

# **DRAMA AND THE NIGERIAN ECONOMIC RECESSION QUESTION: A CASE STUDY OF FELICIA ONYEWADUME'S *ECHOES OF HARD TIMES***

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## **Abstract**

*It is no news that Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa and the largest producer of oil amongst African countries, is currently experiencing economic recession. While the reason for this phenomenon may be global and may be attributed to such factors as: high inflation caused by a rise in the prices of goods and service, a fall in the price and demand for oil, poor economic planning, high interest rate and many others. The purpose of this essay is not to cast blames on anyone or glorify the already identified causes of the recession in Nigeria, but to advance a solution to this problem. Admittedly, drama has served a veritable tool for social reconstruction and redirection. By this, drama does not only entertain, but in doing this it also informs and educates society for good. Drama, thus, has proven a potent tool to solve the problems of man as he interacts with the social forces around him. The foregoing is the aim of this study as this research demonstrates how Nigerians can deal with as well as surmount the current challenges they face in this period of recession, using Felicia Onyewadume's ***Echoes of Hard Times*** as its case study. The study employs the case study and content analysis research approaches of the qualitative research method to realise set objectives. It observed that studies bordering on the role of drama in dealing with economic recession are limited, and therefore calls for more studies to be carried out in this area.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and the largest producer of crude oil in Africa. As observed by Michael, Nigeria produces 1.782 million barrels of oil per day, as against Angola's 1.688 million barrels of oil per day (www.africanews.com). As a country whose main stay is crude oil, which she exports, Nigerians should be benefitting from the rewards of her crude oil exports, but the reverse is the case as a large number of the Nigerian population live in poverty, hunger and starvation. This situation was further worsened by the global economic meltdown that further launched the country into financial crisis. In a yet unstable democracy, ravaged by the woes of political fights and instability from oppositions in successive governments, Nigeria did not learn from other countries like U.S.A, Britain, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and many others that put measures in place

to cushion the effects of recession whenever it is envisaged. Unfortunately, Nigeria is yet to recover from the scourging effects of the economic plague called recession.

Drama has served a veritable tool for social reconstruction and redirection, by this, drama does not only entertain, informs but also educates the society for good. Drama, thus, has proven a potent tool to solve the problems of man, as he interacts with the social forces around him. A lot of reasons have been advanced for the present economic recession that hit not only Nigeria, but other countries of the world. The purpose of this essay is not to cast blames on anyone or glorify the already identified possible causes of Nigeria's present economic woes, but to advance a solution to how Nigerians can deal with the present economic situation of the country using Felicia Onyewadume's *Echoes of Hard Times* as the primary text for analysis.

### **The Dramatist and the Society**

A dramatist is a person who crafts or writes plays. Another name for the dramatist is a playwright. The dramatist does not just write because he wants to express an idea, all too often plays are meant for the society. Plays reflect the tastes, attitudes, lives, anomalies, needs and aspirations of the society, and are written with the aim of informing, entertaining and educating the masses. Drama has been described as a mirror that reflects back society to itself. As such, the dramatist is a watchdog meant to observe, document, and warn society against inimical attitudes and behaviours that can stampede and impede its growth and development. For Bertolt Brecht, plays should engineer the people towards social change. Thus, drama should reflect the dominant worldview and lifestyle of the age in which the drama is situated, and provide tangible solutions to the societal problems of its time.

Over the years, drama has been used by playwrights to make constructive statements on the events in the society, so as to effect positive changes in man and the society. According to Emmanuel Ebo, the dramatist has been described as "the gadfly which God has attached to the state and all day long in places...am feasting upon you, arousing, persuading and reproaching you" (108). The dramatist therefore acts as a watchdog of society as he uses drama as a tool to effect changes in his environment. For Cyprian Obadiogwu, the dramatist aims to show his own stand in his society (112). The dramatist cannot only effect changes in the society by recreating these changes through play texts; he can also serve as a visionary who can predict the future by utilising recent experiences as perspectives on both the present and future (Dandaura 179). Hope Eghagha, commenting on the role of the dramatist in Nigeria, submits that:

Because popular theatre (drama) has the capacity to reach all strata of society using a simple language, a simple method, its outreach could be the tonic the nation needs for the change in values which both the leaders and followers of the country are currently clamouring for (210).

