

Theatre and Politics in Nigeria: A Political Reflection in Macaulay's 'Obanla'

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Abstract

This paper critically reflects on the political scenario in Nigeria as depicted in the dramatic piece "Obanla" by Abiodun Macaulay. It is actually an excursion into the Nigerian political history, with a serious interrogation of the present while offering a forecast into the future against the backdrop of the plots, structure and the thematic output of the play "Obanla". The socio-political context that birthed "Obanla" equally serves as a fulcrum to x-ray the political atmosphere or milieu of Nigeria as a nation where the socio-economic and political well-being of the citizens are premised primarily on ethnic groupings and power tussling; a country where the citizens' rights are encroached upon unrestrained; where governance is a game of wits between various ethnic groups; where one greedily secures political powers and attempts to later transfer same to his immediate family members, either through political elections or military coup d'etat only to prevent others from getting to the position. Such intention is usually cladded in heartwarming speeches with sinister motives to govern unjustly characteristically out of greed, selfishness, self-aggrandizement with unholy agreement to subject other ethnic groups to intentional and perpetual societal hardship and terror crowned with political assassination. "Obanla" therefore presents a most potent tool in understanding the political rivalry, greed, assassination, and corruption in Nigeria. It provides a revelation into the evil being perpetrated by the so-called leaders. This article employs

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Machiavelli theory to illustrate the selfishness of human nature especially in the Africa continent vis-a-vis the corrupt and heinous nature of the African leaders. The play presents a tableau of assorted violence, unequal wealth distribution and power, greed, the destruction of peace and injustice, the growth of disorderly ambition, betrayal, disunity, lawlessness, and dishonesty.

Keywords: Theatre and politics, Coup, Godfatherism, Corruption, Political assassination, Abuse of Power

Introduction

Art according to Samovar, et al. (2009), art ‘‘is a mirror image of the society’’ (p. 33). Art frequently challenges society and it is sometimes on the leading edge of history, appearing to forecast the future. Art grows in the soil of a specific society offering incisive revelations of the prevailing attitude, beliefs and assumption of the society it is domiciled. As stated by Wilson (1988), ‘‘Art may question society’s view or reaffirm them, but it cannot escape them’’. (p. 48) Theatre is an art, and as such it mirrors or reflects life. It does not try to encompass the whole of life at one time but rather selects and focuses on a specific part of the total picture. Throughout history, theatre has concentrated or focused on one subject: human beings. To confirm this, Barranger (1995), states ‘‘theatre is a way of seeing men and women in action, of observing what they do and why they do it... because human beings are both theatre’s subject and its means of expression, theatre is one of the most immediate ways of experiencing another concept of life – of what it means to be human’’ (p. 3)

Throughout history some playwrights have written primarily to entertain their audience, and others have written with a serious purpose in mind: to call attention to injustice, to make a statement

against war, to raise moral or philosophical questions as observed by (Wilson 1988, p. 83). To corroborate this, Barranger (1995), writes that “some playwrights write to expose truths about realities of social injustice, some write to make political statements about people, economies and political system. A playwright writes a play to express some aspect of reality, some emotions and feelings connected with all of humanity, some measure of experience, some vision or conviction about the world” (p.3)

Centuries of European economic and political domination strongly manifest in the African cultural life, especially in its theatre. Tracing the history of political theatre in Africa Obafemi (2008): states;

The sixties witnessed the evolution of critical realist dramatic forms critical both of Eurocentrism and neo-colonialism. Kobina Sekyi in Ghana, Soyinka and Clark in Nigeria, exemplify these trends on the West Coast of Africa. Disillusionment, alienation and betrayal were the essential outcomes of independence-generated plays exploring anti-neo-colonialist, anti-neo-imperialist issues all over Africa. (p. 29-30)

Blacks have made a chequered struggle to create a dramatic culture to “articulate problems, ideas, beliefs, experiences, in propounding paths of change and illuminating the most profound aspects of the human being...in his deepest region of history. In this same vein the play - “Obanla” (The Travails of our Heroes) exposes the truth about the realities of social injustice such as corruption, political assassination, abuse of power, godfatherism, coup and lust for power.

