

IMAGE OF THE NIGERIA POLICE AS PORTRAYED IN GEORGIE IORTEMA'S *NIGHT DUTY*

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Abstract

This article presents a literary analysis of Georgie Iortema's play, Night Duty, which portrays a negative image of the Nigeria Police. The constitutional duty of the Nigerian police is to maintain public safety and public order. In practice, many members of the Nigeria Police are lawbreakers. There are many instances of these law enforcement agents caught fighting, demanding and accepting bribe, killing indiscriminately, and raping women, etc. Disturbed by this development, Georgie Iortema takes a swipe on the Nigeria Police in the book Night Duty, where he reveals artistically the obnoxious and nefarious acts of the men and officers of the Police Force who commonly trample on the rights of the citizens. The present article highlights the negative life of the police that depicts moral bankruptcy, depravity, desperation and misery both in their domestic and public life. The message is poignant and full of moral lessons.

Key words: *image, Night Duty, Nigeria police, drama*

Introduction/ Theoretical Framework

Many African communities and/or countries have a number of problems in common: corruption, tribal nationalism, insecurity, ethnic rivalry, economic oppression, leadership struggle, unstable

governments, just to mention a few. These problems are attractive themes for literary expression. The creative writer, like a few other concerned figures makes inroads into the numerous problems facing society and uses his literary prowess to woo public sympathy about the problem, and canvass for solutions to the ills of society.

In recognition of this role, Udu and Bako call the creative writer, the conscience and forerunner of society (2007). In the same vein, Nwabueze (2011), names the creative writer the referee who tries to correct those that violate the rules of the game of life. Asigbo (2013) is of the opinion that creative writers "...not only write to condemn but must point out the way forward" (p.10). The creative writer represents the action as it happened through the process of re-enactment (Nwabueze, 2011). Creative writers create realistic situations and select appropriate themes and motifs that reflect the cultures of the society where the work of art is set. In addition they create realistic characters that depict the facts of life (Nwabueze, 2011) to achieve their literary visions.

So far, we have talked about the creative writer in general. From this point, we would like to narrow down our discussion to the dramatist—the person who writes drama or dramatic literature to be performed by actors and actresses. Many people consider drama as both a work of imagination and reflection of real life. That is why it is often said the world is a stage and drama is the mirror of life. This statement is true especially if we look at drama from Aristotle's perspective as captured in his highly quoted work, *The Poetics of Aristotle* that drama refers to poetic compositions that were 'acted' in front of audiences in a theatron (Australian Catholic University, 2005). Aristotle's idea of drama as imitation was hinged on the justification that drama imitates actions or deeds performed by people in real life. Drawing both from theory and

his many years of practical involvement in theatre arts, Nwabueze (2011) defines drama as “literature that talks and moves about before the eyes of its audience” (p.162) thereby presenting a fresh perspective to the explanation of the concept.

This definition is strengthened from the standpoint that in presenting their message, dramatists lay bare the ills of the society by creating characters that embody these ills (Nwabueze, 2011). Nwabueze practically demonstrates this through his play, *Guardian of the Cosmos* where truth and evil are at war with each other, and strangely more people desire to thread the path of evil in preference to honest and truthful behaviour. Similarly, more evidence can be cited from the works of foremost African dramatists which have attempted to project the ills that plague the society. Ene Henshaw is one of the early dramatists to make a dramatic enactment of tradition and modernity, and treats as his main theme the option of reconciliation to heal broken relationships in his play, *This is our Chance*.

Wole Soyinka staged an anti-western subjugation crusade, which looks down of traditional customs and practice in *The Lion and the Jewel* just as Megeru Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiongo in the *Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Iyorwuese Hagher to mention a few have in their various works highlighted other problems faced by Africans such as corruption, power struggle, etc. while assuaging the negative image of Africa as presented in western literary writing. Zulu Sofola in *Wedlock of the gods* and J.P.Clark in the *Wives Revolt* depict the image of the African woman and male brutality against women.

