

CORRUPTION AND POVERTY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SOCIETY: AN X-RAY OF SOYINKA'S BEATIFICATION OF AREA BOY: A LAGOSIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

BY

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Abstract

The play is a critical exploration of Soyinka's Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope with the view of analysing the author's perception of the contemporary African society. Using Beatification of Area Boy for an in-depth study, the paper examines some socio-political ills present in the African socio-political scene with the view of bringingsanity and national development in African countries. The study is hinged on the concept of satire with the aim of presenting literature in the African context as inevitable stimuli for change. The paper recommends literature as a therapy for sanity in Africa and concludes on the note that the positive re-creation of African countries depends on the joint effort of the citizens.

Keywords: *Beatification, Corruption, Poverty, African society, Socio-political environment*

Introduction

In any socio-political setting the dramatist is usually a bridge that links the people with their social formation. The dramatist has the artistic creativity and visionary lens to transplants the truth into the nation's socio-political fiber. He creates consciousness of freedom, correct anomalies and creates an itch free atmosphere in situation where contradiction reigns supreme in the society. As a dramatist, Soyinka plays his responsibilities as a critic, socio-political watchdog, and a literary writer who resurrect the socio-political spirit of his environment towards attaining an itch free society.

As literary custodians, preachers of peace and harmony, unity, development and socio-political transformation, ideal playwrights are saddled with the below responsibilities:

...to use ... our pen, our zeal and eloquence to awaken in our people the song of liberation with our writings. We wash away the stigma of inferiority, rouse our dormant energies, unmask the past and traitors among us and preach the positive sermon (Awodiya, 33).

To succeed in the above task, the dramatist uses satire as a lens of mirroring the society.

To Bamidele (41) satire is viewed as:

... dramatic form in which human vices and follies, abuses or short-comings are held up to censure by means of ridicule with intent to bringing about improvement.

Using the above definition, satire exposes man's follies or weaknesses and makes a mockery of it but with the intension of correcting such anomalies. Satire is not destructive in nature but gives objectives criticisms on societal issues, shows likely causes and suggests possible solutions to the problem.

In furtherance to the above, Abrams (162) views satire thus:

... the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it, an attitude of amusement, contempt, indignation or scorn. It differs from the comic in that comedy evolves laughter mainly and as end in itself, while satire derives, that is, it uses laughter as a weapon and against a bolt existing outside the work itself.

Considering the above view, satire is seen as a work of art that relegates the subject matter of a literary work and gives a cockamamie picture of literary work with the intention of commenting (positively) on such a literary work. It further involves laughter and ludicrous approach towards a work of art with the sole aim of redeeming the pathetic situation on ground. Satire differs from comic relief in the sense that, its laughter is never to cushion any effect but rather it acts as a strong weapon of correcting anomalies and bringing situation

to its rightful position.

African drama is characterized with creative literary works that are natured, nurtured, developed by Africans and rooted in African aesthetics for the consumption of African and the development of African states. This drama includes performances in African states like: Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Bokina-fasso, Uganda, Togo, Libya, Republic of Benin, Malawi etc. These states are bedeviled with diverse phases of corruption and different levels of poverty starting from the post-colonial period to the present-day contemporary world. All efforts to suppress these problems do not only prove fruitless but it rather grows different wings at all time and now becomes a tradition in most African countries where Nigeria is not an exception.

Soyinka's *Beatification of Area Boy*: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope is an African play that uniquely displays the degree of corruption and poverty in Africa using Nigeria as a case study. It vehemently refutes the military dictatorship, calls for autopian state and agitates for a democratic government.

The play critically investigates the socio-political realities in Nigeria and African states at large. On this bed rock, the paper is out to discuss the level of corruption and poverty in Nigeria and how far they have eaten into the fiber of our nation with the aim of finding solutions towards the reduction of poverty level and corruption rate in our nation and the entire African states.

Theoretical Framework

A critique of Wole Soyinka's perception of poverty and corruption in the African milieu is in consonance with some Greek philosophical theories. The Plato's philosophical satire in view anticipates rudiments for social organizations and pre-emptive approaches against political retrogression peculiar to African communities in the contemporary era. The Plato Republic construes ideal governance devoid of corruption in the context of justice. According to him, justice implies a political community which enhances functional specialization of the citizen in their individual relevant capacity. Each person should be allowed to function and concentrate on his talented skill (<https://www.britanica.com>). Plato observes governance as the highest and noble sector of a society. He, therefore, advocates for the selection of philosophers who are men of the highest experience in terms of intelligence, administration and wisdom. The philosophical theory of Plato is further projected in his advocacy for the selection of the army guardians, artisans, philosophers among the public based on the individual gifted natural skills (<https://www.britanica.com>).