As such, a dramatist is able to achieve his intended aim through his play because he is a member of the society so naturally that his artistic sensibilities are shaped and sharpened by the socio-economic contradictions and political happenings of his time (Dandaura 179).

### **Economic Recession: A Conceptual Definition**

Economic recession simply means a general slowdown in the economic activity of a country. Economic recession is a downturn in the economy or a situation where a nation's economy seems to be standing on its head. According to Tinuke Fapohunda, it is a period of economic slowdown featuring low output, illiquidity and unemployment. It is characterised by its length, abnormal increases in unemployment, falls in the availability of credit, shrinking output and investment, numerous bankruptcies, reduced amounts of trade and commerce, as well as highly volatile relative currency value fluctuations, mostly devaluations, financial crises and bank failure (8). For Farayibi Oladapo, economic recession is often characterised by symptoms such as rising prices of goods and services, inability of government to meet its financial obligations, exchange rate fluctuations, and poor performance of other macroeconomic variables which defines the state of the economy per time. Economic recession is a recurrent issue because of the cyclical nature of the global economy. That is why most countries, especially the developed ones, often diversify the structural base of their economy to withstand any external shock (4).

Furthermore, Chukwu observes that, the National Bureau of Economic Research defines an economic recession as, "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production and whole sale – retail sale" (43). In the same vein, Kale, Maigari and Haruna view it as a negative real GDP growth rate for two consecutive quarters (say first and second quarter). Judging by the above definition, Nigeria is experiencing economic recession currently, since her first and second quarter growth in 2016 are – 1.7 percent and – 2.06 percent (54).

### **The Nigerian Situation**

According to Jubril and Olayinka, going by the report of the National Bureau of Statistics, economic recession is upon Nigeria. The double quarters of negative growth, high levels of inflation, worsening purchasing power of the naira and the increasing levels of unemployment are all strong indicators that all is not well (302). Oladapo also adds that Nigeria's current economic situation emerged like a thunderbolt at the instance of the negative growth rates recently released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). This admission was just an official declaration of the situation the Nigerian masses have been battling with for quite some time. The antecedents in the country provided justification for this economic woe. Also, the present situation substantiates the effect of an absence of a clear policy direction of the government (4).

A number of factors have been attributed to have caused the economic recession in Nigeria. According to Kale, Maigari and Haruna, these are poor economic planning, high inflation rate, high interest rate, high taxation, policy conflict, overdependence of the nation on petroleum, resource mismanagement (not just petroleum, but natural gas as well), activities of Niger Delta militants, high rate of importation, the debt game (on all levels), the changing dynamics of over population, outright corporate greed, the national relocation of employment and the changing of means of labour, growing gap between the elite and

the impoverished, and other causes like ethno-religious crises, political instability, fraud, leadership crises, disease burden, budget priority and implementation, and so on (55-56).

More so, Oyesiku observes that economic recession does not just occur, certain factors trigger recession which include; inflation, loss of consumer confidence, excess supply over demand, excess demand over supply, and global economic crisis. The present economic recession has severe negative and also some positive impacts on aggregate economic activities in Nigeria. It causes extreme poverty and suffering of the masses, children's right to quality education is denied, affordable inclusive healthcare are deprived, there is adverse demand and supply shocks. It has contractionary effects on aggregate demand and supply resulting to volatile shocks in economic activities. There is scarcity of foreign exchange, few money, reduced income, decreased finances available to households and businesses. There is also weak purchasing power, reduced consumer spending and decrease in sales of goods and services. The purchase of goods and services by individuals, households and firms has drastically reduced as a result of the economic recession. Business activities are now at the low ebb, there are jobs losses and increase in unemployment rate. The reduced employment is due to decreased sales of goods and services by business owners, companies, street vendors, farmers, shop owners, retailers and wholesalers. The aggregate spending power has sharply declined (qtd. in Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku 2).

Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku assert that, following the loss of jobs is the loss of income; the cost of living has gone astronomically too high for the core poor and the middle class. There is sharp decline in savings and investment; decline in the stock market activities, as some investors have pulled out their funds from the stock market due to high risks and uncertainties. There is also increase in the crime rates as life gets harder for a greater number of the population(the poor), living conditions are getting worse, crime rates have escalated; increase in robberies, petty stealing, street hawking, kidnapping, child trafficking, fraudulent schemes and other financial crimes. The aggregate poverty incidence continues to increase. There is budget deficit in government spending. The national and state budgets are experiencing spending difficulties due to shortfalls in government revenues. The governments are borrowing as an option to cover for the fall in revenues. This has geometrically increased the debt burden of the Federal and State Governments. There is high rate of inflation attributable to hike in pump price of petroleum, low domestic production capacity, dependence on imports, a weak naira, scarcity of foreign exchange and high cost of doing business in Nigeria, high interest rates, poor electricity supply, lack of portable water, high cost of transportation and poor state of aggregate infrastructure. Statistical overview of growth rates in major sectors of the Nigerian economy show that they are either slow or negative sectoral growth rates. All the macroeconomic fundamentals (variables) such as exports, balance of payment, inflation, unemployment, and exchange rate are not moving in the favourable direction. Nigeria is still a generator-driven, monoculture economy with epileptic power supply. There is jobless growth as well as major negative social indices. The basic needs of life have eluded almost 85 percent of Nigerians. Human capital indicators or social indices are fast declining, worse still, as oil revenue continues falling. The economy is deteriorating in human development indices, the quality of education and healthcare has collapsed, with

abject poverty, acute hunger and starvation prevailing amongst the poorest poor (Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku 3).

The positive impact of the economic recession in Nigeria is that it is giving an edge to small scale businesses such as small scale cropping, gardening, fishery and animal farms. Low cost transportation business such as the Keke-Napep and commercial taxi are making it as it has become too expensive (in fact a luxury) to move about with car given the hike in fuel price and the level of illiquidity. Average people prefer to pack their cars, except where very necessary, and patronise cheaper means of transportation. It has become more economical to use Keke-Napep. Sales of food items and operating a low cost canteen, low cost health care are business opportunities favoured by the economic recession. There are also individual, household and business austerity measures. Economic agents involved in a lifestyle that leads to wastage of money are making changes. For instance, unnecessary and irrelevant travels, avoidable shopping and flamboyant entertainment and food wastages are minimised. The rich are also complaining. These are making the average Nigerian lifestyle economical and sustainable too. There is budget deficit and budget cuts for individuals, households and businesses. Purchase of expensive phones, new cars, household gadgets and appliances when old ones are still in good condition are discouraged. People are fast imbibing maintenance culture. Those with long appetite for imported foods and services are beginning to realise that it is not economical, or too expensive and unsustainable. In fact many have switched to buy “Made in Nigeria” and have realised that they gain more by doing so. This is good for local manufacturing and employment. Even for the rich, areas of priority spending have become housing, food, affordable education, healthcare, transportation and clothing. Economic agents are into part-time job, business and small scale farming for household consumption which is a positive injection to the economy. Medical tourism to India, United States of America, and shopping spree in Dubai, France, Italy, South Africa and wholesale imports from China and other countries are fast declining (Agri, Mailafia and Umejiaku 3).

The above submissions reveal that the recession in Nigeria has also impacted on Nigerians positively by instilling a sense of discipline, rationality and frugality in their spending lifestyle. As such, Nigerians have cut down all unnecessary propensities to consume.