***Night Duty* by Georgie Iortema**

Night Duty, is a play by Georgie Iortema. Little is known about this playwright in the literary world. But through, *Night*

Duty, his debut play, so much about Iortema's admirable literary gift become manifest. Born in 1971 in a village called Mbakato, Mbakuha in Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State, Georgie Iortema attended Ahmadu Bello, University, Zaria where he read and obtained a B.Ed Language Arts: English Degree. Although he later took to a different career, Banking and Finance, after graduating with a Master's degree in the field, his passion for literary writing did not wane a bit. Armed with this robust educational history complemented by his obsessive extra-curricular travel, reading and writing hobbies, Iortema is able to create a story about police life that is poignant and full of moral lessons. The full plot is presented in the next section.

Synopsis of *Night Duty*

Set in far away Kano, the largest city centre in Northern Nigeria, Georgie Iortema's *Night Duty* is a comic kitchen sink drama about a newly married couple, Mr and Mrs Kiley Ikondo, of Ukan community in Benue State. Kiley Ikondo and Mimi Kiley are the main characters in the play. Kiley is a police constable serving in Kano. On a fateful day, Kiley comes back from night duty and meets Mimi so fast asleep that two incidents—opening the door to the room and confiscating property in the same room—take place right in her presence without she being aware.

Even if Mimi did not wake at the point her husband opened the door, the raucous confiscation of the family property as well as the boisterous discussions bolstered by drinks by the trio of Kpash, Modem, and Rumun, the three official members of Ukan Progressive Union, Kano Branch would have been enough to wake her up. The Ukan Progressive Union, which had granted him a loan in the sum of twenty-five thousand naira to enable him successfully complete Mimi's marital rites sent the three

gentlemen to recover the loan. Kiley is unable to repay this loan, hence the rasping confiscation of the furniture in the house, including his bed, which he had staked as collateral. The only clue to Mimi's long and deep slumber is her somniloquy, the act of talking in the sleep. Mimi sleep-talks and in the process calls Kassim to rest from 'the act' as she is now too tired. What act? And who is this Kassim? Could this be Kiley's immediate boss, the Divisional Police Officer? These are the questions that occupy Kiley's mind. Kiley struggles to find answers to these questions.

The answers are not within reach until he acts cleverly.

Irked by both this jarring incident and the circumstances surrounding his wife's somniloquy, Kiley sets out to get to the bottom of his suspicion—whether or not his wife has an extra-marital affair with someone. He therefore, leaves his duty post at about 1:00am the following day and heads home under the pretext to pick something important he had forgotten there.

The unexpected happens! Kiley nabs Kassim, his DPO right on his matrimonial bed with Mimi, his wife. Kiley corks his riffle and moves to kill the DPO who is extremely frightened. Kiley does not shoot Kassim at once. Instead, he uses a tough rope and ties the two lovers one backing the other. He then calls his neighbours to witness the infamy. The truth about night duty is thus exposed—the DPO has been using the influence of his position to place Kiley permanently on night duty so that he can have unhindered access to his newly married wife. The neighbours constitute a court and give the two lovers a fair trial, ultimately finding each of them guilty of infidelity and adultery and recommending appropriate punishment.

Image of the Nigeria Police as Portrayed in *Night Duty*

There are several reports in the media that depict the pitiable image of the security operatives in Nigeria. Our security operatives namely the army, police, civil defence corps, etc. easily get involved in acts such as giving and taking bribe, street fighting, adultery, rape, stealing and drunkenness. These acts portray them as law breakers instead of law custodians. James Abraham (2014), a reporter with *National Mirror* reports a case of a soldier, who was a member of the Special Task Force in Plateau State who was arrested for raping a four-year old minor. Cases involving the law agents breaking the law are so rampant that a newspaper editorial (*National Mirror*, 2015) recently decried the impunity of these security operatives who instead of maintaining law and order show penchant for lawlessness, which advertently results to trampling on the rights of the citizens they are paid to protect. Disturbed by this development, Georgie Iortema takes a swipe on the Nigeria Police in the book *Night Duty*, where he reveals artistically the obnoxious and nefarious acts of the men and officers of the Police Force.