Interface between Politics and Theatre

Political theatre is a term that has been used to refer to three different phenomena: theatre that comments on political issues; political action or protest that has a theatrical quality to

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it; and any action by politicians that is intended to make a point rather than accomplish something substantive. In the history of theatre therefore, there is a long tradition of performances addressing topical issues, especially those germane to the society itself. This encourages consciousness and social change. The political satire performed by the comic poets at theatre had considerable influence on public opinion in the Athenian democracy. Those earlier Western dramas, arising out of the politics, or democratic city-state of Greek society, had a ritualistic and social significance that enhanced the relevance of the political issues being examined. Political Theatre challenges an audience member's own beliefs, encourages them to critically assess their own moral values. Indeed, a basic functional independence of theatre and politics can be illustrated by certain indigenous performances that have remained unchanged for many years under various political parties, systems, and orders. Although government and politics may be useful to man as a social animal, they are partially inevitable or always necessary. Theatre is political if it is concerned with the state or takes sides in politics. According to Kirby (1975), 'It is a performance that is intentionally concerned with government that is intentionally engaged in or consciously takes sides in politics'. Political theatre is an intellectual theatre as it deals with political ideas and concepts, usually in an attempt to attack or support a particular political position. Since the government in power is part of and supported by the status quo, any variation from the status quo is seen as a threat to and an attack upon that government. Political theatre is explicit in pointing out the institutions and

aspects of government that should change; it often describes and supports the exact nature of these changes.

Political theatre has developed within the civil societies under oppressive governments as a means of actual underground communication and the spreading of critical thought. Often political theatre has been used to promote specific political theories or ideals. John McGrath observed, as documented by Kritzer (2008) in his essay “ ‘There is no such thing as a de-politicized world’ .(p.121) While theatre is not the only art with political dimensions, it offers a unique forum for the political by involving audiences in a perceptible, if ephemeral, social reality through the operation of its conventions. Evidence of the close and perhaps intrinsic relationship between politics and theatre can be found in the long history of governmental regulation of theatre in degrees and forms that have not been applied to music, visual art, or written fiction. Theatre’s most basic political potential lies in its paradigmatic relationship to the polis: within theatre’s space, assembled citizens view and consider representations of their world enacted for them in the immediacy of live performance. Richard Schechner states as quoted in Kritzer (2008), that drama is ‘that art whose subject, structure, and action is social process’ (p. 121). Michael Kustow cited in Kritzer (2008) similarly describes theatre as both ‘an art and ... a model of living together’ (p. xv). Writing of political processes, the philosopher Hannah Rendt quoted in Kritzer (2008) argues that “a necessary constituent of political freedom is a space in which freedom can be exercised- ‘a place where people could come together” (p. 25).

Political artists embrace the opportunity to lend their voices in calling attention to the social and political problems of our

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times. They embody talent, optimism, and a sense of personal responsibility that is admirable.

History of Political Theatre in Nigeria

Modern theatre in Nigeria dates back to the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, which the late Chief Hubert Ogunde initiated from a fused tradition of the indigenous Alarinjo masquerade itinerant performance and the church developed open-air opera. Largely entertainment and profit driven, the theatre played significant activist role in the anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria. It was both populist (being a people's theatre aimed at and produced by the lower rungs of society) and popular in the sense of its social and political relevance to the cause of Nigerian independence. Barber (1986), observes that, "the theatre's conservative and gimmickry are a product of the demands of its large and boisterous audiences." (p.5) She concludes that, the plays open a window unto popular consciousness that is unique in its detail and clarity. They reveal in heightened and concentrated form, the anxieties, preoccupations and convictions that underpin ordinary people's daily experience". (p. 6) For her, and other keen witnesses of this tradition, the "conservatism of the popular theatre is a radical one...it is the paramount cultural document of this new consciousness (p.6). But of course, the Yoruba popular theatre, from indeed the perspective of its doyen, Ogunde, is not just a cultural document it is a political document in many instances. Ogunbiyi (1981), re-iterating the finding of Eburn Clark, who did a seminal pioneering study of Ogunde's theatre, claims that, "Ogunde was from the beginning, actively involved in the struggle for self-rule, an involvement which is not only reflected in the subject and themes of his works, but led to

several brushes with the colonial authorities’’. (p. 23). Tracing the genesis of political theatre in Africa, Obafemi writes (2008):

The history of the Nigerian theatre is synonymous with the history of the struggle for essence from the colonial to the present neo-colonial reality. It is also germane to state that art, theatre in particular, and democracy have a twin existence. Politics and theatre derive from the same source: people, the community, playing roles and finding expressions and solutions to life threatening problems. It is in this regards that we must always take more than a cursory and superficial view of Shakespeare’s characterization of the world as a stage. (p.116),

