

# Rupture of the Common and the Emergence of a Disruptive Force: A Reading of Soji Cole's *Embers*

Oluwakemi Abiola Kalejaiye

Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye

## Abstract

Contemporary African drama has harped its relevance on illuminating everyday society by engaging the new forms of expressive culture brought about by culture, politics and social realities. However, its relevance in illuminating postcolonial Nigeria continues to increase as it navigates the tides of protests, activism and insurgency by engaging the revolutionary antics of Boko Haram Jihadists in Northeastern Nigeria and the prevalence of female insurgents. In the light of these, this paper examines insurgent groups as gendered organisations in Soji Cole's *Embers* with a view to revealing how literary resources such as metaphors, symbols, vivid descriptions and imageries are deployed to contextualize females as agents of insurgency. Engaging insights from Louis Althusser's Marxist theory, twelve excerpts were purposively selected to describe Cole's portraiture of females as tools for insurgent activities. The paper notes that through females' involvement in insurgent activities, Cole argues that there is a rupture of the nation's commonality. The idea of disruption in this paper is constructed through the representation of a dissident group whose tragic vision of the world leads to a radical feminist stance envisioned at dismantling socio-cultural, political and economic oppression. The depiction of ruptured commons in the text portrays the topicality of the menace of insurgency along the existence of fragmented class structure. The paper concludes that revenge and social dislocation are some of the reasons for the disruption portrayed in *Embers*.

**Keywords:** Rupture, Disruptive Force, Radical Feminism, Marxism, Revolution

## Introduction

Soji Cole engages the theatre as a viable weapon for representing the socio-cultural, economic and political realities in Nigeria. Existing studies (Epochi-Olise 2021, Sotunsa & Odesola 2023, Udengwu, Ndubuisi & Obasi 2022, Egole & Nwakanma 2023, Nasir & Omorodion 2023) have established that insurgent activities negatively affect women. Cole is devoted to interrogating the country's current social and political problems as symptoms of a deeper malaise (Sotunsa & Odesola 2023). Evident as the representation of the effects of insurgency is in his play, the subject of the factors which engendered young girls; a group otherwise perceived as vulnerable to resort to insurgent activities as a means of retaliating against a system that has dehumanized them has not enjoyed sufficient scholarly enquiry. Existing literary investigations (Yeseibo 2013, Akujobi 2014, Nwosu 2015, Nnanna 2016, Odi 2018, Nwaosusu 2019, Makgwale 2022) on the portrayal of females have articulated the representation of females in African literature, however, scholars have not sufficiently investigated Cole's engagement of young girls as spearheading insurgent activities especially in *Embers*. A plethora of studies have shown that males are frequently reported as agents of insurgency (Zenn & Pearson, 2014, Bloom & Matfess, 2016, Ojo, 2022, Okoli & Azom, 2022, Schmid & Phelan 2024). In most cases, these

studies have presented males as oppressors and harbingers of terrorism and insurgency. However, this paper argues that insurgency is a collaborative effort and is not gender specific; it is this voice that is echoed in Soji Cole's *Embers*.

*Embers* is a play that presents a critique of Cole's view on the subject of inter-coupled dynamics of a wide range of pressing challenges with governance. Except for Markovic (2018), Allotey-Pappoe and Lamptey (2019), and Agbiboa (2022), information on the roles of women in insurgent activities remain underreported. Although these studies articulate the engagement of women in terrorism, insurgency and counterinsurgency, such representation of women does not depict women as agents of revolution. While previous studies (Epochi-Olise 2021, Udengwu, Ndubuisi & Obasi 2022) on Cole's plays have attested to the denigrating experience of women, this study contends that Cole equally constructs women as perpetrators of insurgent activities. This paper's choice of drama is informed by the playwright's resourcefulness in portraying the subject of revolution via the characters' dialogue, actions and reactions to prevailing situation in the text.

Cole's *Embers* captures the plight of females in Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camp. The play examines the factors that led to the emergence of female insurgents in Northern Nigeria. Insurgency could be described as a violent armed rebellion by armed bandits who practice guerilla warfare against civil authority. It connotes the use of political and military measures by irregular forces to change an existing political order (Austin 2018, Steven & Raymond 2004, Pepinsky & Kalyvas 2011, Long 2018). Previous studies (Markovic 2018, Allotey-Pappoe & Lamptey 2019, Galehan J. 2019, Osasona 2022) have articulated the role of females in insurgent activities and the unprecedented rise in the use of female suicide bombers particularly Boko Haram's preference for young girls. The studies cited above establish that the deployment of women and girls as weapons of warfare connotes a change in the tactics of the insurgent groups.

