



Politics of Deceit and Reality in Africa: A Study of Joseph Edoki's *The African Dream*

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ABSTRACT

Politics and political activities have been very important issues that most critics and literary writers have devoted their attention in Africa. Political matter is a very prominent topic of contemporary scholarship. This is due to the fact that African literary works, being reflections of the debased and unholy political activities of the African society, have replicated this picture. Writers always write to reflect the prevailing conditions in their society. So, most African writers deal with the political, social and economic decay ravaging the African continent as a result of the insensitive nature of our political leaders. These problems range from bribery and corruption by the political leaders and government officials, economic deprivation of the plebeians, the tendency to loot and embezzle government funds, the naked lust for power and wealth, the rigging and manipulation of election results, the killing, maiming and burning of political opponents property, perpetuation of tribalism and tribal hegemony and the general pauperization of the masses. All these are as a result of the recklessness, inordinate ambition and inhuman nature of African political leaders. Problems emanating from poor political leadership in Africa form the core of exploration in writings by Joseph Edoki as shown in his novel *The African Dream*. Edoki not only highlights these heinous crimes by African political leaders, he also provides practical solutions to these problems.

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, Africa is a continent with great potentials; it is blessed with a lot of human and material resources. Our potentials have, however, not been transformed into actual greatness. Africa has what it takes to become great; it has raw materials and human resources to achieve this greatness. However, money from these abundant raw materials in Africa has been devorated to satisfy the yearnings and expectations of Africa's political leaders. So, Africa's greatness for now in the realm of imaginations or rather a mere communistic utopia.

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The main problem of Africa has been leadership; Africa has not been blessed with good and credible leaders. In Africa, most of our leaders are corrupt, they are insensitive to the plights, yearnings and aspirations of the people they govern. We have had ruiners parading themselves as rulers. The result has been stunted growth, stagnated development, dashed hopes, unemployment, misery poverty, penury and squalor that exist across the continent of Africa.

It is in reaction to this lack of good and credible leadership in Africa that novelists like Chinua Achebe, wrote *A Man of the People*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O *Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross* and Ayi Kwei Armah *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born* and *Why Are We So Blest?*

These novels mirror all the vices like corruption, lust for power, embezzlement of public funds by our political leaders, electoral malpractices, the suffering of the masses and the air of general insecurity pervading the whole of Africa. This is why Eustace Palmer says that *Petals of Blood*:

...probably presents the most comprehensive analysis to date of the evils perpetrated in independent African society by black imperialists and capitalists. (288 – 306)

In the same light, Ayi Kwei Arwah asks, "Why are we so blessed?". He is saying that our very blessing has become cause. Rather than convert the rich resources in Africa into a catalyst of growth and rapid development, the continent's ruiners and dealers have, virtually without an exception frittered our riches. Joseph Edoki's *The African Dream* deals with the evil activities of these ruiners in Africa and proffers practical solutions to nip in the bud these problems. It is in the light of the above that I am going to assess the novel *The African Dream*.

POLITICS OF DECEIT AND REALITY IN *THE AFRICAN DREAM*.

In the novel entitled *The African Dream* Joseph Edoki vividly gives us a pictorial view of corruption and political vendetta perpetuated by African political leaders. Corruption among other vices, can be ascribed to the inordinate ambition to remain in power perpetually which has become the political neurosis of many African leaders since independence. Characters like chief Halle Bashal, Chief Ikoyiko and Mallam Lawal Taishe are used by Joseph Edoki to represent the corrupt African leaders. They use their stolen billions of pounds to influence government decisions and perpetuate themselves in power. This is why when the military government of Colonel Aile decides to hand over government to civilians, chief Halle Bashal and his corrupt cohorts use their ill-gotten wealth to maneuver and scheme out the transparent, morally upright and intelligent Harvard Economics graduate Mallam Abu Shaika. During the party's primary, after the first and second

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ballots, it becomes glaring that the transparent intellectual Mallam Abu Shaika is the popular choice of the people to lead them in the new dispensation. However, the corrupt political cabals vehemently oppose to his choice because he will not dance to their whims and caprices.

The party caucus stops the primary and unilaterally pick the corrupt and dubious chief Halle Bashal as their presidential candidate. The bewildered supporters of Mallam Abu Shaika resort to wild protest to register their disapproval of the imposition. Hence, they resort to chanting:

We no go gree!
We want democracy,
not oligarchy
Up up Shaika, down down
Bashal. (41)

In order to intimidate and coerce the docile supporters of Mallam Abu Shaika, Chief Ikoyiko phones the Inspector General of Police. The Inspector General of Police brings a contingent of armed policemen to take control of the situation. With calm and, peace maintained, Mallam lawal Taishe says:

Due to time constraints,
the electoral committee
has decided to use the
results of the second
round as final...
In accordance with the
electoral rules of our party, I hereby declare
Chief Halle Bashal the
presidential candidate
of the Conservative
Convention. Thank you. (46-47)

The unholy activities of chief Halle Bashal and his compatriots confirms the view of Allwell Abalogue Onukaogu and Ezechi, Onyerionwu when they say that:

With the advent of
democracy came the
rebirth of certain
attendant vices such
as money politics,
election malpractice,
thuggery and various
kinds and degrees of
insecurity of lives
and property that can
be said to be politically

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motivated. (91 – 107)

The brute action of chief Ikoyiko against the supporters of Mallam Abu Shaika exemplifies the lengths to which some African leaders can go, in their pursuit of political power. They intimidate, kill, maim and destroy the property of their political opponents because they want the status quo to remain and be in power perpetually.