In the Nigerian situation, politics and issues of a ‘‘fundamentally political nature’’, as democracy, as Amuta (1989), argues, ‘‘has always occupied a central position in Africa literature’’. (p. 56). In the case of Nigerian theatre, be it with the charm rectangles of the populist Yoruba Travelling Theatre, or the exotic arena of the modern literary theatre or even the participatory squares and circles of popular, community and development theatre demonstrate, not just political sensibility, but a robust engagement in politics the difference between generations of the political challenges which it has to grapple with and recreate’’ These bruises, which come in various forms of humiliation, incarceration, banning of performances and so on, went on for three decades under the colonial administration, the civilian government in the First Republic and the military government of the late seventies. *Strike and Hunger* (1946) took its subject from the General Strike of workers in the post-World War II Nigeria in

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June 1946. *Worse than Crime* (1956) is a theatrical documentation of the slave trade experience in Nigeria. *Towards Liberty* (1947), and *Tiger's Empire* (1946) attacked the colonial rule and its tyrannical hegemony. *Bread and Bullet* (1950) was charged with sedition by the colonial police. Ogunde was fined six pounds and the play was banned, 'not only in Kano, but also in Kaduna and Makurdi' (Ebun Clark 1974:5; Ogunbiyi 1981:305). Perhaps the most quoted of Ogunde's reprisals according to Obafemi (2008), was:

The 1965 experience in which his company was banned in Western Region by the Akintola NNDP Government as a result of his song YORUBA RONU a work with an instructive apocalyptic dimension, vindicated later by events in Nigeria's history, beginning with the incursion of military rule in 1966, a year after Ogunde survived another banning slapped on him by the military regime in Oyo State in 1978, to become a political activist on the campaign train of Chief Awolowo's UPN presidential race. In his works, Ogunde exposes treachery and political chicanery of politicians who struggle to kill the truth. Obafemi concludes, 'essentially, the contribution of the practitioners of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, as exemplified in the pioneering works of Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, Kola Ogunmola and the over two hundred Yoruba theatre practitioners is a constant denunciation of falsehood, tyranny and an exhortation of the

virtue of truth, justice and equity in politics''. (p. 116)

Obanla: The Synopsis

Obanla is a story of our past, present and future. It is an African story of political instability, restlessness, corruption, political assassination, betrayal, godfatherism and self-aggrandizement, lust for power and abuse of power. Out of greed and self-aggrandizement, the reigning monarch, Oba Fiwasaye is oozed out of the palace by his chiefs because he will not accede to their plans to divert public funds for their personal use. For this reason, his chiefs conspire against him and dislodge him. They replace him with Balogun Arobiojo, a warlord with the belief that he too will listen to them and dance to their tunes, but unfortunately, Arobiojo has a soft mind for the townspeople. He wishes to improve their standard of living; he wants to be a good king. He wants to serve but not rule but very unfortunate, he has a bad, power craving and crazy wife who will not allow him to fulfill these wishes. His wife turns his mind and attention away from executing his good intention for the people of Iluora. His chiefs also take an offence for these good wishes of the king. The chiefs see this attitude as traitorous, a betrayal of trust and a breach of agreement. For this reason, they tag him as a weakling. Therefore, to prove to his chiefs that he is not a weakling, with the support of his wife, Adesua who makes sure that her vicious whims becloud his mind and overrules his judgment. He seeks a spiritual backup and fortification from his god, Egidiran, and henceforth Arobiojo's mind becomes hardened. He becomes arrogant, deviant and murderous. He extends this anger to the townspeople; the townspeople become the victims of the rift and combustible conflict between him and his chiefs. He begins to

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rule them with a rod of iron in his hand even when danger dangles before him. In the process, many heads roll. The crisis hamstrung him and in the process he incurred the wrath of the gods. To put an end to this autocratic rule of terror, the gods in alliance with Iluora warlords under the command of Bioloja dethroned Arobiujo.

.The Relevance of “Obanla” to the Nigerian Political Situation

Theatre mirrors life. The idea that the stage, is like a mirror, shows audiences’ good and bad qualities along with an accurate reflection of the times. Looking into a mirror is akin to going to the theatre. When we look into a mirror we see our double, the image of ourselves and possibly a background and anyone standing around the reflection. According to Barranger, (1995):

The image can be made to move; we make certain judgments about our humanness. Our humanity as reflected in the mirror has shape, colour, texture, form, attitude, and emotion. It is even capable of limited movements within the mirror’s frame. On stage, the actor’s living presence as a fictional character creates the ‘doubleness’ which is theatre’s special quality. It is both a stage world and an illusion of a real world. Theatre is life’s double, but it is also something more than a reflection of life. It is a form of art – a selected reflection. It is life’s reflection organized meaningfully into stories and fictions about events and people” (p. 13-14).

