist in keeping the girls in the camp so they could have continual opportunity to constantly exploit their womanhood. Ideally therefore, Cole identifies (the male) government officials, politicians and soldiers as the real terrorists and enemies to the nation and humanity, thus:

Goggo, the hassle here is like being in captivity. How do we define a life of freedom when it bears all the signs of captivity? The real Boko Haram is here, not in the forest of Sambisa. They are here with us every day… The Boko Harams are those Government people who brought ten bags of rice to the camp and announced in the news that they came with hundred. The Boko Harams are those Camp Officers who steal seven out of those ten bags of rice and leave us with three to share for food. The Boko Harams are those in uniforms whose job is to keep us safe here but drag out the girls every night to have a fill of their lusty… (*Embers*, pp. 19-20)

Cole again questions the audacious arrogance of the Nigerian Military. The case of a village, Gali, that is left in ruins by the rampaging activities of the Boko Haram guerillas together with the consequent intervention of the Military in *Embers* correlates with the marauding activities of the Army in the face of incessant restiveness in Nigeria today. The ruins in the city of Gali caused by the terrorists are further exacerbated by the Military. This is again correlative to what we find in contemporary Nigeria. To ensure they keep the young girls for their lewd aggrandizement, the soldiers massacre every surviving male in that city, as Atai narrates, of the people who were lucky to still be alive and had returned to see their town; the soldiers killed the men, drove back the old women and kept the young girls to themselves. They first took me to their commander. He had many women with him. And he changed them as new ones come. After three days, he got tired of me too. He gave me to another soldier. It was horror (*Embers*, p. 58)

These girls go through serial rape and torture. They are equally threatened with hunger if they decline the concupiscent overtures of the Camp Officials and soldiers. Through *Embers*, Cole wonders how the nation has degenerated into such inglorious state.

Cole identifies rape, starvation, suffering, hunger, pain, fear, pang, hate, melancholy all of which are made to bear on Talatu, Memunah, Idayat and Atai as instruments of the exploitation of the

female characters. Consequently, the experiences of the female captives become multifaceted. Book Haram's strategy strips kidnapped women and girls their sense of self or identity (Oriola, 2017, p.110). Through these experiences, the wicked soldiers and ignoble politicians further endanger the psyche, emotions and sentiments of these fragile girls. Largely represented by Cole's characters in *Ember*s, the female folk in the Nigerian social space - that is in the recent time replete with all forms of terrorism, suffers psychological depression as a consequence of the Sambisa forest, and the IDP Camps experiences. Their society becomes cruel to them, life becomes unlivable. Idayat recalls how she loses her womanhood even before the completion of her primary education, "I lost my virginity when I was in the last year of Primary School. It was Mallam Bideen who did it to me… He removed my hijab and started to fondle my tiny breasts… He reached down and forced himself into me. He shattered my hymen that cold afternoon" (*Embers*, pp. 46-47). Consequently, Idayat lives with the perpetual stigma of that hideous experience. Using Idayat, Cole draws parallel to the incessant cases of rape within the nation. These girls have to bear the ominous effect of their horrid encounter with men. They must keep the secret of this heinous crime and eventually wallow in perpetual shame and anguish, while the perpetrators sadly go about freely, "Mother said that I would never find a husband once the news got out that another man had defiled me. She said that the whole community would look down on me. She said I would be called names that would bring shame to me" (*Embers*, p. 48).

The rape which these girls, including Talatu experience at both the Sambisa forest and the IDP camp is logically symbolic. Symbolic in the sense that the sexual exploitations they endure colorate with the economic plundering by the nation's political leaders. Set in an IDP camp in the northern part of Nigeria, the characters such as Talatu, Memunah, Idayat and others are symbolic characters who cast themselves as victims of the deadly Boko Haram terror group, but largely representative of the ordinary Nigerian citizens (Ortserga, 2020). These politicians

wreck the nation's economy dry, as the bandits would rape the girls to death. It represents the looting of the nation's economy as the politicians embezzle public funds and share oil resources amongst themselves. Clearly represented with the final rape of Memunah, the ignoble politicians milk the nation dry. As Idayat recalls, Memunah was locked in a room and raped by the Camp Commandant. After he was done, he asked that she be thrown into the guard room. There, one by one the soldiers raped her too. And they then passed her to the cleaners. They wanted her to confess everything and the only way to do that was to rape her. The Camp Commandant gave the order that she shouldn't be given respite until she confessed. They raped her to death. The newspaper this morning mentioned that she died of cholera. (*Embers*, p. 88)

