



DRAMA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN S.N.A AGORO'S *SOMETHING TO DIE FOR*

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Abstract

Drama has long served as a medium through which societies interrogate dominant ideologies, challenge oppressive traditions, and advocate social transformation. While existing scholarship has extensively examined the social functions of African drama, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the representation of social change in S.N.A. Agoro's *Something to Die For*. This article therefore examines how Agoro employs dramatic conflict, characterisation, and dialogue to critique discriminatory cultural practices and promote social reform within the Epie cultural setting. The study adopts a qualitative literary research design based on textual analysis of the selected play, complemented by the consultation of relevant books, journal articles, and other secondary sources. Drawing on close textual analysis, the study argues that the playwright constructs drama not merely as a vehicle for entertainment but as an instrument for confronting entrenched cultural prejudices, particularly the stigmatisation and social exclusion associated with individuals from leprous lineages. Through the experiences of Tokieme and Asueme, the play demonstrates that love, courage, and individual resistance can challenge inherited traditions that undermine human dignity and social justice. The study further establishes that Agoro presents drama as a catalyst for critical reflection and social transformation by encouraging audiences to question obsolete customs and embrace more inclusive social values. It concludes that *Something to Die For* reinforces the enduring role of African drama as a powerful agent of cultural reformation, social consciousness, and progressive societal development.

Keywords: African Drama, Cultural Reform, Literature, Mental Health, Nigerian Theatre, Struggle.

Introduction

Drama is one of the earliest forms of human art through which it is possible for humans to interpret the social situations, to ask questions of the cultural patterns, to advocate societal changes. Throughout history and in diverse civilizations dramatists have employed the theatre, not just for the entertainment value, but as a means to exposing social injustices, challenging ideological



perspectives and raising questions about society's affairs. Drama has revealed the preoccupations of the time in whatever era, ranging from comedies like Aristophanes to tragedies like Sophocles. As a literature genre, drama mimics the conditions of human existence by employing dialogue, action and conflict in its narrative process, in an attempt to recreate actual situations that have significance for the people of different time periods and cultures. Besides its value as an art form, drama performs other roles in the society including education, dissemination of information, and entertainment for the masses. More significantly, because drama draws on the reality of human life, it can be said that drama is the key vehicle through which we critique society and bring reform, highlighting the existing societal discrepancies, offering a different outlook of society, or a new image. The words of Augusto Boal are insightful here, "Theatre is not a reflection of society, but a transforming experience where people reflect on the oppressive reality of society" (122).

One important feature of African dramaturgy is its contribution to social causes like colonialism, politics, gender, cultural identity, and the environment, among others. Nigerian playwrights, in particular, have utilised the genre to attack oppressive norms, and to support more beneficial social beliefs. Therefore, drama has expanded from simply entertain to become an essential instrument for communication, building consciousness and driving social change. As Sola Adeyemi suggests that modern African drama is used in raising questions about historical wrong doings to guide towards the generation of a new vision of societal regeneration (41). Thus, theatre has the responsibility of investigating the incongruities in the society. It is within this framework that we find the play *Something to Die For* by S.N.A. Agoro. In this drama, we are faced with a powerful portrayal of the clashes between traditional societal norms and modern concepts of humanity, love, and justice. The protagonist in this drama is Tokieme, who defied tradition and married Asueme. Asueme is looked down upon due to the family's lineage. The playwright thus questions the validity of such cultural traditions and suggests that individuals, based on their conscience and courage, have the power to oppose societal prejudice. *Something to Die For* is more than just a narrative of a relationship; it is a profound conversation about social reform and the place of individuals in it. Studies exploring the nexus between drama and social change or the social role of African drama abound, but scholarly attention paid to S.N.A. Agoro's play has been negligible. This is largely due to the work being viewed as merely an attempt to produce a play that confronts cultural exclusion, with most analyses being focused more on the role of the theatrical medium in general or the nature of social change itself rather than on how Agoro employs dramatic means to facilitate concepts such as resistance, reform and inclusiveness. Bamidele Francis Afolayan for instance analyses how Osofisan employed theatre as a medium of social transformation yet uses different analytical tools when analysing the plays of Agoro (67). Therefore, this article engages with a textual analysis of *Something to Die For* by S.N.A. Agoro. It will attempt to offer a critical appraisal of the role of drama as a tool for the stimulation of change within society and will explore how through the dramatic elements such as characterisation, conflict, language and action Agoro subverts exclusionary cultural norms and advocates for an all-inclusive, humane society. This paper seeks to augment the present body of African literature through an examination of Agoro's creative contribution to utilising dramatic literature as both a reflection of and an agent for societal change.

Literature Review

There is hardly another genre of literature in which, like drama, the reality of human existence can be brought back to life by action, movement, conversation, dispute, and portrayal. Drama brings the realities of the human world, the contradiction of societies, and cultural truths to the audience with an immediacy no other genre can offer since drama- unlike others which rely solely on narration-offers us human existence on the move and in being. And because of this



attribute, drama is now an important genre and one of the many instruments for cultural as well as political change; an educator of sorts. Indeed, the primacy of action has often been highlighted in the discourse of the genre. According to Emeka Nwabueze, “drama is a form of literature that presents human life in action as characters speak the words and take the actions which are intended to portray this action. Drama is a genre which is produced and enjoyed by a communal performance on a stage” (15). Correspondingly, Juliana Okoh states that “drama” is derived from the Greek word “dran”, which means “to do”, or “to act”. Thus, the emphasis has been placed on the idea that for literature to be considered dramatic, it has to contain an element of action; that it has to do with how humans behave, act, think, talk as well as interacts.” (25). The concept conveyed by drama is that life is realised through the depiction of action. This idea has since been reaffirmed, further solidifying the role of drama as a catalyst for critical thinking among audience members.

More so, the representation of human conflict has also led many literary critics to argue in favour of the act as being crucial for drama. According to John Gassner who quotes Ferdinand Brunetiere, “Drama...is an art form representing the spectacle of man against himself and against the forces outside of him-nature, institutions, society-and the limitations of the individual himself” (16). “The spectacle” for Robert Cohen “is of human action; it is of human action on the move in real time and space...” and hence as such “is nothing else than an action on the move; that it occurs at real place and at a real time; that it comes into being through speech and gestures and motions. In short it is human behaviour on a stage in a specific, and unrepeatable moment of time....” (29). It is clear therefore, that there has been consensus amongst literary scholars that drama essentially depicts or represents human beings locked in a state of tension. The relationship between drama and society extends beyond artistic representation. Clive Krama Ilami says that “drama draws its sustenance from society and the raw materials used in its creation are nothing other than human interaction with the environment, be it natural, cultural or spiritual before being transformed artistically in production.” (18). Therefore, it is no wonder that this genre continues to be one of the most formidable medium to critique social injustice and to instill in its audiences and readers the imperative for social and cultural transformation. For instance, contemporary theatre scholars have developed this perspective, highlighting drama's potential as a catalyst for change. According to Augusto Boal, the role of theatre is not to imitate society but rather "to help to free them from the chains of oppression and participate actively in society's reconstruction" (122). In this respect, Sola Adeyemi explains that modern African drama has been "a nexus where historical experiences, political realities, and cultural aspiration intersect to produce and disseminate consciousness, promoting social reform" (41). Rather than simply treating social issues as given, African dramatists, through their use of conflict, tend to question injustices and propose alternatives to social ills.