The aforementioned parameters will be employed to analyze Obanla’s content as a mirror of the political situation in our society. The situation in “Obanla” is akin not only to the

political situation in Nigeria but to that of Africa as a continent where politics is a money spinner and apparently a “do-or-die” affair.

Coup d'état.

Instability of government is one of the barriers to the development of the Africa political system. Incessant change of government is common, under the pretense of falsehood and other reasons levied against the incumbent government such as mismanagement of public fund, autocracy etc. As it is seen in “Obanla” when Oba Fiwasaye is removed from the throne by his chiefs and replaced with Balogun Arobiojo, a warlord, their motive was clearly expressed in the opening scene when the chiefs and Arobiojo with his soldiers invaded the palace. It is a bloody coup. The palace soldiers were called, King Fiwasaye and his wife were incarcerated. The reason the chiefs adduced for removing Fiwasaye is that he did not listen to them. He did not cooperate with them.

Lukosi: I told you Fiwasaye. I warned you but you only listened to yourself. You think you can rule alone. This is our new king (*Points to Arobiojo who beams and nods in approval*)

Elemo: You are too adamant to correction. The river that forgets the spot of its emanation will dry off. We are your Godfathers. Take them away! (Obanla, p. 2)

Obviously, the chiefs got rid of him because he rejects their attempts at ‘milking’ common resources and ‘sucking’ people’s fund; from draining the government purse. Coup planning and its successful execution is not a new thing in Nigeria. It is done for certain reasons either to fulfill an ambition, for self-enrichment, lust for power and so on as it is depicted in the second scene of the play Arobiojo was a warrior, a soldier whose ambition was to seat on the throne and rule his town just like Nigeria leaders. Arobiojo, his wife

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and the chief's reasons for wanting power is not different from the reasons why Nigeria leaders eagerly crave for power.

Nigeria experienced her first coup in 1966 led by Colonel Kaduna Nzeogwu. It was a bloody coup that led to the assassination of many leaders like Oladoke Akintola, Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa and many others. The country has experienced many coups thereafter, with each leading figure in the coup putting forward a valid reason for seizing power. Nigeria is not alone in this coup experience as similar occurrences are a common place even in several African countries such as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Libya, Egypt, Ivory Coast and so on. Coups brought in Rawlings of Ghana, Samuel Doe of Liberia, Ghadafi of Libya to mention a few..

Godfatherism

Godfatherism as defined by Chrisjane (2012) is “a symbiotic relationship between two persons namely; the godfather and the godson, where the godfather uses his political power and wealth to secure political position for the godson, who upon ascension into power, pays gratification to his mentor in kind or in cash”. Godfatherism has become a norm in Nigeria's political environment where without a godfather; an individual cannot secure a political position. In the fourth republic, it has assumed a ludicrous dimension in the Nigeria's polity.

In “Obanla”, the political godfathers are the chiefs. They were behind the enthronement of kings in Iluora. It is whoever they unanimously endorse that becomes the king and they can at will, remove him if he does not listen to them as they join hands with Arobiojo to remove Fiwasaye because Fiwasaye refuses to listen to them. They later enthroned Balogun Arobiojo whom they eventually conspire against and send out of the palace because he turns a deaf hear to their requests.

Samuel (2015) observes that “Godfatherism is one of the pandemic that is endangering our polity. It compels elected officials to siphon funds made for public infrastructural development to private accounts, thereby jeopardizing and mortgaging the future of the citizens. Edigin (2010) writes that “Crisis in Nigeria do not only portray great danger to our democratic experiments, but also on the very essence and validity of our existence as a nation. The billions of naira expended by Nigerian godfathers for bankrolling the elections of their godsons have totally monetized elections in Nigeria which automatically disqualifies men of honours, character and integrity from holding elected public positions”. One common phenomenon is the fact that godfathers has only one aim which is to make back in folds money expended on their political godsons which in turn always leads to stealing from the state with obvious results. This is exactly what the Chiefs in Obanla exhibited in their dealings with the two kings-Arobiojo and Fiwasaye. The chiefs see their contributions to their enthronement as an investment in movement two.

Iyalode: Yes your majesty. We did not sponsor your coup for nothing.

Others: (Responds affirmatively) Hoo...

Iyalode: We didn’t back you to come and sell groundnut and popcorn or eat remnants in your government. You have to revisit your budget, your majesty

Arobiojo: I shall reimburse you accordingly

Iyalode: Good but remember that it is a life investment. As long as you are still on the throne, you must continue to give us our dues from the proceeds of Iluora.