In *Night Duty*, three Nigerian policemen, namely Kiley, Okoro and Dom show acts that depict moral bankruptcy, depravity, desperation and misery both in their domestic and public life, including when they are on duty. As evidence, the playwright describes Kiley's living room as "exiguously furnished" (p.1). Kiley lives in a one-room apartment that serves as both his living and bedroom. There is hardly enough food in the house to eat by the family. In Act one, scene one, Kiley comes back from night duty with balls of bean cakes (*akara*) wrapped in paper. First, this typifies the breakfast taken in the policeman's house. Second, it is a sign that the policeman lives from hand to mouth. He bought the *akara* from the proceeds of night duty. The reader is touched in the way and manner he shares the food with his wife, which shows

his gluttony. And to further stress his meanness, he tries to hide the food when he hears some knocks at the door, and finally stuffs his mouth with it and forcefully swallows it lest his visitors are disposed to share it with him. Furthermore, as a result of the poor working conditions, or perhaps his reckless financial discipline or both, Kiley habitually borrows to supplement his salary as it is evident in his loan deal to finance his marriage project. This he himself admits much when he confesses to his guests that since a year ago when he married his wife he cannot buy her clothes, and not even a handkerchief for himself or good food for the house. As expected, he is unable to repay the twenty-five thousand naira loan, a development which leads to the confiscation of his property – his bed inclusive leaving him and his wife with no option other than to be sleeping on a borrowed mat. Below, Modem sneers:

Modem: ...You signed the loan agreement which bound you to offset it within a year or forfeit your property to the Union. You failed to honour the agreement. A three-month period of grace was granted (to) you, but you failed. The Union then had no choice but to confiscate your property in accordance with the agreement (p.6).

The consequences of Kiley's debtor-life soon catch up with him. His newly married wife, Mimi is lured into an adulterous life as his boss, the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) immediately takes advantage of his poor financial status and uses his official position to engage in a love affair with her. Mimi's illicit love affair with the DPO is the main cause of crisis in the story.

Other acts of moral bankruptcy, depravity, desperation and misery are seen in the characters of Dom and Okoro. Dom in particular stealthily removes money from a citizen under the influence of alcohol. In literary consideration, this act is ironical and in civil

matters criminal! Should the police do this to the citizens they ought to be protecting? The police have a mind of their own. They even lament when there are no criminals around, as that to them means no avenues for undue advantage.

OKORO: *Nnaa* this street dry today o.

DOM: T-o-o m-u-c-h. E dry like sand in the desert. Make we patrol instead for dey sit down for one place (p.32).

The play further creatively reveals the high level dissipated life of the Nigeria police. For this, lessons can be learnt about the DPO's character. The DPO sees nothing wrong in sleeping with another policeman's wife in that man's house, and on that man's bed. The immoral act is premeditated and habitual. The DPO has permanently placed Kiley on night duty in order to facilitate his unhindered access to Kile's wife and he (the DPO) chose the nighttime to operate so that he cannot be noticed. But like the biblical saying, all that is covered by nightfall shall be blown on rooftops. The day of reckoning came, and the DPO's nocturnal operations were finally exposed.

A similar lifestyle is seen in the character of Okoro, another policeman. Okoro is over ready to shoot unarmed, innocent lovers over flimsy charges but shamefully resorts to asking irrelevant questions when a victim of an armed robbery operation runs to him as a way of evading confrontation with the criminals:

OKORO: You just run come, breathing like person wey just do Olympics, and begin dey shake *jigjigijigijigi* like say you get typhoid fever; man like you dey rush

me instead of you to cool down and make proper report. Na so dem dey behave? (p.23)

Okoro arrests Iyabo for the offence of going about the city streets in the late hours. Instead of following due process in the exercise of the law, the policeman wields his rifle at Iyabo and threatens to shoot her. The question is, does the law prescribe shooting a criminal for this kind of offence? By no means! The terrified Iyabo begs for pardon. Strangely, Okoro has been dragging at something: to make Iyabo feel guilty of her offence so that he will take advantage of this, and mete out his 'own personal punishment,' sexual satisfaction. So at last, Okoro drags Iyabo to the dark corners of the streets, and the two "...are swallowed up by the murk" (p.28).

