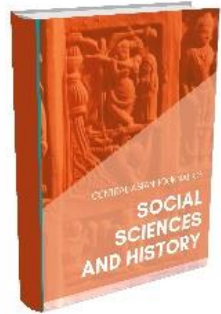




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The Dramaturgy of War in Godswill Okiyi's Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole

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Abstract:

This paper begins by throwing light on the function of literature in Africa. African literature is proactive and it is used to change a dicey situation. African literary writers are not alone in the fight against corruption and bad governance, as scholars in other areas of human endeavour are also in this crusade. Corruption is a manifestation of bad governance and this has been identified as the bane of our society, Nigeria. This paper on Godswill Okiyi's Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole discusses corruption, exploitation, deprivation, oppression, and infrastructural decay. The paper concerns itself with the interrogation of the socio-economic and political situations in Nigeria with the hope of changing these situations. Using the Marxist theory, the paper summarily depicts the fact that corruption cannot be combated with a simple demonstrative approach; instead, war is suggested as a potent tool used to curb corruption in the society.

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Introduction

Literature has for decades proved itself the center and circumference of life, and a very potent tool for salvaging humankind. Like a factotum, it ministers to the yearnings of the society in all ramifications so that it becomes the only overhanging tree silhouette that renders the society an iridescent brilliance. This attests to why Ngugi Wathiong'O opines that:

Literature does not grow or does not develop in vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society...There is no area of our lives which has not been affected by the social, political and expansionist needs of European capitalism. (6).

The issues of capitalism as espoused by Ngugi above are fatal diseases whose kaleidoscope has reached epidemic proportion. With a razor-sharp dissecting knife, it has succinctly set apart and even sewn a seed of discord amongst humankind so that the society metamorphoses into a suntrap. These uncommon quirks are what literature purports to mirror. Foremost, it lampoons these societal foibles, and proffers potent solutions with which they could be checked and sutured accordingly. This is the reason we acquiesce in Ngugi that literature, as a product of the society tends to reflect the happenings in it. These happenings birth literature.

The function of drama is to raise man's consciousness and awareness of his basic potentials as a human being. According to Arnold Hanser, "all art aims to evoke, to awaken in the observer, listener or reader emotions and impulses to action or opposition." (Ngugi, 6). And as Tar Ahira observed, "the highest goal of theatre within the radical perspective is to help man to understand his social environment and to rationally and emotionally master it" (Nwamuo, 33). Achebe believed that a writer "should March right in front in the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done" (45) and that the artist is "the sensitive point his community." In a different opinion, Achebe asserts that

the struggle for power at different levels of individual and communal interaction by people of different beliefs, orientation and backgrounds would more often than not generate crisis and conflicts which could cause a lot of physical, mental and spiritual harm to those concerned and even others who are under their authority. (23).

In modern critical parlance, writers in the likes of Woke Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Godswill Okiyi and Arnold Udoka etc. are playwrights of the Marxist school of writers whose works are approached with the Marxist mentality. The Marxist writers ask the questions: does the work advance the social revolution? Does it or doesn't it contribute to reality and the cause of the present social truth among contemporary Africans by insisting (vulgar Marxist style) that literature as part of ideological superstructure, must divorce itself from the luxury of art for art's sake and ally itself with the Marxist dictum that art, as an instrument in the class struggle, must be a reflection of the basic economic struggle? Terry Eagleton has insisted that what the "narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggle of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitations and oppression." (vii). This is where a Marxist reading of Okiyi's *Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole* comes in.

THE DRAMATURGY OF WAR

It is the proletarian Marxist African play par excellence with the normal revolutionary fervor; the normal subject matter which deals with the class struggle, trade, dispute, strike and the attendant brutalities inflicted by the capitalist comprador; treacheries from certain members of the proletariat who have been bought over by the capitalist oppressors; lynching of traitors who subverts the workers' solidarity; the resultant negotiation between the workers and their oppressors; and finally, the triumph of the proletariat over the authorities as part of denouement. In *Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole*? The readers moral indignation as he traces the sequenced brutal methods by which the authorities try to frustrate the workers from cutting or shortening their leave and unleashing other ill treatments on the workers, as evident in the dialogue between Adams Oshiomhole and his gang in the prologue:

A Voice: (Adams Oshiomhole) This incessant suffering can no longer be. People are dying. The masses no longer feel ashamed picking from the dustbins. Our children are no longer going to schools. Universities are shut. Shall we continue like this?....