In spite of the avalanche of literature which have articulated the play's engagement of terrorism as a social reality in Nigeria (Epochi-Olise 2021, Ndubuisi & Obasi 2022, Egole & Nwakanma 2023, Sotunsa & Odesola 2023, Udengwu, Nasir & Omorodion 2023), the involvement of females in insurgent activities still beg scholarly attention. To address this scholarly gap, this paper describes the girl-child as agents of insurgency, identifies how the socio-cultural and political systems fostered the girl-child's recourse to violence, revolution and insurgency, and discusses how prosaic elements are recruited to contextualize females as agents of insurgency. The paper draws insight from Louis Althusser's Marxist Theory, considering its emphasis on `overdetermination` and class contradictions during social and economic crisis as a crucial factor that leads to revolutionary rupture. The paper maintains that rage becomes a weapon for responding to the labyrinth of unending hopes which the masses had precariously hung to.

### **Soji Cole and the Synopsis of *Embers***

Olusoji Henry Cole was born in Mushin, Lagos State, in 1976. He is a Nigerian academic, playwright and author. The award winning playwright was educated at University of Ibadan, Kansas State University and Brock University in Nigeria and USA, respectively. He is an Assistant Professor of Black Literature and Culture at St. Mary's University, USA. His literary

works attack social problems ranging from political corruption to class injustice and terrorism (Epochi-Olise 2021, Udengwu, Ndubuisi & Obasi 2022, Egole & Nwakanma 2023). Through the deployment of the theatre, he explores ideological tenets to articulate Nigerian socio-political and cultural challenges. As a playwright, he consciously weaves theatrical performances to depict the malaise in postcolonial Nigeria. He has won a number of outstanding awards, among them the NLNG Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2018, Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Playwriting Award 2014, the Fulbright Visiting Scholarship at the Drama Therapy Unit, Kansas State University, Manhattan, USA 2014-2015, the African Theatre Research Award (AfTA), and the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR/FIRT) award.

Cole's dramatic oeuvre is geared at tackling the social condition of the lower class. *Embers* presents the experiences of females in Sambisa forest, and in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Through the character of Talatu, Memunah, Idayat and Atai, we draw insights into the oddity which characterize the existence of the female victims before their abduction into Sambisa forest, the widespread corruption, misappropriation of funds, and moral decadence which pervades the camp. Talatu, who equally doubles as the protagonist and mentor to the girls, introduces the readers to the dysfunctional socio-political system that shapes the world of the young girls. While Talatu's assumption of the role of a mother portends a ray of hope for the young girls whose lives are imperilled by the system that should protect them, the dialogue of Memunah, Idayat and Atai, reveal the anger and resentment of the young generation. The playwright seems to suggest that the brazen acts of insurgency is fanned by the activities of politicians and military personnel that have failed in their social responsibilities. The play ends with the girls' detonation of bombs in the IDP camp to rejuvenate the socio-political institution.

### **Literature Review**

Studies (Ekaterina 2008; Olanrewaju, Folarin, & Folarin, 2017; Allotey-Pappoe & Lamptey 2019) have examined insurgency from different perspectives. Ekaterina (2008) interrogates the synergy between extremist ideologies and organisational models of non-state actors. She concludes that while terrorism cannot be counterbalanced by secular global ideologies or moderate Islam at the global level, it is likely to be affected and transformed by radical nationalism at the state level. On the effect of insurgency on the nation, Olanrewaju, Folarin and Folarin. (2017) submit that the frequent insurgent attacks has resulted in the crippling of the peace, stability, development and sovereignty of the Nigerian state.

On the role of women in insurgency, Allotey-Pappoe and Lamptey (2019), Agbiboa (2022) Adamu (2022) and Nwankpa (2023) observe that traditional gender order is being challenged by women's representation in insurgency and internal wars. Allotey-Pappoe and Lamptey (2019) argue that the factors which drive women to participate in armed conflict are complicated. However, they aver on the one hand, that while some women are driven by circumstances, a few others voluntarily fight to support the ideology of fighting forces who captured them. They further add that a few other women engage in guerrilla attack in a bid to protect themselves or provide for their families, at other instances, others enlist in insurgent groups as a sacrifice for their families.

Agbiboa (2022) interrogates counterinsurgency by underscoring the role of women in combating violence against the state. The study challenges the binary role of women in armed conflicts either as victims or perpetrators. He concludes that women's involvement in armed rebellion is an indication that women play gallantry role in combat. Conversely, Adamu (2022) refutes Agbiboa's position that there has been an increase in the percentage of women who engage in combat roles. He contends that women have not been adequately included in the actual combat activities. Rather they have provided supports to their male counterparts who have been the dominant participants in insurgency operations.

