

PERFORMATIVE TRINITY

Rasaki Ojo Bakare's Theory and Practice of
AFRICAN THEATRE



EDITED BY

**PERFORMATIVE TRINITY: RASAKI OJO BAKARE'S
THEORY AND PRACTICE OF AFRICAN THEATRE**

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SEMIOTICS AND SYMBOLISM IN BAKARE OJO RASAKI'S *ONCE UPON A TOWER* AND *THE GODS AND THE SCAVENGERS*

ABDULRASHEED A. ADEOYE & OLUWAKEMI M. EMMANUEL-OLOWONUBI

Introduction

Theatre has long been a vital medium for social commentary, serving as a mirror to society's values, struggles, and transformations. Throughout history, playwrights have utilised the stage not merely for entertainment but as a platform to explore complex societal issues, engage with political discourse, and provoke thought among audiences. This practice is particularly prominent in dramatic literature, where the nuanced interplay of language, symbols, and performances invites audiences to reflect on their realities and engage in meaningful dialogue about the pressing issues of their time. At the core of this theatrical exploration is the discipline of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols as fundamental components of communication. Semiotics offers a robust framework for understanding how meaning is constructed and conveyed in theatrical texts. Through the lens of semiotics, the relationship between the signifier and the signified becomes a focal point, allowing audiences to unpack the layers of meaning embedded within dramatic works. By examining how playwrights employ metaphors, symbols, and cultural codes, we gain insights into the societal critiques that underlie their narratives.

The capacity of theatre to address social realities is further amplified by its reliance on satire, humour, and allegory. These literary devices provide playwrights with the tools to highlight the absurdities of societal norms, challenge the status quo, and foster critical awareness among audiences. Through satire, playwrights can engage audiences in a conversation about political corruption, social injustice, and cultural identity, often using humour to disarm viewers and encourage reflection on serious issues. This ability to provoke thought while entertaining is one of theatre's most potent attributes, making it an essential vehicle for change. Moreover, the reception of theatrical works is shaped significantly by the cultural contexts in which they are produced and consumed. Audiences bring their unique perspectives, experiences, and social backgrounds to the interpretation of signs and symbols within a play. This interplay between text and audience is crucial, as it underscores the idea that meaning is not fixed but fluid, evolving through the interaction of various social and cultural factors. In this way, theatre becomes a

dynamic site of engagement, where playwrights and audiences collaboratively navigate the complexities of their realities.

This study aims to explore how playwrights utilise semiotic principles to reflect societal issues, engage in cultural critique, and inspire audience introspection. By examining the intricacies of signification within dramatic texts, the research illuminates how metaphors, symbols, and cultural codes function as tools for social commentary. In addition, it analyses how theatrical productions employ satire to challenge prevailing norms and provoke critical thought among viewers. Through a comprehensive review of relevant literature and examples from a diverse range of theatrical works, this study underscores the significance of semiotics in understanding the multifaceted relationship between drama and society. By focusing on the artistic choices made by playwrights, the study will highlight the role of theatre in shaping public discourse and influencing social change.

This exploration seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the power of theatre as a form of social engagement, illustrating how playwrights harness the complexities of language and symbolism to create impactful narratives that resonate with audiences. As we delve into the realm of semiotics in drama, we will uncover the profound connections between the signs presented on stage and the societal realities they reflect, reaffirming theatre's enduring relevance as a catalyst for thought and transformation. This study examines how Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* and *The Gods and The Scavengers* employ semiotic principles to reflect the socio-political realities of Nigerian society, highlighting the collapse of educational institutions and the pervasive corruption that stifles youth potential. Employing a semiotic framework, the research explores how metaphors, symbols, and cultural codes in the play serve as vehicles for social commentary, revealing the systemic failures that resonate with audiences. The methodology involves a detailed analysis of the play's language, character interactions, and symbolic elements, demonstrating how Bakare employs satire to critique societal norms and provoke critical reflection among viewers. By integrating insights from semiotics with the specific themes present in Bakare's work, the study underscores the power of theatre as a medium for social engagement and change, affirming its vital role in addressing contemporary issues and fostering dialogue within society.