The African Literary Tradition has historically employed drama as an agent for social change. According to Femi Osofisan, African Theatre should bear an ethical mandate: to question society and to encourage spectators to actively engage in addressing its problems and in challenging the social, political, and cultural contradictions it presents (5). Therefore, playwrights in Nigeria tackle such social issues like corruption, sex discrimination, ethnic discrimination, environmental issues, oppression, social justice etc., and portray dramatic literature as an instrument of social consciousness and reform. Thus, in the broadest sense of the word, drama may be defined not just as artistic product but as an active social and political instrument for discussion and action in society. If entertainment is the immediate purpose, it is not an end in itself but is rather a tool for challenging oppression, exploring assumptions, engaging public opinion, and facilitating change. This conception of drama may therefore help us contextualise S.N.A Agoro's *Something to Die For* in terms of its use of conflict to critique social discrimination and advocate for reform. It suggests that drama does not stand apart from society.



Drama and society have a symbiotic relationship that affects each other in different directions. The relationship between the social world, on one hand and drama, on the other is dynamic and reciprocal. The playwright plays the central role in this interrelation. "The play-writer is thus the original innovator of the play" and, as Robert Cohen contends, the playwright's vision forms the blueprint upon which all dramatic performance relies" (381). But although drama must become a collaborative performance experience, involving directors, designers, actors, and the audience, the dramatist still remains the ultimate 'ideas man whose conception of the world can dictate the direction in which the play can take. By occupation, thus, the playwright enjoys a strategically situated role within society. According to Clive Krama Ilami, drama "can serve as a historical record for a people, at the same time as it can act to shape public consciousness and encourage public action". Ilami also maintains that "the dramatist acts as a change-agent whose duty is not only to entertain but to influence the public attitude, social values and behavioural pattern of a society" (41). Such a feat would surely necessitate an in-depth understanding of the society in question since effective societal intervention can only proceed from an accurate reading of culture. As Ilami also asserts: "the person who attempts to influence society without adequate understanding of the social processes may produce artistic works that are of no immediate value to society" (41-42).

This concept of the dramatist as social-reformer continues to be very dominant in African dramatic practice, as almost every play-writer in the continent has over the years used the stage to confront political, ethnic and economic discrimination, cultural oppression and the like. Victor Akande observes that "In the face of hostile socio-political environment, it had always been possible for dramatists and theatre activists to use theatre for self-expression, affirmation, and liberation" of oppressed peoples. David Boles argues that "The playwright can best contribute to the welfare of the human race when he has the wisdom to employ the drama to advance justice, moral responsibility, and public conscience" (1). It is indeed clear how drama helps us to re-imagine the society we live in and indeed to reshape attitudes towards social injustices, especially African drama in which this concept has become part and parcel of the dramatic practice. Many Nigerian dramatists like Hubert Ogunde, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Tess Onwueme, Kenneth Eni and several others, using their creative talents, have taken a hard look at corruption, political power struggle, ethnic discrimination and conflicts, social and political oppression, gender injustices, cultural stereotypes and so forth through their dramatic productions. As Sola Adeyemi argues: "Contemporary African theatre remains a vital space to negotiate with histories, politics, and cultures in search of socio-political transformation" (47).

The tradition of Niger Delta Literature is also aligned with this focus. The original study showed that dramatists and authors including Saro-Wiwa, Gabriel Okara, J P. Clark, Barclay Ayakoroma, Akpos Adesi, and Ben Binebai have been very consistent in highlighting the environmental devastation, marginalisation, exploitation and pursuit of equity that characterises the Niger Delta. Their works often have informed public debates regarding resource control, environmental issues and the region's political and social experiences. These examples indeed show that African dramatists do not just record the social experiences of their societies; they play active roles in directing the ethical and political dialogues about societal development. Contemporary research corroborates this study. Olu Obafemi opines that contemporary Nigerian theatre continues to be an instrument of social reconstruction in that it encourages audiences to question received ideational frameworks and to contemplate alternatives for a fairer society (214). Similar views were expressed by J. Plastow: African performance traditions continue to be popular for their capacity to involve the community in debate about social justice, democracy and cultural change (96). It shows that society needs theatre to communicate its continuing processes of change and struggle, as well



as its potential changes of outlook. Thus, a social exchange exists between society and the dramatist where the former provides content in the form of social issues and cultural narratives which then inform the creative and aesthetic processes in the drama and the latter gives society back the mirror in which the social conditions, values and culture are displayed, interpreted and often questioned or challenged. The dramatist thus functions as a publicist, not simply as entertainer but as moral commentator, philosopher and promoter of social justice. The work under study belongs to this tradition, whereby dramatic action is used to subvert discriminatory customs in favour of a better and a more enlightened social order.

Theoretical Framework

This work relies on the concept of functionalism which is a type of theoretical perspectives that uses the society to study as an integrated whole made up of many interacting institutions, rules, laws, values and culture which collectively maintain the society. Functionalism asserts that within any society, various interrelated parts or segments function for the persistence of the social system and similarly each social institution such as the family, religion, laws, political and culture operate to contribute towards maintaining equilibrium in the social system. In the event that any particular institution or element of culture ceases to be conducive to the well-being of the collective and begin to impose discriminatory or conflict generating effects on the collective and create instability, then such institution is termed nonfunctional. The intellectual heritage of the theory of functionalism can be trace in the works of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, whose analysis of social solidarity emphasizes the importance of collective sentiments, beliefs and the role of institutions in fostering social integration (38-45). According to Durkheim, society is far more than mere aggregations of individuals, for society is composed of its own unique qualities, such as a 'collective conscience', that act on individuals and integrate them (79). Traditions, customs and the norms of the group have the social function to fulfill and once they cease to be useful to society, then it is a matter of time before they are discarded (102). With the increasing progress of a society, some traditions could create hindrance to its development, hence they could become subject of reformulation for the maintenance of social equilibrium.