In a similar vein, Nwankpa (2023) flaws the misrepresentation of reality of gender roles in armed conflict. He corroborates Agbiboa's position that women play active roles in counterinsurgency because of their position that warring against the Boko Haram may be a viable option instead of being conspicuously absent in counterrevolution. This stance contradicts Markovic's (2018) stance that women who perpetuate acts of violence are coerced or manipulated.

Extant literature on Soji Cole's *Embers* is quite informative. Epochi-Olise (2021) interrogates forced migration as a gendered problem. She observes that women are the most vulnerable in forced migration. She concludes that vices such as sexual exploitation, rape and violence are festered by forced migration. Sotunsa and Odesola (2023) contend that terrorism is borne out of failed family, educational and political systems. They suggest that revolution and destruction of the old corrupt system is the panacea to the crises ravaging the Nigerian state. Udengwu, Ndubuisi and Obasi (2022) argue that the prevalence of female fundamentalists in contemporary Nigerian society is borne out of disillusionment with the power structure and not with Boko Haram fundamentalists. Egole and Nwakanma 2023 examine the effect of abduction on the females. The paper argues that the patriarchal structure of the society contributes to the suffering of the victims. The paper concludes that females should form a synergy to organize a revolution that will lead to the emancipation and regeneration of the present generation. Nasir and Omorodion (2023) investigate the impact of structured violence on women and children. They submit that trauma victims live with the memory of the pain they have witnessed or experienced.

They have also paid attention to the reasons for the high levels of women's involvement in suicide attacks. This paper improves the discussion on women and protests by exploring ways by which Soji Cole creates symbolic characters cast as victims of Boko Haram to foreshadow female insurgent activities. The significance of this discovery is to crystallise the understanding of women's engagement/participation in revolutionary changes. A cogent question to ask here is the crux of this paper as Cole interrogates a relatively new trend in contemporary warfare. This essay differs from most literature in that it examines the condition of women and girls while revisioning the psychological engagement which could make a group hitherto known as pacifists engage in violent confrontations.

By focusing on Soji Cole's *Embers*, this paper explores revolutionary changes within the context of the plethora of challenges and harrowing experiences which predisposes the girl-child to engage in guerrilla attacks. It explores the question of dialectical contradiction in the political, economic and socio-cultural structure of the society. To achieve this, this essay engages in a rigorous and critical analysis of the text in terms of how the characters have been

able to rupture the structure which suppresses them. The paper also employs concepts from dialectical contradiction and over-determination to guide the analyses of the text under the concept of Marxism. It is important to note here that Cole's repositioning of women as being central in militant and guerrilla attacks is an attempt at challenging an existing status quo about women and religious fundamentalism and radicalism.

A relative interrogation of the role women play in religious violence projects a branch of feminism that spurns resistance to constituted authority. In *Embers*, Cole seems to imply that when resistance to an existing order is objectively appraised, there is always a dimension of radicalism, revolt and revolution. This paper focuses on the controversy and disenchantment which stems from philosophical and ideological conceptions of radicalism among Nigerian women. This understanding will help to address conflicting interests and antagonistic projection of the females and the roles they play in fuelling terrorism and insurgency.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Despite the fact that Marxism has been harnessed to divergent views such as economics, history, society and revolution, the common premise of the various schools of thought is that literature can best be understood within the framework of social reality. To the social Marxists, literature is not merely a product of a writer's individual mental processes neither can it be divorced from society and history. The sociological spectrum sees the world solely from the perspective of the structure within it. On this, Forgas (1985, p.135) avers that "for Marxists, social reality is not an indistinct background out of which literature emerges or into which it blends, it has a definite shape. This shape is found in any given moment of society because particular class relationships and particular political, cultural and social institutions are related in a determinate way.

The structure of history and the society are what Marx and Engels called 'dialectical' and Louis Althusser explored as dialectical contradiction in *For Marx* (1965). Althusser stresses the condition of 'over-determination', an intensification of class contradictions at a moment of social and economic crisis as a crucial factor which leads to either "historical inhibition" or "revolutionary rupture". Thus, for Lucien Goldmann, a sociologist theorist, literary works primarily 'arise out of social consciousness and behaviour and it was the way they are linked to the society the playwright sought to establish' (Forgas, 1985, p.152) Goldmann argues that the "mental structure of these social classes saw social behaviour as arising not from the will of separate individuals but from two or more individuals acting as one."