Corruption and Poverty in Africa

Corruption has different phases depending on the angle which it is been viewed by the spectator. It can be seen as a means of illegitimately obtaining power or influence on the detriment of others in the society. In Africa, corruption spreads its feather every day and night, it has become a cankerworm that devours the development of African states and kills the qualitative socio-political lives of people, destroys states infrastructures and bring to a pause the wheel of national development in Africa.

To Mushtaq, H. Khan (12) corruption is defined as:

.... act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of personal motives such as wealth, power or status.

Considering the above definition, corruption is characterized with greed, selfishness and personal interest. In a state engulfed with corruption, majority of the office holders become opportunist who use government portfolios for their personal interest or to enrich their purses by extortion, diversion of public fund, mismanagement of fund and so on. It could be as well the usurpation of public office or power for personal benefits. The section two (2) of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offenses Commission Act 2000, is of the opinion that corruption involves bribery and other criminal offenses that are tantamount to it such as fraud, embezzlement, drug trafficking, gratification etc.

Giving the summary of the United Nations Organization typology of corruption, Femi Odekunle (97) divides corruption in to five (5) folds, viz – a – viz:

- Political corruption
- Economic corruption
- Administrative corruption
- Organized corruption
- Working class corruption

With the above perimeter, it is a glaring that corruption cuts across every aspect of African society and it is a major instrument for amassing wealth, securing loyalty from politician supporters and bring to anarchy every political stumblingblock on their ways.

In Africa, corruption has been a tradition where everybody is involved and like a wild fire, it has spread all-over human endeavor and have become a *bird flue* in the societal health. Presently, every segment of human endeavor has been inflicted with corruptive virus there by contaminating morals, destroying personalities, creating an unfriendly social environment and slowing down the paste of national development.

Contemporarily, corruption is seen to be constellating in the socio-political system of African states and its efforts have brought a stand – still to national development and hampers nation’s building. For example, socio-political problem like rigging of election, poverty, human trafficking, terrorist attack, bombing, kidnapping and so on are all fruits of corruption which hamper the growth and development of African states.

Poverty in African states has become an epidemic caused as a result of bad leadership, corruption, mis-rule and ineffectiveness of government. The level of poverty in African states supersedes the rate of wealth and it has a high negative effect on the developing countries. Poverty is seen as a characteristic of under-developed countries and it is a pointer to mal administration and bad leadership. Poverty is an economics situation where people are living below the standard of leaving. This may be as a result of low income, unemployment, low level of consumption etc. At this level, people are unable to provide for themselves and their families adequately as a result of poor economic situation.

Poverty gains ground in a situation where people failed to engage in meaningful productive economic activities.

To Okoh R.N (222) poverty is seen as *a state of depredation, in terms of both economic and soul indicator, such as income, education and health care, access are self actualiasation.*

Mwatsuma K.M (27) quoting Olayemi (1995) gives the description of the poor thus:

... those who had no access to basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, and decentshelters; unable to meet social, economic, political obligations.

From research, a total of 1.5 billion people are wallowing in object penury and out of the 1.5 billion people, Africans constitute about 250 million which is 17% of the total percentage of poor people in the world (FAAN, 2008). With the above analyses, it implies that Africa is taken the lead in celebrating poverty in the entire world.

The World Bank Poverty Task Force (1990) gave the following as causes of poverty: lack of access to employment, inadequate physical assets and in availability of credit facilities. In a nut-shell, most African countries are emerged in poverty and consumed with corruptive syndrome. These two concepts (corruption and poverty) if not properly treated can mar the nation’s development and hamper nation’s building.

Religious Literature and Its Effects on the African Concept of Poverty and Corruption

Religious Literature in Islam and Christianity have played prominent influences on the African attitudinal dispositions to socio-political affairs. The Islamic concept of political sovereignty absolutely belongs to Allah (God) (Qur’an 7:3 and Qur’an 7:54). According to religious view the concept of Divine delegation of authority to man in a political system connotes trust from God. Man, therefore in this capacity acts as Vicegerent of Allah on earth (Oyedeji Azeez, 2010:494) In a functional political community, with the citizenry’s obligation and welfarism are coordinated by Divine precepts to enhance standard economic growth, development and ideal social intercourse. The democratic setting and welfare goals as detailed in the political ethics of religion encourage participatory governance by all members of the society. Religion craves for consultation with men of proven abilities as the Qur’an further proves thus: *And they conduct their affairs by mutual consultation* (Quran 42:38)

Abdulkarim Al-Maghili was an Islamic scholar who belonged to the Berber tribe of North Africa. His religious satire on corruption and welfare of State has a relative political philosophy with the treatise written by Nicolo Machiavelli of Italy on governance. Abdulkarim Al-Maghili's wrote a treatise titled: *The Crown of Religion Concerning The Obligations of The Princess* as a guide on the principle of welfarism and rulership. The treatise was written at the instance of the request Muhammad Rumfa in Kano (1443-1499).