Voice: No! Never! We shall not continue like this. What about generations of our

children who are to come? Should they live in slavery their own land? The land our fathers bought with their own sweat and blood. In toiling and working everyday to make sure that we have a heritage? (pause) Now where is the hope? Where is the prosperity? Where is life? Hunger and want stare us daily in the face. The haves have more, and have nots are dying daily. Where is the hope? All is not lost. Everything is gone. The worker works, but have a little to show for it; where is the hope? (1-2).

The looming corruption portrayed in the above quotes thrives with sinister connotations; hunger reigns supreme among the masses to the extent that picking from the dustbin becomes an alternative source of livelihood. The harsh result of capitalism makes the masses live in slavery in spite of the fact that they are in their fatherland.

The zenith of corruption in the play is revealed in the rhythm of brutalities that each repressive measures subsumes. It begins with poor working condition of, poor salary, poor medical services, and inadequately equipped hospital. In the mass starvation which this corruption engenders, men, women, and children and completely subjected to inhumane substandard means of existence and are reduced to eating rubbish and scavenging for food among heaps of dustbins. This disease of the pockets instigates the rancour that ensues between Francis and his wife, as portrayed here below:

*Helen: (voice rises) How I for talk before,
Eh? Francis, how I for talk? Whish
Kain husband wey you be sef? Bring
Money for food na wahala, everyday
Na union, union, na union be food?
See Lucky now? Im de sick, yet
Medicine no dey to give am, im
Sista Florence nko? When im go school las?
Francis: (voice rises) No insult me oh! I dy tell
You, no insult me. All the suffer wey i
Dey suffer, no bi say make e beta for
All of us? All the work wey I dey do,
No be for us, eh? Every money wey
Enta mai hand, no bi for your bodi e
Dey go? No insult me oh! (11).*

With the above brusque exchange of words, the secrets of the homestead which is not meant for the ears of outsiders is now blown into the wind as the rancour between Francis and his wife grows and metamorphoses into the scuffle that attracts the attention of well-meaning neighbours.

Another striking case or instance of corruption in the play is poor servicing or replacement of malfunctioning equipments in the factory. From the dialogue in the play, we discover that there is

certain equipment in the factory that has claimed so many lives and has also lived some disabled. The management though has noticed the defects in keeping such equipment, refuses to work or replace it with another. They accord little respect to the workers who perform the most tedious tasks in the factory. Their corruption-filled minds allow for little recognition of the rights of the workers as well as the dignity of labour. This is the reason workers are threatened with sack anytime an alarm is raised on poor working condition. The peak of this corruption of this corruption is the heart-breaking fact that even those workers who sustained injuries from this spoilt machine have no adequately equipped hospital to be taken to, as the characters dialogue thus:

II Voice: Na we both dey the same section, oh!

Na the engine wey dey pack the bottle

Dem comot wey don spoil, naim nack

Am for hand, come break am.

III Voice: Am as we wan carry am comot, na so

The engine jus' de hol im hand

(demonstrates)

II Voice: Even, as we manage carry am comot

Say make we go clinic, na so doctor no

Dey, nurse no dey and no medicine,

Naim the manager wey dey there carry

That bandage hol' im hand.

Resistance entails the ability of a leader to mould the minds of a people to collectively decide to effect a change of situation that is unfavourable to the people. It is the process of pooling together, harnessing, actualizing, and utilizing potential human resources for the purpose of development. It is the process whereby human beings are made aware of the resources at their disposal are also motivated and energized to collectively utilize such resources for the improvement of their spiritual and material conditions of living. Therefore, the achievement of this great goal of resistance is the essential preoccupation of the young generation of Nigerian playwrights.