### **Synopsis of *Echoes of Hard Times***

The play, *Echoes of Hard Times* is set in Lagos, Nigeria. It revolves around the family of Jide Ojo, a company clerk and his wife, Bisi Ojo, a food vendor. The family is poor, and they have a son, Tunde and three daughters, Adeola (the eldest), Wumi (second daughter) and Bola (the youngest daughter). The main action begins when Jide tells his wife that Chief Ladipo; a rich business man has indicated his interest to marry their daughter Adeola. He also tells her that his company summoned its staff that had put in fifteen years and above, and told them that the company is running into debts, as such, it has become necessary to lay off some of its workers, but if they are willing to accept half of their salaries till the economy improves, they will be retained. Bisi reacts and tells Jide that their daughter will not marry Chief Ladipo or his riches. She says he hates his daughter for him to think of such an idea. She tells him that Chief Ladipo already has three wives, and that

her daughter will not marry anybody until she finishes school. Jide tells her that he cannot steal to keep his children in school, and that people use what they have to get what they want. The situation escalates to a quarrel and their neighbours intervene to separate the duo from fighting.

The action progresses as Jide tries to convince his daughter to accept the marriage proposal of Chief Ladipo, but she refuses and begins to cry. Bisi comes in and tells Jide that she dropped out of school to marry him, but she won't allow the same thing happen to her daughters. She then summons her children and tells them to put in extra hard work in their studies, and possibly get scholarship awards. She tells Adeola and Wumi to assist her in the market after their school, and says she will ask the two girls assisting her to leave so that she can save some money. Bola would stay at home to prepare food for her father, while Tunde would help his uncle in his car-wash business after school, so that he can get pocket money whenever he asks his uncle.

Jide visits his friend Peter Akeju, who has been retrenched from work for about six months. Peter tells Jide that the economic crunch has made him a prisoner in his own house. He adds that his wife, Mrs. Joe Akeju, who is a contractor, is now the man of his house, and even refuses him sex. He tells Jide that even his mistress, Nina, whom he told about his unemployment, told him to go back to his wife, and never return until he gets another job.

The next day Jide returns home hungry from work and asks Bola to bring his food. He is surprised when he discovers that his wife put just a piece of meat in the food. He complains about this, but later eats the food. Chief Ladipo visits him and enquires from Jide if he has spoken to Adeola about his marriage intention. Jide tells him not to worry that everything will be fine. Chief Ladipo tells him that he would be back by Monday to finalise their discussion. He hands Jide an envelope of five thousand naira, which he calls kola, then he leaves. Jide opens the envelope, counts the sum and says it would be for the purchase of Tunde's JAMB form, he then prays that God should make his wife and daughter see the reason why he is taking that decision, or provide him with a better alternative so that his son can complete his university education.

The action progresses as Joke, Jide's younger sister, visits him and tells him that her husband, Femi now has a shop where he does his cobbling business. This he uses to augment the money from his government job. He has two apprentices working with him full-time, and their son joins them whenever he returns from school. Jide is fascinated by the idea. She hands him a letter which his father from the village sent him, then she leaves. Jide opens the letter and reads the contents. He then says his father is not serious, and must be joking. He visits Peter and tells him that his father wants him to marry another wife so that he can have more boys. He says he would reply his father with a strongly worded letter; telling him to forget about the idea. Peter tells him to calm down and take it easy. Peter then says he heard that Chief Ladipo has the intention of marrying Jide's daughter. Jide confirms that this is true. Peter tells Jide that he has no problem; that he should marry his daughter off and get another wife. Jide reacts that Peter can't be serious, and that if he has to give his daughter to Chief Ladipo, it must be to see Tunde through his university. Peter asks if Adeola likes the idea, Jide says she doesn't. Peter tells him that she may be right. Jide replies Peter, and tells him that it is not a matter of right or wrong, she just has to marry

Chief Ladipo so that her brother can finish school. Peter then suggests that Jide asks Chief Ladipo to sponsor Tunde through his university and wait one extra year for Adeola to complete her secondary education before marrying her, so that she can at least have a certificate and be employable.

Jide asks Peter about an interview he attended, and Peter says it was fine, but he isn't putting all his hopes there. He tells Jide that he is pursuing a loan from a bank to start off something before the year runs out, and that he does not think he can work for anybody anymore. Jide tells Peter of his sister's husband, Femi, who does cobbling business alongside his government job. Peter then tells Jide that he could do same since he is a barber. Jide says he would need money to get a shop and buy some tools. Peter tells him that he would lend him some money when he secures the bank loan, which Jide would pay back gradually. Jide thanks Peter for the idea and says he would discuss it with his wife.

