

UNCOMMON ARTISTRY

UNDERSTANDING BAKARE, OJO RASAKI'S DANCE, DRAMA AND THEATRE



Edited by

AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye, Ph.D

Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu, Ph.D

Solomon Ejeke, Ph.D

Etop Akwang, Ph.D

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SPM PUBLICATIONS
London

SPM Publications

Unit 136, 113-115 George Lane, South Woodford,
London E18 1AB, United Kingdom

www.spmpublications.com

in conjunction with the Department of Theatre and Media Arts
Federal University Oye Ekiti, Nigeria.

First published in Great Britain by SPM Publications – an imprint
of Sentinel Writing & Publishing Company Limited in October
2014.

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ISBN 978-0-9927055-4-1

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Set in Times New Roman.

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Text and Textuality in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* and *The Gods and The Scavengers*

By

**AbdulRasheed, A. Adeoye, Ph.D.,
and Oludolapo, Ojediran Ph.D.**

Introduction

The play-text is the specially created guiding document and the engine room of aesthetically loaded performance. Right from the time of Thespis to Aristotle and all through the evolution of international playwrights like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Chekov, Brecht, Soyinka, Ngugi and so on; the prescription, description, logicity and reasoning essence necessary for the making of the play-text has been theorised and illustrated upon.

The profile, content and context of what the play-text should look like have also be examined within various diversified poetics and in the word of Nwabueze (2012, p.v), “no text without intertext”. The intertext serves as the strategies, ingredients, forms, links and determinants of a play-text. In this type of creative endeavour which is speculative, the voice of the playwright in his play remarkably celebrates the intention and the mission of the dramatist. Whether the style of writing or the dramaturgy pleases one or not, the tension of rejection and the confrontation of critic can only lead to the play to be re-written. The first edition of the text, if not re-written remains creative words on the landscape of dramatic enactment. As we regulate our behaviours through our obedience to rules and regulations so also, there are rules and regulations (not imposition) guiding the text and the expanse of textuality in the theatre profession. Like Nelson Mandela's Torch of Freedom recently auctioned, the torch of a good text lies in the hand of the playwright who is expected to have carried out a serious research as he puts pen to paper to create a work of art that has been described as personal, subjective and emotional.

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As much as we appreciate the usefulness of various organic rules guiding the postcolonial and postmodern plays, we are quick to

add that the postmodern theatre has no respect for writing rules. The centre is being broken to accommodate the periphery and the periphery moves closer too to the closet to celebrate the tension of the postmodern age of terror, violence, illogicality and opposition. Consequently, this study examines text and textuality in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* (2004) and *The Gods and The Scavengers* (2013). The study also discusses the issues that define the success and challenge of the two plays.

On Text and Textuality

The outlay of a play and what it takes to write a good play has been set by Aristotle. These features are universal standards except that the tension and dynamic with those standards have led to arguments and center-arguments. To Aristotle in his *Poetics* (the unabridged dover edition):

Every tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality – namely, plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. Two of the parts constitute the medium of imitation. And these complete the use. These elements have been employed, we may say, by the poets to a man; in fact, every play contains spectacular elements as well as character, plot, diction, song, and thought (Aristotle, 1997, p11).

Technically, these prescriptions can only be used for and to write tragedy. This challenge is a sign of insufficiency in the Aristotelian postulation because there are several tragic plays whose content and context deviate radically from the Aristotelian projection. For example, as crucial as a plot is to a play, the post – Aristotelian perspective and Betiang's (2001, p. 30) observation is that

...in many modern and contemporary plays, especially of the 'avant garde' tradition, plots are not necessarily resolved in the Aristotelian tradition. Apart from being in the episodic form, more like screen plays, most plots prefer to pose questions for individual resolutions.

Some plots like Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* 'resolve' the play with a 'deus – in – machina'...

The sense of plot illogicality is not peculiar to tragedy alone. In fact, "some comic plots have some peculiarities in structure designed to entertain, or tide man to respond through what only man can do, laughter." (p.31). The important point here is that there are several winning ways in the construction of the text and textuality which have rubbished Aristotelian dramatic principles. Literally, text is seen as "a written record of the words of a speech, lecture, programme, or play" (Rundell, 2007, p. 1545). In literature, the generic form of drama, which is a play, will essentially inform its structure. In the reality of writing, the text is given life through verbal creeds and linguistic colouration all housed by accessible or, as others may claim, inaccessible language which often extends to semiotics.