Most of the works of Nigerian playwrights highlights the problems and aspirations of the masses. By doing this, the playwrights aim at helping to create senses of direction towards positive development of the people and thereby providing suitable avenue for sensitization and resistance. Thus, the young generation of Nigerian playwrights encourage the process of resistance by first focusing on socioeconomic and political problems that plague the masses, and secondly, by emphasizing that solution to such problems lie not in the benevolence of a supernatural being but on the collective will of all the common people. The workers in *Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole* ?, for example, understand this and because of collective will, stand to say no to an oppressive and exploitation system. They are mobilized with the sole aim of changing their pathetic conditions as exemplified below:

Voice: That is better comrades. That is much better

*Someday, we shall overcome all. But we all
Should be prepared. We all have to take our
Destinies into our hands. We can no longer
Allow the merciless and the brutal oligarchy
Primitive capitalists take us for
Granted. No matter where you are, no
Matter what you do, think to change it
All the better. Rise and stand to be
Counted. Even when you are battered, hold
Your head high, for in the course of time
And sands of fortune your cause and
action is firmly etched never to be erased.
I man: You heard him comrades, didn't you?
We all have a role to play, to make
sure things work out for us all. (2-3).*

In addition, Okiyi emphasizes the demands of the workers thus:

*I Man: As part of our demands, we request
for the following:
better machines!
All: Yes!!
I Man: Better working condition!
All: Yes!!
I Man: Improved salaries!
All: Yes!!
I Man: Free medical services, and a well equipped
Hospital!
All: Yes!!
I man: Transparency in Management, and t
heir recognition of our Union!
All: Yes!!
I Man: Freedom and Liberty for all workers in this*

Company!

All: Yes! Power to the workers!

I Man: And we also demand a panel of enquiry

Be put in place by Government and the greater

Union, to see what is happening here!

All: Yes! Power to the workers!!! (42-43).

It is noteworthy, to mention here that the rhythm of pressure from the workers, supported by the women, goes along with the rhythm of resistance by the stubborn powerful elites who counter every dramatic move by the strikers with corresponding resistant counter measures in the form of imprisonment and the use of armed men plus the plain cruelty in sacking the pleasant workers. This rhythm of brutality resurfaces in a crescendo that begins with arrest and beatings and imprisonment. For sensitizing the masses (the peasant workers) for the sudden resistance that almost took the management of the factory by relative surprise; Francis Okoli, and Theophilus Numan are arrested and imprisoned. By focusing on the problems of the masses and demonstrating that such problems require human efforts for, the playwright (Okiyi) engages in spurring and triggering the workers into resistance as well as revolution. This resistance forms part of an overall framework towards the attainment of individual or the people's rights and dignity of labour. Okiyi therefore, focuses on man's awareness on the exploitative and oppressive nature of the comprador capitalists as exemplified in the characters portrayal of Bommel Van Syke, Mr. Ade Smythe, and Mr. Chukwuma.

One thing is to mobilize the people toward resistance the other is the issue of effective and sincere and or true leadership. The play demonstrates that the ability to mobilizes or prepare the masses for the revolution lies in the effective and accountable leadership; a leadership that shares in the people's problems. In the play, in spite of the brutal torture and ill treatment meted on Francis Okoli, and Theophilus Numan in prison, they display epitomes of good leaders. Even when the management of the factory offer to bribe them so that they (the duo) will in return, silence the workers' union/protest, they instead turn down the offer by refusing to hamper the protest of the union, as the playwright puts it:

Van Syke: Mr Francis and Theophilus, look i

Have gone through your files and i

Know that you're hardworking men,

Responsible and with families (pauses)

Look, I know what you earn, even with

Your qualifications, but I promise you that

We will work it out. I personally promise

To promote you both to manager levels,

Right now and even give you

Official cars, right now! (pauses).

..., look, I know all the other workers

*Respect you, and look upon you as their
 Leaders, look I am sorry about the beatings and
 The detention, I don't know about it, but i
 Want you to go out there and talk to them,
 Let them go back to work, and all their
 Demands would be met. (63-64).*

The solidarity that exists among the workers culminates in their triumphant victory over the management of the factory as the intervention of the government as well as the Adams Oshiomhole brings the capitalists to book.