The treatise has attained great attraction in the quest for ideal political resuscitation of the West African region (Muhammad, S.A and Abdulfatai, 61)

The treatise contains eight chapters. Abdulkarim Al-Mahili in his intellectual effort to rid the African society of corruption justifies necessity for war. According to him, war is not limited to the physical defence of a nation. It is also as a vital weapon to fight corruption to maintain the territorial integrity of a country. He viewed that those guilty of corruption should be punished according to Islamic law.

Abdulkarim Al-Maghili recommends people of exceptional qualities in moral standard for leadership in the official capacities. He lays emphasis on the inevitable doom of a nation. This he explains as a consequence of class discrimination and isolation of the ruling class from the masses. (Muhammad & Abdulfatai, 65)

Corruption and Poverty in *Beatification of Area Boy*: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope

The play *Beatification of Area Boy* depicts different forms of corruption and many phases of poverty which plays prominent role in the lives of Nigerians and African states as a whole. This socio-political saga has benched the development, nation building and societal transformation into the hands of God fatherism, cabals and other autocratic rulers. By implication, Nigeria and other African states' national development, nation building and societal transformation cannot see the light of the day until the level of corruption and poverty is reduced to minimal level or totally eradicated as it has become death virus in the nations' system. In Nigeria, there is the celebration of economic bastardisation, which gives birth to inflation and increases the level of poverty in the country. Pathetically, the exchange rate has drastically fallen and when compared with other world's currencies, the Naira (Nigeria money) has lost its dignity and it has stopped to be what it used to be in the 60's and 70's. The effect of the fall in Naira at the international level in the inflation we are experiencing in Nigeria despite the economic hardship. **Trader** exclaims:

Even if to say I did, I fit read...

We currency don fall again, petrol day scarcity, which mean to say, transport fare done double. As for food stuff and other commodity, even gari wey be poor man diet... I just dey explain why I need small time to put new price for all these goods (7)

From the above words of Trader, we realise that Nigeria is under severe economic crunch. As one of the oil producing states, fuel scarcity has become a festivity, the pump price is not at the reach of the masses, nation's currency devalued, and transport fare has been sky-rocketed. As a state bless with agriculture, people can no longer afford three square meals daily. The average man's common food (Gari) now becomes expensive and getting out of an average –man's reach. All these are symbols of poverty and underdeveloped state.

Soyinka presents Lagos as the Centre of Nigeria where we have the conglomeration of people from diverse places, tribes and languages. **Minstrel** testified to this in one of his songs thus:

I love this Lagos, I no go lie

Na inside am I go live and die

I know my city, I go lie

E fit in nation like coat and tie

When Lagos belch, the nation's swell

When the nation shitt, na Lagos day smell.

The river wey flow from Makurdi market

You go find in deposit for Lagos bucket (17).

With the above formation, there is a linguistic variation in terms of language usage. The Pidgin English is commonly attached to uneducated elites while the British English is attached to the literate and semi-literate

people. Characters like Trader, Boyko, Ministrel, Mama Put, Barber, Area Two Four, Parking Attendant, Shop Worker, Vendor etc. speak pidgin English which depicts their level of education and social class formation in the society.

In furtherance, poverty is seen written on the faces of characters to acknowledge the fact that it cuts across everywhere in the nation. Mama Put who happens to be an industrious food seller in the play could not afford buying books for her daughter and make prompt payment of school fees. In one of her conversations, **Mama Put** said to her daughter:

... You have the new books?
... don't lose them. Its all I can afford
For now. Tell your teacher We'll get
the rest next month or next term.
Whenever God chooses to increase my profit (19)

The above statement does not give a clear cut as to when the remaining books will be bought for the Girl. This further tells us the gravity of the time-less poverty that wrestles with people in the contemporary African society.

In the light of poverty, the Cyclist comes with a Moblet to purchase tie in preparation for the interview. The scenario calls peoples' attention from every angle as people are amazed to see Moblet in the 21st century when technology has engulfed the entire world. People assumed that Moblet is last seen during the colonial and the early stage of post-colonial era and presently, it should not be found in the society.