The Theoretical Framework of Semiotics

The semiotic theory primarily draws from the foundational works of two key figures: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure, in his seminal work *Course in General Linguistics*, posits that signs consist of two

parts: the signifier (the form of the sign, such as words, objects, or images) and the signified (the concept or meaning conveyed by the sign) (Saussure 66). In this framework, meaning is relational and dependent on the interplay between the signifier and the signified, as well as its place within a larger system of signs. Charles Sanders Peirce expands upon this with his “triadic model” of the sign, which includes the “representamen” (the form the sign takes), the “object” (the thing the sign refers to), and the “interpretant” (the meaning derived from the sign) (Peirce 85). Peirce’s model emphasises the dynamic process of interpretation, where meaning is not fixed but is constantly negotiated between the sign and the audience. This is especially useful in theatre, where signs (such as props, gestures, or lines of dialogue) are continuously reinterpreted by audiences concerning their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Tenets of Semiotics Relevant to the Study

1. **The Signifier and the Signified:** A sign consists of two parts: the “signifier” (the form, such as a word or image) and the “signified” (the concept or meaning). This duality helps us understand how meanings are constructed in drama. For example, a character’s action can symbolise deeper themes, such as rebellion or despair (Saussure 66).
2. **Arbitrariness of the Sign:** The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary; there is no inherent connection between them. This means that the meaning of signs relies on social conventions. For instance, a dove might signify peace, but this meaning is culturally constructed (Barthes 89).
3. **Semiosis (Sign Process):** This refers to the process by which a sign produces meaning. It involves the interplay between the “representamen” (the form), the “object” (what the sign refers to), and the “interpretant” (the meaning derived). This concept highlights how audiences interpret signs dynamically (Peirce 85).
4. **Denotation and Connotation:** Denotation is the literal meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the associated meanings or emotions. For example, a red rose denotes a flower but connotes love or romance. This distinction helps analyse the layers of meaning in a play (Barthes 112).
5. **Codes and Cultural Contexts:** Codes are systems of signs governed by cultural rules. These codes are essential for interpreting meaning in a play. Different cultures may understand symbols differently, affecting how messages are received (Hall 100).
6. **Polysemy (Multiple Meanings):** A sign can have multiple meanings, making it polysemous. This means that different audiences might interpret the same sign in various ways based on their experiences and cultural contexts (Barthes 89).

7. **Intertextuality:** Intertextuality refers to the relationship between different texts, where one text influences the interpretation of another. In theatre, this might occur when a play references historical or cultural symbols, enhancing its meanings (Kristeva 37).
8. **Myth (Cultural Narratives):** Myth refers to the deeper cultural narratives embedded in everyday signs. In drama, these myths can help convey societal issues, allowing playwrights to critique or reinforce cultural beliefs (Barthes 141).
9. **Reader/Audience as Co-Creators of Meaning:** The audience plays an active role in decoding the signs in a text. Their interpretations are influenced by their cultural and social backgrounds, making meaning a collaborative process (Hall 104).
10. **Symbolism and Metaphor:** Symbols and metaphors are essential in semiotics, representing ideas beyond their literal meanings. In theatre, symbols can reflect societal themes, and metaphors can make comparisons that reveal deeper truths (Elam 72).

These tenets of semiotics provide the theoretical foundation for analysing how playwrights encode messages within their works and how these messages are interpreted by audiences, making them highly relevant to the study of drama and its relationship with society. In this paper, semiotics provides the guiding framework for analysing how playwrights use signs, symbols, and metaphors to mirror society, provoke critical thought, and encourage audience reflection. Semiotics, derived from the Greek word "semeion" meaning "sign," is the study of signs and their meaning-making processes in various forms of communication, including texts, images, and cultural phenomena. This theory is particularly relevant to analysing dramatic works, as theatre operates through a system of signs that encompass everything from dialogue and character behaviour to stage design and music, each of which can signify deeper societal meanings.