Dramatic Techniques

The language and style in *Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole?* are influenced and informed by certain situational variables-province, period, game, culture, religion, subject matter etc. within the consciousness of the playwright. The language and style are influenced by local borrowings etc. The language reflects the socio economic and political atmosphere of the time the play is set. The language is suggestive of violence and resistance; it also captures the state of affairs in the country. The language depicts the oppression; torture economic exploitation and forced labour meted on the people by the white imperialist and their brothers who have been bought over. The war song sung at various times in the play is rhythmic, repetitive and suggestive of resistance, as portrayed the following lines:

VOICE: Solidarity forever!

Solidarity forever!

Solidarity forever!

For our rights!!...

All: (sing) we shall overcome

We shall overcome,

We shall overcome,

Someday, one day,

Deep in our hearts,

We still believe,

We shall overcome some day! (1-2).

Godswill Okiyi explores immensely the situational variables to achieve an unpretentious style. The language is simple. Good evidence of the domestication of the English language is shown in the play. We observe some elements of subjectivity in Okiyi's diction. We see local colour influencing the language and style of the play through the setting of the play; borrowings from the Nigerian Pidgin English Grammar. Okiyi's choice of naming almost every character on African name, shows how his language and style have had influences from local colour and borrowings from the pidgin English

culture.

In the play, we observe a pragmatic use of language, that is, the portrayal of language as a socio-semiotic tool by which status, setting etc. are marked or indicated. Francis Okoli is a perfect example of this assertion; he uses language according to setting, situation, and the status of the interlocutors. At the closure of work, he speaks pure pidgin English with his uneducated wife at home as evident in their brusque exchange of words below:

Helen: Na dat one we go chop? Francis, na

dat one we go chop? Your pikin no

well, the senior one no dey go school,

yet you tanda there dey talk say you

be Union leader. E dey give food?

Francis: Kai! Man pikin don suffer, no bi

small. Helen! Shuo! Na bicos say

nothing dey naim you dey talk laik dat? (10-11).

When speaking with educated people both at work and with the union he leads, he uses standard English as evident in his conversation or dialogue with the company management below:

Francis: Even if the company closes

down, who would suffer

the loss, you or the workers? As at

now, the workers have nothing

to lose if the company no longer

exists!

Van Syke: (Hurriedly) Mr. Francis, let's do

the first thing first, look, go and

beg the workers, and then we

can turn to the other things, i

promise. (65).

Diction like ‘Solidarity’, ‘overcome’, ‘we no go gree’, ‘action’, are suggestive of war. The language of the Workers Union is revolutionary and violent. Hunger/slavery connotes hardship and poverty. Expression like “... our children are no longer going to school” (1), “hunger and want stare us daily in the face.”, “ the haves have more , and the have nots are dying daily.”, “ the worker works but have a little to show for it; where is the hope?” (2), portray economic exploitation, oppression, suppression, and forced labour where the people are deprived of their produce and manpower including making conscript labourers and low salary.

The presence of Van Syke the white overseer/headman portrays the cruelty of the neocolonial system.

In the aspect of setting, we could unequivocally adduce that the African names eg, Oshiomhole, Okoli, Chukwuma, Alhaji, Mina, Okoro used in the play and the excessive use of Nigerian pidgin English undoubtedly, situate the play in Nigeria. The pidgin used in the play is typical of the Edo-Delta variety.

Conclusion

Neocolonial capitalism and resistance against it form the historical antecedent of this plays. *Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole* grapples with socio-economic and political realities that have confronted and still confront the African continent. The playwright is a Marxist. The paper has shown sensitivity to change and the plight of the masses. Okiyi's literary temperament carries the sensitivity of war in conflict resolution. The masses in *Who is Afraid of Adams Oshiomhole* are under internal or democratic cum neo-colonial capitalism. Finally, the paper unearths the economic and sociopolitical exploitation, neglect, and oppression that reign supreme in the human society and opines that war is the only potent tool that can be used to combat neocolonialism in the society.

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