Parsonian system approach builds upon the basic assumption by Durkheim where in an auto regulating social system all social institutions fulfil a certain role towards establishing continuity, order and equilibrium. He states that any social system must perform four essential functional prerequisites: adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and latent-pattern-maintenance (or common-culture) that are generally summarised as the AGIL paradigm (26-36). In this context, Culture should act as a contributing factor to attain harmonious balance and social integration. When such culture starts generating exclusion, inequity or conflict then they cease to perform their integrative role and thereby make for destabilisation of the entire social system thereby rendering necessary an adjustment in to regain stability (79-88). This idea has since been greatly developed by Robert K. Merton in his creation of concepts of 'manifest functions,' 'latent functions,' and 'dysfunctions.' According to Merton, 'manifest functions' are the intended and recognised effects of social institutions, while 'latent functions' are the unplanned or less visible consequences that occur as a result of social action (73-76). More importantly, in terms of this essay, Merton points out that the functioning of any particular institution or tradition might develop into a dysfunction, thus becoming detrimental to the stability and development of society rather than contributing towards them (105). This refinement of functionalism does not align with prior functionalist beliefs that all components of society must be conducive to societal stability, but acknowledges that traditions may, as a consequence, support the subjugation of some against others. Functionalism is a theory which



is particularly relevant within the scope of literature and culture because of the nature of literature and the portrayal of interactions between individual and social institutions which govern their being.

Literature is a medium for which to both highlight the strengths and shortcomings of the social structure, and it serves to encourage us to scrutinise beliefs, customs, and institutions which might support or inhibit the development of a society. In other words, literature is not just enjoyable; it is a means of social analysis and deliberation in respect of what may need to change within it. The structure of dramatic literature in particular lends itself to analysis as it very much centres on the conflicts between tradition and change. However, in spite of the useful applications of Functionalist Theory, it is not immune from critique. This theory has been denounced for overemphasising social equilibrium and paying too little attention to the significance of struggle, conflict, and power relations as forces for social change. The assumption of the theory that social institutions serve beneficial roles overlooks how dominant classes might maintain exploitative arrangements through traditions and culture. Also, it suggests a rather passive model of social change in which it tends to happen in gradual evolutionary shifts, whereas in reality significant changes occur as a result of conflict and struggle. Fortunately, Merton's idea of a 'dysfunction' directly deals with such concerns by explaining that some functions may cease to operate for a period, thereby creating a need for social adjustment (117-121).

The Functionalist perspective offers a useful framework for analysing this research because *Something to Die For* inherently concerns itself with the link between cultural traditions and social integration in the Epie community in Bayelsa State. Even though discrimination by branding members of leprous parentage may have, for all intent and purpose, served specific roles and objectives at some point in the history of the community, in the form it is depicted in Agoro's work, the tradition had become dysfunctional since it engenders discrimination, stigmatisation, sorrow, anguish and oppression of all forms. In essence, it is counter-productive in terms of building communal bonds of friendship and love as it generates division, antipathy and undue strife between communities and individuals alike. The plays highlight in the characters of Tokieme and Asueme that indeed, social institutions are established to promote the welfare of society, rather than become instrument of social tyranny. In it are portrayed how such elements as love, justice, bravery, commitment to moral conviction, are used to break down the walls of unjust and outdated traditional structures. Therefore, the dramatic conflict herein is not against culture, but against some elements of the culture which are now in direct contravention to societal harmony. From Functionalist's viewpoint, Tokieme's quest to reject and break these discriminative traditions should be seen as an attempt to regain a harmonious socio-religious state. Thus, Functionalism provides a viable framework for interpreting the effectiveness of drama as a vehicle of social reform, and to ascertain as to what extent does Agoro use such dramatic elements as character, dialogue, plot development, conflict to denude these maladaptive and counter-product of cultural heritage, and propagate alternatives that foster unity, fairness, integration and harmonious community development. Hence, Functionalism would buttress the research statement of the study that drama offers an array of aesthetic benefits as well as functional contributions through the instigation of social conscience with respect to the necessity of adaptation for future societal progress.

Methodology

Qualitative research was applied in this study to investigate how drama works as a means of social change through a critical study of S.N.A. Agoro's *Something to Die For*. In this regard, qualitative research is ideal for literary research since it enables one to conduct a detailed analysis of texts, characters, theme, language, and society. The study was therefore interpretive and analytical, involving an investigation of the meanings that lie within the drama text and how they



can help in the social transformation. The primary data in this study came from S.N.A. Agoro's *Something to Die For*, and this forms the main text to be analysed. However, secondary data were sourced from academic books, journals, conference proceedings, among others, relating to drama, African literature, social change, and functionalism theory. The data in this study are derived from documentary research, in which there was an intensive scrutiny of the text and any other relevant documents. This process involved close observation of episodes, characters, dialogues, conflicts, and dramatised actions that show the connection between cultural practice and social transformation. The relevant scholarly literature on the topic was also reviewed in order to obtain information about different views regarding drama as a form of criticising society. This information also helped to pinpoint the research gap that this study seeks to fill. The data were analysed through qualitative textual analysis that was informed by the tenets of functionalism theory. This analysis was aimed at how Agoro uses dramatic characterisation, dialogue, story development, and conflicts to critique cultural practices that have become dysfunctional in Epie and calls for their transformation for the sake of justice, social cohesion, and humanity. Functionalism was used as an analytical tool in determining to what extent this play represents how drama can be used to question social tradition and restore the social equilibrium through positive social transformation. Thus, this study made use of interpretative approach in which the text analysis of the play is blended with Functionalist Theory and literature.

Presentation of Data, Analysis and Discussion on *Something to Die For*

Synopsis of the Play

Something to Die For is a five-scene drama written by S.N.A. Agoro which captures the tension between cultural values and the current concepts of justice, equality and inclusiveness in the Epie society of Bayelsa State. In this play, the protagonist, Tokieme, is the only son of Enimotor and Bisi. Tokieme is emotionally distraught because of the continuous rejection by several women whom he wishes to marry. This psychological distress makes him commit suicide through drug abuse, taking an overdose of heroin, hence getting hospitalised. After recovering, Tokieme is visited by his friend, Sopupu, who advises him against the act of committing suicide no matter what happens in life. In the process of counselling, Tokieme reveals the painful experience that caused him to commit such an act: the rejection from Nimi, a receptionist at his former workplace, and Bonze. After his return home, Tokieme communicates his parents his plan to reconstruct his life and move to Abuja for the continuation of his legal career. Whereas his mother, Bisi, approves of his choice, she demands that he marries a worthy wife before venturing to follow the plan. However, three months later, Tokieme makes public his new plans of love, informing his parents that he has fallen in love with a girl named Asueme from a family whose reputation is tainted by the leprous genetic factor in the family. It is at this point that the major conflict in the drama story emerges since marriage in this family is taboo and attracts stigma in Epie community. Even though the family members and friends warn him about the cultural implications of marrying Asueme, Tokieme does not back down. Asueme herself becomes worried about the stigma he might receive as a result, but Tokieme believes that love, justice, and respect for human dignity are worth more than observing an unjust culture. This is achieved through the marriage between Tokieme and Asueme. This is an action that helps to end the discriminatory practice in place for a very long time. This practice discriminated against people who were from families that suffered from the leprosy disease. The marriage symbolises victory for love over the discriminatory act and also serves as an example of people fighting against the bad cultural practices just like other social discriminations. Some examples of such discriminations include the Osu system in southeastern Nigeria.