The author, also castigates the oppressive and repressive rule of the military leaders. The military leaders always incapacitate and render impotent any dissenting voice against their actions. They like the politicians are corrupt and morally bankrupt. They are insensitive to the plights and degenerate state of the people they govern. Any attempt to raise any objection against the administrative pattern of the leaders whether civilian or military is always met with barbaric treatment.

This is why Sule Umonte the leader of the Peoples Socialist Party is hated by successive government for being the conscience of the down trodden and castigating government official for their excesses and subjecting the people to untold hardship in midst of abundance. We are told he has been jailed many times. Yet, he is undaunted in his crusade against political, economic and moral corruption of the leaders. For daring to criticize the evils of the military government of General Mollan, Sule Umonte is arrested held in solitary confinement. He is tortured, given quasi trial and later sentenced to death. General Mollan continues in this his oppressive and repressive nature until he is overthrown by Colonel Aile another military man. The humiliating action of General Mollan against the voice of reason justifies the claim by Chidi Amuta that:

The overly politicized General
is so intent on holding power
that he plays his dedicated
officers against a cabal
of mercenaries and vice
versa until the military
situation deteriorates
to a point where he has no
republic to preside over. (85 – 92)

Sule Umonte is however released when Colonel Aile overthrows General Mollan. It is as a result of the corrupt and the decaying nature of both the political and military leaders that Fernando tells his associates that he has a dream to lead, liberate and take his people to true and realistic el dorado and dismantles the false communist utopia that things will be well created in the minds of the people by successive leaders.

His initial ambition is to run as an independent candidate but he is later adopted by the Conservative Convention as their presidential candidate. In the cause of his electioneering campaign, Fernando is vividly able through

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his political manifestos to give a pictorial and glaring view of the problems of his country and the solutions to them. Fernando believes that the major needs of the people are those things that will provide them general comfort. So, his programmes include green revolution, free primary and secondary education, commercial technology scheme, provision of drugs, water and electricity. He further explains how he will actualize these programmes.

In addition to the above, Fernando promise to build strong and virile economy for the nation, eliminate fraud and established purposeful and accountable government that will see to the end of military incursion in democratic government. According to Fernando the military always come to power when the politicians refuse to play game according to the rules. This is why Fernando states:

When politicians get into office,
most of them lose their heads,
lose their minds and go crazy.
By so doing, they go their own ways
And abandon the people, that
is why each time the military talk of a
rescue mission we have no choice
but to accept them. (III)

In the course of his political campaign, he encounters various human and spiritual obstacles from his opponents but with great determination, personal zeal, the will to survive and the help of God he is able to overcome all of them. As expected, he wins the presidential election. Now as President of his country Savannah, he faces another arduous task from members of the opposition in the Senate, especially chief Ernest Chicom, the Senate President and his cohorts who want to truncate his dreams for his nation because of their parochial and egocentric interest. They threaten to impeach him and starve him of the needed funds to execute his mass-oriented programmes. In the midst of these quagmire Fernando, is undaunted but determined to succeed as the political messiah of the savannah people.

As the President of the Savannah Republic, Fernando is revolutionary in every sphere. He carries out drastic and radical changes through his exemplary leadership. Fernando runs an open door government. He accommodates all the members of the society ranging from the plebeians to the elites. He does not believe in class stratification. In his determination of succeed, he turns down the offer of the yearly gratification of millions of dollars from chief Ralph Ozidi, Chairman of the Merigo chambers of commerce and Industries which previous Heads of State of Savannah use to collect annually. These post Heads of State are full of greed, corrupt and morally bankrupt. Their evil ways justify the claim made by Charles E. Nnolim that our politicians are full of greed, myopic and corrupt. According to Charles E. Nnolim:

The lachrymal nature of

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modern African literature made it inevitable for that literature to start by blaming the white man for everything wrong with us, castigating him for exploiting our resources and debasing our humanity. We also blamed the white man for not granting us at least, the flag of independence to allow us to develop ourselves. And when the white man threw in the towel, our eyes were opened to the rapacity, greed, myopia and the corrupt tendencies of our indigenous politicians. (1 – 9)

Also, president Fernando rejects the offer of a private jet from Mallam Sir Chief Isa Megadu, the building contractor who had earlier given a huge amount of fifty million pounds to Angela the President's wife. These offers are to unnecessarily influence Fernando to award him a ten billion pounds building contract. However, the president rejects and returns the bribe accepted by his wife. His action affirms his earlier claim during the electioneering campaign He says:

I believe in a noble cause and
for this cause I am set to pay the
supreme sacrifice, I am prepared
to live and to die for my fatherland.
I am prepared to lead and to leave
behind a good legacy. I have long made
up my mind to be an exemplary
Leader and no Jupiter can stop me. (75)

President Fernando is a dogged and pragmatic politician. As an erudite scholar he is very calculative and upright leader. In order to solve the multifarious problems of the masses, he orders his ministers to inform him on a daily basis with the number and names of jobless youths in the country as well as the different prices of common foodstuffs in different parts of the country. These will enable him to formulate a workable economy policy for the country.

