

## Exploring Protest Theatre through the Lens of Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead*

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### **Abstract:**

*Theatre not only entertains but educates and motivates the society, which qualifies it as a weapon against societal vices and socio-political unrest in several countries to avoid dystopian societies. This paper focuses on the view of revolution, and how Rotimi uses his play to reflect revolutionary aesthetics and tendencies. This paper adopts Marxist ideology of Georg Lukacs' Reflection Model in expounding social realities of class consciousness and struggles. The model was utilised in processing the specimen play to reflect the motivating ideology of quest for freedom and agitation for survival in a society bedeviled by oppression and social inequality. Resting on the pedestal of qualitative research methodology, narrative Research model is used in probing into the primary text. This paper discovered that the primary text was used by the playwright as a means to sensitise the society to have a good knowledge of their rights to demand a classless and egalitarian society. It also revealed that those who are interested in true revolution must never resign to fate. This paper concludes that Rotimi used his play to purge the ills of the society and recommends that committed African writers should commit their works to the emancipation of the oppressed and see revolution as an instrument of change and not violence.*

### **Keywords:**

*Revolutionary Aesthetics; Protest Theatre; Class Struggle; Marxist Ideology; Emancipation.*

## I. Introduction

Theatre has grown to be a means by which the society is educated, corrected, motivated, mobilised, and many more. The most meaningful asset that a theatre artist may possess is the ability to influence his/her followers or audience. Theatre artistes who possess such ability will experience utmost joy when they realise that their plays motivate, encourage, and make life better. Thus, theatre artists through their works make contributions to the growth and progress of their community or society. This term has evolved basically as a means to entertain, educate, correct and fight the social decadence in a dystopian society.

Theatre is a means of communicating ideas, feelings and emotions to the society in form of a live performance. There are various genres of theatre but this paper shall be limited to Protest Theatre which can also be seen from the perspective of theatre for collective struggle, theatre for emancipation, revolutionary theatre, theatre for social change, theatre of the oppressed to mention but few. Protest theatre can be referred to as a theatre that is utilised to fight against political and economic inequalities and social ills. Esat 2014 explains protest theatre as a term normally used as "Agit-prop, Political theatre, Theatre of defiance, Theatre of determination, Theatre for resistance, Theatre for testimony (Testimony theatre), Theatre as a weapon, Alternative theatre, Provocative theatre and more. Provocative theatre, according to (Szymczak, 16) can be described as "the kind of theatre which grabs the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message". This form of theatre opens door

to many writers in the period quoted above in Britain such as Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. These are plays that are concerned with the unjustness they felt in the social, economic and political climate in the United Kingdom of that time. The antagonism that reflects in the writings has a long effect on subsequent writers, audience and the theatre community. While these writers were making observations and points on their own social situation in Europe, then in South Africa, the apartheid system of government was moving to an alarming stage of violent resistance.

Szymczak (17) says further that "South African Protest Theatre can be considered as a form of provocative theatre with a definite agenda: a tool for social change as a response to the negative injustices and conditions of apartheid". Protest theatre such as Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* which can also be seen as provocative theatre is a form of theatre that has zero tolerance for any form of injustice, corruption or oppression. It is that kind of theatre that is set to gear up the spirit of resistance for the oppressed to stand on their feet, take their destiny into their hands and fight for their rights. So many dramatists, playwrights and theatre artists have on many occasions used their theatrical work to sensitise their audience to fight against social injustice, corruption, inequality, etc hence making this form of theatre a revolutionary theatre. Revolution is derived "from the Latin "Revolucio" –a turnaround" (Enor and James 14). Revolution is the most extreme but necessary societal alternative taken when other options or avenues to achieve reform have been exhausted. It is meant to arouse the consciousness of man with the revolutionary ideology. It helps human beings to understand, master their environment and fashion it to serve humanity better. However, there are other perspectives of revolutionary attempts that have been made by African artists to evolve a revolutionary ideology. "A revolutionary ideology is not merely negative, it is not a mere conceptual refutation of dying social order, but a positive creative theory, the guiding light of the emerging social order" (Nkrumah 97).

Tanter' and Midlarsky in *A Theory of Revolution* also submit a contribution on revolution by saying that "revolution is equated with irresistible change – a manifestation of the world spirit in an unceasing quest for its own fulfillment" (264). Revolutionary ideology has its aim in ensuring a social order in our society and will negate the evils that have their residence in colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and neo-colonialism.