Sanda is surprised to see such as he exclaims:

You don't understand, my friend,
Even I, I don't recall when last
I saw one of these in streets
of Lagos. Its quiet a sight, I promise.

Trader: I tell you, this na wonderful
Wonderful! A real bicycle inside
Lagos. Which place you find am? (26)

To further ascertain the identity of the man (Cyclist), Sanda asks 'where are you from, my friend?' (26) and the Cyclist replies 'Ajegunle new settlement' (26). Still filled with surprise, the **Trader** said:

.... the last time I see bicycle for this Lagos na before the Oil boom. Enh? You mean to say somebody still dey, we no troway in bicycle inside Lagoon? ... Na genuine pedal locomotion, the kind my great, great grand pa dem call iron horse When Oyinbo missionary first ride one for Lagos last century (27)

People think the Moblet belongs to the Cyclist but to their surprise and lamentation, the Cyclist borrow sit from a friend. Having this pathetic mind set, the Trader recounts the period when the country (Nigeria) was in a stable economic situation, good leadership, and good governance when people were given "salary increase, salary advance, salary areas, motor-car advance, motorcar incentives..." (27) compare with the present time where things are economically tight and difficult, coupled with bad leadership and governance.

Ritualisation and incessant killing in Africa are fruits of bad governance as a result of corruption. This is vividly displayed in the case of the Landlord. Barber and his in-law visit him at night and through the window, they are able to see human head and close to the head is the landlord 'lying face down, necked, prostrated on the floor...' (36). This is evidence that ritualisation in Africa which has become a tradition and a gate-way to wealth. **Barber** further testifies thus:

The mouth of the head was wide open
Just like the eyes. And it was
Vomiting notes! Crisp Naira notes. Fifty Naira denomination (36).

In addition to the above, the issue of missing genital is another signal to the insensitivity of the government to the security and plight of the people. Sanda's groaning shows that it has been occurring and re-occurring times without number. This issue arouses the curiosity of a woman who questions the role of the government on

the insecurity in the society.

Woman: what of the government role in all this? Have you thought of that? (53)

Sanda: The government. What about the government? (53)

Woman: suppose they are behind it all. It is a military government and they've been preaching population control... (53)

The above conversations expose the government's carelessness, bad leadership and neglect to its citizens. Though the government might not be directly involved in the missing genital but their silence to the act makes them to be indirectly involved and that is why a witness concludes on the note that 'the military wants to emasculate all of us' (53).

Apart from the missing genital issue, the playwright further expatiates on other forms of corruptive ways in Nigeria- societies and Africa at large. Taking a critical consideration of the below discussion, the terrain of corruption in Nigeria is explicitly discussed.

Trader: Those overnight millionaires' then, how do you think they do it? (14)

Sanda: cocaine, 419 swindle, God fatherism or mothering armed robbers. Or offer a career with the police or the army, if you are lucky, to grasp a political post. Then you retire at 40 as a General who has never fought war. Or you start your own church, or mosque etc. (14).

With the above word of Sanda, it is glaring that cocaine, 419 Swindlers, God fatherism, and mothering armed robbers, are all forms of corruption. Religious houses like Churches and Mosques are not exempted from this ugly act. Politicians do embezzle government's fund and at the age of forty years (40), the culprit resigns from the government service. In the case of Army, the culprit will never taste war but will be promoted to the rank of General.

Extortion is another form of corruption in Nigeria as depicted by Area Boys in the play. To earn a living, the Area Boys have turned the collection of illegal fees on official or non-official (government) properties in to a business. In the words of **Foreigner**, he paid illegal fee of Seven Naira, fifty kobo to an un-identified and acclaimed packing attendant after which another illegal attendant demands for another payment for the packing lot and for the security of his car. The attendant further threatens that failure to pay, the Foreigner's car will be towed by the time he comes back. The Foreigner calls for the intervention of **Sanda** who consoles him thus:

Well, you do not know what insurance is, I expect. The same principle operates with these... oh, its embarrassing, I mean... You're right. Its extortion but I'm afraid that's what given on here. Everybody puts in with it, and the police condones it (39).

The above statement lay credence to the fact that not only civilians are corrupt but also the uniform men in the country who are charged with the responsibilities of protecting and guiding lives and properties.

In the spirit of corruption, Nigerians have carved out different names in order to make it presentable, well packaged and good to hear in the contemporary socio-political scene. The issue of corruption in Nigeria is no longer a new thing to the **Foreigner** as he exclaims:

It gives a very bad impression of you people to foreigners. You're driving people away from your country. Airport, the same grab. Customs ditto. Dash Kola, bread, Wetin – you carry, donation, gift, Sweet-belle... very poetic – I thought I had mastered all the extortion rackets going on... and now you tell me there's another one called insurance (40)

Using the above statement, the play apparently exposes Nigeria as a lawless, indisciplined and corrupt society. It gives the picture of moral decadence and suggests how the government has failed totally towards the good administration of the nation.