Embers and the Revolutionary Appropriation

It is clear and equally deliberate, that all the people these female characters come in contact with, from the politicians, to the Boko Haram terrorists, and to the Army and soldiers, are all more powerful than them. For Cole therefore, socio-political injustice against the female folk must be abrogated. Fed up with their situation, Cole's characters feel an urgent and crucial need to circumvent their dire condition through a revolution. This revolution is necessitated by the girls' personal and collective experiences as exploited group. Edebor describes *Embers* as "a play that paints a dark picture of the Nigerian nation… The play centrally chronicles happenings in the lives of some young girls and an elderly woman (Talatu) who became trapped residents of the camp due to the nefarious activities of the dreaded Boko Haram insurgents" (p. 50). By resorting to revolution, Cole explicitly demonstrates the awareness that people have lost confidence in government regarding the safety of the numerous abducted Nigerian school girls. Cole's female characters decide to take laws into their "fragile" hands. They defy their social and natural constraints to challenge the status quo.

It is on this analytical stance that *Embers* also provokes a Marxist informed reading. Marxist ideology is established as a

combative tool to oppose the marginalisation, oppression and exploitation of common masses. Marx conceives the capitalist structure as exploitative, oppressive and marginalizing. Accordingly, Trainer observes that…in any historical period dominant and subservient classes can be identified. Inequality in wealth and power was of fundamental moral concern to Marx. Some groups come to dominate others and to win for themselves a disproportionate share of the society's wealth, power and privileges. The ultimate goal Marxists aim at is a classless society, i.e., a society in which all enjoy more or less equal wealth and power. (2-3)

However, dissatisfied with their oppressed and exploited conditions, the girls necessarily seek a possible means to an end, and often, through a revolution. As is seen in *Embers*, the marginalised and exploited female group feels an apparent need to fight against the injustices meted out on their persons, and on their sex. For Cole, and for the girls in *Embers*, the society can only be salvaged through an impulsive revolutionary process. This process involves a comprehensive annihilation of the socio-political order. According to Edebor (2018), a work of such contemporary magnitude "must examine social realities, making the populace aware of social ills and sympathetic to action that will wipe those ills away. It must expose the bourgeois' overt and subtle machinations in social reality in order to sensitise the masses so that they can be empowered to overcome them" (p. 49).

Feminist objection of the economic exploitation of women and the denial of opportunities that would place them on equal footing with men within the socio-economic and political system echoes that of Marxist feminists (Nutsukpo, 2011, p. 156). For the Marxist feminist, women oppression, marginalisation and exploitation is attributed to capitalist orientation. Hence, any attempt of the female group to extricate from the entanglement of the exploitative capitalist system must involve the deployment of a revolutionary or Marxist tool. As can be seen in *Embers*, the plot and execution of revolution towards the end of the play was carried out by women. It is Cole's perception therefore that women must

synergise to confront the socio-political issues bedeviling their womanhood. Thus, Cole's idea of using female teenagers becomes significantly deliberate. First, his delineation of female characters with revolutionary impulse points to the fact that women can also make meaningful contribution toward a nation's recuperation. Second, Cole proposes that since the future belongs to the younger generation, it is not an aberration for that generation to fight and secure their future, thus, the dramatist's conscious creation of mainly young female characters as catalysts for change. Talatu's admittance further validates this point, "I admit that my generation has failed. It has failed itself and your own generation. Your world is full of dark vacuum that my generation brought upon you. I agree with Memunah, to bring light into this empty darkness of your lives there has to be destruction. The destruction of those who brought untold misery into your lives" (*Embers*, p. 81). Inciting them for the crucial task, Talatu reminds the girls that "… your generation is an angry one. One day there will be a new war. A war in which blood will be spattered on the conscience of the weak and the innocent" (*Embers*, p. 82). With *Embers,* Cole points out that the process of revolution and socio-political emancipation is a selfless service. To bring about a new social order, the revolutionist must let go his/her interest. As Talatu warns the girls:

Your generation is failing too. You want to escape only so that you can have luxurious lifestyle. You never think about the future. Yes, your generation is angry. But it is angry only because of the selfish things you think about not because you want things to change… Your generation has become part of the rot. You are doing the same things that we did that turned the country the way it is. You cow you should speak… (*Embers*, p. 84)

Memunah believes the system has to be destroyed first if the society is to experience peace and order yet again. The society must regenerate but first, has to destroy the corrupt system, and Memunah accepts it falls on her generation to do so, "I told you Talatu. There is no choice for this generation. Nothing can heal our country. Nothing. Unless we destroy this system we will never regenerate. There is no future here until those who are leading us

are completely destroyed. And it is my generation that can do that" (*Embers*, p. 62). In the end, the system is crucially destroyed, even while Idayat announces that "Another generation is coming" (*Embers*, p. 94). Cole explains in his final stage direction that