Semiotics in the Theatre

Theatre, as a complex system of signs, operates as an ideal medium for semiotic analysis. Keir Elam, in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, emphasises that every aspect of a theatrical performance dialogue, gestures, props, lighting, and sound functions as a sign that contributes to the overall meaning of the performance (Elam 72). Elam's theory of "theatre as a sign system" is crucial for understanding how playwrights use symbols and metaphors to comment on societal issues. For instance, an ordinary object in a play, such as a road in Wole

Soyinka's *The Road*, can carry significant symbolic weight, representing complex themes like Nigeria's uncertain journey toward modernity and the failures of leadership.

In this regard, semiotics is invaluable for unpacking the layers of meaning embedded within a play's narrative and staging. Signs within the play often act as cultural codes that reflect the social realities of the audience. For example, Roland Barthes' concept of "mythologies" in semiotics argues that "everyday objects and signs are imbued with deeper, often ideological meanings" (Barthes 89). In dramatic texts, these signs take on mythic proportions, allowing playwrights to communicate complex political and social critiques through metaphorical representations. The use of symbols, such as Soyinka's road or the tower in Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *Once Upon a Tower* and *The Gods and The Scavengers*, allows for a critique of leadership and corruption, reflecting broader societal concerns in a way that resonates with audiences.

Cultural Codes and Audience Interpretation

Semiotics emphasises that meaning is not inherent in a sign but is instead constructed by the audience through interpretation. Stuart Hall's theory of "encoding and decoding" further supports this view by suggesting that texts (or in this case, plays) are "encoded" by creators with certain messages, but the audience "decodes" these messages based on their own cultural and social backgrounds (Hall 100). This dynamic between encoding and decoding is central to understanding how different audience members might interpret the same signs differently. For example, a play like Femi Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers*, which employs symbols such as guns and masks, may be decoded by Nigerian audiences as a critique of state violence and socio-economic disparity. These signs resonate within a particular cultural context, where the audience understands the historical and political significance of armed robbery and state corruption. However, for an international audience unfamiliar with these specific codes, the same signs might be interpreted differently, focusing more on the universal themes of crime and justice.

Application of Semiotics to the Current Study

In this chapter, semiotics will be used to analyse how playwrights, particularly African dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, and especially Bakare Ojo Rasaki, employ metaphors, symbols, and signs to mirror societal realities. The study investigates how these playwrights encode their works with political, social, and cultural critiques, and how audiences decode these messages based on their socio-political contexts. For instance, in Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower*

and *The Gods and The Scavengers*, the symbol of the tower, which initially represents intellectual achievement and societal progress, gradually deteriorates into a sign of moral and institutional decay, mirroring the disillusionment with post-colonial governance and corruption in Nigeria. The tower functions as a signifier of failed leadership and educational decay, which Nigerian audiences can easily relate to, given the systemic corruption prevalent in the country's institutions.

Additionally, by analysing the audience's reception of these signs, the research will explore how effectively the playwrights' use of semiotic tools such as satire, metaphor, and cultural symbolism elicits critical reflection and, potentially, social change. Drawing on Hall's theory of decoding, the research will consider how different audiences local versus international interpret these dramatic signs and symbols, and whether the messages resonate as intended or are reinterpreted through different cultural lenses.

On this note, semiotics provides a robust theoretical framework for analysing how playwrights use signs, symbols, and metaphors to reflect societal realities. By understanding the relationship between signifiers and the signified, as well as the process of interpretation by audiences, we can gain deeper insights into how theatre functions as a medium for social critique. By using symbolic language and cultural codes, dramatists mirror the socio-political issues of their time, encouraging audiences to critically engage with the messages embedded in their works. Semiotics, therefore, offers a powerful tool for analysing the complex interplay between text, performance, and society.

Satire as a Tool for Social Reflection and Change

The theatre has long served as a vehicle for social commentary, using metaphorical language and symbolic representation to discuss themes such as corruption, oppression, and inequality. According to Keir Elam, in his influential book *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, theatre operates as a sign system through which playwrights can transmit cultural codes and values (Elam 72). Elam argues that every element in a play, from the dialogue to the set design, functions as a sign capable of conveying deeper societal meanings. In this way, plays become a reflection of the cultural and political landscapes they emerge from.