Marxist theory holds that in every society, dynamic and opposed forces are always at work within them. Looking at the structure of the social reality in the Nigerian state, one can infer that reality and thought constituted a dialectical totality in which everything was interconnected. With such a view, Cole's *Embers* arise out of social consciousness and behaviour and that the playwright seeks to establish that social class and revolution are linked to society. This paper posits that Cole's *Embers* portrays the endemic state of political corruption in Nigeria and it adopts Marxism to examine the roles of women as agents of revolution in the text under study.

## Method

Cole's *Embers* constitutes the data for this study. The study adopts the qualitative research design. Twenty excerpts from Cole's *Embers* were extracted after a close reading of the text relating to women's activities in insurgencies. Out of them, twelve excerpts were purposively selected for analysis. The motivation for the choice of the sampled excerpts lies in the representation of the women as tools of insurgent activities in the text. The selected excerpts of the young women are interrogated to ascertain their roles in insurgency. The thoughts, emotions, feelings, acts, inactions, and motivations of the female characters are in relation to the theoretical framework in the study. Specific metaphors and imageries are described in terms of how they portray women as revolutionary in nature. The study engages Marxism as a literary theory to examine how socio-political realities in the Nigerian socio-political space engendered insurgency. The study takes a radical departure from the perspective of women as victims of terrorism. In the play under study, the courageous tendencies of women are projected in the play; women are not portrayed as victims or villains but as revolutionists. The specific tragic vision of the women are identified and described with reference to Marxism.

## Data Analysis

This section presents the play's depiction of the underlying factors which engender the prevalence of female insurgents. Cole argues that females act out their indignation by assuming the role of knowledge brokers, infiltrators and frontline fighters. The young girls' presentation of the covert actions of institutionalised structures with the resultant effects are discussed below with appropriate excerpts from the text.

### Projection of Women as Knowledge Brokers

#### Excerpt 1

TALATU: I told you I started out early in life, I didn't even know my father, but my mother told me he was alive, somewhere, starting new families wherever he found himself, After three or four children by a woman, father would abandon the family and move to another city to start a new generation. It was Nana, my mother who struggled to keep the family. I was thirteen when she died. I remember vividly the day she was lowered into the grave. It was the most undignified internment I have witnessed. Even the Imam refused to pray to her body because she stopped going to the mosque long before she died. She had struggled so hard to live, and had died wretched. She would wake up struggled so early to the farm only to return with scruffy vegetables for the two of us to eat. She worked as a cleaner at the Dogon-Kuri Local Government Council where she swept so that she could return the next day to keep her job. She washed dirt off other people's children for pittance. Then, in the evenings, she would sit in the verandah to pare rinds off rotten potatoes she'd collected in the market. We lived like scavengers. Then...., one day, they brought her body. She had slumped in the village market. My mother's death taught me a lesson;

we are all inside a grave, to come out of it you must tread on corpses.  
(*Embers*, Pp 6-7)

In Excerpt 1, Cole captures the absence of a father in young Talatu's home and the prevailing economic reality in Nigeria. The playwright gives a vivid description of the neglect and poverty that the young Talatu was exposed to. After the disappearance of Talatu's father, Talatu and her mother Nana are petrified as to what becomes their fate. With the absence of a father figure in Talatu's life, Nana struggles to provide for herself and her daughter. Cole notes that the penury and miserable state of both mother and daughter leave their fate hanging on the precipice. In addition to the aforementioned, the role of religion as instruments of oppression for the common man is also highlighted. Religious leaders who should give a beacon of hope to the common man completely disregard his essence as a being. The Iman refuses to pray on Nana's body because she had stopped coming to mosque before her death. She was ostracised when alive and even in death. Commenting on the manner she was buried, Talatu reflects 'It was the most undignified internment I have witnessed' (6). The shabby manner Nana was treated even in death makes Talatu bemoan the doom that awaits the poor at their demise. As such, Talatu comes to a position that 'we are all inside a grave, to come out of it you must tread on corpses'. (p.7). Her comment characterises the existential crises of ordinary people as they grapple with the oppression of tyrants who occupy political offices, while being in a grave and treading on corpses is a metaphor for a desperate struggle for survival of the average citizen as a result of systemic violence and oppression.