There are days when theatre is mostly used as a weapon of collective struggle, mobilisation, and emancipation against the whites in the land of the blacks during the colonial era. Then, protest theatre had played a lot of roles to gear up the spirit of resistance in the blacks for them to take their destiny into their hands and fight for their right. But, now reverse is the case; theatre for collective struggle, mobilisation and emancipation is no more for the whites in the land of the black, but against the blacks by the blacks on the land of the blacks. Mike Van Graan posits that:

I would have thought that for writers, South Africa is now a lot more interesting than the apartheid era when the big narrative was pretty clear. Then, it was black against white, us against them, goodies against baddies, and the only really interesting thing was how would the story end. Would it be bloody? Would the baddies be driven into the sea? Well, no. We would simply ask some of the really bad guys to say sorry, and then give them a golden handshake to go farming in the Karoo. While these latter questions have largely been answered, the story hasn't really ended. Rather, we have simply entered a new chapter.

(1)

From the submission of Mike, it is evident that protest theatre has grown beyond black against white, now, it is black against black which is as a result of neo-colonialism; the black colonising, oppressing, suppressing and depressing fellow blacks via corruption and class stratification. On this note, protest or radical theatre seeks to combat bad leadership by encouraging and mobilising the masses to fight for their right and agitate towards emancipation.

## II. Review of Literature

Protest theatre can simply be seen as a theater of revolt; “the theatre of the great insurgent utilized by modern dramatists, where myths of rebellion are enacted before a dwindling number of spectators in a flux of vacancy, bafflement, and accident” (Brustein 62). It can also be defined as “a genre of theatre that manifests itself in many situations of political conflict and social oppression, and unashamedly calls itself by this name” (Mike 3).

Protest theatre are most time used to sensitise and encourage the masses to combat anti-humane policy of policy makers such as government officials, religious leaders, economic leaders, to mention but few through an artistic work which can either be textual or performative art. It can also be seen from the angle of theatre of activism as Aniukwu and Uchumkpa postulate that “there must be influence and such influence is achieved through conscientisation, healthy conviction, criticism and propaganda” and that it must entail

Voluntary act of advocating and speak for the voiceless, the oppressed and the handicapped that are left as destitute begging for financial salvation. It always fights unfriendly happenings in the society, which the government is in most cases the recipient (35).

Protest theatre is a genre of theatre that is used as an avenue to speak and make the voice of the voiceless heard. Many at times, this genre of theatre is not really targeted against the political leaders or the government officials, but against the ill structured society and the ill policies that enhance the oppressing, bedeviling and tyrannising the masses, which could be achieved in “writing or in action” (35).

### 2.1 Theatre for Collective Struggle

When something is collective, it means a situation whereby an assembly is being formed by gathering either things or people together. Reverso Dictionary defines collective as a scenario where people or things were “formed or assembled by collection forming a whole or aggregate of, done by, or characteristic of individuals acting in cooperation”. Being collective is when many individuals are gathered as one force to achieve a specific target. Struggle on the other hand is an act of making forceful or a violent endeavour to get free of limitation or restriction. Theatre for collective struggle is a form of radical theatre that deals with mass mobilisation towards agitation for emancipation. Radical theatre, according to Murdock, is seen as a theatre that:

Sets out to present a critical perspective on the present social order. It aims to lay bare the structures of power and privilege and to show how they permeate everyday life, limiting and curtailing opportunities for self realization and social change (151)

Theatre for collective struggle as a radical theatre is a genre of theatre that aims at presenting the social reality and exhibiting the ill-structured social order with an attempt to

bringing sanity into the social life of the masses, hence going against dystopian structure and then work towards realization of self reliance and agitation in the society. This genre is achieved by playwrights and theatre artists by putting up a play either textual or performative to gear up the spirit of resistance in the life of their audience hence enlist the masses to fight for their right. If theatre must be used as a “weapon for collective struggle, and human mobilisation and liberation, it must encourage the people to protest and resist all oppressive structures in the society. If it is done, our leaders will be on their toes in delivering the desired quality of leadership needed by the people” (Asen, 2015). Theatre for collective struggle is a weapon employed by theatre artists to battle oppressive government and put the political leaders in check and balance, by exposing all their ill-structured governance to the masses who in turn are encouraged to revolt and fight for their right.

