

Womanist View and Political Stance in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's Selected Plays.

**By
Ojediran, Oludolapo Ph.D**

Introduction

As a Nigerian male playwright, Bakare epitomizes a writer whose works have consistently explored the beauty of language, culture, economy and politics in all aspects of creativity. He intertwines all these in most of his plays to showcase the economic deterioration, moral decadence, and social decline in his described country system. Bakare exposes the abuse of power, gender, class and position to discuss the wastefulness of what life entails and how human beings handle it and never want to let go.

His use of language reveals that language is a powerful phenomenon in creativity. Thus, this creativity expresses the most important people in the society, i.e the middle class and especially the lower class who are unable to cater for themselves. While 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. In one of the selected plays, *The Gods and The Scavengers*, Bakare calls these low class people 'The Scavengers' and refers to the middle class who govern them as 'The Gods' in pursuit of their individual selfish interests.

In the plays under analysis, language helps to develop situations that call for further investigation which readers/audiences see and feel vividly when reading or watching a dramatic piece. This mirrors what Morosatti (2009, p.317) observes about Osofisan's writings that

if we follow Osofisan's argument that a truly autonomous, independent and democratic society should have moments of collective

discussion to its logical conclusion, then we may be led to a conclusion simple yet of immense importance; that, beyond the literariness of any given genre, drama alone may ultimately be considered a socially-relevant form of expression whereas fiction and prose, based as they are mostly on individual enjoyment, may on the contrary unintentionally become weapons of a society that is more closed, rigid, and isolated.

Although, this is Morosatti's summary of Osofisan's dramatic works, Bakare's works also lends from this point of view. While Bakare is an internationally recognized dancer and choreographer, he writes plays that are challenging, dramatic, entertaining and educating to gain the attention of his audience in order to highlight the democratic values, economic standard and patriarchal view that exist in the country showcased by the playwright. This democratic values and economic standard is evidenced in the scavengers' opening song

We are the scavengers, we the main men. When
those rogues eat their beans, we comb their bins.
They cheat, we lift their shit. We are the
scavengers, we the main men.

We are the scavengers, we the main men.
Though we sweat like God's beings, we feed from
bins. How does one explain this? We are the
scavengers, we the main men.

We are the scavengers, we the main men.
Our land is sold to gods that we made with our
votes. So, cheat and shit and beans in bins have become
our lot because we sleep (1).

The song reveals the marginalisation, dehumanization and humiliation of voters who elect their leaders, yet cannot boast of

any progress in the country in question. Rather, these voters are left at their own mercy without food, clothes, jobs, social amenities and health care facilities, security amongst many other necessities of life. The unavailability of these things makes the scavengers' lifestyles a living hell in a country endowed with more than enough to satisfy its citizens. This also mirrors Agboola's (2012, p. 125) observation of Ayo Akinwale's play, *This King Must Die*, that

the nation's political leaders engage in a lot of activities which smacks of a people afflicted with mental illness. Nigeria's numerous problem, particularly the ones paraded in *This King...unemployment, prostitution, corruption, bribery, drug peddling, drug addiction, vote rigging* (p.70) are products of political elite (man-made problems) which are borne out of selfishness and greed.

Going by what is portrayed in Bakare's *The God's and The Scavengers*, society does not depreciate in a day, but accumulation of bad leadership, bad government and egocentricism contributes to the gradual drifting apart of a society.

Also, Bakare's second play, *Adanma*, presents a young beautiful lady that is admired by many especially Mohammed and Ezego. Ironically, Bakare shows Adanma as a lady who is marginalized in the patriarchal system she lives in. While a woman's beauty is a thing to be appreciated, it can also be a cause of downfall to a woman who is ignorant or boastful of such. In the African context, a woman's beauty is appreciated with different physiques, behaviours, attitudes, cultural heritages and others such attributer which could be evidenced through her shape, teeth, neatness, buttock, breast, eye, complexion, etc. One of the songs rendered by Adanma's friends in the play expresses this perspective of African beauty that

Ada Anna nwamma (2x)	Ada Anna fine girl
Ntutu di n'isi	Hair on her head
Ala di n'obi o	Breast on her chest
Nekwa Ada n;azu o	Look at her behind
Nekwa efekefe efe	Look at her yanga (style)
Ada Anna nwa mma o (2x)	Ada Anna fine girl (p. 20)