Iyalode: Signed and sealed. (Obanla, p. 9)

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Godfatherism is both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together permeate the political process and atmosphere in Nigeria. Public officials who owe their positions to the efforts of a political godfather incur a debt that they are expected to repay without end throughout their tenure in office. According to the former Rivers State opposition candidate, the conflict arising from godfatherism has become one of the greatest problems facing the Nigerian political system. The holder of the political position becomes a stooge to his godfather because he that pays the piper dictates the tune. By the time the godson refuses to meet their godfathers' demands, he is eventually impeached from political office. In support of this discovery, Samuel (2015) writes that "the political godfather usually brings the political godson to the limelight of politics. He (godfather) introduces him (godson) to the people that matters. However, the godson having successfully clinched the seat with the support of their godfather quietly wants to sideline their political godfather. This may be as a result of over lordship by their godfathers wanting to dominate the government; giving directives and controlling the administration.

Combustible conflicts erupt between the chiefs and the two kings in "Obanla" – Fiwasaye and Arobiojo because the two kings will not allow the chiefs to control them which become a major face-off and the reason for the conspiracy that lead to the removal of the kings. The chiefs bankrolled Fiwasaye and Arobiojo's kingship ambition. Therefore, they expect the kings to respect the unwritten agreement between them and pay them back handsomely. The chiefs want to take control of the government. They want the kings to dance to their tunes. To avenge the kings for noncompliance to their requests they conspire against them and show them the way out of the palace. Unluckily for Arobiojo, he was killed.

Corruption and self-aggrandizement

Corruption is an endemic disease that has eaten up every facet of the Nigerian society. It is defined as “The abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone who depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority.” (transparency.org 2015) Corruption and mismanagement of funds remain a major cause of Nigeria’s failure to make meaningful progress in improving the lot of ordinary Nigerians. Politics is a dirty game as often echoed. It is enveloped with greed and self-aggrandizement. Adesua, Arobiojo’s wife and the chiefs exhibit these greed and self-aggrandizement to the fullest.

Arobiojo: I don’t want to shed anyone’s blood. I want to be like king Fiwajaye.

Adesua: Why do you want to be like him?

Arobiojo: He was a good king

Adesua: If he was a good king, why did you remove him?

Arobiojo: To fulfill our dreams

Adesua: If you want to be like him, you will have problems. You will dig a grave for yourself. This is Iluora. We both know them, if you can’t change them...if you can’t beat them, you join them. It is eat and let’s eat

Arobiojo: What do I do then to enjoy my reign?

Adesua: Follow tradition. Toe the line of your predecessors before Oba Fiwasaye or you will face the wrath of the Chiefs just like Oba Fiwasaye. Follow the former tradition that Fiwasaye was trying to bend, and your reign will be long (Obanla,p. 7)

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The chiefs are good examples of the kind and caliber of leaders Nigeria has at the helm of power. They consider their own welfare paramount to that of the townspeople. The purpose of giving Arobiojo's support to become king is to enrich themselves and members of their entire families and they made it clear they won't have anything less.

Lukosi: You greased our palms. Is that why you want to breach our agreement? How much did you give us that are worth the throne you are sitting on and the crown on your head? Don't get us angry. A river that forgets its source shall get dried.

Arobiojo: But gentlemen, my gentle Chiefs, this will have a negative effect on our administration and management

Lukosi: Don't gentlemen us. We are not gentle. In fact, we will not be gentle. We are lions and lions are not gentle. We didn't sponsor you to come and erase corruption; we sponsored you to make name and money.

Esade: What your predecessors didn't care about, don't care about them. (Obanla, p. 9-10)

The visit of Oba Ajibade a neighbouring king worsened the situation. He apparently expressed corruption to the fullest and did his best to show Arobiojo all the tricks in governance that he can use to divert public funds to his own personal pocket. He advised him to borrow money for projects that will never be executed and that security votes running to millions of naira is there for him and his family.

Ajibade: I don't see that as a problem. All you need to do is to borrow money. Take bonds and loans from banks and other money lending organizations and you

will be happy. Everything will go on smoothly and you will have good governance

Arobiojo: How do I pay back?

Ajibade: You pay by exploitation

Arobiojo: Explain that

Ajibade: You will increase tax and tariffs on farm products. You will tax the townspeople heavily.

Arobiojo: They will complain and agitate.

Ajibade: You will turn a deaf hear. They will stop, blend and adapt after some time. And if they don't, you know what to do to make them comply. You are a trained soldier. (**Arobiojo nods**) I have borrowed one hundred billion naira. My friend, if you don't borrow money, you can't have money. You can't enrich yourself and your government will crumble. If you contract a project out to a contractor, if it is a billion, you will document ten billion. Nine billion will go to your pocket apart from the ten percent that you will collect from the contractor. You see, I have commissioned many uncompleted projects

Arobiojo: And they are documented as completed?

