

ALARINJO

JOURNAL OF THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS

Vol 1 | No. I | ISSN:2636-7238



DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS,
FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OYE-EKITI,
EKITI STATE, NIGERIA.



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OYE JOURNAL OF THEATRE
AND MEDIA ARTS

ISSN: 2636-7238 | Vol. 1 No. 1 | April 2017

EDITOR

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A Publication of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts,
Faculty of Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.



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ALARINJO: Oye Journal of theatre and Media Arts (ISSN:) is a biannual publication of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University Oye – Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Paper subscription: Libraries and other Institutions, U.S \$75.00; Individuals, US \$50.00; Association Members, US \$30.00; Students, US \$25.00, Journal orders and remittance should be sent to **ALARINJO** Editor.

Manuscripts: Articles submitted for publication should be emailed to theeditoralarinjo@gmail.com. Manuscripts should meet the criteria outlined in the instructions for contributors (appearing at the end of this journal).

Published by:

BOOKWORKS Publishers

#31 Alpha Street, 1st Avenue, (left) Off Iorkeya Ako Street,

Makurdi Benue state, Nigeria.

Bookworks99@gmail.com

Printed and Bound in Nigeria by
Sintex Designs
08065480030

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THEATRE OF COMMITMENT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NIGERIAN NATION: A STUDY OF AKANJI NASIRU'S THE RALLY AND BAKARE OJO RASAKI'S ROGBODIYAN

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Abstract

Theatre of commitment is an ideological effort from the part of a committed playwright to write his works based on emerging issues which affect the wellbeing of the people. The focus of the ideological engagement of such playwright is to create an environment within the text in which issues that affect the people are portrayed and solutions are proffered. In view of this socio-political and culturally inclined committed theatre, this paper examines Akanji Nasiru's The Rally and Bakare Ojo Rasaki's Rogbodiyan as committed theatre and paradigms for change management in the Nigerian nation. This paper employs deductive and descriptive methods of research. It has come to the fore in this paper that for effective governance and management of the Nigerian nation, national consciousness through people's participation in politics, quality leadership, accountability and transparency are paramount. This paper, therefore, concludes that the voices of Nigerians should be recognised and their fundamental human rights be protected by governing the Nigerian nation in accordance with people's yearnings and aspirations.

Key words: Commitment, Governance, Politics, National Consciousness,

Introduction

From time immemorial, theatre has been an agent of change and has served severally in all ramifications as an awareness builder. From the Greek theatre experience, through other ages in theatrical development, theatre and other areas of arts have been socially, culturally and politically committed. Nasiru (1989, p. 28) opines that a committed drama "embraces the full range of plays that centre on socio-political issues relating to the Nigerian society". These committed plays, according to him, are strong weapons which a playwright employs to guide his society towards a right direction. Similarly, Shittu (2006) cited in Ukande (2014, p. 255) describes that

the main concern of the socially committed artist is to see a change in the structure of the society and an eradication of the social ills that plague the society. He, therefore, works relentlessly to ensure that these problems are seen in their right perspectives, apprehended totally and presented to the public as the bane of the society.

Ukande's description of a committed playwright is apt and therefore supported as a basis for evaluation of dramatic or literary essence to the Nigerian society. Since the emergence of theatre practice in Nigeria from the period of the Alarinjo Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre to the period of Hubert Ogunde and the literary theatre, Nigerian playwrights have been socially, politically and culturally committed. We cannot forget the contributions made by playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, J.P. Clark, Ahmed Yerima, Olu Obafemi, Ayo Akinwale, among others who have written plays to shape the Nigerian nation.

It is obvious that the political situation in Nigeria calls for urgent and collective attention of the stakeholders. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, Nigeria as a nation has had one leader (President or Head of State) after the other with constant changing of political leaders either through coup or electoral process, yet the country has not recorded adequate improvement socially, politically and economically when compared to her counterparts. This paper, thus, examines *The Rally* and *Rogbodiyan* as plays of socio-political commitment and paradigms for change management in the Nigerian

nation. The choice of these plays was prompted by the fact that drama has been used as agents or weapons of socio-political change, cultural preservation and religious propagation. Binebai (2013, p. 427) asserts that

from its origin, western/literary drama has been appropriated for various purposes. The Greek dramatists dramatised their gods, religion and fate and with the likes of Aristophanes, politics emerged as subjects of Greek drama. Aristophanes in fact imposed a more direct sociological function on drama of the comic genres. Social and political impishness of the Athenian leaders and those who made themselves agents of subjugation came under the stinging and critical edge of his dramatic pen.