Shakespeare, for example, often employed metaphors and symbols to comment on the political climate of his time. In *Macbeth*, the recurring imagery of blood symbolises guilt and the moral decay that accompanies unchecked ambition. The play reflects the consequences of political corruption and the disintegration

of social order, themes that were highly relevant to an audience living in a period of political instability and intrigue. According to Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespeare's metaphors often mirrored the socio-political anxieties of Elizabethan England, allowing audiences to see their fears and concerns dramatized on stage (Greenblatt 55). Similarly, in African theatre, playwrights like Wole Soyinka and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have used symbolic language to critique colonialism, corruption, and postcolonial disillusionment.

Satire is another common technique used by playwrights to reflect societal problems and provoke critical thought among audiences. Satirical plays often highlight the absurdity of social norms and institutions, using humour to expose hypocrisy, corruption, and injustice. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his work on the *carnavalesque*, suggests that satire in literature allows for a temporary inversion of societal structures, where the powerless can mock the powerful, creating a space for critique and reflection (Bakhtin 105). This form of social commentary can be seen in many plays that use humour to challenge the status quo.

In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the women of Greece withhold sex from their husbands in a bid to end the Peloponnesian War. The play uses humour and exaggeration to expose the absurdity of war and male domination, allowing the audience to see the flaws in their society's gender dynamics and political decisions. As John J. Winkler notes, Aristophanes' use of satire enables a serious critique of war and gender relations without alienating the audience, making it an effective tool for social commentary (Winkler 12).

Similarly, in more contemporary African drama, Femi Osofisan's plays frequently employ satire to address themes of corruption and oppression. In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Osofisan critiques the social and economic conditions that drive individuals to crime. Through a combination of humour and symbolism, he exposes the contradictions of a society that punishes its citizens for crimes born out of desperation while ignoring the systemic issues that create such conditions in the first place (Osofisan 24). Satire, in this case, allows Osofisan to tackle sensitive issues without alienating his audience, making his critique more accessible.

However, satire as a literary device has its limitations. While it can prompt audiences to think critically about societal issues, it can also be dismissed as mere comedy, failing to inspire genuine action or change. In some cases, audiences may enjoy the humour without fully engaging with the play's deeper message, as Bakhtin himself acknowledges that "the carnivalesque may only offer a temporary suspension of societal norms, with no long-lasting" effects (Bakhtin 107). This is a notable divergence in scholarly thought, with some

arguing that satire's power lies in its ability to subtly embed critique within humour, while others, like Ato Quayson, contend that "satire's indirectness may reduce its political impact" (Quayson 45).

There is a consensus among scholars that theatre can reflect society and provoke critical thought through the use of signs, metaphors, symbols, and satire. Most agree that these elements make theatre a powerful medium for social commentary. However, there are divergences in how scholars view the effectiveness of these techniques in promoting actual change. For instance, Roland Barthes, in his work on "semiotics," emphasises that symbols and metaphors in theatre can serve as powerful vehicles for ideological critique. Barthes argues that by transforming ordinary objects and actions into symbols of larger societal issues, playwrights allow audiences to engage with complex themes in an accessible way (Barthes 89). This view aligns with the work of playwrights like Ola Rotimi, JP Clark-Bekederemo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Zulu Sofola, Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, who use symbolic language to criticise their societies.

On the other hand, critics like Augusto Boal, in his theory of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, argue that traditional plays even those that use metaphors and symbols are limited in their ability to enact social change. Boal contends that such plays often leave the audience in a passive role, where they may recognise societal problems but feel powerless to act upon them (Boal 72). Instead, Boal advocates for a more interactive form of theatre that directly involves the audience in the performance, encouraging them to take an active role in challenging societal injustices. This highlights an important debate in the field: while playwrights use symbols and metaphors to reflect society, there is an ongoing discussion about whether this reflection is enough to inspire real change. Some scholars argue that theatre's primary role is to reflect and critique, while others, like Augusto Boal, believe that theatre must go further, actively engaging the audience in the process of social transformation.