In the play, Cole portends that in a situation where citizens live as destitute, terrorism and insurgency becomes a weapon of rage. Imageries such 'pittance', 'scavengers' and 'slump' used to describe the masses capture the disposition of the playwright to the living condition of the girls which make them susceptible to revolt. Using Marxist theory, this paper argues that the prevailing economic condition is enough to trigger a revolt. The inclusion of Talatu in the Boko Haram group reflects her role as a knowledge broker. She establishes the violence which the institution perpetuates against the women ranging from sexual, physical, psychological and economic abuse. In this instance, having realised that they are bound by a common fate, violated, exploited and abused by those who are meant to protect them, the girls lie in wait for a day of retribution when they will destroy the system that emboldened them to become insurgents.

### **Excerpt 2**

IDAYAT: I lost my virginity when I was in the last year of primary school. It was Mallam Bideen who did it to me. He was the Arithmetic teacher when I was in Primary Six. He would encourage me and tell me that I was good in Arithmetic. He said I was going to be the first woman medical doctor in the whole city if I got more serious with my books. I never knew he had another plan for me. That day, he told me to stay over after school for an extra coaching in Arithmetic.

IDAYAT: He reached down and forced himself into me. He shattered my hymen.

ATAI: And you didn't report this to the school....?

MEMUNAH: Will you report that if it were you?

IDAYAT: I walked home in the rain. My clothes and books were soiled as I got home. Mother was waiting for me with hot tea. When she saw the way I walked in, she knew what had happened. (*Embers*, p.48)

IDAYAT: ...Mother said that I would never find a husband once the news got out that another man had defiled me. She said that the whole community would look down on me. She said I would be called names that would bring shame to me.

TALATU: And the man! The man who did that! What was his punishment? He would walk around free and force his wretched penis inside another innocent girl! (*Embers*, pp.47-49)

### **Excerpt 3**

TALATU: Maybe, your generation will change things. In my time, women were mere fabricating machines for making children. They were the ill-coloured frames hung on walls like synthetic decorations. (*Embers*, p.6)

Excerpt 2 captures the plight of the girl-child especially the psychosocial conditioning of gender violence and sexual relations power. In this stance, sexual violence does not only involve overt brutality and psychological cruelty but the anguish and disintegration of the self. Unbeknownst to Idayat that her Mathematics teacher is a sexual predator, she trusts in the guidance and academic mentoring Mallam Bideen promised to provide. Cole seems to suggest that breach of trust between Idayat and her teacher signals a change of paradigm of dialectical reasoning and foundational crises that assuaged her being. Firstly, the school which should provide a safe haven and educational empowerment is the locus where violations against the girl-child is often perpetuated with teachers preying on children who should have been guided and supported. In the play, Cole criticizes the discrimination which rape victims are subjected to. Cole notes that such individuals will be called names and will not have men to marry them. Additionally, Memunah harps on the silence and secrecy that rape victims often acquiesce to. This is portrayed through the role of Idayat's mother, who reveals the social conditioning and sexual relation of power where the rape victims have to live with the guilt of being sexually molested while the males walk in the triumph of being a conqueror. Invariably, victims of sexual abuse struggle with surmounting the trauma of being violated. Cole thus expresses the opinion that disillusionment, pessimism and suicide becomes an option for victims of sexual abuse.

Excerpt 3 reveals the denigration and contempt in the manner that women are treated by men. The response from Talatu, shows an internalised patriarchal ideology and practice that oppress women. Talatu challenges the girls to revolt against the tradition which subjugate them. Literarily, women experience reproductive servitude and exploitation as they are objectified while bearing the burden of domesticities. Talatu further opines that just like the 'synthetic decorations', the women are perceived as reduced waste merely useful for nurturing children. Again, Talatu harps on the need for the young girls she is nurturing to change the dynamics by focusing on equality and equity while they redefine family structures and relationships. With the portrayal of Talatu's role, Cole depicts that his social commitment is aimed at conscientising

the down-trodden and the vulnerable especially the girl-child to demand justice from the socio-political system which has constantly repressed them.

#### **Excerpt 4**

ATAI: The soldiers brought me. They were stationed watching over the ruins of my village. They were angry too. They said the Boko Haram killed many of their fellow soldiers. They made me stay with them for five days.

IDAYAT: Doing what?

ATAI: The horrors that I saw in five days were more frightful than the fiercest things I saw in Sambisa forest. The soldiers slaughtered any man that passed by the village. They didn't even wait to ask questions. Some men who escaped the destruction of the Boko boys were returning to Gali to see what can be salvaged. They were all killed by the soldiers. Even when I told them that I knew a man they captured, they threatened to kill me too.

MEMUNAH: Of the people who were lucky to still be alive and returned to see their town; the soldiers killed the men, drove back the old women and kept the young girls to themselves.