Major Characters

The dramatic action revolves around five principal characters whose interactions collectively advance the playwright's message of social transformation.

Tokieme is the protagonist and the principal agent of change in the play. A trained lawyer and the only child of Enimotor and Bisi, he experiences emotional trauma resulting from repeated rejection in his search for love. His eventual relationship with Asueme transforms him from a victim of personal despair into a courageous advocate for social justice. By choosing to marry a woman rejected by society because of her ancestral background, Tokieme challenges an oppressive cultural institution and demonstrates that love and justice should prevail over discriminatory traditions.

Enimotor, Tokieme's father, is a Chief Superintendent of Police who embodies the tension between cultural conservatism and parental compassion. Although he initially opposes his son's decision because of its cultural implications, his eventual acceptance of the marriage illustrates the possibility of attitudinal change when traditional values conflict with justice, humanity, and family bonds.

Bisi, the wife of Enimotor and mother of Tokieme, represents maternal compassion and emotional stability. Throughout the play, she consistently supports her son, encourages his emotional recovery, and ultimately accepts his decision to marry Asueme. Her character demonstrates the importance of empathy and family support in overcoming social prejudice.

Asueme serves as the symbol of marginalised individuals within society. Although she belongs to a lineage stigmatised by traditional beliefs, she is portrayed as compassionate, loving, and morally upright. Her relationship with Tokieme exposes the irrationality of judging individuals based on inherited social labels rather than personal character and integrity.

Sopupu functions as the voice of friendship, reason, and encouragement. His intervention following Tokieme's suicide attempt prevents further self-destructive behaviour and reinforces the importance of hope, resilience, and emotional support during periods of personal crisis. Although his role is comparatively limited, he contributes significantly to the moral development of the protagonist.

Dysfunctional Tradition as the Source of Social Conflict: Tokieme's Ordeals in *Something to Die For*

The main problematic presented in S.N.A Agoro's novel *Something to Die For* revolves around the experiences of Tokieme; Agoro's protagonist, through whom he explores the impact of deeply embedded cultural patterns that no longer function properly in present day society. Similar to Oedipus of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Odewale of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to blame*, Tokieme commands the play's dramatic centre, as virtually every significant occurrence relates to his personal trials. Conversely to the ancient tragic hero who undergoes suffering and ultimately experiences irreparable collapse, Tokieme undergoes similar suffering, but achieves instead social awareness, personal and individual satisfaction and the necessary cultural transformation. In this regard, Agoro, unlike the conventional tragic archetype, utilises suffering to bring about a positive change within the society, instead of unavoidable destruction. From a functionalist standpoint, Tokieme's ordeal cannot simply be interpreted as unfortunate for him as an individual, but rather as a manifestation of the breakdown of dysfunctional social institutions which do not facilitate well-being for the overall society. In his essay on social theory, Robert K. Merton notes how institutions function in an adverse way when 'they no longer have, or at any rate no longer have primarily, functional relevance to social stability but produce unintended side effects that are considered



dysfunctional for the system as a whole (11). Agoro's use of Tokieme's personal struggle serves to showcase the detrimental effects of ancient traditions that can cause individuals social anguish and oppression, rather than communal harmony.

Tokieme's predicament is initiated at his family level, he is the only child of Enimotor and Bisi, whose status as a sole child turns into a problem, in the course of finding a wife. The realisation in his father's speech highlights the effect of the society in the relationships of an individual:

Enimotor: *If Toky's problem is that of being rejected then he made a big mistake. He was really bigoted to think that every woman would accept him. After all, what can he really be proud of, frankly speaking, he has many factors to his disadvantage.*

Bisi: *Factors such as what and what?*

Enimotor: *His parentage. Don't forget he is an only child. Some ladies would like to be married in families where there are other sons and daughters so that their children would have uncles and aunts.*

Bisi: *That's true.*

Enimotor: *After all, who would like to marry a police officer's child? (6)*

This dialogue demonstrates that Tokieme's suffering originates not from any personal deficiency but from social perceptions over which he has little control. His status as an only child and the son of a police officer becomes a basis upon which others evaluate his suitability for marriage. From the perspective of Functionalist Theory, marriage is expected to strengthen family relationships and promote social integration. Ironically, the same institution becomes an avenue through which arbitrary social assumptions produce exclusion and emotional distress. What should ordinarily facilitate social cohesion instead generates alienation, illustrating the dysfunction of societal expectations that privilege family structure over individual character. An even more significant ordeal confronting Tokieme is his repeated rejection by women, an experience that gradually erodes his emotional stability. During his conversation with Sopupu, he expresses profound frustration over the persistent disappointments that have characterised his search for love:

Tokieme: *Do you think I have not seen enough rejection already...? (12)*

This brief but emotionally charged statement encapsulates the cumulative psychological burden that rejection has imposed upon him. Unlike Tokieme, however, Sopupu interprets rejection from a developmental perspective rather than a destructive one:

Sopupu: *I think you should still be rejected by many more girls...*

Tokieme: *You don't mean that as a serious prayer, do you?*

Sopupu: *Seriously, sir, I'd prayed with all the seriousness that I could muster.*

Tokieme: *Why, if I may ask?*

Sopupu: *Just to make you grow up... (12)*

The contrasting perspectives of the two characters deepen the dramatic conflict. Whereas Sopupu views rejection as a process of emotional maturity, Tokieme experiences it as a devastating assault on his self-worth. Agoro thereby reveals the subjective nature of human suffering while emphasising the devastating psychological consequences of persistent social exclusion. Tokieme



further recounts his painful experience with Nimi, a receptionist at Makies Chambers, whose apparent affection eventually culminates in unexplained rejection:

Tokieme: *She raised my hopes only to dash them completely... I couldn't believe myself when Nimi told me that she wouldn't marry me.*

Sopupu: *Did she give any reason?*

Tokieme: *She gave me no reasons at all... (14)*

The absence of any explanation intensifies the emotional impact of the rejection. Agoro deliberately withholds a rational justification in order to emphasise the arbitrary nature of human prejudice. Tokieme's subsequent rejection by Bonze reinforces the recurring pattern of disappointment that defines his emotional life. Reflecting upon these experiences, he attempts to rationalise his suffering:

Tokieme: *Sometimes I think I am paying for refusing to acknowledge the love girls earlier had for me... (16)*

In the context of this self-reflection, we find an illustration of the process by which the victim is made to experience the sting of guilt in spite of situations resulting from outside causes. Rather than coming to terms with the capriciousness of social relationships, Tokieme views his trauma as a moral condemnation. His resultant distress culminates in substance abuse and suicide attempts and escalates the already severe consequence of emotional denial. Seen through the lens of the functional theory of society, the suicide attempt signals the failure of existing social institutions to provide adequate warmth and support. Family, friends, and communal solidarity all prove insufficient against the forces driving Tokieme toward utter despair. Taking his concerns beyond individual mishap, Agoro thus exposes society's fundamental failings. The tragic irony of his story, is that it is only in a hospital ward for the consequence of his suicidal attempt that Tokieme at last finds both Asueme and recognition, the very thing that society rejected him for, thus presenting a new set of trials for his devotion: now, he is spurned by the world that denied him comfort in the first place, for the failure of that world to afford him comfort when it had the opportunity.