Text and textuality assume critical dimension in performance because the text may have one story (linear plot structure) or assemblage of stories (episodic plot structure) and this may essentially limit or make textuality to be expanded. In fact, Jenkeri Zakari Okwori has written on the limit and expanse of textuality to celebrate the fact that the text is limited and can as well be critically expanded by the theatrical author. On the limit of textuality, Okwori (2004, p.154) reflects that:

I begin to address this by first cautioning against the myth of text. A myth deriving from the notions of stability and security based on the 'civilisation of the sign'...Textuality is not limited to the printed word alone. And to promote the written above other forms of textuality is to narrow the expansive and creative implications of concept. Performance itself is by implication text stored in the human body and in this inscription written text may even be a limiting rather than an enabling factor in performativity.

The text that is limited in performance can also be expanded within the polemics of “the expanses of theatricality”. Certainly, “performance...has been honoured with dismantling textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favour of the polymorphous body of the performer” (Diamond, 2000, p. 68). The text must be accountable to some standards and it is when this is achieved that we can be talking of expanding its limit and re-orders its wrong or illogical arrangement.

In the postmodern theatre, the structure of the text is changing. Some texts have accommodated the successful style of Henrik Ibsen’s dramatic technique which “is patterned after the method of exposition – situation – discussion which constitutes the three – act structure” (Nwabueze, 2011, p. 102) to embrace the “subversion – containment dialectic which has been a central concern of new historicist critics...” (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p.249). In fact, some texts cannot even be placed or categorised – they simply deconstructed existing structures known about the text. In this type of situation, examining text and textuality in the dramatic enterprise should be encouraged. Hence, the desire to examine text and textuality in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki’s *Rogbodiyan* (2004) and *The Gods and The Scavengers*. Certainly, the endless nature of creativity has made the text to wear chameleon garb and this proximate dynamism makes the theatre, the confirmed house of truth and reality.

Text and Textuality in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki’s *Rogbodiyan* and *The Gods and The Scavengers*.

In *Rogbodiyan* (2004), textuality is not just the written words, rather, the word in context and the readers’ interpretation of what has been written. As Bakare employs simple and beautiful language, dynamic characters and deft skill to keep his readers/audience interests, it is the interpretation of the text that appeals to people’s imagination. This reality cannot be overemphasised.

In Bakare's text, *Rogbodiyan*, he shows a sense of real society experience whereby the people suffer for no just cause due to bad leadership. Apart from the Prologue, the play consists of 9 Movements which revolves round the actions and the abundant suspense which is aesthetically handled by Bakare. This also gears the imagination of his audiences/readers. In the Prologue, the playwright discusses the people experience through a narrative song below:

Rogbodiyan, oo, ee Rogbodiyan oo (twice) Trouble has come oo, ee, Trouble has come oo Rogbodiyan tide oran sele, ijangba ti de oran Trouble has come, problem has arrived sele, Iluoo roju kotun raye, awa bere ooo, eee Confusion has visited, chaos fills the land

Awa bere oo kini ka ti se? (p.6)

We are asking, what shall we do? (p.6)

Bakare starts this play with a rhetorical question which none of the people could answer. The king and his chiefs are portrayed as novice because when trouble strikes, nobody is said to be intelligent. As the narrator explains what the people of Koroju are experiencing and seeing the entry of the physically deformed people, it is vivid that the problem is more catastrophic than it appears ordinarily:

Narrator: . . .Yes, catastrophe brought upon oneself by oneself. When the child does what he is not supposed to do, his eyes see what he is not supposed to see. They are now victims of self-inflicted disaster because he people dine and wine with injustice, Koroju, a land where merit is thrown to the winds, Koroju, an entity controlled by nonentities, Koroju, abode of religious hypocrites and political sycophants, Koroju, where intelligence means nothing and academically brilliant is a political pauper. Koroju, a land where truth has been hindered and falsehood exalted. Ladies and gentlemen, a land of corruption where material and political wealth are worshipped and

the false acquisition of them is encourage is bound to be stricken by Rogbodiyan (p.7)

The Narrator's words have summarised all that is expected in the play. He gives the background information, details and establishes the setting of the story the readers/audiences are expecting. Koroju, meaning 'No Solution' reveals a society filled with corruption and retarded growth. Bakare succinctly explores the socio-political, historico-economic and religious situations amongst many other problems in Koroju. The Narrator's words show a creative artist whose intension is to expose the irregularities of a society through an entertaining medium. Like most contemporary playwrights who do not want to lose focus of contemporary social, economic, political, religious issues, Bakare tries to keep track of what is happening in his own society by presenting a political situation which relates to social conflict and social disorder.