Kati Francis in *Theatre for Struggle and Transformation* sees theatre for collective struggle as a “powerful tool for the making of theatre for the people” this is the kind of theatre that will project the voice of the voiceless. He posits further that it is a genre of theatre that is needed for “a physical, dialogical theatre of struggle and transformation as a collective mode of expression” (102). This theatre for collective struggle is essentially needed as a great weapon in the quest of freedom.

Discussing theatre for collective struggle will not be complete without discussing class consciousness and class struggle. There are two social classes in the society according to Karl Marx in Communist Manifesto which are “Proletariat” and the “Bourgeois” which are borne out of capitalism.

Capitalism, according to Sarwat Jahan and Ahmed Saber Mahmud is “often thought of as an economic system in which private sectors own and control property in accord with their interests, and demand and supply freely set prices in market...” (44).

Anthropologist Eric Wolf’s “Sociological Dictionary” (383) defines capitalism in terms of three inter-twined characteristics, first, capitalism entails control of the means of production. Second, labours (Proletariats) are denied independent access to the means of production and must sell their labour power to capitalists (Bourgeois). Third, the maximization of surplus produced by the labourers with the means of production owned by the capitalist entails ceaseless accumulation accompanied by changes in the method of production. Wealth in its pre-capitalist form has been volatile and expansive. Capitalist wealth demands constant accumulation and concentration of the capitalists as quoted in Necessity of Art.

...The development of capitalist production necessitates a continuous increase of the capital invested in an industrial undertaking; and capitalist to the immanent laws of capitalist production, as external coercive laws of competition forces him continually to extend his capital for the sake of maintaining it and he can extend it by means of progressive accumulation (50).

As a result of this exploitative nature by the capitalists and denial of independent means of production to the labourers’ (masses) who are responsible for maximization the capitalists’ wealth, lead to poverty, oppression, inequality, slavery and other woes in the society. Capitalism is the system that breeds inequality in most human societies thereby making life so difficult for the masses, who will work relentlessly and will only have little money for survival.

This can be seen in the life of Idemudia and Queen as Festus Iyayi puts it in his novel, *Violence*:

For more than four hours, the four men laboured to clear the cement. Osaro and Patrick stayed on the top of the trailer from where they handed down the bags of cement to Idemudia and Omifo who then carried them either on their heads or on their backs to the shed more than ten meters away ...They breathed in their long , sharp gasps as the hunger gnawed at their stomachs and their hearts, almost making them dizzy. They worked mechanically but resolutely, stubbornly, determined not to give up. At the back of each man's mind is the money Five Naira. Nothing much (34).

It is believed that one day through theatre of collective struggle, the audience who are the member of the masses will realise their state of vulnerability; how they are being oppressed, suppressed and depressed. This genre of theatre will enlighten them, they will then see reasons why they have to stand and fight for their right.

#### a. Theatre for Emancipation

Emancipation can be seen as an effort made by any individual or group of people to procure economic and social rights, equity or political rights in support of a marginalised group. Alexander Somek (1) also sees emancipation as a “means to accord equal status to formerly marginalized groups. Their members are enabled to participate without stigmatization or discrimination in open process of socio co-operation”. Emancipation is an effort made towards liberation in which just like Marxism seeks to combat social inequality, injustice, overthrowing an oppressive government and replacing it with equity and egalitarianism. This may not necessarily be a one man's effort. It will be more effective when it is collective.

Now bringing the word emancipation into theatre means a situation whereby artists make use of theatrical works as a weapon to fight inequality in the society and seek to overthrow an oppressive government through the weapon of theatricality in arousing the consciousness of the masses or a specific marginalised group in the society to fight their right out of the shackles of oppression and that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the society as a whole. Theatre for emancipation agitates for equity, egalitarianism and socialism. Egalitarianism is a trend of thought in political philosophy which:

Favors equality of some sort: people should get the same, or be treated as equals, in some respect. An alternative view on this last-mentioned option: people should be treated as equals, should treat one another as equals, should relate as equals, or enjoy an equality of social status of some sort. Egalitarian doctrines tend to rest on a background idea that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status. (Arneson)