In furtherance, Sanda who happens to be a security man at shopping plaza happens to be the leader of the Area Boys. He uses Boyko and Area Two Four for his criminalist acts and presents himself as a mediator in the public. Two Four hands over Big Man Shoppers' properties to him and he extorts Big Man Shopper for proper investigation on his stolen items.

Sanda uses his security uniform for illegal act in order to be free from suspicion.

Soyinka satirises the character of Sanda in order to present the criminal activities which is rampant among the men in uniform. Presently, the uniform has ceased to portray the personality of the owner, nor the integrity of the state but rather a pointer to mis-trust, stealing, robbery, extortion and other forms of criminal activities. Uniforms have now become legal means of legalizing illegality in Nigeria and other African states.

The demolishing of Moroko in Lagos is another phase of political corruption. It triggers the rate of poverty in Nigeria and further escalates the level of criminal activities in the nation. Demolishing of Moroko is a capital project that enriches the government's purse on the detriment of the masses. The military are only concerned on how to enrich themselves and have no concern on the welfare of the people they governed. Many people become homeless, many become unemployed because their shops, factories and industries are demolished and thousands find it difficult to make ends meet since their sources of income is taken away from them. The scenario further depicts an act of aberration of law and authoritative rule as the military fails to follow the Court's injunction. This is an anti-socio-political syndrome that punctures the effectiveness of the military system of government and renders the incompetent in governing African states.

The evaluation of people in Moroko and the illegal destruction of houses and properties are acts of injustice which gain their root from corruption.

Lastly, the playwright paints the politicians as part of the corrupt element in the society. Chief Kingboli who happens to be the highest bidder in the oil business has the upper hand on Professor Sematy who happens to be the former minister of Oil and Petroleum resources. Having been influential, Chief Kingboli is given an honorary award of 'Order of Merit', Honorary Doctorate award and Chieftaincy title. He displays his wealth in the preparation of his son's wedding which never sees the day light. The money he wasted on the wedding is received from the 'Brown envelopes' he receives from people as a result of empty promises he made to give them employment.

All this is an attestation to the fact that nobody is left out in the corruption saga in Nigeria. Both military and civilian government celebrate corruption in diverse ways in African countries which is causing harm to the development and social transformation of an African society. To curb corruption in our nation, it takes a joint work of every sundry in Africa and Soyinka as a social critic, appeals to our sense of reasoning to put a stop to corruption and pave way for national development, social transformation and nation building.

Conclusion

From the discussion, there is clear evidence that African drama has brought to line light human realities in African societies and displays the socio-political, religious and economic issues as shown in the primary text in order to create a utopian society free from all anti-social vices.

However, Soyinka's analytical perspective and the condemnation of the menace of corruptive practices in African (Nigeria) is ethically inclined by the culture and religions of the people. For instance, the religion of Islam vehemently prohibits bribery and corruption for Muslims. These are forms of gratification, unlawful consumption of another person's wealth and in due pressure or influence on authority or personality to achieve one's gain. The Qur'an is of the opinion that:

...do not consume your property among yourself wrongfully, nor seek access to judges by means of its in-order that you may sinfully consume a portion of people's wealth, while you know (What you do) (Quran 2:188)

Conclusively, the time has come for a drastic revolutionary movement in Africa in-order to stand vehemently against the bad activities of our leaders. The capitalist or Bourgeois are getting richer and popular at the expense of the Proletariat in African countries and until the Proletariat are redeemed from the shackles of the Bourgeois, poverty will continue to reign supreme in Africa.

Recommendations

The paper presents the following suggestions in-order to create an egalitarian society free from corruption and other anti-sociopolitical behaviors that can hamper the development of our nation (Africa) and bring to stand-still the process of social transformation in Africa.

- Literary writers should be encouraged to integrate anti-social vices and corruption in their writings at all level of our educational system.
- There is the need to have a literary workshop where contemporary issues such as corruption, poverty, nation building, national development, dictatorship, moral decadence etc. will highly be discussed with the aim of using literary works to curb the occurrence of social menace which hamper social transformation and discourages national development.
- Africa leaders should always remember that the mandate they hold is to serves the people whom they represent and this should be done with all honesty, dedication and loyalty.
- African should learn to live beyond bigotry so that our states can be fully developed.

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