Playwrights have long used metaphors, signs, symbols, and satire to mirror the societies they live in, offering audiences a reflective space to consider their own social, political, and cultural realities. While these techniques can be effective in prompting audiences to think critically about the world around them, their capacity to inspire concrete social change remains a topic of debate among scholars. Playwrights like Soyinka, Osofisan, and Aristophanes have shown how theatre can serve as a mirror to society, using symbols and satire to expose its flaws. However, as critics like Boal suggest, the power of theatre to enact real-world change may depend on how directly it engages with its audience.

Semiotic Reading of bakare, Ujo Rasaki's *Once Upon a Tower and The Gods and The Scavengers*

Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *Once Upon a Tower and The Gods and The Scavengers* function not only as a critique of the Nigerian educational system but also as an allegory of societal decay. The semiotic approach enables a deeper exploration of the play's symbols, particularly how the university setting, and its key elements serve as signs representing the broader dysfunctionality within Nigerian society.

The tower in the play's title symbolises not just an educational institution but the idealism associated with higher learning, intellectual growth, and moral development. However, as the play unfolds, the tower emerges as a signifier of a "failing institution," mirroring the collapse of Nigeria's moral and educational foundations. Early in the prologue, Bakare presents the university in song: "Once upon a Tower, the Ivory upon the marble... a place for civilisation" (Bakare 1). Here, the tower represents the potential for greatness, echoing the grand aspirations that Nigeria's educational system once held. However, this imagery quickly deteriorates, as the chorus reveals that the tower is now "in the dust," signalling a complete degradation (Bakare 1).

This semiotic reading is supported by Peirce's theory of semiosis, where the meaning of a sign evolves depending on its context (Peirce 85). The tower in the play initially represents a beacon of hope, but over time, it becomes a metaphor for the decaying institutions that have failed to serve their purpose. As one of the students in the play remarks, "Half education is better than none, na de philosophy of our universities now" (Bakare 5). The transformation of the tower from a beacon of knowledge to a symbol of collapse reflects the state of Nigerian higher institutions, where corruption, power struggles, and negligence have supplanted the original purpose of education. The play, thus, uses the tower to highlight the semiotic gap between what the university is supposed to represent and what has become an emblem of societal failure.

Barthes' concept of mythologies helps us understand this dynamic. According to Barthes, cultural objects and symbols often carry additional layers of meaning that extend beyond their immediate function (Barthes 112). In this case, the medical instruments are not just tools of the trade but become mythologised symbols of a failing system, one in which students like Pedro are left "practising without tools" (Bakare 58). The tools, therefore, signify not just incompetence but the systemic betrayal of students by the very institutions that are supposed to nurture them.

Pedro's medical training provides another layer of symbolic meaning. His struggle with miseducation is symbolised through the tools of his trade, which should signify knowledge and competency but instead become signs of "ignorance and danger." This is most evident during the abortion scene, where Pedro, having administered the wrong dose of anaesthesia, inadvertently causes Khadijat's death. "I gave her ten tablets of the 50mg per ml concentrate" (Bakare 56), Pedro confesses, revealing how his incomplete education and access to faulty or incomplete information contribute to the tragic outcome.

The medical tools, intended to heal, become instruments of destruction, mirroring the broader theme of "institutional betrayal." The fact that Pedro was never properly trained due to the university's failures turns these tools into semiotic representations of how the system "cripples" the very students it is meant to empower. As Bakare weaves this narrative, he underscores the peril of "dry practicals" (Bakare 58), where students engage in theoretical exercises without actual resources, further symbolising the intellectual and material starvation that has come to define the Nigerian educational system.