Significance of the Title of The play, *Night Duty*

Further evidence of the negative image of the police can be seen in the framing of the title, 'night duty.' Night evidently symbolizes evil. The play provides a debauched image of the Nigeria police whose main duty is to maintain public safety and public order by way of serving the community, safeguarding lives and property, protecting the innocent, keeping the peace and ensuring the rights of all to liberty, equality and justice; (Nigerian Constitution, 1999; Onibokun, 2013). Although the injurious police operations do not take place only at night, but the incidences in the play show that more happens when the rest of the world is asleep. The Nigeria police is widely known for bribery and corruption. No wonder when Kiley could not get the representatives of Ukan Progressive Union to 'arrange' for the second time he tries to slip an envelope in Modem's hand in a

driver-without-papers-and-check-point-police style (p.12). The fraudulent personality of the police takes its highest toll in the life of the DPO, the man in command of Godo Police Station. Apart from occupying a leadership position, the DPO is an enforcer of the law. So when he breaks the law which he himself is meant to enforce, what becomes of the society? When Kiley catches the DPO red-handed in an adulterous act with his spouse, to our surprise the DPO shows no sign of remorse for what he has done. Instead, he still brandishes the authority of his office. But Kiley is not joking. His rifle is at the ready. Nonetheless the DPO howls:

Kassim: Kiley, march right back to your duty post before I get annoyed and charge you with dereliction of duty, and bare-faced impudence and impertinence. One, two— (p.34).

But when it becomes clear to him that Kiley means business and has corked his gun to shoot him, the DPO begins to beg Kiley promising to give Kiley instant promotion and money to reclaim his confiscated further reveal so much of the life of the police. Georgie Iortema's play calls readers to reflect not only on property. Similarly, the DPO offers the trial judge money to share with the panel of adjudicators so that the case brought against him can be ruled in his favour. These acts of desperation and corruption the operations of the Nigeria police alone, but also on the characters of all those who occupy leadership positions at whatever level of our national life. The expectation is that leaders should provide direction to the citizens of this country; ensure that the rights and privileges of the citizens are not trampled upon; make provision for the improvement in the welfare of those they are leading, etc. What we see in return is the opposite.

The police barracks, where this story is set, is a microcosm of Nigeria. A police barracks houses both men and officers of the police force, their families, and other civilians who render social services such as education, trade, and transport, etc. Iortema's literary searchlight beams on the DPO, who controls the centre.

His character therefore, reveals the rot, dishonor and despondency of not only the security system but also the entire machinery of governance. Iortema, the author of *Night Duty* advocates that it is only a fair and equitable judicial system that can provide the desired hopes and aspirations of the masses. That hope and wish is expressed in the deliberate way the jury is constituted by the inhabitants of the barracks to give the DPO and his estranged lover, Mimi fair trial. This arrangement represents a true democratic set-up, which is the desire of the common man. Luckily, the caliber of members of the constituted jury has not disappointed the readers and audience. Unequivocally spurning the DPO's mouth-watering promises of money and a fair deal for all, the judge says:

Judge: And let me also tell you, expressly, that justice is no respecter of personality. And you cannot buy justice. Justice is invaluable and priceless. Justice is beyond Naira and Kobo. Only your act can afford you justice! (p.52).

Its final judgment provides an important lesson for both the reader and the general public that the people are more supreme than a government cabal that puts itself in positions of authority, even when such people have procured the most expensive security gadgets and weapons, they are still at the mercy of the common populace. Another important lesson is that no matter how long it

takes, one day the actions and inactions of citizens in authority shall be brought to judgment, and the rule of law shall have its way.

Conclusion

Night Duty presents a negative perspective of the Nigeria Police. It focuses on areas such as corruption, immorality, misuse of power, etc which have brought our country pain and backwardness. The dangers of these crimes have been highlighted by Georgie Iortema, and the way forward has been suggested also. The democratic constitution of the jury, which is a deliberate creation of the playwright points to one of the innovative ways our problems can be tackled. The author of *Night Duty* seems to imply that hope of the Nigerian populace lies in an incorruptible judicial system that can administer justice that is fair to all regardless of the class, religion, social or education status of whoever is involved. The message is poignant and full of moral lessons and generally constitutes an important contribution to national consciousness and rebirth.

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