MEMUNAH: The bastards! I know!

ATAI: They took me to their commander. He had many women with him. And he changed them as new ones came. After three days, he got tired of me too. He gave me to another soldier. It was horror. They threatened to kill me if I ever mentioned a word to the people outside when I leave.

TALATU: And you didn't?

ATAI: I kept my pain. When you have the gift of life in the midst of chaos, all other things seem not to matter. (*Embers*, pp.59-60)

Excerpt 4 opens with a description of what goes on in the soldiers' camp after the annihilation of villages and communities by the Boko Haram sect. Through Atai's delineation of the horrific acts which the soldiers perpetuate, Cole presupposes that it is not only the Boko Haram insurgents who kill innocent citizens. The soldiers who are backed by the constitution to protect lives and properties are actually culpable of criminal homicide. The response of Idayat, one of the female characters, reveals that a good number of the citizenry have succumbed to ennui and despair. She quizzes rhetorically: 'What's the difference if we die here? Outside there, we die every day. Each person is a corpse wishing to survive just one more day' (p.9). One would expect protection, support and defence from the security agents, but the reverse is the case.

Additionally, the rage of the female insurgents is heightened by the animosity and callousness of the soldiers towards the male returnees in Atai's village. To Cole, the actions of the soldiers is symbolic of the self-inflicted pain which the law enforcement agents have subjected the citizenry to. Atai identifies the emotional and psychological pain of watching her kinsmen killed and she being sexually molested by different soldiers. Cole seems to suggest that insurgency becomes a weapon for the females because their group is endangered as a result of disintegration of the self triggered by the various denigrating experiences they have been subjected to. So, an act of victimization is expressed as Atai lies in wait to avenge the injustice

from the individuals and systems that should have protected her. For Atai, being sworn into an oath of secrecy is a weapon to leverage her collaboration with insurgent groups. Through vivid description of the roles of the soldiers in the IDP camp, one is able to connect how Cole castigates security agents by asserting their roles as detractors.

The depiction of young girls as a disruptive force by Cole is underscored by the gender bending roles of the females in insurgent activities. Through the representation of the girls as knowledge brokers, one is able to identify with Cole's articulation of factors which engendered the young girls to become exasperated. Similarly, the choice of females as a disruptive force foregrounds power asymmetry between the perpetrators and victims. Through the existential anxieties and dilemmas in excerpts 1, 2, 3 and 4, Cole foretells that the females in Northern Nigeria portend a looming danger waiting to explode as a result of the various precarious condition which defines their lives.

### **Women as Infiltrators**

Apart from projecting women as knowledge brokers, Cole through the lens of Marxist theory, portrays young women as infiltrators in IDP camps. Females engage in revolutionary activities by collaborating with the Boko Haram group to carry out insurgent activities in the IDP camp. The representation of the girl-child as ruptured presents a question to engage the thoughts and perceptions of the entire citizenry with regard to the revolutionary antics of the females in bringing about a desired change in the nation's socio-political space.

#### **Excerpt 5**

IDAYAT: Yes, Goggo. There are so many things that you don't understand. Some of us came into the camp for a mission, disguising as displaced people. We are actually emissaries working with Boko Haram. Memunah was part of us. There was still others in this camp yet unknown to many. I told you about Qudus. My first love. I found him in the forest of Sambisa. He taught me new things. (p.94)

#### **Excerpt 6**

IDAYAT: He taught me that the real Boko Harams are here and not in the forest. Those you call Boko Harams are a group of young agitated men and women, but those who empower and use them are right now-the politicians! They are the ones who snuff lives out of the people they are supposed to lead.

IDAYAT: Don't even try to understand it, Goggo. Very soon the whole camp will be a wreck. Somewhere in that wreck they'll find my soul and body. They find the souls and bodies of both the guilty and the innocent. We are blowing up the whole camp in a moment. (p.94).

#### **Excerpt 7**

CAMP OFFICER: Who is Memunah here!

MEMUNAH: Me.

CAMP OFFICER: You will need to come with us now!

(There is a sudden ambience of fright among the women).

TALATU: Please be gentle with her, whatever it is. She is leading the dance for the Governor tomorrow.

SOLDIER: Dance for governor ko? Gaskiya, you are a clown!

CAMP OFFICER: She will no longer be part of the dance. She led some Boko Haram boys with bombs into this camp.

(The women's demeanour change).

TALATU (completely nonplussed). I don't understand. How can that be? Memunah....?

MEMUNAH: I did not bring them in. I let them in.