However, Adanma is not only deceived by the men in her life, but also, she is misled by her fellow women without using her own woman's gall to discover what is at stake. As the main objective of this paper is to discuss the womanist aesthetics and political view in Bakare's two selected works, the role of women within a patriarchal system is analysed in line with Alice Walker's view of womanism. Walker's (1994, pp. xi-xii) four-partite definition of womanism is useful in analysing the two plays:

...the black folk expression of mothers to female children, you acting womanish, i.e. like a woman...usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or wilful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one...(A womanist is also) a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture . . . and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually . . . committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist . . . Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (xi-xii).

Walker depicts the potential for the oppressed in the society to grow out of their situation. Her four-partite definition seems to suggest multiple uses of womanism. These multiple uses are very different, but all of them have a common denominator – they show a link with black women's past in relation to their gender and race and the collaboration that exists within the black society.

Hence, the adoption of womanism in this paper is to see men as working partners rather than foes of women as the western feminism portray them (separatist nature of western feminism).

Women in Bakare's Selected Plays

Women in African society are usually grouped into two different categories. Women can be active participant or passive participants in a society. This elaborates the issue of power and powerlessness, vocal and quietness, confidence and jittery as represented through the presentation of different female characterizations in the works of many African writers. When it comes to male writers, their representations of female characters vary. While many male writers do not show the positive side of womanhood except to present them as, silenced, uneducated, unintelligent, amongst other things, some male writers still present a balanced image of womanhood.

Bakare expresses female voices from a marginalized 'other' view, exploring different forms of womanism which at the end show them as silenced beings. While Walker (1984, p. 256) explores the relationship between men and women, and why women are always condemned for doing what men do as an expression of their masculinity, why men are praised for engaging in the same activities as women who are referred to as "tramps" and "traitors", the selected plays lend credence to this assertion and also create avenues for change. As noticed in Afolabi (2002, p. 131), he agrees that properly coordinated feminism could be a very useful weapon in obliterating human oppression, and in advancing society to higher realms of understanding, tolerance and peace. Afolabi's view shows that barbaric and invaluable traditions, system and laws could be eradicated by women themselves, through women and for women.

Increasingly, one notices that the plays under analysis tend to depict the characters especially women as metaphor for colonial exploitation which makes the writer examine character

stereotypes with damaged self-image and inferiority complexes trying to correct the assumed imperfection of their gender. Alabi and Akpa (2003) as quoted by Lucas (2009, p.117) see that as a result of historical mistakes of colonialism and forced amalgamation, women have continued to be disadvantaged and discriminated against in all spheres of life ranging from family to political and social places of society. The life of a woman in the social setting is that of a slave or at best a third class citizen.

This shows that the female characters as created on the page and embodied on stage, rather than become the mouthpieces for their own stories through which they can redress traditional and contemporary situations, communal memories and experiences, the social, cultural and gender induced issues, they become dormant, ignorant and inexpressive (third class citizens). Readdressing female issues might not seem as easy as it sound in any patriarchal system where men take charge of public sphere except the domestic sphere and reproductive issues. This is because the male gender is given full support religiously, culturally, socially, politically and economically. It is assumed that even when women in this system navigate themselves, try to be vocal and audible, engage in different things to prove their worth, the fact remains that the patriarchal system is a gendered system that mostly benefits the men. In Ezego's self-worth words, he sees himself as someone who can have anything he wishes for

Ezego: Nkem, Nkem, Nkem, Everybody knows that it is the beginning of a new moon and I have to change blanket. Everybody knows that this one is becoming very old. Look Nkem this world is all about cooperation. If Ada enters this house, the two of you will cooperate inside my bedroom. If she do for Monday you will do for Tuesday or you

want to do for the whole week? *Leading her into the bedroom*) (p. 19).