The use of music and song in *Once Upon a Tower* function as a satirical code, offering commentary on the moral decline within the university and by extension, the nation. Songs such as "Asewo Campusi Yakare" (Bakare 3), which mocks the behaviour of students who use their sexuality to navigate academic life, reflect a culture where moral integrity is commodified. The repetition of this song throughout the play serves as a recurring reminder of the pervasive decay, not only among students but also within the administrative and academic ranks.

These musical interludes operate as signifying practices (Hall 100), where the music functions as a signifier for the broader collapse of values in Nigerian society. The lyrics, "Some of these Alan posers / Dem brains na tomatoes" (Bakare 3), serve as coded language for the deterioration of intellectual capacity within the university. The humorous tone belies a serious critique of how academic standards have fallen, with both students and faculty participating in a system where knowledge and merit are secondary to personal gain. These musical interludes provide a semiotic contrast to the formal academic ceremonies, further emphasising the gap between the ideals of education and the realities of corruption. The cultural code embedded in this song is one of satirical resistance, mocking the hypocrisy of the educational system while simultaneously revealing the truth about its moral and intellectual bankruptcy.

As Saussure notes, the meaning of a sign is relational, dependent on the system of signs within which it operates (Saussure 68). In other words, in a semiotic

reading, characters serve as signifiers of larger societal forces. Pedro, for instance, embodies the “disillusionment of Nigerian youth,” representing a generation whose potential is systematically crushed by the very institutions meant to nurture them. As a character, Pedro shifts from being a hopeful student to a vengeful man, signifying the corrupting influence of a failed system. His eventual turn to violence is symbolic of how corruption breeds further destruction: “I came into this University... a real gem... but now I am the destroyer you have made me” (Bakare 12). Through Pedro, Bakare interrogates the cyclical nature of systemic failures, where broken institutions produce broken individuals, perpetuating societal decline.

Similarly, Professor Kurumbete symbolises the entrenched academic elite, whose main concern is maintaining power rather than fostering intellectual growth. Kurumbete’s insistence on preventing Pedro’s academic success, for fear of being overshadowed, represents the monopolisation of knowledge and opportunity by those in positions of authority. His self-aggrandising statements, such as “In the field of academic gymnastics, I am Primus Inter pares” (Bakare 19), reveal the egotism and incompetence that have infiltrated the educational system, turning it into a personal fiefdom for those at the top. As Peirce’s triadic model of signification (object, sign, interpretant) suggests, Kurumbete represents the “object” of academic corruption, while his actions serve as the “sign” of the broader decay within the educational system (Peirce 89).

Beyond the university, the play explores the intersections between political power and educational decay. Senator Abdulrahman Ike Anobi’s dealings with the university serve as a semiotic representation of how politics compromises public institutions. The Senator, who manipulates academic contracts for personal gain, embodies the political class that uses the education system as a commodity, reflecting the commodification of public institutions in Nigeria. When Pedro confronts him, accusing him of contributing to the death of his daughter, the dialogue reveals how deeply intertwined the personal and political are in the country’s corruption: “You cornered a contract meant for... chemicals, and I was left to perform “dry practicals” (Bakare 58). This interaction highlights how individual greed sabotages collective progress, with students like Pedro becoming the casualties of political manoeuvring.

The Senator’s insistence that his daughter marry Ogbuefi, a corrupt businessman, further underscores the marriage of political power and personal enrichment. Khadijat’s rebellion against this marriage, and her tragic death, symbolise the cost of personal autonomy in a corrupt society. The familial

drama between the Senator, Khadijat, and Pedro is thus a microcosmic reflection of the broader societal dynamics at play.

Through a semiotic lens, *Once Upon a Tower* reveals itself as a richly layered text that critiques the institutional, moral, and political decay in Nigeria. Bakare employs a variety of signs and symbols from the crumbling tower of education to the tools of mis-education to comment on the broader societal breakdown. Characters serve as symbolic agents of these systemic failures, while music and language act as satirical codes, offering both humour and scathing critique. By analysing these semiotic elements, the play becomes more than a simple narrative of personal revenge; it serves as a powerful allegory for the collapse of national integrity.