It can be inferred from Binebai's submission that a committed playwright is that writer whose writings have been used for social and political change. This has brought to the fore the relevance of Akanji Nasiru's *The Rally* and Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* as plays of socio-political commitment and paradigms for the management and governance of the Nigerian nation.

A Review of Governance in Nigeria

The issue of governance in Nigeria has been a debated issue. This is because of diverse opinions on whether Nigeria government is working or not. Some people believed that government of Nigeria is performing based on her ability and available resources in her disposal. Nigeria as a democratic country has faced and still being faced with series of challenges which are yet to be solved by the government. Some of these challenges may be said to have emanated from the activities of the colonialist while carrying out their colonial expedition on African soil. Marcellinus and Ngunan (2010, p. 207) comment that "almost fifty years ago, Nigeria got her independence and the country still suffers from political instability, lack of legitimacy of political leaders, religious and ethnic intolerance, socio-economic disorder, corruption etcetera". These unresolved socio-political problems identified by Marcellinus and Ngunan are still present in the country till date. In fact, these problems are

skyrocketing day-in-day-out, from civil war, sharia crisis, ethnic crisis, Boko Haram insurgency and currently Niger Delta Avengers. All these problems characterised the past and present administration respectively.

The transformation agenda of the Peoples' Democratic Party and that of the change mantra of All Progressive Congress are yet to yield fruitful results just like Nigerians were disappointed on the transition to democracy from military administration which they taught will bring hope for them. Nigerian democracy is still struggling in managing crisis and bringing improvement to the lives of the Nigerians. Marcellinus and Ngunan further observe that political leaders over the years have been surrounded with many challenges of improving and developing on the infrastructure facilities as well as the country's economy. This demands personal sacrifice but the spirit of selfishness seems to have replaced the spirit of nationalism which rendered most political leaders incapacitated in the performance of their duties with corruption on the extreme (Marcellinus and Ngunan, 2010, p. 207).

It is obvious that we cannot have a better nation without a strong nationalism. Nationalism is the active involvement of the people in political activities which are devoid of selfishness and corrupt minded people. The present government led by President Muhammad Buhari must live by example by being honest and truthful in their dealings in order to move this country forward. The present administration should not operate like the previous ones which Obafemi (2002, p. 1) describes as "kleptocracy- a regime of stealing black and blue what you have mandate to protect". This description aligns with Ojediran's (2014, p. 162) assertion that *the lower class engage in menial jobs and can hardly feed, clothe and provide for their dependants, the middle class see themselves as sophisticated beings who ride on the sufferings and poverty level of the people they are meant to help.*

Furthermore, the present administration should mow down the issues of domination which characterised the Nigerian polity and survival tendency of democracy in Nigeria. The issue of domination has made people at a point in the history of this nation to clamour for rotational presidency. However, whether rotational or not, Nigeria as a nation has lost direction and what she needs is a visionary leader who is ready to pilot the country to the promise land.

Nigeria has great people whose intelligence can be used to propel economic advancement and political stability. However, within the abundance of great resources, the intelligences of some Nigerians are being diverted to advance political and economic instability. Some people go to the extent of collaborating with the militants, Boko Haram insurgents and thugs to create instability in the government. Hence, the level at which the fire of violence, corruption and social menace fuel is mushroomed. The socio-political situations in Nigeria, therefore, made Ododo (2014, p. 113) to conclude that

without necessarily going through the detailed of the socio-cultural and political problems that often constitute serious impediments to our upward movement as a nation, the Nigeria political terrain has become musky watered where man of integrity honour and forthrightness fear to get near. The popular conception of politics in Nigeria today is that it offers an avenue for one to take a greedy bite at the national cake. They see it as an enterprise for self-serving individuals that starts and ends with self. The governed is constantly at the mercy of the governors; he is brutalised and battered on a constant basis. This essentially negates the true concept of democracy which emphasis the people rather than self.