Just like egalitarianism, socialism is an economic and political system which is based on the fact that the public ownership should be in place in the society; that is, the means of production should not belong to an individual as a person, but should belong to everybody, which in one word is known as collective ownership. Amadeo sees “socialism is an economic system where everyone in society equally owns the factors of production. That ownership is acquired through a democratically elected government”. Socialism as a theory of economic and political philosophy advocates that ownership and control of the means of production and distribution should be vested on everybody as a whole in the community. Both

egalitarianism and socialism are the major target for theatre of emancipation in replacing a capitalist and oppressive system that marginalised the society hence placing a social class above the other which increases the wealth of the rich, and thereby increasing the poverty of the poor. Through theatre of emancipation, artists expose the masses or a marginalised group to know the extent to which they are being oppressed in order to gear up the spirit of resistance in them through works of art.

#### b. Revolutionary Theatre

Revolution, derived from Latin word “Revolucio” means turn around. Ugala (38) defines it as “mass action in which the vast majority of the inhabitants are aroused to a just anger to bring a vast change in their situation”. With this, it will be easily said that revolutionary theatre can simply mean a turn-around theatre. That is, a genre of theatre that agitates for situational change in an unfavourable situation. Revolutionary theatre is a form of radical theatre that combats oppression in the society. Ugala (38) posits further that it is “the theatre that is specifically designed to revolutionize the masses to challenge them and even seek to overthrow the system that chokes them”. The basic aim of revolutionary theatre is to “enforce change” (Jones and Baraka 1) in the society. Piscator also posits that revolutionary theatre should aim to transmit “not only excitement, but also enlightenment, knowledge, recognition” (Barun 42).

### 2.2 Theatre for Social Change

Social change can be seen according to Harper in *Essay in Film Studies* as “the significant alteration of social structure and cultural pattern through time”. Theatre for social change is that genre of theatre that provokes the audience to stand for change in the society by sensitizing the audience to issues in the community which need urgent attention in making change. “Brecht believed that theatre should appeal not to the spectator’s feeling but to his reason. While still providing entertainment, it should be strongly didactic and capable of provoking social change”.

Theatre for social change is one of the many frameworks of theatre that can be utilized to solve problems and create changes in the society. It is the “theatre in the service of social change” (Prentki and Preston 12). This genre of theatre is in similarity to the Applied theatre (TfD) which is also known as Community theatre because it is capable of providing insight to the social problem by allowing the participants to learn and visualise the problems through and performance. It can also be used to educate masses on the steps to take in tackling their own problem by themselves without the help of any third party. Leonard and Kilkelly also have this to say: “Sometimes the play speaks what everybody knows; sometimes they speak what nobody says. Sometimes they open paths or unveil truths; sometimes they change the way things are done or understood”.

There are so many times whereby people know and understand their problem but lack the courage to face and proffer solution to it, and at times too, people may be facing some problems and do not really see it as a problem. This is the point at which Artist employing theatre for social change establish their theatrical works to open and unveil the mind of people to the path of truth on what they need to know. It can also be employed to speak the truth to political leaders in the society bedeviled by corruption to challenge them and show them that their policy goes against a good structured leadership. Example of this can be traced to the Mbachaga’s *Widows Might* where Ifeoma agitates together with other women in their community to kick against the tradition of molesting and harassing widows. Theatre for social

change is that genre of theatre that agitates and solicits for a better change of structure in the society.

a. Theatre of Revolt

This genre of theatre can be seen from the angle of rebellious theatre. It's a genre of theatre that goes against some certain norms or a specific authority to achieve reform or social change by sensitizing the masses in knowing the level at which they are being oppressed. Robert Brustein defined theatre of revolt as "The theatre of the great insurgent modern dramatists, where myths of rebellion are enacted before a dwindling number of spectators in a flux of vacancies, bafflement, and accident". (4). It is a theatre of insurgent; which is as good as a genre of theatre that can also be classified as a theatre of the dissatisfied. In a situation whereby the masses are not satisfied with the policies of the government or their political leaders, theatre takes its place as a weapon of rebellion against unfavourable policies. This form of theatre can also be seen from another point of view as a theatre of activism. Theatre of activism is a genre of theatre that speaks for the voiceless.