The next scene shows Jide discussing with his wife about the idea Peter suggested. She likes it. Jide tells her that the challenge he has is the money to rent a shop and to buy some tools. Bisi tells him that she has some money in her safe, which she was saving for Tunde's university fees. She asks Jide how much he needs, he says between five hundred and one thousand naira. She then tells him that she has two thousand five hundred naira. Jide is happy and embraces her fondly. Bisi tells Tunde that she is doing all she can to make the best out of their marriage because she loves him. Then she tells him not to force their daughter to marry Chief Ladipo, and that Adeola needs education just as Tunde does. Jide tells her of Peter's suggestion that they tell Chief Ladipo to sponsor Tunde's university education and wait for a year till Adeola completes her secondary education before marrying her. Jide tells Bisi that he has not told Chief Ladipo yet, and hopes to do so when he comes on Monday. He tells her that Chief Ladipo gave him the sum of five thousand naira as kola, which he gave to Tunde for his JAMB form. Bisi reacts as she says he would not have collected the money if he told her. She tells Jide that they would keep Chief Ladipo's five thousand naira for him when he comes on Monday. Jide then tells Bisi that they should start looking for a shop nearby and tell their children to invite their friends to come have their hair cut next week, when he must have bought the things he needs.

Tunde tells Jide that he wants their television repaired because he and four other science students were selected for a scholarship to be given to the best two science students, which is sponsored by the Old Boys Association of his school. They were asked to listen to the news every day and read newspapers for current affairs, which will form part of the interview. Jide tells Tunde that the television will be repaired tomorrow. He advises Tunde to study extra hard now, and that he should keep the news within the family. He then tells him to call his mother so that he can disclose the news to her himself.

The succeeding scene shows the family of the Ojos seated. Also present are Joke and her husband, and Jide's landlord, Mr. Otubanjo. Peter arrives and narrates how his wife fell into the hands of fraudsters (419). Chief Ladipo and his people arrive, after formal introductions, Jide tells him to sponsor Tunde through his university, Chief Ladipo accepts. Jide then tells him to wait one more year to enable Adeola complete her secondary school before he marries her. Chief Ladipo is infuriated by this and says he cannot wait. He is about leaving with his people when Jide hands him the sum of five thousand naira in an envelope, then he leaves angrily with his people.

The last scene shows Bisi and Jide discussing in the parlour. Bisi says she is happy that Chief Ladipo is out of their lives. Jide tells her that the rich also cry because God gives the poor what riches cannot buy, and makes the rich sometimes hunger after what the poor have in abundance. Bisi tells Jide of a man who asked her to put in an application as a food vendor, because the government is opening a big soap factory at Ilupeju, and they need a food vendor. He then said she would pay him one hundred naira every day when she starts supplying the food. Jide does not like the idea and discourages her from it. He tells her that the times are hard but they can't join the dirty games going on everywhere. He adds that when he settles with his part-time job, she may have to enrol in one of the catering schools around, so that she can have a certificate to apply for contracts; and she may even open her own restaurant. Bisi likes the idea. Tunde runs in from outside singing as he announces that he has won the scholarship, Bisi breaks into a joyful song, the play resolves as Jide joins and the whole family is agog in dances of joy and celebration.

### **Discussion**

The play *Echoes of Hard Times* is very relevant in the present times, especially in a time when the world is still plagued with the woes of recession that has affected not only advanced nations of the world, but even developing countries. The play is a reflection of the socio-economic situation Nigerians are facing at the moment: the rate of unemployment is increasing on a daily basis; companies are laying their staff off, crime rate is on the increase and security remains a major challenge in the country. The present government of President Muhammadu Buhari has done a lot in fighting corruption by recovering looted funds and blocking wastages, yet a lot of Nigerians, especially the poor are suffering because of the ailing effects of the recession in Nigeria. In an attempt to provide a solution to this situation, and recommend ways through which Nigerians can survive in these hard times, Felicia Onyewadume's *Echoes of Hard Times* provides a blueprint on the survival mechanisms Nigerians can adopt to face the challenges of the recessed Nigerian economy.