Ajibade: Yes. It is a tradition. My predecessors did it, why wouldn't I do it? Beside that, the one hundred million naira the Chairman of the Obas sends every month as security vote goes into my account directly. There is no document on how you spend that. Nobody questions how you spend it. Whatever you like, you give to your Chiefs as their own share. Kabiyesi, you see this throne, this seat (**Points to the throne**) you are sitting on, underneath there are billions in naira

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Arobiojo: So I am sitting on money- on billions
(Jokingly)

Ajibade: Yes, you are. Don't be a coward. Strike while
the iron is hot. (Obanla, p. 20-21)

In confirmation of the chiefs and Oba Ajibade's greed and self-aggrandizement, Samuel states that "Politics in Nigeria has become an investment where the investors are set to make profit at all cost, as a result, political brutality is pervading the society. Many public officials use stolen public revenues to pay for political violence in support of their ambitions. Former Rivers State opposition candidate ((Nairaland.com, 2012) reports that "Most of these politicians are linked to cult groups – they finance them, they maintain them, they sustain them. And all that is out of the use of government funds. These financial factors are closely entwined with the rampant political violence in Nigeria. Public revenues are not only stolen and misused, but often pay for the services and weapons behind the political violence. Because violence and corruption make political competition a very expensive endeavor in Nigeria, many politicians are far more accountable to powerful and violent political godfathers who sponsor them than they are to their constituents.

Assassination

The barbaric act of godfatherism, violence and corruption also resort to political assassination eventually. Assassination has been described in several ways. "It is to kill suddenly or secretly, especially a politically prominent person, murder premeditatedly and treacherously (dictionary.reference.com.2015.) "Assassination is defined in Assassination Law and Legal as "killing of a prominent person for political reason" (definitions.USlegal.com/a/assassination.) Political system that involves a drastic style of operation encourages "political

assassination”. Political assassination is reported to be first used in the medieval times to describe the murders of prominent Christians by the Hashshashin, a secret Islamic sect and with time assassination were said to be used in the twenty-first century to describe murder committed for political reasons. Assassination also dates back to the earliest forms of government, with the killing of Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. In Nigeria, political murder started in 1966 when Samuel Oladoke Akintola, Ahmadu Bello and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa among others were killed in a cold blooded coup led by Col. Kaduna Nzeogwu. Political assassination is a potent tool in the hands of the federal and state governments to eliminate or for the elimination of perceived opponents.

In movement eight when Arobiojo discovers that chief Elemo has become a thorn in his flesh, he gets rid of him on the advice of his wife, Adesua.

Adesua: (Laughs softly) ... Elemo is an enemy cloaked in friendship and the enemy is always waiting like a sleeping tiger. If you want to kick the tiger, you had better have a plan for dealing with its teeth. Now that you have bit him, don't you think he will want to bite back? He is a very powerful man. You had better plucked out his teeth.

Arobiojo: He would meet my lion in the den

Adesua: No, it could be dangerous. Don't wait for him; hit him before he hits you. Attack him before he attacks you.

Arobiojo: Relieve him of his life?

Adesua: Yes, for your safety.

Arobiojo: *(Rises, looks thoughtfully for a moment)* It shall be done (Obanla, p. 55-56)

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The Nigerian political terrain had its fair share of political assassinations right from the military era to the so-called democratic government of the fourth republic that came to existence in 1999. Pa Alfred Rewane an elder statesman and activist was murdered in his Lagos home in 1994, Chief Bola Ige, a sitting Attorney General of the federation was killed in his Ibadan residence in December 2001 while Chief Funsho Williams, a gubernatorial candidate in Lagos state was murdered in 2006 to form a long list of murdered Nigerian political figures. All these political assassinations remained unsolved till date.

Betrayal

The character of Jiganbiekun, one of the kingmakers in “Obanla” depicts the life and nature of some of the Nigerian leaders from local to national level. This character symbolizes betrayal, and shamelessness of some of these leaders. It reveals the Nigeria leaders love for money over their integrity and conscience. This character depicts disunity in Nigeria political system. In the government the likes of Jigan will pretend to be part or members of a protesting group, fighting for the same and right course; fighting for the betterment of all, but they are wolfs in sheep clothing. They are black sheep who will later go behind to reveal the joint decision of the members to combat and submerge the opponents. But when the secrets are leaked by the insider who is a mole, an odd one out who serves as an informant to the opponent, the joint plans will be intercepted and truncated. Many had done it in the past and some are still doing it but the law of Karma always catches up with them as it did on Jiganbiekun in movement eleven who is Arobiojos informant. The mole that leaks the secrets of the townspeople to Arobiojo

Arobiojo: Have you not heard?