The true concept of democracy emphasises the importance of the governed in the process of governance. It is a government of the people which is being controlled and managed by the people and at the same time listens to the voice of the people and considers their yearnings and provides for their social needs. Inegbe and Udofia (2014, p. 48) assert that "recent political unfolding have shown that

if democracy is utopia in other societies, it is a different political ball-game in Nigeria". A true democratic practice preaches fairness, respect for human right and rule of law, transparency, accountability, social justice, and above all, good governance. From socio-political problems which have militated against the survival of a true democracy in Nigeria, it can be said, therefore, that Nigerian democratic practice has practically negated some elements of a true democracy.

The Rally and Rogbodiyan as Committed Drama and Paradigms for Change Management in Nigeria

The Rally

The Rally as a political drama is a third part of the *Irepodun* plays. The first part is titled *Our Survival*, the second part is *The Bold Choice* and *The Rally* completes the trilogy. *The Rally* is chosen as a paradigm for this paper because it deals with a situation which portrays the common adage that "our destiny is our hands". What this implies is that nationalism is a prerequisite for good governance. This is depicted by the youth of Irepodun community who stand their ground against favouritism, nepotism, imposition of leaders especially the issue of godfatherism which characterised Nigerian politics.

The youth of Irepodun having realised the importance of taking responsibility for their wellbeing form an association with the sole aim of controlling the affairs of their community and bring back into existence its lost glory. *The Rally* as a committed drama starts with the narrator who briefly describes the ordeals faced by the Irepodun community. Thereafter, the play progresses to a point where Chief Oladele campaigns for people's support to become the pioneer Chairman of the Irepodun Local Government. Obviously, he is a politician who is well known in the community but the youth seem not in his support because of his selfishness and corrupt practices.

The youth with the leadership of Jide are able to fight against the nomination of Chief Oladele by the Baaale to become the Chairman of Irepodun Local Government. Chief Oladele has been found to be representing the community in almost all facets of

government functions including appointments without giving priority to the wellbeing of the people of Irepodun. These and other factors encourage the youth under the leadership of Jide to ascertain through a well organised awareness campaign that Chief Oladele is not given the automatic mandate to become the Chairman of Irepodun Local Government. Jide being the youth leader is attacked and brutalised. However, the youth still carry on their mission which they eventually accomplished through their collective efforts at the end of the play. Chief Oladele loses the mandate to Mr. Joseph, the Founder and Principal of Irepodun College whose candidature is supported by the youth of Irepodun.

Akanji Nasiru has demonstrated that the problem of power play is a factor which militates against the survival of a true democracy in Nigeria through his play- *The Rally*. The play exposes to a large extent the negative impact of corrupt practices in our nation polity. Suffice to say that the cankerworm has eaten deep into our nation since the first republic till the present. There is power play at the apex of the government and among the governed. For instance, Chief Oladele wants to represent the community in virtually every area not minding what he is expected to do for the people who put him in power. This is illustrated below:

Jayeola: ...for five years now, he has been the sole representative of Irepodun in virtually every matter and situation. (Numbering them off his fingers as he recounts) Constitutional talks... Chief Oladele, Constituency Assembly ... Chief Oladele, Elders Forum... Chief Oladele. And now that Irepodun has its own local government and we need a chairman, Chief Oladele wants to come in again. Hawu! Let him take the back seat a little, the rest of us has not come to the market to watch! (The Irepodun Plays, 2005, p. 133).

What transpired in this dialogue is a true reflection of the political situation in Nigeria, a situation where those in power are not ready to leave for others coming behind to experiment their God given talent and their true patriotism in the governance of the Nigerian nation. Those in the helm of affairs refused to leave or

sometimes rotate the appointment of public offices among themselves due to the corrupt practices which they do not want their successors to know. So, they keep on shifting the base and rotating the appointments among themselves. This, no doubt, is against the doctrine of a true democratically governed nation. Nigeria as a democratically governed nation has not fulfilled, in totality, her expectations to the people. This is because at each level of government- Federal, State and Local Government, people's fate on who becomes their representative is not determined by them but by the godfather, who selects, nominates and appoints their representatives. This situation has been a general phenomenon and is a factor which militates against the survival of democracy in Nigeria. This is reflected in the play thus:

Baale: Let us not drag matters for too long. We do not approve your search for your own chairman. Do I make myself clear on the matter?