In Movements 1 to 8, corruption becomes the main issue in the play. Although several plays such as Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin?*, Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* and Kongi's *Harvest*, Ayo Akinwale's *This King must Die*, AbdulRasheed Abiodun. Adeoye *The Killers (a social drama)* have discussed corruption at large. Bakare's *Rogbodiyan* sees corruption from the traditional cum political end where political leaders are imposed on the people without asking for their input. Njoku (2014, p. 267) observes that corruption has many forms. Many writers have grouped corruption into such forms/types as political, bureaucratic, judicial and electoral. Others are: bribery, nepotism, favouritism, embezzlement, extortion and so on. Njoku's observation summarises Bakare's play, *Rogbodiyan*, whereby people deviates from the standard codes of conduct to deliberately do what is unacceptable for their own selfish end. Although no one knows the criteria which the Regent used in picking Gbadegeshin and Asagidigbi as opponents, it later becomes clear how these two wanted power by all means. The conversation that takes place at the palace shows the people's

unwillingness to go along with the Regent whose imposition of two candidates sounds awkward:

Regent: That has been taken care of. I have decided to choose two candidates who are not from my own lineage and out of these two candidates, the Kingmakers shall choose one and announce to the people in four days time while three days after the announcement, coronation shall take place...

Woman: (Defiant). Yes. I insist on being heard! I must speak my mind. How can anybody wake up one morning and impose two candidates on us just like that? Aren't there established procedures for this sort of thing? Are we people without tradition? Wonderful things are happening in this land (pp.11-12).

The Regent is not bothered by the people's interests; rather she authoritatively speaks of her two choices. Bakare depicts these two opponents as people who want the throne at all cost and will do anything to be crowned. Despite the Ifa priest, Fadele's warning that none of the two candidates is suitable for the position; the people are left with no other choice. As the two opponents bribe their ways through the Kingmakers (except for Aloba who rejects their offers), Asagidigbi emerges as the winner. Although Aloba calls to the conscience of other Kingmakers, but their poverty level will not allow them think.

While there are lots of sacred moments that must be observed after coronation to make the community free of problems and calamities, Asagidigbi, flouts many of them because he cannot do without what he calls 'enjoyment' at the detriment of the people. Despite Agogo's several warnings to the King not to defile the young maiden, Arugba Oge, he rejects this warning and goes ahead to defile the Arugba. This brings affliction to his people:

Agogo: Good advice, indeed. I know I am the one who gives you bad advice. That is the way of our

leaders. God advisers are quickly sent packing because they tell the truth. Bad ones get promoted because they are professional sycophants. Hnn, I remember my childhood friend, the former Second-in-Command. Good trees don't live long in the bush. Kabiyesi, may Akigbe not lead you astray (p.38).

At the end, Akigbe leads the King astray and collaborates the meaning of his name which his opponent, Gbadegesin, summaries during their manifestoes that "the eagle is powerful but is it just? Ask the mother hen what she did to the eagle when it clawed her chick away. The eagle uses its strength to oppress . . . The eagle is an oppressive and predatory bird, that is what he is". (p.15).

Movement 9 can be assumed to be the epilogue and the resolution of the play. The playwright presents a solution to the existing problems of the people who are introduced at the prologue. As the prologue is used in capturing the interests of the readers, so is the epilogue as readers are interested in knowing the end of a leader who is incorrigible and the Kingmakers who are ingrained in corruption. Nevertheless, Bakare employs Adegbanji as the resolution to the play. He pretends to be the saviour of the people, but he is a saviour with a hidden agenda through his suggestion:

Adegbanji: Listen to my own suggestion first. People of Ilu Koroju, let us fool the dead by making me wear the costumes of a king. I shall wear his agbada and sokoto, put the king's beads on my neck and wrists; but most of import of all, I shall wear the crown on my head. Then I shall go for the healing water. When I get to the land of the dead, their leader will believe I am the king and will allow me cross their land. In less than two days from now I will be here back with the water and

then I will return the king's property back to him (p.49).