Jigan: Heard what Kabiyesi?

Arobiojo: That my chiefs have conspired against me.

Jigan: That is why I am here, Kabiyesi. You lay the golden goose of my life and good turns deserve another.

Arobiojo: Not many people know about that.

Jigan: I do kabiyesi, you should trust me.

Arobiojo: I don't know who to trust any longer.

Jigan: Count on me as one of your ardent loyalists. I shall forever be loyal to you.

Arobiojo: Tell me what is going on?

Jigan: Plans are in the working to unseat you, not only unseat you, but to kill you.

Arobiojo: Who and who are involved?

Jigan: Your Chiefs have sought for the assistance of Bioloja to attack you.

Arobiojo: (Shocked) Bioloja -ogun?

Jigan: And he has agreed. I was there, in fact, my life is at risk as I am standing here telling you because we took a very powerful oath not to reveal this but I can't keep you in the dark about such danger.

Arobiojo: Bioloja-ogun, I know he would want to use this as an opportunity to avenge for my taking his place but I shall once again remind him of the Battle of Ibiripo.

(To Jigan) Tell me, how do they plan to attack?

Jigan: That, I don't know

Arobiojo: Find out

Jigan: I will

Arobiojo: This is the beginning of another victory. You deserve a big compensation for this. I will be back.

(Goes inside). (Obanla, pp. 81-82)

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But he never waits to receive the compensation. He defiles tradition. He offends and betrays the gods. He ignores the importance and effect of their words and power. When the oath is to be taken he is reluctant but he has no choice. He dies miserably afterwards

Abuse of power

Abuse of power is the illegitimate use of power. It is that situation that exists whenever someone who has power over others, (that is the capacity to impose his or her will on those others) for example by virtue of his or her superior mental dexterity, social position, physical strength, knowledge, technology, weapons, wealth, or the trust that others have in him or her, unjustifiably uses that power to exploit or harm those others, or through lack of actions, allows exploitation or harm to occur to them

In summary abuse of power is the improper usage of or treatment of an entity, often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit. And this can come in any forms, such as physical or verbal maltreatment, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes or other types of aggression. This act of illegal and improper use of power is vividly perpetrated and demonstrated by Arobiojo and his wife, Adesua.

Lukosi: You must Kabiyesi. We are your co-rulers. Any decision you make outside our consent is null and void. If anything affects the eyes, the nose will share in the pain. If you fall, we fall together and I am not ready to fall.

Elemo: We put you on the throne. We joined hands with you to drive Oba Fiwasaye out of the palace. There is nothing you can do without us

Arobiojo: To let you know that I can do a lot without you especially you Elemo, and to prove to you that I am not a weakling, I strip you off your chieftaincy title. (Obanla, p. 52)

Lust for power

The majority of Nigerian political officeholders always bid for second term and they are always ready to do anything to remain in power' It is ridiculous to note that someone like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, a ninety year old man is presently running the sixth term in government. This leads many to always ask the question: why? The answer was provided by Adesua, Arobiojos wife when her husband told her about Yemoja's mission to the palace that he must leave the throne for peace to reign in the town.

Yemoja: The gods say that your drum has sounded too loud; it is on the verge of bursting. To prevent this, they warn and advise you to leave the throne.

Arobiojo: Leave the throne? That is not possible, Yemoja.

Yemoja: Peace brings joy, war brings destruction. Choose peace.

Arobiojo: And lose my power?

Yemoja: That is the only choice you have, Kabiyesi Arobiojo. The pain you have to bear to prevent future calamities.

Arobiojo: That is from grace to grass

Yemoja: No, from grace to grace. You will save lives and properties and redeem your image

Arobiojo: I will lose everything- the respect and prestige. No, Yemoja, I can't

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Yemoja: That is the only sacrifice that you can make that will be accepted from you. Throw away your ego and pride

Arobiojo: No, I can't !