Sopupu warns him of the implications of this decision:

Sopupu: *if you marry this girl, you will be estranging yourself from the entire community...*

Tokieme's response reveals both his emotional exhaustion and moral conviction:

Tokieme: *Why must it always be so with me? I was worthless, so I engaged in drugs. Now I have been accepted by a lady and you are suggesting that marrying her would mean my estrangement from our small local community. (29)*

The conflict reaches its deepest moral expression when Asueme herself attempts to persuade Tokieme to reconsider his decision because of the severe consequences awaiting him and their future children:

Asueme: *Toky, do you think it is all worth the pains? Must you really become estranged from your parents and the entire Epie community because you want to marry me?*

Asueme: *None of your children would ever be allowed to marry from the clan.*

Asueme: *They are excluded from all traditional titles.*



Tokieme: *I have thought about all the things you have said and all the things you will ever ask. (32)*

Through this interaction, it becomes evident that the main conflict of the story involves much more than romantic involvement. Agoro brings to light a cultural practice, which has been having negative ramifications through the generations and that influences marriage, politics, social acceptance, and collective identity. In terms of functionalism, this kind of tradition cannot be seen as being socially valuable anymore since it causes disintegration rather than maintaining what it was supposed to maintain from the very beginning. Instead of uniting, this cultural practice causes exclusion, fear, and oppression. Overall, the biggest test that Tokieme has had to undergo has nothing to do with the rejection by the women, drugs, or even with the threat of being excluded by the community. The biggest test Tokieme has had to undergo is facing a cultural practice that requires sacrificing justice and humanity in the name of tradition. In choosing love and moral stand over tradition and communal acceptance, Tokieme has become the dramatisation tool that Agoro uses to call for change in dysfunctional social practices.

Characterisation as an Instrument of Social Reform

The play uses “characterisation” as one of the major Dramatic Devices to promote social reform, a role S.N.A Agoro successfully adopts in his play *Something to Die For*. Characterisation is used by the author to expose the clash between conservative culture and the call for reform by allowing the characters to stand as representatives of varying ideological stance on matters of traditions, justice, love and social obligation; in place of them just participating in the events in the play. Thus, “characterisation” stands out as the most significant device used to drive home the playwright’s quest to dismantle some destructive traditions. According to Functionalist theory, society requires all individuals within it to play their designated role, which must either promote stability or promote instability in a social setting. Therefore, individuals who refuse to deviate from harmful norms would indirectly aid to maintaining a society that has become dysfunctional. Whereas an individual that actively fights against some “old and redundant” structures will bring about some semblance of “health” back to the society. With this understanding, let us examine how the main characters in *Something to Die For* fit in with the functionalist’s description of societal members: -Tokieme;

Asueme: *Toky, do you think it is all worth the pains? Must you really become estranged from your parents and the entire Epie community because you want to marry me?*

Tokieme: *I have thought about all the things you have said and all the things you will ever ask. (32)*

This response demonstrates that Tokieme's decision is neither impulsive nor emotionally driven. Rather, it is a deliberate moral choice grounded in his conviction that justice should prevail over inherited prejudice. Through this characterisation, Agoro suggests that meaningful social change often begins with individuals who are prepared to sacrifice personal comfort in pursuit of collective justice. Within Functionalist Theory, Tokieme becomes the catalyst through which society confronts and eventually reforms a dysfunctional institution. Closely connected to Tokieme's transformative role is the characterisation of Asueme. Although she belongs to a family stigmatised because of its association with a leprous lineage, Agoro deliberately portrays her as compassionate, humble, emotionally mature, and morally upright. Her characterisation directly contradicts the assumptions upon which the discriminatory tradition is built. Rather than depicting her as socially undesirable, the playwright presents her as possessing the very qualities expected of



a responsible wife and member of society. Equally significant is Asueme's awareness of the enormous sacrifice demanded of Tokieme. Instead of encouraging him to disregard the consequences, she repeatedly reminds him of the social cost of marrying her. She understands that their marriage would affect not only themselves but also future generations. This self-awareness strengthens her moral credibility and prevents her from appearing selfish or manipulative. Instead, she becomes a symbol of countless innocent individuals whose opportunities are limited by inherited social labels rather than personal conduct.

Enimotor's story reveals a third major facet of Agoro's portrayal of human character. He cherishes his son; he is nevertheless in the position of custodian of traditional values and so initially finds he cannot accept Tokieme's decision. His moral predicament represents the paradox that faces many African cultures—that of preserving traditional value systems with the modern, emerging values of fairness and equity. Agoro has not depicted Enimotor as inherently wicked nor has he presented him as a blind apologist of suffering. Enimotor is depicted as the “ordinary individual” caught in a cross-fire of old ideals versus fatherly love and moral obligations. His eventual approval of the marriage is critical; it represents hope for societal change without abandoning culture itself. The theory of functionalism states that any social institution, if it is to continue to function, must constantly be adapted to changing conditions; hence, Enimotor's eventual approval signifies adaptive transformation and not the total disintegration of the culture. The society can afford to forsake injustice and not commit social suicide; indeed, by doing so, it will strengthen its own morals, and Agoro suggests as much in the play.

This transformation process is rounded out by the role of Bisi, which constantly manifests the maternal, emotional aspects of life; above and beyond cultural dictates. She constantly considers her son's happiness and well-being first, in all his decisions and her ready willingness to assist him signifies the understanding that real security in a family comes from love, understanding and compassion rather than adherence to mere traditional values, therefore Bisi acts as the nexus between tradition and new development. Sopupu offers support in another form as moral and emotional. As a confidant and friend of Tokieme, his efforts to dissuade Tokieme from completely surrendering to depression helps him see the possibility of an alternative route; and the very warning which he offers against the idea of Tokieme's going ahead with the marriage is, rather than stemming from an inherent hatred for change, from the honest desire to protect a loved one against hardship. Therefore, meaningful consultation, encouragement and emotional support serve as necessary components of change. Individually, the characters reveal Agoro's insightful conception of social change as a protracted, nonviolent struggle that takes place through processes of conflict, compromise, persuasion and subsequent readjustment of cultural institutions. No single protagonist causes the alteration of the society; instead, each acts as a catalyst to illuminate the inadequacies of a stagnant cultural convention. Through the interactions of this assortment of characters, Agoro makes clear that social change is attained not by physical force or constraint, but by the courage of one's conscience, tenderness of heart, the ability to speak and debate and the readiness to defy inherited presumptions. Therefore, characterisation in *Something to Die For* does not solely perform its role in creating vivid dramatic personalities; rather, Agoro metamorphoses the characters into embodiments of antagonistic social ideologies, thereby affording the spectators a clear perspective into the ideological battleground on which prejudices and inclusive values, exclusion and acceptance, old traditions and social reform are clashing. Seen from the point of view of the Functionalist theory of sociology, the play presents society's perpetuation through adjustments of cultural traditions in accordance with contemporary social contexts rather than a dogmatic reverence of established practices. Consequently, the playwright's utilisation of characterisation serves as a crucial avenue in conveying Agoro's vision for a just and humane social order.