In order to eradicate inordinate ambition for material possessions and corruption among the Savannah people, Fernando decides to reward excellence. To achieve this, monetary rewards and honours are given to inventors to encourage technological and agricultural growth. This will enable him to eradicate poverty, hunger, unemployment and revolutionise the entire economy system of the country. Fernando also provides free primary and secondary education for the people, he provides the hospitals with modern and sophisticated equipment and rehabilitate them. He also

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provides essential drugs for the hospitals so that the health need of the people can be adequately taken care of. In the cause of his fighting for the social, political and economic upliftment of his people, Fernando relegates the interest of his family to the background. To him, the needs of the nation must come first. This is why he refuses to build a house for his old father and for himself while he is in the office. This makes his wife Angela to say:

... what disturbs me is
that the way he is going,
we will leave this place
without any real financial
elevation. (270)

So, in order to ensure that they did not leave without real financial elevation, Angela decides to engage in unholy act of corruption and when her husband discovers this he puts her in a solitary confinement and later divorces her. The signal Fernando sends to the entire nation through this action is that "Charity begins at home". That he must succeed in his revolutionalising his country, he must start from his immediate family. Hence, Fernando tells Angela his wife:

Let me tell you in case you
don't know, a visibly
angry Fernando said, I
would rather live without
you than live a life without
principles. (267)

To eradicate the country of corrupt enrichment, Fernando sets up a tribunal to probe and try all those who had served in the previous governments and corruptly enriched themselves. He instituted the process of asset declarations. He personally appears before the panel and declares his assets, forfeiting to the state, those assets his enemies had dubiously registered in his name. Former heads of state like Allison Aile, former ministers like chief Ikoyiko and former chairman of General Electric Power Authority Sir Don Looker all who corruptly enriched themselves while they were in office forfeited them to the state. Assets corruptly acquired by all past leaders whether military or civilians are confiscated and the money is used to improve the lots of the downtrodden in the society.

For his exemplary leadership qualities and selfless service to the nation of Savannah, he is re-elected by the people for a second term. However, thirteen months into his second tenure, the military headed by Sergeant John Kadenya takes over the reign of power from president Fernando. This is short lived because the people rally round him to regain the power from the military though many of them pay the supreme price.

As a result of Fernando's good qualities, the people of Savannah press for the amendments of the constitution to ensure that he continues to rule

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them for third or if possible fourth tenure. Although the National Assembly of Savannah accepts the people's wish Fernando however rejects the offer, because to him 'No body is indispensable. Hence, Fernando says:

There are many people who can
do far better than that I have
done. After all, if I hadn't the
chance to prove myself nobody
would have known I could do it. (434)

Through characterization the author is able to present to us two sets of classes of people. We have characters like General Allison Aile, General Mollan, Chief Ikoyiko, Chief Halle Bashal, Darl Salom and Angela, president's Fernando's wife. These characters epitomized the mindless lust for power, mundane things, embodiment of corruption and senseless exploitations of the economic resources of the nation to their advantage at the expense of the suffering masses.

On the other hand, we have characters like president Fernando and Yvonne. They represent characters worthy of emulation.

Fernando is a real model, a president that understands the feelings, needs and desires of his people. He tries as much as possible to satisfy their needs. With him the people of Savannah lack nothing. Fernando is a realist, welfareist and a pragmatic utilitarian who knows the problems bedeviling his country and provides practical solutions to them. Hence at last, the Amazon of our time, Yvonne, a woman of substance who is undaunted and not stampeded by men's unethical actions, honours Fernando with a real gift, the laurel of his dream her daughter Mawa.

Fernando Summarizes the person and character of Yvonne in the following words:

O Yvonne the rarest of
all breads, you are of all
women, the most wonderful. (450)

Truly, Yvonne is most wonderful, she weathers through the storms, goes through the thickest snow, passes through the most torrential rain unhurt, stands by Fernando all through the tempting and joyful days. She is an example of a woman with impeccable and infallible character. Indeed, Yvonne is a rare bread and wonderful of all women. Infact, Fernando and Yvonne are characters worthy of emulation by all. Models to be imitated by genuine leaders in modern progressive Africa. President Fernando plays politics of reality that ensures the liberation of the people of Savannah.

Infact, he is a model for all African leaders to emulate if we must advance politically, morally, economically and socially. President Fernando is a dynamic, progressive and articulate leader. He possesses the three qualities that Aristotle says a good leader must have. They are ethos, pathos and logos.

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Fernando has a good moral character, he has the ability to touch feelings, to empathise and reach out to his people emotionally and he has the ability to give solid reasons for an action, grounding his activities. So, he is an accomplished leader of the people of Savannah. This is type of leader Africa countries need to become developed nations.

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