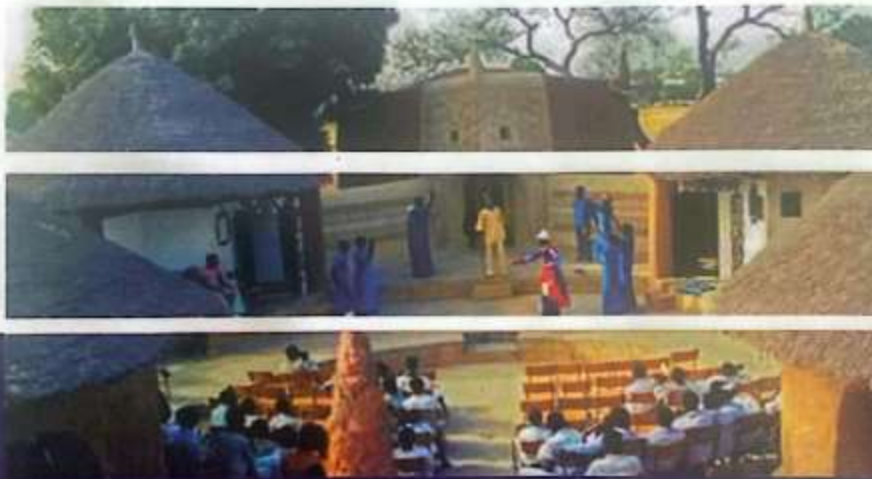


Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria



Mukabala

Journal of Performing Arts and Culture



Volume 5 Number 1



SEPTEMBER 2023

Mukabala

Journal of Performing Arts and Culture

ISSN 1596 – 8998 | Vol 5 | No. 1 | September 2023

A Publication of the Department of Theatre and
Performing Arts
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria-Nigeria

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Subscription

Mukabala is published twice in the academic year by the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria. The annual out-of-Nigeria subscription rate, including air-postage is \$50.00 dollars for individuals and \$75.00 dollars for institutions and libraries. Singles-issue rate for individual is \$25.00. Claims for copies not received must be made within two months following an issue's publication. Local subscription for individuals is N 2,500 direct purchase or N 3,000 per copy including postages. Provisions exist for generous discount for bulk purchases.

Printed by:

Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, Zaria,
Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Tel.: 08065949711

E-mail: abupress2020@yahoo.com

abupress2013@gmail.com

Website: www.abupress.com.ng

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THE PERFORMANCE OF POWER AND THE POETICS OF HEROTISATION IN THE NOLLYWOODIAN'S *BASÒRUN GÁÁ* AND *ÀFÓNJA*

AbdulRasheed Abiodun ADEOYE

Abstract

History (whether reconstructed, deconstructed or through the postcolonial theory of factionalism) has always served as a muse for the poetics of herotisation in political theatre. Consequently, the deliberate choice made by the dramatist to learn, unlearn or re-learn from history housed the changing tide in the conversion, and or mediatisation of the literature of the past to the reality of the present. Interestingly, Thomas Carlyle's herotisation hypothesis, Sigmund Freud's definitive theatrics on the power of consciousness and unconsciousness, Aristotle's prescriptive tragic muse on heroism in his *Poetics*, Niccolo Machiavelli's ruthlessness in *The Prince* and others have shown hero's use of crude power. Man's pristine use of power has also been confirmed to be universal. This study, through the theoretical framework of John Brannigan's New Historicism within the expanse of postcolonial theories, therefore, examines the power of performance and the poetics of herotisation in the Nollywoodian's *Basòrun Gáá* and *Àfónja*. We observe that although there are a few technical and artistic errors in the production of the two films, they are nonetheless successful in theatrical cum dramaturgical interpretations. We argue that the misuse of power noted with heroes has no barrier of age, gender or culture. It is not an ancient phenomenon but the universal reality of our recent past and immediate existence. Since man will become history, we conclude this study by warning present leaders to be honest, sincere, merciful, benevolence and judicious in their use of power.

Keywords: Performance, power, history, poetics, herotisation

Introduction

The silence of the cinematic tradition was finally broken in Nigeria through Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* produced in 1992. Other national thrillers and blockbusters such as *Rituals*, *The Battle of Musanga* and *Glamour Girls* followed immediately. The transitional nature and the diversified approaches of the Nigerian film industry have also been researched into by Jonathan Haynes, Chiedu Obadiagwu, Okome Onookome, Barclays Ayakoroma, Alex Asigbo and Emman Dandaura among several other recent conversations and intellectual submissions to

tell the Nigerian stories. This period also marked the success and supremacy of capitalism in the Nigerian film industry which is known as Nollywood, a Nigerian model of the American Hollywood.