Love, Acceptance, and the Transformation of Social Values

In *Something to Die For*, the main agent of change is love. It is conceived not just as an intimate interpersonal relationship between two people but as a social ideal through which the forces of oppression are combated and ancient, oppressive cultures replaced by modern, equitable traditions and societal norms. Love is seen throughout the drama as a force by which ingrained cultural prejudices are shattered, hence revealing drama as a social change agent. In essence, the role of love in the drama goes beyond a romantic rendezvous; it is, rather, the bedrock upon which the play's idea of a decent, just society is anchored. Social institutions are believed to be crucial in maintaining societal integrity, cohesion and harmony according to the functional theory, marriage plays a significant societal role in binding together a family unit, as a mechanism for social integration, and perpetuating cultural transmission. However, in a situation where cultural values create restrictions and boundaries which deprive people of the right to contract marital bonds based on inheritance/family origin, these values are no longer functioning as cohesive forces but are divisive forces and sources of social fragmentation. It is precisely this disparity that S.N.A Agoro exploits by foregrounding the love story of Tokieme and Asueme in the play. The emotional development of Tokieme is clear evidence of the centrality of search for love in building the foundation of the play's conflict.

The frustration he experiences from constant rejections by ladies prior to meeting with Asueme affects his entire psychological makeup leading to great instability in his relationships, the erosion of self-esteem, addiction to drugs and eventually a suicide attempt. Thus, the play illustrates that emotional integration is a basic requirement for human beings which can be psychologically damaging when not met. Ironically, the same hospital where Tokieme undergoes rehabilitation becomes the place where he encounters Asueme, whose compassion and acceptance transform his outlook on life. Agoro deliberately juxtaposes despair with hope, suggesting that genuine human affection possesses the power to restore psychological balance where social rejection has produced emotional collapse. In this respect, Asueme represents not merely a romantic partner but a source of emotional healing and personal renewal. The irony that defines the central conflict of the play lies in the fact that the very relationship that rescues Tokieme from self-destruction simultaneously exposes him to another form of social rejection. Having finally discovered genuine love, he is confronted by a cultural institution that condemns his choice solely because Asueme belongs to a family historically associated with a leprous lineage. The conflict therefore shifts from the private sphere of personal relationships to the public sphere of communal values, where individual happiness becomes subordinated to inherited cultural prejudice.

This contradiction is vividly expressed when Sopupu cautions Tokieme about the consequences of marrying Asueme:

Sopupu: *if you marry this girl, you will be estranging yourself from the entire community...*

In response, Tokieme declares:

Tokieme: *Why must it always be so with me? I was worthless, so I engaged in drugs. Now I have been accepted by a lady and you are suggesting that marrying her would mean my estrangement from our small local community. (29)*

This exchange captures the fundamental irony of the play. The society that failed to protect Tokieme during his emotional crisis now seeks to punish him for embracing the very relationship that restored his sense of purpose. Agoro thereby questions the moral legitimacy of cultural practices that frustrate rather than facilitate human fulfilment. The emotional intensity of the



conflict deepens when Asueme herself expresses concern over the consequences of their relationship. Rather than encouraging Tokieme to ignore tradition, she reminds him of the sacrifices their union will require:

Asueme: *Toky, do you think it is all worth the pains? Must you really become estranged from your parents and the entire Epie community because you want to marry me?*

Asueme: *None of your children would ever be allowed to marry from the clan.*

Asueme: *You wouldn't win any elections in the clan.*

Asueme: *Our children wouldn't be admitted into any respectable society in the land. They are excluded from all traditional titles.*

Tokieme: *I have thought about all the things you have said and all the things you will ever ask. (32)*

The conversation also proves that the love between Tokieme and Asueme is more than an expression of personal attraction, but also one concerned with social issues like membership of the society, ancestry, possession of property and integration in it. The couple's proposal of marriage seems like a call for reform, not just of their own immediate relationship but also of one cultural norm that outlaws not only a contemporary alliance but also future generations of the lovers and any posterity of their union. Functionalists say that if an institution leads to such wholesale marginalisation of the entire people, it becomes dysfunctional because rather than enhance the group solidarity which is essential for the society to function as a cohesive unit, it destroys it. Hence, Agoro presents love as a tool which, being a moral instrument, can expose the futility of an uncritical application of acquired prejudice. Tokieme chooses Asueme as a life-partner not in the spirit of revolt against convention for its own sake but out of a conviction that true humanity is inimical with entrenched segregation. That he goes ahead to defy the negative consequence illustrates the superiority of justice and love over culture in any community's continued existence. Love is seen as being all-conquering in the face of all oppositions as can be inferred from the changing of the Enimotor's heart towards the pair at the end of the work. The re-conversion to positive opinion towards the lovers on the part of Enimotor means more than parental concession or forgiveness, but the beginning of the re-definition of the societal values in the face of emerging ethical paradigms.

Unlike the argument that culture must necessarily be destroyed to reform the society, Agoro shows that culture itself can be transformed through positive human values such as love, compassion, and justice. As a result of this development, love functions as a catalyst that enables society to move from a system of rejection and discrimination to one of acceptance and integration. The lessons derived from this play have also wider contemporary relevance, especially for present-day African societies where some traditional practices continue to perpetuate discrimination and social exclusion. The suffering of Asueme at the hands of the Epie community can be likened to the experiences of many individuals across Africa who continue to face rejection because of their lineage, ancestry, or circumstances of birth. By presenting love as a force for social transformation through the relationship between Tokieme and Asueme, Agoro suggests that genuine development can only be achieved when individuals are judged by their character and personal merit rather than by inherited social labels.