In a moment, the deafening sound of a bomb is heard, followed by other multiple explosions. Spirals of gunshots begin to rend the air, accompanied by uproar of other ricocheting sounds. Haze of dust and smoke begin to hover around until the stage becomes completely enraptured. Incoherent cries of pains and hurried footfalls are heard in the background… As the smoke clears, the camp has transformed into shackles of debris, with charred remains of human bodies lying about… but some tents are still being consumed by the smoldering embers of the inferno. The camp is now a complete spectacle of desolation. (*Embers*, p. 95-6) By the actions of his female characters, Cole identifies women as indispensable regenerative force. Their effort toward social redemption is instinctive. These characters basically understand the need to redress their oppressive social system and make invaluable sacrifices even when it costs their precious lives.

Essentially, Cole's dramatic discourse on Boko Haram terrorism is significantly timely. The dramatist is socially relevant because *Embers* addresses one of the bothering topical issues in the society. Accordingly, *Embers* illustrates the ongoing problems of terrorist attacks and the paradox of their long-term presence in our community… In the drama book, we are introduced to the experience of the internally displaced people, especially the female victims of the Boko Haram terror group now in a makeshift camp in the northern part of Nigeria (Osuolale, 2019). For Cole, *Embers* is the graphical reflection of Boko Haram terrorism, pointing out different levels of exploitation that go on in the IDP camps in Nigeria. In view of this, Edebor (2018) writes that Cole "beams a searchlight on the government and its various agencies, particularly the Army, for their culpability in fuelling rather than curtailing the prevailing crisis. The Army as portrayed in the play, is ruthless and debased… they also abuse their authority by

fondling with the hapless girls they are meant to protect, raping and using them" (p. 51).

Conclusion

With *Embers*, Cole establishes himself among dramatists who pertinaciously explore the contemporaneity of Nigeria's socio-political world order. He ingrains his creative prowess in *Embers* to the coeval Nigerian society by the propagation and interrogation of the nation's contemporary history, particularly the Boko Haram terrorism on which *Embers* radicates. As has been revealed, in the canon of Nigerian playwrights of the new generation, Soji Cole already has a place for his dramatic vision, social concern and the depth of his work. *Embers* is a play that will continue to be relevant as long as Nigeria does not get her act together (Ibiyemi, 2019). The dramatist is disgruntled with the socio-cultural disoriented Nigerian society, and as such, believes that the nation, enmeshed in all forms of crude practices requires stringent measures for ultimate redemption. Therefore, "the Nigerian nation stands the risk of experiencing total collapse except if urgent measures are taken to set the nation on the path of honour and regeneration" (Edebor, 2018, p. 56). According to Epochi-Olise (2022), "this dysfunctional society, which births a generation whose fury, is at its breaking-point and simmering embers that will burst forth into infernos that may consume the entire society" (p. 163). Cole himself notes that he tells the Nigerian story in the play and has fitted the locale in a Boko Haram-induced IDP camp. The background provided the play with the necessary opportunity for verisimilitude. There are things happening in those camps in the northern Nigeria… some of the things happening in these camps are actually happening in and around us every day (Ajeluorou, 2018). The masses are overwhelmingly disgruntled by the socio-political situation of their society and wish to restore its values by dismantling the nefarious, avaricious and ignoble political leaders. In *Embers*, Memunah, Idayat and Atai, led by Talatu, are all aware of the crucial responsibility, and even from the outset are prepared for the ultimate execution. This female group promotes national

development by engineering a social change. As Talatu tells the girls, "It is good you talk. It is refreshing for me to see young girls like you speak up. It was never so in my time. Maybe your generation will change things. In my time, women were mere fabricating machines for making children. They were the ill-coloured photo frames hung on walls like synthetic decorations" (*Embers*, p. 5). There is therefore a beaming hope for social regeneration through the young female generation. These girls sacrifice their lives to destroy the corrupt political structure. Theirs is an invaluable sacrifice.

Remarkably, *Embers* is a play on the ugly contemporary experiences of Nigerian young girls in the hands of the dreaded Boko Haram terrorists in Sambisa forests and the ignoble soldiers who are charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives of these girls in the IDP camps. According to Ayo Banjo, *Embers* is a good book of dramatic literature, which focuses on one of the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) Camps in Northern Nigeria. The characters gave testimonies of their ugly encounters in Sambisa Forest, as well as the painful discovery of life in the IDP Camp (Braide, 2018). In the end, there is absolute annihilation of the Camp which claimed the lives of all, including the innocent. With *Embers* therefore, Cole warns that an immutable price must be paid if a society is to experience any regeneration. Hence, Cole's heroes in the play are not only the girl who carried out the destruction of the Camp, but also all those innocent masses who lost their lives in the process for social recuperation.

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