Activism therefore, is an action that is red in tooth and claw due to its nature and demand which appears to be a threat to the government of the country. To be a theatre of activist entails voluntary act of advocating and speaking for the voiceless, the oppressed, and the handicapped that are left as destitute begging for financial salvation. Activism does not exist in a vacuum, it always fights unfriendly happening in the society, which the government is in most cases the recipient. (Aniukwu & Uchumkpa, 35).

Theatre activism is a kind of revolt theatre that serves as and poses threat to any government when things are not going the right way in the society. Theatre activists, who can also be seen as theatre insurgents are those set of people who voluntarily dedicate their works of arts and themselves to the course of advocating and speaking for the voiceless, the oppressed and the financially handicapped people in the society by using theatre as a rebellious weapon of change to battle the government, thereby putting the government or political leaders on their toes to do the needful. This is a genre of theatre that uses fiction, romance, satire, propaganda, and so on as tools to enlighten and encourage the masses concerning the evils inherent in oppression, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, hence battling oppression and the oppressive system in the society.

b. Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the oppressed was founded by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian director in the early 90s. Its root stretched out in Brazil during the late 50s. Prior to founding of this genre of theatre, Augusto Boal was a director in Sao Paulo in the *Teatro Arena company*. For fifteen years, he had written and staged plays, in order to lead the Brazilian theatre away from its classical, bourgeois and European roots and become national, popular and political.

Theatre of the oppressed traditional theater style used to prompt dialogue and promote community centered problem solving. It is designed to promote awareness of one's social situation and how our bodies are bound by tradition. It has been used by organizers and educators worldwide for democratizing their own organizations, analyzing problems, and preparing for action (2).

Theatre of the Oppressed is a participatory theatre that encourages democratic and cooperative form of theatre among participants. This is a genre of theatre that is used to train people who want to learn ways of fighting back against oppression. It is an arsenal of theatre

techniques and games that seek to motivate people, restore true dialogue, and create space for participants to rehearse taking action. Boal who is the founder of theatre of the oppressed calls it bourgeois theatre. This genre of theatre is similar to theatre for social change. There are many forms of theatre of the oppressed according to Levana Saxon, which are image theatre, forum theatre and invisible theatre.

### **2.3 Theatre as a Weapon of Collective Struggle**

Theatre can be seen as a weapon of collective struggle when it is used to galvanise the oppressed from their lethargic position to a position of exertion, and coming together as a force to fight oppression in the society. This genre of theatre is in one way or the other related to a form of applied theatre which is Theatre for Development (TfD), also known as Community Theatre. In TfD, theatre is employed as a tool of development in bringing a particular community together, identify their problems and solve the problems together as a community without depending on any governmental body or external body in achieving their own success. This kind of success is what can be seen as ‘self-reliance’ which is achieved through the use of theatrical performance to propel the strength and the insight that such a problem can be solved collectively.

### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

Marxism, a theory that deals with fighting and struggling for equity and egalitarianism, is the theoretical guide for this research. Sola Afolayan and Charles Ibitoye explain the conception of Marxism in “A Marxist Interpretation of the Dystopian Society in African Novel” as a model that has its origin “from a radical perception of human society and its practitioners have always been viewed as radicals. This is why, more often than not, Marxists are called ‘leftist’ to indicate them to be antibourgeois” (341).

Marxism is a theory of societal radicalism that deals with class struggle, that is, struggle between the upper class (bourgeois) and the lower class (proletariat). David Forgacs in his Marxist Literary Theory says “Marxism is a “theory of economics, history, society and revolution before it has anything to do with literary theory” (134). Afolayan and Ibitoye further explain Marxism, as a theory that is “not primarily designed for literature. As Eglaton has identified that “it is a body of theoretical work that further explicates the complex nature of and formation of individualism in society” (342).

Primarily, Marxism is a theory that Karl Marx propounded for the purpose of political, economic and historical revolution, but for the fact that all these can only happen and be found in the society, then Marxism has found its way into literature because literature mirrors life and reflects everything in the society. Afolayan and Ibitoye explain further saying that Marxism “operates on the assumption that literature can only be properly understood with a larger framework of social reality” (432).