Before this period, Ekwuazi (5) has reflected that the Nigerian:

indigenous feature film made its debut in 1970 (*Kongi's Harvest*); and peaked in 1986. Between 1972 and 1990, some 80 indigenous feature films had been licensed by the censor for public screening. In 1982, the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) was established by the Federal Government with the statutory functions *inter alia* of accessing indigenous practitioners to production and capital equipment resources.

Owing to the power of common indigenous language, cultural celebration and the commitment of its practitioners, the indigenous feature films, especially of the Yorùbá extraction is a huge success in Nigeria. In fact, Adedeji and Ekwuazi (162) have concluded that the "Yorùbá travelling theatre companies turned film production companies... accounted for 60 percent of the films that featured at the 1st National Film Festival in 1992". The Yorùbá travelling theatre's intervention in the filmic tradition in Nigeria has also been documented by Tunde Lakoju, Hyginus Ekwuazi, Onookome Okome and others with Hubert Ogunde, Moses Olaiya, Ade Afolayan, Eddy Ugbomah, Mahmood Ali Balogun and a few other filmmakers serving as pioneers apart from tens of postcolonial filmmakers in the Yorùbá filmic tradition. On the interconnection between the Nigerian and global film cultures, notable studies have indeed commented on the essence of the Nigerian filmic tradition as necessary tool in the sustenance and promotion of the Nigerian and global multicultural identities. Discussions on the steady progress being recorded by the Nollywoodian industry in Nigeria are also over-whelming. In most of these works, however, no much emphasis is placed on the use of power and power relations, heroism and their consequences on the global or *glocal* culture.

It is important to state that history (whether reconstructed, deconstructed or through the postcolonial theory of factionalism) has always served as a muse for the poetics of herotisation in political theatre. Consequently, the deliberate choice made by the dramatist to learn, unlearn or re-learn from history housed the changing tide in the conversion, and or mediatisation of the literature of the past to the reality of the present. Interestingly, Thomas Carlyle's herotisation hypothesis, Sigmund Freud's definitive theatrics on the power of consciousness and unconsciousness, Aristotle's prescriptive tragic muse on heroism in his *Poetics*, Niccolo Machiavelli's political ruthlessness in *The Prince* and others have shown hero's use of crude power.

Man's pristine use of power has also been confirmed to be universal. This study, through the John Brannigan's New Historicism, therefore, examines the power of performance and the poetics of herotisation in the Nollywoodian's *Basòrun Gáà* and *Afónjá*. The technical, artistic and the historical essence of the two films are also considered as we interpret the relationship between the two lead characters in the two films within our contemporary reality of the global and *glocal* cultures. The two films selected for our discourse, *Basòrun Gáà* and *Afónjá* though produced in Yorùbá language and subtitled in English language for millions of the viewing public, are classical works by the very standard of the word. Arguably, the Yorùbá people from the South Western Nigeria are believed to be the most accommodating, cosmopolitan, sophisticated, diplomatic, religious and educated people of Nigeria. Spreading over ten States in Nigeria, the Yorùbá people can also be found in the Republic of Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Brazil, Jamaica and others. The present population of the Yorùbá people is estimated at 30 million. Thus, it is interesting to note that the Yorùbá people are also entrenched in rich culture which permeates their governance, religion, law, custom, tradition, ethics, mores and their social institutions.

Historically as well, the Yorùbá people are emigrants in Nigeria who must have migrated from Arabia (Davidson 119), Sudan or Egypt to their present abode (Johnson 15 and Akinjogbin 3). Odùduwà, the controversial progenitor was reputed to be the father of the Yorùbá race while Ilé-Ifè, a city in the present Osun State, Nigeria is seen as the cradle of life and a place where civilisation began. Works such as Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yoruba* (1921), Ade Ajayi's *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century* (1967), S. A. Akintoye's *Power Politics in Yorubaland* (1970), among several others from historians, anthropologists, dramatists, sociologists and political scientists have also served as rich exploratory literary materials on the world-view of the Yorùbá whose people live permanently in three worlds but merely transited due to the cyclical nature of their cosmology.

To the dramatist, every stage of the life of the Yorùbá people is dotted with performance. From birth, growth and adulthood, marriage, transition to reincarnation, the Yorùbá people are great lovers of performances. They can also distinguish between low and high cultures while relishing in poetry, semiotics, incantations, evocations, invocations, pantomime, masquerading and others which are dialectically linked and ideologically rooted in their changing aesthetics, diverse myths, folklores, ethics and mores.