From the play, one can infer that the main motivation behind Jide's decision to give his daughter in marriage to Chief Ladipo is for him to sponsor his only son, Tunde, through the university, which forms part of his responsibilities as a father. His wife's refusal to accept his proposal almost leads to a fight. Fortunately, their neighbours intervene to prevent the fight. This situation is very common amongst poor families, as most fathers, especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, think that marrying their daughters out to rich men is an alternative means of getting wealth, and any opposition to this, leads to constant fights and quarrels in the family. Jide, still unwilling to give up his idea, tries to convince his daughter, Adeola to accept Chief Ladipo's marriage proposal, but she refuses and begins to cry. He then gives her an ultimatum to either drop out of school and join her mother in the kitchen or marry Chief Ladipo. His wife Bisi comes in and intervenes. She tells him that she dropped out of school to marry him, while her mates are driving big cars. Today, she cooks and sells to feed and clothe her children all because she dropped out of school; and the same thing is about to happen to her daughter. She tells Adeola to wipe her tears, that even if the economy is bad, she will not marry Chief Ladipo. This scenario shows that poverty, induced by recession; makes a lot of poor Nigerian fathers take wrong decisions by making their daughters drop out of school to marry rich



men, just to survive, even when this is against the wills of the ladies in question. The result is a life filled with the feeling of non-fulfilment on the part of the ladies, who realise that their futures have been short – changed because of poverty. Consequently, most women who suffer this, determine to do all they can to give their children a better future. This is what Bisi strives to achieve in the play.

Finding a way around the present challenge, Bisi decides that her two daughters, Adeola and Wumi would assist her in the market after school. She tells them to study harder and possibly get scholarship awards. Tunde, her son, would assist his uncle in his car-wash business after school, so that he can get pocket money from his uncle whenever he requests. While Bola, the youngest daughter will stay at home to attend to her father by providing his meals. She tells them that they shall survive one way or another. From Bisi's resourcefulness and wisdom, we construe that in desperate times as this period of recession, for one to survive, one must adopt desperate measures by thinking outside the box, rather than crying, indulging in self-blame or begging others for help. Bisi represents every strong Nigerian mother, who despite the hard times, have refused to resign to fate or depend on their husbands for help, instead she takes the bull by the horn by determining her fate and that of her children.

In the play, Tunde observes that his father's decision to give his sister out in marriage to Chief Ladipo is as a result of the economic mess the likes of Chief Ladipo have forced Nigeria into. In his words:

**Tunde:** ...I know Papa would never have consented to that ugly scheme but for the economic mess the likes of the Chief have forced this country into. I hear he became an emergency millionaire through series of contracts awarded him by some unscrupulous government officials, contracts which he never executed (Onyewadume 8).

From Tunde's lines, we can see the replication of the Nigerian situation in the play. Chief Ladipo represents all corrupt Nigerian politicians and government officials who siphon public wealth through poorly executed or unexecuted contracts, just to amass wealth and keep the masses in poverty. The activities of the likes of Chief contributed to the recession Nigeria is facing today. In this regard, Kale, Maigari and Haruna observe that:

...when the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) was selling dollars at N197 and people were buying at N300, the highly placed individuals in the country were putting call across the banking industry to get dollar at the official rate. This they later resell at the parallel market rate of N300. Think of how much some of them were making. An individual can make as much as N1 billion naira without doing anything according to the former CBN governor (Lamido Sanusi). The people that were profiting from this were people that were telling the government that if it didn't devalue the naira people would suffer. The poor paid the price of a devalued currency and the rich schemed off the profits (55-56).