### **2.5 Lukacs’ Reflection Model**

Georg Lukacs’ Reflection model is a model that deals with and believes in the reflection of reality in literature. This model primarily believes in literature reflecting social realities in the works of literature. Marxism is an economic theory but finds its way to literature for the fact that it deals with human life which is part of social realities. Forgacs explains this further by saying that “the result, in the case of a correctly formed work, will be that form of literature works that reflect the form of the real world” (139). It is believed that literature mirrors life because it shows exactly what is happening in the society, it reflects the total ways of human life. Forgacs explains further saying “it is not a theory of literature in general but a theory of



realistic literature” (139) which means it can only be used as a tool of analysis for a work of literature that exhibits social realities unlike romance which is far from reality.

The selected text is evaluated via Marxian reading, and Lukacs’ reflection model is adopted as the tool of analysis to look into the social realities and tendencies of revolution through a collective revolutionary movement in human society as exemplified in the play text.

### III. Research Methods

The methodology adopted for this paper is qualitative under which Narrative Research model is adopted for the purpose of content analysis. Narrative research according to <https://atlasti.com> is “a term that subsumes a group of approaches that in turn rely on the written or spoken words or visual representation of individuals. These approaches typically focus on the lives of individuals as told through their own stories”.

With this model, the narratives of Rotimi’s *Hopes of the Living Dead* shall be probed into with the aim of carrying out a critical analysis of the play text.

In order to go about this, the study relies on both primary and secondary sources for our data collection. The means of collecting data for this research work are sub-divided into two divisions which are the primary and secondary sources. The primary data is the play text under review, while the secondary materials are sourced through University and College libraries, e-journals and internet surfing, etc.

### IV. Results and Discussion

All protest theatre are also rebellious theatre. It is a genre of theatre that is used to rebel against authorities who are not performing up to expectation. *Hopes of the Living Dead* falls under the category of this genre of theatre because it is a play that serves as eye opener for the audience to understand that they still have power against authority, which is the power of one voice (Unity) to fight as a collective force. In one way or the other, this play exhibits various rebellious activities by protesting against policies that do not go down well with the inmates.

**Hannah:** (*breaks off her tableau*) Well, we can’t wait forever! You hear? (*in a frenzy*) The night watchman you sent is too slow for our pains. Go yourself and carry the SMO here on your back.

**Matron:** (*shocked beyond belief*) Miss Hannah!

**Hannah:** Don’t Miss Hannah me! What’s the matter! Don’t we have a right to live in this land – just because we are like this...? (*displays her body*) Everything we do – (*crosses from inmate to inmate releasing them from their tableaux*) Sit down. Relax, all of you. The SMO? We can wait for him sitting down. Iyah! You people think we don’t feel? Think we can’t sense... (7 & 8)

The above dialogue between Miss Hannah and the Matron exhibits a form of protest against the way they (leprosy patients) are being treated like insignificant persons by the

hospital management which they bluntly rejected with emotion of anger. Miss Hannah continues to strengthen up the spirit of resistance in her fellow inmates saying:

**Hannah:** To people like her... (*indicating Matron*) ...we are like children without father or mother. When you don't take a bath, they tell you, you smell and they beat you. The day you take a bath, they beat you still and say you're wasting water (8).

Miss Hannah makes her fellow inmates to understand that whether they choose to dance to the tune of the hospital management or not, the management can still never be satisfied with them because to the hospital management and the government, they are all just nobody. This dialogue comes up as a result of a patient who is scared of going against the Matron's order that everybody should stay as they were "As you were! Everybody. Don't move..." (4). Here, there are still some inmates who are scared of what the outcome of their rebellious action may be, this then aids Miss Hannah to strengthen their heart with the above quotation.

**Supt.:** (*imperious sternness*) Now, you listen to me! By the power conferred on me by the laws of the land, I hereby again order you and all the patients in the Leprosy Wards, within 24 hours, to clear out of the premises of the General Hospital of Port Harcourt, and from the environs of Port Harcourt!

**HW:** And by the power conferred on me by our suffering people, I say give us a chance to live like human beings, or we shall remain bones in your selfish throat forever!

**Supt.:** You want trouble, you'll get trouble.

**HW:** We shall wait! And ours shall be victory in the end. Why? Because, try as they might, bad rulers in this land shall never find strength enough to crush the people down forever (47).