Jide: You do, kabiyesi. What you have not made clear to us is the chairman you have already appointed for Irepodun.

Baale: I said you will know later (p. 151).

As pointed out by Nasiru in his play *The Rally*, the youth of Irepodun are able to triumph by standing against the Baale who wants to impose Chief Oladele on them as the sole candidate for the chairmanship position for the new Irepodun local government.

Jide: ... (Now turning to BAALE) I thank kabiyesi for his concern for matters of state which makes him decide who he wants as chairman for Irepondun. Indeed, we were prepared for some form of opposition when we put our heads together to form a party. But it never occurred to any of us that kabiyesi would be part of that opposition. I will be brief. Kabiyesi, you will command greater respect if you do not set yourself in opposition to the will of the people (p. 152).

Violence is another major thematic preoccupation of this play. There are different levels at which violence is perpetrated in Nigeria. Violence occurs socially, politically, religiously and domestically. Inegbe and Udofia (2014, p. 50) foreground that "any form of violence that directly affects the human body, be it an injury or inflictions, falls within the realm of physical violence". Invariably, violent cases can be physically, structurally and psychologically manifested on a victim. This is demonstrated in the play when *Otun* organises thugs to attack Jide and his friend Femi, who happened to be the leaders and spokesman of the Irepodun youths. Jide and Femi are brutally attacked on their way back to town from Irepodun. This scenario is depicted in the dialogue below:

Joe: Well? ... Tell me everything.

Ajayi: He is alive but in critical condition. He's been taken to a hospital, I learn.

Joe: An accident, you say?

Ajayi: Well, not really an accident. I mean, they tried to make it look like an accident, but he was actually attacked. He and his friend, Femi.

Joe: Attacked by whom?

Ajayi: *Oga*, the whole thing looks suspicious. I hear the police are already into the matter (pp. 164-165).-

This situation is a replica of the ways Nigeria politicians perpetrate their evil deeds with their political opponents. Nigeria politics is a do or die affairs with a belief that whoever obstructs you, must be cleared. It is evident in the play that this evil act was masterminded by *Otun* without prior knowledge of the *Baale*. However, it has shown that in every will there is a way. Though, the youths of Irepodun were touched by the attacked on their leaders, they did not allow it to weigh them down. They triumphed at the end even with many obstacles along the way.

Furthermore, a breakdown in friendly relations existed between Jide, the President of the Irepodun Youth Association and Kunle, his Vice President. The estrangement which ensued between them led to the breach of confidentiality and trust which had existed between them. *Otun* in conspiracy with the *Baale* adopted this device

as a divide and rule strategy to penetrate the youth to win them to their side so as to support the candidature of Chief Oladele. This scenario was manifested when *Otun* sends a letter to the youth through their Vice President.

Seyi: I hold the same view with the last speaker.

Jide: And I am of that opinion, too. (*Taking the letter from AJAYI and passing it on to KUNLE*) Vice President, you can take back your letter.

Kunle: But what is wrong with reading it?

Jide: (*Facing him squarely, no longer making any attempt to disguise his disgust*) Everything- starting from where it comes from and the way it crept into this meeting. I find it most shocking that it is coming from you. You are not just the Vice President of the association, you headed the team that drafted our resolutions. (*Pulling out a document from his file and reading it*) Resolution 5: That we find in Mr. Joseph, the founder and Principal of Irepodun College, such qualities and endorse his candidature for the said office of Chairman; Resolution 6: That a rally be held on October 15 at which the Association of Youth and Workers will be formally launched and Mr. Joseph presented to the people for their consideration. Did you not draft those words?

Kunle: (*Standing up*) I protest at this high-handed way of directing the affairs of this association. We did not appoint you as an executive president, and I am not going to sit at a meeting where you behave like one!

He makes to leave the meeting, but is restrained by SEYI who is next to him (p.158).

This is a common strategy which Nigeria politicians use to destabilise patriotism and end their opponents in the Nigerian political terrain instead to be fair and just in their political dealings by giving room for the electorate to choose a candidate of their choice. This is a sign of treachery which endangers the survival of democracy in Nigeria.