Ezego's words see women as gullible beings who can put up with any situation they find themselves in. While he had promised the assumed last wife (3rd wife) that there will be no other woman after her, he discovers Adanma, whom he sees as the prettiest of all women. The first wife who wants to please her husband, seeks all ways to convince Adanma to agree with her husband's love proposal. She lures Adanma into visiting Ezego. While the playwright presents Adanma as unintelligent "Don't mind my small brain" (p.26), her actions in the play also attest to it. On the one hand, Adanma believing what Ezego's first wife whispered into her ears, trusting her friends especially Nkechi, following Ezego into the bedroom to be disvirgined shows the opposite of what Walker's womanism advocates for women. Walker sees that women are intelligent, supportive and capable. On the other hand, the womanist spirit of wanting to know more than is desired is seen in Adanma when she enters the room with Ezego to confirm what his first wife has said

Adanma: *(coming out and crying after been deflowered)* So they deceived me. They deceived me. Ezenwanyi herself, she told me that Nna-ayi was not complete and with my tiny brain I believed her. I believed her oo *(cries for sometime then goes still. She rises slowly with laughter)* But, he is a man, a real man *(Indicating with her hand)* (p. 27).

Readers might imagine Adanma is raped. Rather than being sober throughout her monologue, she consoles herself that Ezego is also man enough to handle her sexually after the promise of getting her a 'Toyota Cecelia' (p.27). This is a crime committed against Adanma's body, a patriarchal system that should condemn such act, but rather prepares Adanma for marriage. This mirrors Rudin's (2009, p. 191) observation that rape and sexual harassment are traces of oppressive foci that perpetuate women's marginality and *reification*. Women's survival act to have access

to economic resources and freedom in the light of patriarchal system is an important issue that makes most women fall victim of rape. Until recently, most patriarchal societies see rape as part of manliness, or do not even consider it as rape or violation of a woman's body. However, since democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999, rape has been seriously considered as breaking of fundamental woman's right.

Ignorantly, Mohammed is the only man in the play that rejects Adanma's marriage to Ezego. Mohammed's love for Adanma explores the expectation of Walker's womanism which explains the accommodationist nature of the theory as observed by Ogunyemi (1996, p. 55) that womanism believes in the freedom and independence of women... wants a meaningful union between black women, black men and black children in order to eliminate the sexist stance that exists.

Bakare's Women and their Political Stance

Moody (1970, p. 58) asserts that the urge to convey one's needs effectively to the other people is one of the fundamental origins of language as it becomes successively more complex as the individual develops and human affairs become more intricate. . . Language may of course be used for the promotion of both worthy and unworthy causes, using either valid or invalid methods, and the use of language for persuasion should be attended by rational critical consciousness. Nevertheless any mastery of a language must include the capacity to marshal facts and arguments in such a way as to gain maximum attention to them.

Moody explains the use of language amongst human. Language could be used persuasively or unpersuasively but most importantly, before one can effectively use it. One must master the language to marshal one's point and argument, that is, the language=code, person speaking=code and person receiving the message=code all have to understand the language before an effective communication takes place. However, persuasive

language goes beyond trying to pass across information; rather it is used to gear people's psyche in order to convince them. Such words are mostly used in political settings whereby politicians need to sell their 'products' to the citizens in question. This is the situation in Bakare's *The Gods and The Scavengers* where the politicians used their persuasive languages to gain the needed votes and at the end exploit the people. Iyaloja in turn uses her own political stance and knowledge to negotiate between the people and the politicians. She speaks of hope instead of hopelessness

IYALOJA: Yes, that the hoodlums in the name of councillors try to perpetuate irregularities, fraud and long throat should not make us hopeless. We have hope in our Chairman, we have a chairman that listens. If our spokesmen and representatives are not happy with the wind of change that is blowing across the land, they can die and roast in pieces. Let us rise and complain to our Honourable. He has ears he will listen. My people, my people, this is not the time to sit and mourn, this is the time to rise and act (p. 16).

Ignorantly, Iyaloja presents a diplomatic view of an African woman who is interested in change and prosperity of her people. Nevertheless, to an African woman, the persuasiveness in the womanist theory that seeks a meaningful union in a patriarchal society seems to be more appropriate in the analysis of women's experiences. While women such as Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Efunsetan Aniwura, Emotan, Queen Amina, Charlotte Olajumoke Obasa, Omu Okwei, Nana Asma'u, Olaniwun Adunni Oluwole, have been technically and unapologetically involved in wealth creation, fighting of wars, empowering other women and taking up social works at different levels, historically most of the women who took these fore fronts have been neglected and forgotten. This is observed, in Obadiegwu (2009, p. 110) that women have always seen their socio-political involvements in human society as attempts at gender balance rather than calls for

their contributions to the development of the society only. The role of Iyaloja in *The Gods* and *The Scavengers* clearly reveals this.