New Historicism and Media Culture in Nigeria

In the mediatisation of theatre, three critical perspectives have emerged on the interpretation and re-interpretation of historical cum cultural issues. They can be broadly categorised as: historicism, old historicism and new historicism. The general effects (negative or positive) of history housed historicism while old historicism is mainly concerned with the understanding of the social background and the intellectual currents of time that illuminate literary works for later generations and that which insists that a literary work be read with a sense of the time and place of its creation (Diyanni 2082).

New historicism is a postcolonial re-reading of old historicism. This is necessitated by man's changing culture. Interestingly, bad and good happenings of the numerous 'pasts' in our numerous cultures are interrogated within our contemporary reality. Lessons are also drawn from the adventure or misadventure of our glorious and inglorious pasts. Under new historicism, man's culture is seen as a corporate but changing entity. However, the mishandling, through limitless freedom, and over-liberalisation of the same historic culture can lead to its destruction.

In fact, new historicism "considers historical contexts of literary works as essential for understanding them". The central relevance of new historicism to this study is that:

One common strategy of new historicist critics is to compare and contrast the language of contemporaneous documents and literary works to reveal hidden assumptions, biases, and cultural attitudes that relate the two kinds of texts, literary and documentary... An important feature of new historicist criticism is its concern with examining the power relations of rulers and subjects (Diyanni 2083).

The prevailing structures that dominate power and powerlessness in societies are re-examined in creative and or literary works by new historicists. The place of cultural and social institutions in power construct also makes the postcolonial theory of new historicism a cultural interpreter's delight. We adopt for this study, John Brannigan's multifunctional definition of New Historicism. Brannigan (417-418) submits that:

An important realisation of the new historicism is that literature and history are inseparable. History is not a coherent body of objective knowledge which can simply be applied to a literary text in order to discover what the text does or does not reflect. Literature is a vehicle of representation of history, and it does contain insights into the formation of historical moments... For new

historicism, the object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature *in history*.

Considering the place of history in media culture in Nigeria or elsewhere, we are certain that a thorough scrutinisation and the subsequent application of the theory of New Historicism will enable researchers to come to term with the reality of media culture in history and its second face value of media theatre in contemporary reality. Certainly, multimedia technology of cinematography "is responsible for basic and rapid changes in Africa" (Enahoro 21). Due to its popularity and mass appeal, media theatre all over the world has exploited politics and social issues bothering on historical figures and subjects that enjoyed stark resemblance with our immediate neo-conservative political leaders such as, Idi Amin, Mobutu Seseseko, Robert Mugabe, Laurent Gbagbo, Saddam Hussein, Muommar Gaddafi, Sanni Abacha, George Bush and others that have disturbed and are disturbing the Maghreb, and the peace of the human race as point of focus.

Basòrun Gáà and Àfònjá in Yorùbá History

At a time when war reigned supreme and when loyalty has to be total, two titled Chiefs emerged in the 18th century at Òyó Empire located in the then West African sub-region. The first was Basòrun Gáà who was the Prime Minister (Basòrun) to four successive Aláàfins (the supreme emperors) of Òyó Empire. In the highly monarchical political structure of Òyó Empire, the Prime Minister, to date, is an important political personality who is equally the head of the most dreaded Òyómèsi, the body responsible for the religious and political control of the Empire through a well-defined checks and balances not only on the ruling Aláàfin (the title of the paramount ruler of Òyó Empire) but on urgent matters of state bothering on administration, justice and social co-habitation.

This particular Basòrun, whose Yorùbá history of yore is not complete without the mentioning of his name, Basòrun Gáà sought for political kingdom for clear economic gains. In what we can reframe as tyrants swallowing tyrants and dictators replacing dictators; Basòrun Gáà succeeded in destroying, through forced suicide, four Aláàfins (Lábisi, Awónbíojú, Agbólúajé and Májèóogbè). The case of Lábisi was pathetic. He was "never crowned and only 17 days after he commenced the preliminary ceremonies, the new Basòrun... rose to power... Olubo and Ajibadu the king-elect's friends were summarily put to death" (Johnson 178) while Lábisi too "put an end to his own life". The three other Aláàfins mentioned earlier too showed courage but one of their own instruments, Basòrun Gáà, destroyed them all through forced suicide and politics of deceptions that bother on power equation and relations.

In fact, Akinjogbin (2002: 38) submits that: "From 1750 A.D. the Oyomesi was headed by a very powerful Basòrun Gáà. He decided to curtail the economic powers of the Aláàfin in the province and his political powers at home. Thus, he earned the reputation or dis-reputation of being the kingmaker and the king destroyer". Akinjogbin's reflection above only helps to reinforce the fact that god-rulers as the case was in the periods of the Empires were ruling to expand and defend their economic interests. This dynamic tension of balancing and re-balancing of power has not changed to date.