Jide visits his friend, Peter, who has been out of job for the past six months. Peter narrates his ordeal and tells Jide that he has lost his place as the man in his house. His wife, who is a contractor, is now his boss. This shows that recession can make a man lose his position of authority and respect; especially when he can no longer fulfil the financial responsibilities that the roles of a husband and father demand of him in his house. The result is that such a man becomes a houseboy to his wife; mainly when the woman is the breadwinner of the family. A similar situation is seen when Jide returns from work hungry, and requests for his food. He realises that his wife put just a piece of meat for him. He complains about this, but financially handicapped because of the economy, he later eats the food.

The situation begins to take a different turn when Jide's sister, Joke, visits him and tells him that her husband now does cobbling as part-time business, which he uses to augment the money he gets from his government job. Jide discloses this to his friend Peter, and Peter advises him to follow the steps of Femi, Joke's husband, by taking advantage of his barbing skills. He tells him to look for a shop and promises to assist Jide with some money, which Jide would pay back gradually. Peter also tells Jide to ask Chief Ladipo to train Tunde through his university and wait until Adeola completes her secondary school education before he marries her. Thus, providing Jide with alternatives to solving the challenges he is faced with. Jide discusses Peter's suggestions with his wife Bisi, and she agrees to provide Jide with some money from her savings to help him secure a shop, buy some tools and start his barbing business. She also uses this opportunity to tell her husband to give up the idea of her daughter marrying Chief Ladipo. Jide accepts and they agree to return Chief Ladipo's five thousand naira to him when he comes on Monday, and present him with the requests of training Tunde in the university and waiting till Adeola completes her secondary school education before marrying her.

The foregoing shows that all hopes are not lost even in the midst of difficulties, and serves to dissuade Nigerians from depending only on one source of income, as well as the preference for white-collar jobs, especially in this period of recession. From Femi's decision to go into cobbling as a part-time job and Jide's decision to go into barbing to support his half-salary job, we learn that Nigerians can seek alternative means of surviving by going into jobs that require informal training, in the form of unskilled labours. By this, both white-collar workers and the unemployed are encouraged to acquire non-vocational skills and training, as this can ensure their survival in this period of recession. In the play, both Femi and Jide found alternative means of survival by going into non-vocational jobs. Even Peter was pursuing a bank loan to start a business of his own, as he said that he can no longer work for anybody. Having found the answers to his problem, Jide is better equipped to face Chief Ladipo, who rejects Jide's proposal that he waits one more year for Adeola to complete her secondary education before marrying her. Consequently, Jide returns the five thousand naira Chief Ladipo gave him, after which Chief Ladipo leaves angrily with his people.

Having got his place back as father and husband; Jide confidently tells his wife that when he is settled with his part-time barbing business, she may have to enrol into one of the catering schools around, to enable her get a certificate which she can use to pursue

contracts. She may even set up her own restaurant, and to crown it all, Tunde returns with the good news that he has won the scholarship award, and the family is thrown into a celebration and singing galore. Jide summarises the play's message when he tells his wife:

Jide: Can't you see that the antidote for stomach adjustment palava (SAP) is to engage yourself in whatever you know how to do best? (Onyewadume 40).

This, therefore, is the message which Nigerians must embrace and take seriously if they must survive in this period of global recession.

### **Conclusion**

The world is currently facing recession and a lot of measures have been put in place by world governments to mitigate the effects of recession on the masses, and Nigeria is not an exception. The play, *Echoes of Hard Times*, typifies the cries and the echoes of the hard times Nigerians are facing currently because of recession, and as a solution to these challenges, the play opines that, Nigerians should engage in non-vocational jobs, as well as acquire non-vocational skills if they are to survive the recession.

Drama is a reflection of man's life and the age in which it is situated. By this, drama serves to entertain, but while entertaining, it informs and also educates. The foregoing is what this essay is concerned with, as it strives to use drama as a tool to answer the Nigerian economic recession question, by providing a tangible solution to the untoward hardships. The study observed that studies bordering on the role of drama in dealing with economic recession are limited, and by way of recommendation, it calls for more studies to be carried out to fill the knowledge gap in this research area.

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