The above dialogue that ensued between Harcourt Whyte, Superintendent of Police, SMO and Nweke in "Strain of Leadership" shows how far the protest of the lepers has gone, as the government wants the Lepers to vacate the General Hospital and the environs of Port Harcourt without providing for them where they will live which they bluntly reject via their leader. In every protest or revolutionary theatre, there must be revolutionary character(s) that will be seen as the leader leading the oppressed or marginalised people out of the shackles of oppression to freedom. In this play, we have Ikoli Harcourt Whyte as the leader of the inmates, assisted by Miss Hannah and Nweke. A revolutionary character is a personality who will never resign to fate no matter how difficult the struggle may be. Ikoli can be seen as a good revolutionary character, because of his stand in the struggle not minding his own interest; placing his fellow lepers' interest above his own. Despite every temptation, threatening, and some other forms of intimidation, he still stands on his feet and fights for the rights of his people.

**SMO:** It's a packaged. To take care of everybody, so to speak. Let's start with you. We are proposing a pension for you, Mr. Whyte.

**HW:** The Superintendent has already told me.

**SMO:** Well, then... (*Extracting an envelope form a file on his desk*) This time, there mustn't be a room for

misunderstandings or distrust, Harcourt. (*proffers envelop to Harcourt Whyte*) The details are all here in black and white, as you'd say...

- HW:** What will happen to the rest of... the people?  
**SUPT.:** Come now, Harcourt, one thing you must bear in mind is that your people can't remain as a group forever. Sooner or later, you're bound to split up. That's life.  
**HW:** Split up as a movement, true. But not as a group. We just have to stick together. There's simply no other choice; we must survive together. (94&95)

The above quotation is an evidence that the SMO and Superintendent of Police try their best in bribing Harcourt Whyte to forsake and betray other lepers as their leader by offering him a pension plan. Mr. Whyte as a revolutionary character who is the major leader of the Lepers; being a strong-headed comrade among the lepers stands on his feet without thinking otherwise rejects the offer given to him by the SMO and Superintendents for him to abandon their agitation which is one of the major quality of a revolutionary character as the above discussion has pointed out.

Without saying much, the play can be regarded as a theatre of revolt because it centres on acts of rejection of unfavourable policies by political leaders. Revolt does not just mean rejection, because some rejections might only be in form of words, but this kind of rejection is preceded by actions of no nonsense as the Lepers reject everything they see as nonsense from the hospital management and the political leaders.

Ola Rotimi successfully uses the play as a weapon for collective struggle with the kind of cooperation he uses his characters to achieve. He uses the play to show that through collectivity, freedom is attainable. In every decision made, all the lepers fight and agitate in collectivity as they all trust the decision of Ikoli Harcourt White.

- HW:** Each one tell one. Our silence means we shall remain here. Our silence means we shall continue to sleep on mats, eat grace if we have to, drink air, remain neighbours to the cemetery, until we are certain... certain that, indeed, there is land in Uzuakoli upon which our hospital will stand! Am I speaking your hearts?  
**CROWD:** (Uproarious glee: in a flurry of languages)  
You are!  
We are with you!  
You speak right!  
Say it again! (100)

Despite the fact that the lepers are from different ethnic background, they have collective voice and same ideology which made it so easy for the lepers to achieve their desired freedom at the end.

## V. Conclusion

As seen in the primary text, the playwright presents his play in a way of purging the society of its ills and shortcomings thereby bring out the aesthetics of revolution in the play. His aim in the play is to use drama as a tool to gear up the people to fight against the decadence of the dystopian society in order to emancipate the oppressed masses, and to reconstruct the society on a new socialist orientation not minding their problems, suffering and sacrifices. Effort has been made in this paper to reflect on what revolution is and suggests that future researchers should also see “revolution as a means of change and not violence” (Adeseke & Apalowo 178).

Ola Rotimi’s *Hopes of the Living Dead* has been evaluated as a theatre of revolt, weapon of collective struggle and theatre for social change as the lepers were exemplified as the poor masses at the mercy of the hospital management and government after being treated as nonentities and people of no value, they arise from their lethargic position to a state of acting and fight for their rights as citizens who should enjoy liberty as every other citizens do. This kind of play is a play that is being used to gear the spirit of resistance in the audience in encouraging them that they too can take their destinies into their hands and fight for their rights because if they did not do so, nobody will do it for them.

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