TALATU: How? You were here...., all of us.

MEMUNAH: The beggar, and the boy.

CAMP OFFICER: Yes, the Boko Haram Boys disguised like some beggars. The soldiers have put there in their torture room. (To the soldiers.) Take her to the office of the Camp Commander. (p.64).

Cole portrays the girl-child as an undercover agent in insurgency. Excerpt 5 starts on a note of revelation. Idayat, one of the girls Talatu had won over as mentees, discloses that most of the women who came into the camp as displaced people were there for a mission; to act as undercover for the Boko Haram insurgent group. She confesses that apart from Memunah whose intention has been unravelled, there are several others including the security who are agents for the insurgent groups. Idayat's disclosure about how she was indoctrinated by her boyfriend Qudus, a Boko Haram jihadist known for recruiting young ones, and her emphasis on the number of young girls who are willing collaborators of the Boko Haram sect, paint a grim picture of youths whose agitation for a rejuvenated system have left them in vulnerable positions. In excerpt 6, Cole observes that the activities of the politicians have made the citizens to metamorphose into disgruntled individuals who will sacrifice their lives for a common goal; to destroy the leaders who have continued to pillage the country's reserve.

The contextual use of 'they are the ones who snuff lives out of the people they are supposed to lead' paints an imagery of suffocation. It reinforces Cole's position that the actions of the politicians have negative effects on the citizens. Similarly, he establishes a dichotomy between the politicians and the electorates who have become political pawns. The excerpt equally foregrounds the politicians' abdication of their responsibility to the citizenry. Ordinarily, one of the civic responsibilities of the government is to cater for the welfare of the citizenry by ensuring the protection of their lives and properties. Commenting on entrenched elites who makes up the Nigerian political system, one of the guards observes: 'You mean those Senators! Please don't talk about them here! They are the biggest leech in our democracy' (p.28). From his utterance, one can deduce the supremacy of the politicians as powerful social actors who drain the treasury. Consequently, rather than enjoying the dividends of democracy, the citizens groan under tyrannical politicians who extort the populace feeding off the nation's resources.

In excerpt 7, one of the camp officers, comes to arrest Memunah for bringing in Boko Haram boys into the camp. She, however, posits that, she `let them in`, hence her poised disposition in the midst of the confusion that followed the women discovery of Memunah`s actual intention in the camp. Her decision to allow the beggar and the unnamed boy enter the camp with bombs establish her decision to change the status quo. Similarly, her deliberate efforts to keep secret the strategy of helping the Boko Haram boys infiltrate the camp despite the presence of security agents establish her ingenuity. It holds that women could penetrate security systems. The excerpt captures the psychological description of women as valiant, brave and heroic individuals who are intentional about staging a revolt against elitism in democratic Nigeria. Excerpt 7 presupposes that the commons have ceased to act as vulnerable and expendable population who will continue to gloat over systemic injustices. Memunah`s unperturbed stance is a representation of the transition of ordinary citizens from victimhood to sturdiness.

### **Women as Frontline Fighters**

Cole identifies the collective yearnings for regeneration as a drive for women`s participation in insurgency. The excerpts below justify the negotiation of violence as a tool for achieving desired change.

#### **EXCERPT 8**

TALATU: I admit that my generation has failed. It has failed itself and your own generation. Your world is full of dark vacuum that my generation brought upon you. To bring light into the empty darkness of your lives there has to be destruction. The destruction of those who brought untold misery into our lives (p.82)

#### **Excerpt 9**

TALATU: I have to spur you on and build hopes with you. Your generation is focused on escaping all the wrath that my generation inflicted on itself and on yours. Your anger is only because you want to escape and nothing more (p.85)

#### **Excerpt 10**

MEMUNAH: (Going away): I told you Talatu. There is no choice for this generation. Nothing can heal our country. Nothing. Unless we destroy this system, we will never regenerate. There is no future here until those who are leading us are completely destroyed. And it is my generation that can do that. (p.64)

#### **Excerpt 11**

IDAYAT: A system that gives so much room for us to be inhuman to each other has to self-destruct to give way to a fresh generation (p.95)

### **Excerpt 12**

TALATU: I am saying that your generation is an angry one. One day, there will be a new war. A war in which blood will be spattered on the conscience of the weak and the innocent. (p.83)

Excerpts 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 present women as forerunners in the violent confrontation against a ruling class that has continually subjected her citizens to untold hardship. Cole's portrayal of women as advocates of political, transformation account for the variables which made women susceptible to vicious change. Cole uses Talatu's role to depict how the current leaders have failed the people they govern. In excerpt 8, Talatu, nudges the common people to the failure of the political leaders. She informs Atai about the perceived failure of the political leaders. Talatu admits that the current set of rulers have failed the electorate who entrust them with leadership positions and the younger generation who trust their leaders to help secure a better tomorrow. For Cole, the commons are facing a generational failure because individuals who take up elective position are older generation who do not have the interest of the electorates at heart. Through Talatu, there is a premonition that the girls will destroy the IDP camp.