From the cover page of *The Gods and the Scavengers*, the scary semiotics of a one-eye semi-mask man are displayed. This is sending a signal that revolution is on display and that it will happen, one day. The total darkness and the silhouette at the Prologue of the play are semiotic symbols of the darkness that we are in Nigeria, and the silhouette represents the dangerous deconstruction, instead of reconstructing that most ethnic groups in Nigeria are orchestrating for the political control of the nation, attempting to dress-up the beautiful half fish-half man. The half-fish-half-man lady is Nigeria and the contest for her soul is political. The Prologue indeed, sets the stage for other overlapping.

The Gods in the play plays are the politicians, the oppressors, the ruthless capitalist bourgeoisie and the postcolonial careless rulers while The Scavengers in the play remain the oppressed weaklings. The Gods and The Scavengers are in permanent conflict and they compete to institutionalize Karl Marx's structure and the superstructure. Proletarian revolution is symbolic in the play while resistance to it is also inescapable.

The refuse dump symbolizes waste and plenty and at the same time, it is the symbol of distortion and heaven for the poor. The refuse dump is always filled up with leftovers, food items and materials that the capitalists, politicians, and oppressors are no longer using. They are the Gods of the universe while The Scavengers pick these items up, eat them to kill hunger and make use of most of them as symbols of survival. The song in Movement I of the play captures this opulence in the face of hunger:

We are the scavengers, we the main men. When three rogues eat their beans, we comb their bins. They cheat, we lift their shit. We are the scavengers, we the main men (Bakare p.1)

The Nigerian's affluence is celebrated at the beginning of Movement 2 through a song. The cattle-rearing couple, fishing couple, blacksmith couple and farming couple are semiotic representations of the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. The song is saying that irrespective of the fact that you are Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo or Tiv; we all agree that our nation is richly blessed with abundant natural resources.

The open-space nature of the market is depicted in the play while the blind-followership mentality is also relayed. Hopelessness is symbolized in the play while hopefulness is used to deconstruct it. The political class, chiefs, and councillors on one and the rebellion pretentiously led by Iyaloja, Anago and Yemoja on the other hand, heighten the conflict of the play.

The Gods are symbolically deconstructed to also represent the supernatural forces whose words, laws and intentions cannot be challenged. Movement 8 is a scene where Odewale sets himself free and blames the Gods for the follies and foibles of man. The brief symbol of truth below will capture the empire of our universe which is the empire of the gods:

ODEWALE: Or from what you have heard did I ever want to kill my father and marry my mother?

CROWN: No!

ODEWALE: Who wanted those things to happen?

CROWN: The gods

ODEWALE: Why then do you blame me for an act plotted by the gods? The gods are to blame, not the son of man. I choose to live and reign and be happy. I hold the gods responsible for your ailments. I choose to be free and I'm free indeed. (Bakare pp. 54-55)

The semiotics and symbolism in *The Gods and The Scavengers* warn that we should stop relying on the gods-man and the metaphysical for solutions to our countless problems. But that we are gods ourselves and that as scavengers, we will always get what we want through the much-awaited proletarian revolution.

Conclusion

This study examines how Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *Once Upon a Tower* and *The Gods and The Scavengers* employ semiotic principles to reflect the socio-political realities of Nigerian society, highlighting the collapse of educational institutions and the pervasive corruption that stifles youth potential. Utilising a semiotic framework, the research explores how metaphors, symbols, and

cultural codes in the play serve as vehicles for social commentary, revealing the systemic failures that resonate with audiences. The methodology involves a detailed analysis of the play's language, character interactions, and symbolic elements, demonstrating how Bakare employs satire to critique societal norms and provoke critical reflection among viewers. By integrating insights from semiotics with the specific themes present in Bakare's work, the study underscores the power of theatre as a medium for social engagement and change, affirming its vital role in addressing contemporary issues and fostering dialogue within society. This research highlights the intricate relationship between dramatic texts and the realities they depict, illuminating the enduring significance of theatre as a catalyst for awareness and transformation in the face of societal challenges while preaching proletarian revolution at the same time.

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