Dramatic Conflict and the Restoration of Social Equilibrium

In conflict lie the foundations for the dramatic structure that *Something to Die For* is built on. Far from being solely an avenue for suspense Agoro uses drama conflict as a tool to show the contradictions present within traditional societal institutions and to show the inevitability of cultural change. In the case of this play, the play has demonstrated the truth of this point by revealing that society is not held together in lasting stability by the continued existence of customs and traditions that create injustices. Instead, society is brought to equilibrium when its members have the ability to revise existing traditions that are no longer serving a societal purpose. This transformation of conflict into stability represents the Functionalist assumption of that societal systems are held together by continual adaptation to change rather than the rigid retention of traditional elements and procedures. In the early development of the play, the Epie community appears to be a unified society with well-established customs that have stood the test of time but it soon becomes apparent that certain traditional practices that exist within the society do, in fact contain their contradictions and create social tensions. For example, the community adheres strongly to the practice of ostracising people of families affected with leprosy, which would have originally been designed to contain possible disease transmission has in time come to be a discriminatory practice. By creating a protagonist such as Tokieme to be the carrier of such contradiction, Agoro is also showing the struggle against cultural oppression, the pursuit of an individual's personal happiness leads into a struggle that takes on a social aspect where individuals must question the validity of an institution that denies individuals fundamental rights on the basis of the actions of their ancestors. Thus, the conflict becomes that of justice vs tradition.

The strength of this conflict is increased further by the very serious implications of his choice. Marriage to Asueme has implications that go far beyond the level of personal relationships. Asueme reminds him that:

Asueme: *None of your children would ever be allowed to marry from the clan.*

Asueme: *You wouldn't win any elections in the clan.*

Asueme: *Our children wouldn't be admitted into any respectable society in the land. They are excluded from all traditional titles.*

Tokieme: *I have thought about all the things you have said and all the things you will ever ask. (32)*

This legislation indicates the argument at hand is about belonging, inclusion in society and a fair and equal distribution between generations – rather than simple romantic love. By Agoro artificially expanding the meaning of this tradition he is able to further display the degree to which social inequalities permeate and mold society to a greater extent. If the argument from a functional perspective – that of the social stability of a society – it can be noted that a society where there are qualified members excluded would have detrimental impact. Surprisingly Agoro offers neither physical revenge nor revolutionary action as resolution but rather through peaceful persuasion, and in this case; moral persuasion. *Something to Die For* is a great play for a lack of violence. In many dramatic stories, there is the system that is dismantled through physicality of resistance; for, example if in the past system the father had refused permission, the son, Tokieme would have either had to resist by violence or run away. However, herein; rather than the breaking of a corrupt society there is the use of moral bravery, communication and compassion. Tokieme's will not give up his values for, of course Asueme as a husband also; whilst at the same time remaining non-hostile to his family and community demonstrates moral as opposed to destructive, action and suggests that society in the end can be changed through the force of conviction rather than aggression.



One clear way in which this transformation is made apparent can be seen through the father of Tokieme, Enimotor who represents the forces of tradition when his son proposes marriage and knows that it goes against the tradition within the culture. However, through love of his son he decides to go against what has become ingrained in his culture and grants them marriage. This act is more than simply that of a father; it symbolises an institutional change and an adaptation for Agoro, as a society will adapt its rules when its compassion guides its interpretation of tradition and culture. This change follows Talcott Parsons' Social theory which asserts that social order is not maintained by society rigidities but rather through an ability to adapt; maintaining stability in social systems by adjusting new realities to old values to preserve core necessities of societal viability. Agoro portrays this in so far as the renouncing of unjust practices doesn't leave the Epie people to disintegrate but, as mentioned; gives it greater moral legitimacy and cohesiveness. Therefore, the marriage of Asueme and Tokieme is the structural/ symbolic end of the play in as much as at a literal level it marks a harmonious union, it is in effect the symbol of justice triumphing over unfair inheritance, equality over inequality and an ethical society over a stagnant one. This then serves as the vehicle for Agoro's demonstration of the reconstructed stability of society.

The subsequent move of Tokieme and Asueme to Abuja once married can be considered as significant as Enimotor granting the marriage. For Abuja signifies more than the geographical point of their destination but rather it is the new possibilities the country has to offer outside of what had previously excluded people from having their rights and social participation dependent on their lineage. It suggests the new social possibility where individuals have their worth assessed on the qualities they have as opposed to who they are descended from; however, it does not, and rightly, suggest that such changes can only happen elsewhere and not from within tradition; Enimotor proves this point. Thus, in the broader context, not just of Nigerian societies but Africa at large; where we see numerous societies continuing to oppress based on lines of lineage, ethnicity, birth status, health, handicap etcetera; Agoro gives us hope that transformation through the dismantling of an oppressive regime can be done through the moral choices and the power of the heart rather than the strength of arms or the thirst of revenge. The restoration of balance in *Something to Die For* is thus not the denouncement of culture in its entirety but the rejection of the particular aspect of tradition that is a hindrance to societal welfare and, in view of the functionalist perspective the rejection of an institution that is undermining its ability to promote human welfare in both an individualistic as well as the wider societal context, the play shows us that the key to societal stability is not a preservation of cultural traditions for the sake of tradition, but the adaptation and reforming of those traditions.

Contemporary Relevance of *Something to Die For* as a Drama of Social Change

Beyond its dramatic narrative, *Something to Die For* functions as a profound social commentary on the persistence of discriminatory cultural practices within contemporary African societies. Although Agoro situates the action within the Epie community of Bayelsa State, the issues addressed in the play transcend geographical and ethnic boundaries. The playwright interrogates broader questions of social exclusion, inherited stigma, cultural identity, and human dignity that continue to shape social relationships across many African communities. Consequently, the play should not be read merely as the story of Tokieme and Asueme but as a dramatic intervention advocating the continuous reform of social institutions that undermine justice and collective well-being. One of the most significant contributions of the play lies in its critique of hereditary discrimination. The cultural prohibition against marrying individuals from leprous lineages symbolises a wider pattern of inherited social exclusion that persists in different forms across African societies. Similar practices can be observed in systems that stigmatise individuals on the



basis of ancestry, caste, disability, ethnicity, or family background rather than personal character and achievement. By exposing the irrationality of such practices, Agoro demonstrates that inherited identity should never determine an individual's social worth or access to opportunities.

In the Nigerian context, this play also rings particularly relevant where many communities, some still, are living with forms of caste based social marginalisation and seclusion. In fact, Agoro highlights this more widely issue by having Tokieme reflect hopefully on how the ostracism that has bedeviled the community in which his parents are from, the Epie community, would one day become obsolete as the *Osu* caste, that continues to be a blight on Igbo society, would, to this day, and forever, come to an end.

By thus linking the leprous ancestry in the story with the contemporary relevance in the country through the prism of the *Osu* caste system, Agoro sets a broader agenda than the ostracism and the consequent impact it have had on people based on their forefathers, or even ancestry on account of perceived impurity in the culture and tradition of some societies in the country, setting it within the broader current day debates about justice, equity, citizenship, equality, and, rights of human personhood in this our Nigerian nation state in particular and indeed in the entire global scene in general, therefore inviting all to critically question the traditional institutions or social formations which cause some in any society to discriminate others simply based on ancestry instead of individual abilities or talents and contributions to social good in his society.