Through Marxist theory, one can connect how Cole foregrounds the role of women in revolution. Talatu submits that the old generation of politicians have brought misery into the lives of those they are leading. Consequently, there is a need to destroy the political structure to create a better living condition for the citizens. Excerpt 9 presents Talatu's adroitness in the girls' desire for a revolution. She spurs the girls to go on with the plan to decimate the IDP camp. She expresses confidence when she realizes that the benefit of the revolution outweigh the risk of a reprisal. She expresses admiration, and respect for the girls' indignation. She notes that the wind of revolutionary change is inevitable for the females to subvert and dismantle the existing class structure in the nation. To Talatu, revolution is motivated by a dissatisfaction with the status quo and its replacement with a perceived better alternative. Through the exchange between Talatu and the girls, the playwright seems to suggest the nation needs a reformist and transformational revolution to build a better society.

Additionally, revolution in the *Embers* is aimed specifically at defending the interest of the common through a reflection of how corruption, poverty, insecurity and victimization is heightened by inequality and human rights violation in the face of massive government failure. The play reflects the women's manifestation of their dissatisfaction at the manner the government rips off the citizenry. In excerpt 10, Memunah identifies the political class as the oppressive structure which must be destroyed. Her statement in excerpt 8 surmises Cole's position that the predicament of the common is fuelled by the nature and practice of politics and government. In this instance, the playwright reveals that the planned revolution is motivated by resistance against hardship and social inequality to ensure the emergence of a new society from the debris of the old. To Cole, manipulation of scarce resources by special interest group and corruption aided the break-up of the girl's social order and created the condition for revolution. In excerpt 11, Idayat corroborates Memunah's position on the need to jettison the faulty state structure. To Idayat, savagery in the nation is heightened by social difference in the face of massive inequalities and distribution of power engineered by politicians who suffer from the malaise of selfishness and indifference to the plight of the common people.

Idayat's expression in excerpt 11 captures the unbending resolve of the young girls to destroy the system in order to enhance the condition of life of the citizens. She asserts that the new generation's survival is dependent on destruction. One could infer that revolution is sacrosanct; the destruction of the country's political system is targeted towards regeneration. Through the character of Idayat, the playwright captures the psycho-social description of the common people as helpless, defenseless and vulnerable individuals who are constantly at the mercy of the politicians. Besides, the failure of the state is reflected. The government's inept handling of the indignation of the common people and the failure of the state facilitated the revolution. Excerpt 12 warns that the impending war will reveal the deep-rooted decay in the political system. Talatu notes that the girls' rampage will eventually lead to the emancipation of all the oppressed people in the country. The metaphoric description of blood splattering on the conscience of the weak establishes that the vulnerable electorate will live with the weight of the guilt of the systemic violence the politicians have subjected them to.

### Conclusion

Cole's exposition of the emergence of female suicide bombers in *Embers* is a testimony to the playwright's commitment to interrogating the inherent socio-political ills in the Nigerian society. This paper has presented the rupture of the common and the emergence of a disruptive force with reference to the underlying factors that can make insurgency attractive to young girls. While the female gender is often represented as agents of peace, growth, development and sustainability, Cole portrays them as revolutionaries in *Embers*. Cole argues that insurgency is an offshoot of social and political injustice in the text. He contends that the creation of females whose dynamics of power aims at revamping the society is an indication that there has been a shift in the general perception of the role of women in society.

Ekaterina (2008) observes that in asymmetrical conflict, terrorism is neither destroyed by repression nor is it amenable to external influence. However, the political transformation of violent Islamic movements in specific national contexts can be discouraged and the transnational ideology of violent Islamism nationalized to have a violent free state. Taking a cue from Cole's representation of the girl-child in the text, we could infer that he uses the theatre to offer a rationalist perspective on the roles women play in revolutionizing the social and political space. The paper submits that by deconstructing or revising discourses and images of women as subversive and subordinate individuals, Cole defies the stereotype position that women are trapped in a masculine world of representation by unmasking the revolutionary or reactionary nature of the girl-child.

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