The question Bakare raises at this point is that 'Can anyone deceive the gods?' Who is fooling who in this context? Adegban's lines mirrors Ogunsi (2013, p. 30) view that man is a political animal, man uses language as part of his instrument to achieve and sustain his political ambition. Ironically, Adegban's spoken language serves as his manifesto, but unknown to the people, he navigates his way through to the end while he convinces the king and the people that he intends to do them a favour. Although the gods are aware of his actions, he is accused when he gets to them:

Ara Orun: You bear this task not because of your people but because of yourself. But by helping your selfish self you may as well be helping your people. Do not forget what you have prom-ised us. We will allow you to pass for your bravery, confidence and readiness to give unto the Dead what is theirs (p. 51).

This shows that no one can fool the gods. They understand the lies, selfish interests and gains Adegban is after, but because he will also help his people out of their problems, the gods decide to help him cross the land of the Dead. Bakare exemplifies what Gowon (2005, p. 469) observes about Brecht that readers should identify with the helpless heroes on stage and advocates that they should think, compare, question and see the implication of the play as it affects the environment.

The Gods and The Scavengers (2013) has a Prologue and 9 Movements. The one page Prologue is the exposition that summaries the central theme of the play. In this particular Prologue, the deconstruction of the gods in the Marxian mode becomes central. In fact, the lyrics of the first song of the play from the Lead and the Chorus points to the need to begin afresh, think of a new dawn as we are informed in the to note that:

Leah:

Why do we shout God as if he never gave us brains? Why do we shout the devil like we are zombies? In the scriptures all the things were put in our hands. When we do nothing the gods do nothing (p. ivi).

Prologue in some play-texts serve as the muse of introduction but in this particular play, the Prologue serves as exposition and a critical resolution of what to expect in the play.

Movement 1 of the play is a continuation of the Prologue. Here, the gods are further satirised and the Scavengers in the play bemoan maladministration and leadership failure. This style moves closer to the episodic text form and this also embraces the subversion – containment dialectic earlier discussed.

The rising action of the play is engraved in Movements 2 to 6. These Movements allow the Protagonists and the Antagonists in the play to pull the tension of conflict which is the soul of drama through camp following, deception, betrayal, deceit, emotion and distraction. For example, Chief Anago anatomises the unpredictability in man through his deception while his Councillors plan a dangerous coup that throw the community (now Nigeria) into religious, ethnic and political strives. In fact, Chief Olowokere, a leading member of the corrupt Councillors expands the deception nexus:

Chief Olowokere: Chairman, there is problem in the land. Big problem. People are just maiming and burning. People are just killing one another shaa. Let me go. I don't even know whether they are now in my house (p.40).

The above is the situation of the play that makes the text, a good material for performance. Movements 7 and 8 represent the climax of the play. This climax also contains the main themes and tendencies of Movements 2 to 6 except that Movement 7 and 8 take a swipe at fatalists as the grand plans of the activists or

freedom fighters come to the fore. Andy leads this pack and the 5 Scavengers are his instruments. The Movements serve as the dramatic time for action as it also historicises man's failure to take his own destiny in his hand. Yet, the supposed bad people (Andy and Scavengers) now transform into the defenders of the people, agitating for a new dawn contradicting a play of destiny and fate as seen in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame*.

Movement 9 is the resolution of the play and to us, an obvious anti-climax. We should not forget that in anti-climax, discussion continues. Interestingly, this Movement gives a clear direction to the Nigerian society through Andy who insists that:

Andy: ...I am not suitable to lead you either. Those of us who clamour for a kind society may not be exactly kind ourselves. Among you are capable leaders. Go home, search for leaders among yourselves and give them your mandate to lead...(p. 62).

Therefore, the play has a clear open ending in terms of thematic concern.

Conclusion

Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's is a success in text and textuality. This is because the two plays analysed in this study: *Rogbodiyan* (2004) and *The Gods and The Scavengers* (2013) have shown flexibilities and complexities that are the hallmarks of the postmodern drama and theatre. In the two plays; the explosion – situation – discussion and the subversion - containment dialectic are unknowingly accommodated. At the same time, Bakare's uniqueness in prologue – movement – discussion – resolution style cannot be ignored. His language is apt while his description of place and event should not be overemphasised especially by budding dramatists as they create to change the society.

In conclusion, Bakare, Ojo Rasaki has celebrated the success of the text in the two plays studied and at the same time, he has opened a wide gap for creative re-invention of textuality

especially to artistic directors who may want to direct the two plays. To direct the two plays studied in this work, future artistic directors are admonished that dramatic theory and criticism (in this present case, the text and textuality) of the two plays should be appraised as they direct creatively and as they interpret imaginatively.

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