Furthermore, the play remains contemporary on account of its focus on issues of mental health and general well-being of human persons. Tokieme's act of suicide as portrayed in the play is thus not the isolated consequence of individual mental deficiency, but rather a direct result of social isolation, emotional alienation, continuous rejection, and an absence of meaningful social support network in his community; in other words, a demonstration of what now the world and professionals regard as mental illness. In this manner, Agoro anticipates what he now considers the more pressing issues regarding social and cultural implications for mental health. In this wise, he illustrates the ways that social and cultural injustices and exclusion produce a chain of consequences far wider than mere breakdown in social relations, leading to psychosocial trauma, substance abuse, depression and eventually death. In effect, he sets an example for broader socio-political activism by thus adding an emotional, human, and psychological dimension to issues of justice, equality and rights of human personhood, thus expanding the scope and dimensions of socio-cultural struggle and human rights discourse and practices in society, for the common good of society as a whole.

Finally, it is significant to underscore here, how the play underscores the use of dialogue, peaceful negotiation and reform in achieving societal change and progress. It advocates neither violent nor revolutionary means in the struggle against social injustice, rather, it stresses that sustained social progress relies on persuasive argument, moral appeal, the cultivation of an empathetic, and reflective mind, and critical understanding of the issues. Tokieme does not seek to destroy his community or even totally renounce the cultural practices of his community; rather, he targets a specific cultural practice that has no useful purpose any longer in society, which to Agoro is how culture should evolve. By doing so, he affirms the principle that cultural transformation does not necessarily amount to repudiation or destruction of culture; instead, cultural progress, and, transformation involves constant reappraisal of the traditional practice so as to remain in sync with values such of equity and human dignity.

View as an illustration of Functionalist Theory; the play can be seen as reflecting what functionalists scholars understand as the nature and processes of social and cultural transformation; it maintains that in society, an institution remains relevant and functional only in so far as it plays a



part in social order and stability of the group and society; whenever an institution ceases to play its functions and produces social breakdown and conflict instead of equilibrium, it will have to be revised if the society is to continue and to prosper; for the restoration of social harmony through the eventual accommodation of Tokieme and Asueme in society is a clear sign that any society, despite her varied customs and tradition, has within her innate capability of self-appraisal, adjustment and re-alignment with social forces and the general needs and demands of society for peace and cohesion without necessarily dismantling her cultural framework, if only she consciously sets her will to do so, and it has.

In the play, a deeper validation for drama as a vehicle for societal introspection and enlightenment is given to us. The tradition of African literati has long shown that dramatists have used the stage to de-mask social evil, criticize political authority, contest an oppressive custom or even arouse the conscience of people; with the play *Something to Die For*, Agoro succeeds in de-making use of the theatre to critique the immorality inherent in established values. Unlike in a directly ideological fashion in which one prescribes solutions to problems, he enables the audience, by engaging with his drama – its conflict, characterisation and dialogue – to engage critically with prevailing cultural values and practices, thereby to discovering for themselves new ones.

In this regard, *Something to Die For* demonstrates an instance of the capability of dramatic literature in initiating contemplation, revising views, and thereby ushering social change. What is ultimately affirmed by the play, *Something to Die For*, is that culture is not an object that must remain rigid; a culture must remain responsive to its societal context; tradition wins validation and justification not just by dint of age, but by how it guarantees justice and well-being to all segments of the society. Traditions that victimise and alienate a society from itself and de-limit its potentials of fulfilling a common human dignity are, by contrast, merely of antiquarian significance as they no longer serve any meaningful purpose in that society.

Agoro's vision, then, is that of the triumph of hope over despair; a vision that places faith in individual and collective capability to transform an unjust world by challenging the structures that deny people opportunities to fulfill their humanity. Hence, the relevance of *Something to Die For* goes beyond it being just another play. It is a pertinent piece of discourse on African cultural reform, social justice, and the vindication of the individual's human rights, by creatively and powerfully using drama's potent characterisation and conflict to engage critically with outdated discriminatory practices, thereby confirming the overarching principle of this study that drama mirrors society and contributes to its ongoing transformation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Playwrights should continue to employ drama as a medium for interrogating harmful cultural practices and advocating social justice, equality, and human dignity. Dramatic literature remains a powerful platform for stimulating critical public discourse and encouraging progressive social transformation.
2. Traditional institutions and community leaders should periodically re-evaluate cultural practices that perpetuate discrimination or social exclusion in order to ensure that such practices remain relevant to contemporary societal realities and the principles of justice and inclusion.



3. Educational institutions should promote the study and performance of socially committed dramatic texts such as *Something to Die For* to enhance students' understanding of literature as an instrument of civic education, cultural reflection, and social reform.

4. Further scholarly studies should explore the role of contemporary African drama in addressing other forms of social exclusion, including caste discrimination, gender inequality, disability stigma, environmental injustice, and political marginalization, thereby expanding the discourse on drama as an agent of societal transformation.

Conclusion

This study critically analysed a dramatic work by S.N.A Agoro entitled: *Something to Die For* through a critical study to probe the role of drama as a medium of social transformation by adopting functionalism as the theoretical approach for the study. The study revealed that Agoro dynamically exploits, conflicts, characterisation, dialogue and themes to bring to criticism the dysfunctional societal practice in discriminatory cultures in order to proffer a change towards a just and more humane world. The struggle between Tokieme and Asueme further revealed how the discriminatory and inhuman social practices that infringe on human dignity offer no longer any form of societal integration and hence calls for careful scrutiny and change. The analysis under functionalism further revealed that the stability of any society does not stem from rigid adherence to customs and traditions, but rather through the adaptive capacity of social institution to societal changes.

In the light of the findings, Tokieme's fighting against the traditions of discrimination of lineage for lepers, the play reveals the individual capacity of agents to foster social changes while Enimotor accepting the marriage indicates the adaptive nature of social institutions. Also, the play goes beyond a purely artistic expression; it has been observed that *Something to Die For* operates as an agent of social critique, commentary, and enlightenment; the concerns of the play transcend its local setting (Epie) in order to address larger issues such as societal shame, marginalisation, human rights violations, and discrimination, in most modern African society. The fight against the established cruel practice via a crusade, a revolutionary approach using love, justice and morality by Agoro clearly indicates the timeless capability of drama as agents of critical reflection and transformation. Finally, the drama is hereby asserted to be one of the strongest mediums of social and literary discourse, aimed at social issues, to enlightenment of society and consequently, toward social and reformational changes, of which, *Something to Die For* serves as a clarion call for dramas that transcend artistic and aesthetic appeal, towards societal Integration, dehumanization and constant rebuilding.

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