Yemoja: Then, you shall lose all, kabiyesi Arobiojo (Obanla, p. 58)

When he told his wife about this, her reaction was negative

Adesua: Have you thought of the after effect -the disgrace and the shame? How would you explain that outside? How do you tell people? That you were deposed? That you voluntarily abdicated? I, Olori Adesua who people call Olori to be relegated to the ordinary; no, my lord, if you can face the shame, I can't face it. What are you scared of? Are you not that stone-hearted lion that nothing worries except my love? And when he roars the earth quails violently and hundreds of heads roll off their bodies. Are you not that warrior who drinks with the skull of a tiger? You cannot leave the throne, my lord. (Obanla, p. 62)

It is glaring why Arobiojo and the wife would not vacate palace because of the accolades and the wealth acquisition including properties and bank accounts all over the world to the extent. Instead of losing all that, they prefer to die on the seat of power by refusing to heed the advice and warnings from the powers that be – the gods and witches.

Transiting from Military to Civilian Rulers

Nigeria democracy is an expansion of military rule. Arobiojo is a warlord who unseats the ruling monarch and installs himself. What Ibrahim Babangida and Sanni Abacha tried to do but failed.

Despite this fact Nigerias democracy has been populated with recycled military men both as presidents or lawmakers. Olusegun Obasanjo is a typical example a two-term democratic President that was once the nation's military Head of State. The present President Muhammadu Buhari was also a past military ruler while the erstwhile senate president David Mark also falls within this category.

Soldiers are trained to defend the country against external aggressors. They are not trained to handle the administrative side of the nation. Soldiers do not have the technical know-how, that is why their regime as military leaders and civilian leaders are so porous-full of mismanagement, corruption and violence. They rely on guns. One of the tragedies caused by these military turning civilian is that something that could have been resolved in one intelligent adult conversation would be addressed with violence. Military administrative know-how is poor. When Arobiojo becomes the king, he doesn't know what to do, or how to rule.

Truncated Visions of Good Governance and Intentions

In movement two, when Arobiojo accedes to the throne, his intentions are good, his plans and programmes are fantastic:

Arobiojo: People are crying for food, I want to provide food for them. They are crying for shelter, I want to provide shelter for them

Lukosi: How do you hope to go about this, your majesty?

Arobiojo: To lessen the task of the farmers, I shall provide tractors, and reduce the tariff over their farm produce. I shall apportion land to those who have none to farm. From the purse of the government, I shall build some low cost houses for the destitute. Those who are

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too old to work will be entitled to some certain amount and foods stuff at the end of every month, while the younger ones will have access to free education. For now those are my plans. (Obanla, pp.8-9)

This is a prove and an indication that he has compassion and interest in the welfare of the townspeople of Iluora but his chiefs and his wife serve as hindrance, stumbling blocks to his realizing this dream. They are not on the seat of power to serve but to rule and for self- aggrandizement. They poisoned his mind against the people of Iluora.

Iyalode: The plans are good if they can be effectively implemented but I hope they will not be to our detriment

Arobiojo: Your detriment? How do you mean?

Iyalode: Yes your majesty. We did not sponsor your coup for nothing.

Others: (Responds affirmatively) Hoo...

Iyalode: We didn't back you to come and sell groundnut and popcorn or eat remnants in your government. You have to revisit your budget, your majesty Arobiojos' wife and his chiefs minds work together.

Arobiojo: What do I do then to enjoy my reign?

Adesua: Follow tradition. Toe the line of your predecessors before Oba Fiwasaye or you will face the wrath of the Chiefs just like Oba Fiwasaye. Follow the former tradition that Fiwasaye was trying to bend, and your reign will be long. (Obanla, p. 9)

The essence of this is that not all these leaders are heartless and not compassionate. Some of these leaders have vision and interest in the people's welfare. They have some milk of human

kindness in them which they intend to share with the masses to lessen their burdens; to provide good standard of living; to provide shelters and every other necessities of life to the citizens of the states and federal but because of the ungodly people they surround themselves whose main aim and objective for coming into politics is to milk and suck the people's fund and drain the government purse thereby truncating these good intentions. Instead of joining these leaders to execute the good programmes, they will fill their minds with falsehood and set them against the people as Adesua did.

Summary

The society often looks up to playwrights to give them insights into the world around them – to provide fresh perspectives and new visions. Having successfully fulfilled these expectations from the society, theatre, therefore, has contributed immensely to the reshaping of society. It has been used several times and on many occasions to teach excellent conducts in the society. The role of theatre is to correct the ills of the society. Therefore, it has served as a vital tool to teach the society its problems and make corrections. Through this medium called theatre, attention has been drawn to character formation rather than wealth. Theatre can be used and has been used to predict the future of the society. Theatre alone cannot change the society but it can only point to change. It can tell and show people how to behave, points to problems either with violence or without violence depending on the perception or point of view of the writer, director and other production team. Theatre can influence change by addressing topical issues using real life characters. Human beings form what is called “society” and these human beings are both theatre's subject and its means of expression.

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