Rogbodiyan

The word "Rogbodiyan" is a Yoruba coinage which means trouble, disaster, chaos or state of confusion. The play starts with the appearance of people with different deformities- blinds, hunchbacks, lepers and imbeciles, etc. This event occurs at the prologue. From movement one to movement six, we see a situation where the Regent calls the town people and the kingmakers to deliberate and choose a new king. The Regent, therefore, presents two candidates- Asagidigbi and Gbadegesin. The aftermath of the selection of the new king witnesses series of vices ranging from mismanagement to corruption. Asagidigbi bribes his way to ascend the throne. While he is drunk in the palace, he defiles the Arugba Oge (the calabash carrier) who supposes to carry calabash of sacrifice during the Oge festival.

The situation pictured in the play demonstrates the true nature of gaining political power and political administration and management in Nigeria. The so-called kingmakers and their loyalists who are expected to be partners in progress and collaborators of development are found wanting in the discharge of their political responsibilities. This is depicted in Asagidigbi's conversation with the kingmakers.

Asagidigbi: Money, man, money. Ego, wasobia! In each bag is contained what all of you combined cannot earn in twenty years. Give me the throne and take the money or give the throne to Gbadegesin and die in poverty. The choice is yours.

Eto: In fact, Asagidigbi, you are my man. You have always been my man.

Abere: Asagidigbi, I insist that you wear the crown. You are the best choice this land can have.

Salotin: (*Apparently happy*) Your ascending the throne Asagidigbi is as certain as milk in the breast (pp.25-26).

The kingmakers paraded themselves believing that the destiny of the people is in their hands. They forget the promise made for the people that they will bring forth a trusted and honest leader. Where, then, is the messiah? Even though Nigeria is blessed with all

"shades of talent" the greedy ones outnumbered those who are ready to bring positive change to this country. Bakare Ojo Rasaki brought to the fore people's will to change their destiny by being politically conscious as reflected thus:

Woman: Fadele, with or without healing water, we want to know the root of this problem immediately.

King: My people Adegbamì will soon...

Woman: But why the reluctance to tell us what we have a right to hear? Who is hiding skeleton in his cupboard?

All: The woman speaks well. Fadele, tell us. We want to know.

Fadele: Alright, I will talk.

Woman: It is high time you did.

All: Say it, say it.

Fadele: Okay, I will say it. Kabiyesi, and people of Ilukoroju, Ifa says Arugba Oge, the sacrifice carrier, was defiled. Her red seal was broken. The innocence of Arugba Oge was compromised, and no woman may carry the sacrifice that is less than pure (pp.52-53).

The social vices in our society go on and on. The questions which are begging for answers are; where can we place the menace of beggars, Almajiris and pipeline vandals? What about the issues of unemployment and armed robbery? Where can we place the Boko Haram insurgence, Niger Delta Avengers and political saboteurs? It is high time our leaders showed trust and honesty to move the country forward. In other developed world, the ultimate concern of their polity is the political, economic, social and cultural wellbeing of their people. The reverse is the case in Nigeria. The first priority of our leaders is material acquisition and self gratification.

Conclusion: Hindsight

It has come to the fore in this paper that for effective governance and management of the Nigerian socio-political institutions, people's

awareness and participation in politics is paramount. For patriotism and nationalism to spring up to its full engagement, the voices of Nigerians should be recognised and their fundamental human rights be protected. Those in the helm of affairs should govern with fairness, rule of law, transparency and accountability. The need for the application of these principles is crucial for the management and effective governance of the Nigerian nation because the political scenario in Nigeria is pregnant with evils, such as hooliganism, radicalism, favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, regionalism, bribery and corruption and so on. To proffer solution to inadequacies, deficiencies and anomalies that characterised our national polity, we should search our hearts; examine it critically to allow reasons to guide us as a nation.

For Nigeria to move forward, all hands must be on deck. Nigerians must be ready to seek positive change through active participation in social, political, economic and cultural activities with a mind devoid of corrupt practices but uphold justice, transparency and accountability. On the other hand, Nigeria leaders should lead by example by being fair in governing Nigeria nation in accordance with the yearnings and aspirations of the populace. Therefore, Nigerian political leaders should learn to device new innovation, strategies and techniques to deal appropriately with good and bad eggs which constitute Nigerian socio-political system. There must be new but effective policy with full enforcement to tackle power play, corruption, violence, betrayal of trust and other negative imports in the Nigerian socio-political terrain.

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