IYALOJA: Long live the Honourable. We are here to register our displeasure concerning the way your councilors come to the market to raid us on daily basis. Honourable Chairman you already told us you have stopped the collection of royalties by councilors. But these your councilors (pointing at the councilors seated) still come to the market to forcefully take royalties from us. Secondly, you blame us for evading payment of taxes and revenues. But the truth is we pay our taxes and revenues to the councilors who head our constituencies. Honourable, does it then mean that we suffer lack of basic amenities because our representatives don't bring you the taxes and revenues we pay? Chairman sir, save us from the hands of some of your men who insist milking us dry in spite of the commitment of your regime to a better life for all and sundry. My people, I never talk una mind? (pp. 24-5).

Iyaloja means mothers of the market. She is often the female head of each community group apart from the Iyalode who is among the chiefs. Iyaloja serves as the mouthpiece of the market women who engage in buying and selling. They are the ones who bear the brunt of the economic deterioration, political instability and social degradation of the society. Bakare presents Iyaloja as an out-spoken and independent minded woman whose persuasive language speaks on behalf of others, both women and men. Just like the women listed above that made political influences, Iyaloja speaks for the survival of her people, prevents them from being exploited, exposes different levels of corruption among the commissioners who are meant to serve the people. While the Honourable Chairman, Anago, is dishonest, he claims to be what

he is not by promising heaven on earth to the people. For example,

ANAGO: Let me put it this way. The poor shall become rich in my time as long as the poor work hard. In my time, the rich will remain rich as long as they do honest business. And by the grace of my ancestors, in my time the rich who has been cheating the masses and the land will become poor. I am sure you understand the signs of the season (pp. 11-12)

The chairman's inhuman nature comes up with him at the end when the scavengers who are evicted from their assumed houses return with the chairman's decamped special adviser, Andy, who could not cope with the lies, fraud and unconcerned behaviour of his boss. Andy calls for a true democratic system amongst the Scavengers. However, what readers notice in Bakare's works is summed up by Awuawuer (2009, p. 336) that Nigeria is said to be politically and economically dominated by men who dictate its political affairs and manipulate it to their advantage. Women are perpetually left behind in the political arena, and only a negligible insignificant number are allowed in, to partake in the politics of the nation under the tutelage of men. Ironically, women writers have always neglected the role of women in democratic politics; rather, they often discuss women's positions in socio-cultural, economic and traditional settings, but Bakare's work exposes how men control politics, negotiate themselves in politics and how men make politics their own rights.

Also, diplomatic persuasive language is explored in *Adanma*. Ezego's first wife uses these words to lure Adanma to her husband. The role played by Ezenwenyi is the same role exhibited by Sadiku in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. Ezenwenyi and Sadiku portray elderly women who are ready to satisfy their husbands' urges in different patriarchal societies, not minding the effect it will have on the younger generation of women. Rather than helping these young women grow out of

their inhibitions in societies that view women as men acquisitions, they played along with their husbands to cajole these innocent young women to becoming the latest 'properties'.

Nevertheless, the present writer sees Bakare's playwriting skills in Musa (2002, p. 46) view that the playwright is a creative artist who is often guided by inspiration or the environmental condition of his society when writing. He is also a visionary artist and a creative person, an observer of things- an iconoclast.

Conclusion

Although, more work needs to be done on women and their political stance in democratic societies, women in the selected plays question the low level of women's involvement and commitment in the politics of the patriarchal system, economic injustice and social development. However, Bakare's portrayal of women can be said to be balanced. While he portrayed Iyaloja as vocal and outspoken, speaking for others, Adanma on the other hand is seen as a gullible woman with little or no intelligence. Although, these two women characters are of different age groups and backgrounds, Bakare shows elderly women (Iyaloja and Ezenwenyi) in the plays as people with womanist visions who want the collaboration of men and women in the society, unlike the younger generations (Adanma, Nkechi, Third wife) who want to remain where the patriarchal society dictates for them.

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