In power equation, Basòrun Gáà was able to achieve a larger-than-life notorious reputation by pretending to be fighting on the people's side through populist rhetoric. He was a natural creator of crises who profited from his self-created crises and intrigues. As a benevolent dictator whose power of oratory was perfect, he killed with impunity to instill fear in the hearts of his people. He was a confirmed 'man of blood' whose economic expansionist's desire was well-planned and executed. Basòrun Gáà ended his life when everything that he has failed him. As a special mortal that swallowed courageous mortals, he was eventually swallowed by his own subjects under Aláàfin Abíodún Adégoólú to confirm the changing nature and vanity of power.

Also, the history and rise of Àfónja to political fame was during the reign of Aláàfin Aólè, the immediate successor to Aláàfin Abíodún Adégoólú. Unlike Basòrun Gáà, Àfónja was the Generalissimo, the Àrè Ònà Kakanfò of the entire Òyó Empire. In a period of war, banditry, lawlessness and rascality, it took the political wizardry and military might/courage of the likes of Àfónja of Ilorin (an ancient city in the present capital of Kwara State, Nigeria) to defend the Empire.

The military strength of Òyó Empire was the Empire's major weapon of survival. Consequently, war was the order of the day. Within the same Òyó tradition, a new Aláàfin must strive to outdo his predecessor by declaring war against real or imaginary enemy. To this end, Aláàfin Aólè who ruled the Empire towards the tail end of the 17th century was asked several times to name his enemy (a person, a group of people, a village or town) to which Johnson (189) recalls that Aláàfin Aólè replied that "my enemy is too formidable for me". However:

Being pressed, he named the powerful chief Àfónja the Kakanfò residing at Ilorin with great reluctance, as he foresaw evil ahead... Àfónja alone was his enemy, the other chiefs were as yet loyal to him, but circumstance occurred, one after the other which created disaffection between him and the Basorun and the other chiefs... (190).

Importantly, Àfōnja was ordered to go and capture Ìwéré Ilé, "a place fortified by nature and by art, and impregnable to the simple weapon of those days". Àfōnja detested this suicide expedition and he, Basòrun and some of his friends ordered King Aólè to go and open the calabash. This action made Aláàfin Aólè to fire darts to curse the Yorùbá race that they will end up as slaves and that their children will never obey them. Sensing that his enemies are too formidable, Aólè finally committed suicide in the famous Àfōnja – Aólè – Òyó Empire's intrigues.

Certainly, Àfōnja was fortifying himself by doing everything possible to protect Ìlorin, his own little but formidable Kingdom. His desperation led to the disintegration of the Empire because he recruited Fulani Jihadists under the leadership of Ááfá Álími (a strong Islamic spiritualist) from the Northern part of the country as soldiers fighting on his side but calculating very diplomatically too to take control of the political soul of Ìlorin from him. On this, Akinjogbin (64-65) informs that:

Unknown to Àfōnja, Alimi's programme was different from the role which Àfōnja intended for him. Alimi lost no time in winning the allegiance of the Fulani and Hausa followers of Àfōnja and turning them to his own personal army. Some Yoruba leaders around Àfōnja saw the danger and warned him to no avail.

Sadly enough, Àfōnja was assassinated by the very force that he used his own hand to recruit. Ìlorin gained independence but falls under the Fulani Emirate system of governance to date. This great fall is seen by most conservative defenders of the emerging Emirate as the tragedy of the disunity of the Yorùbá people. While searching for power, Àfōnja expressed the internalisation and externalisation of personality order and disorder in the use of power. His uncalculating and undiplomatic nature made him to see the end of Aláàfin Aólè while seeking for independence of Ìlorin from Òyó Empire. This is a clear act of political subversion. He killed people for rituals at will and his advisers, friends and relatives were nothing to him on matters of state and self-preservation.

The place of traditional religion and Islam must also be discussed through the Àfōnja – Álími – Ìlorin's political subjugation. It is important to note that Àfōnja had captured every other power under the traditional religion. He wanted more power and Álími was handy through Islamic power. He paid dearly for his greed. The philosophy that all snakes are to be eaten gave him up.

Basòrun Gáà and Àfònja in the Nigerian Theatre

Adebayo Faleti's *Basòrun Gáà* (1972) is a major Yorùbá language play-text devoted to the history and political misadventures of Basòrun Gáà. The play has been performed several times at the University of Ife now (Obafemi Awolowo University) and University of Ibadan. The play was also produced under our Artistic Supervision on 25th and 26th May, 2010 at the Performing Arts Theatre Auditorium, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. The film version of the play which we are presently discussing with the title, *Basòrun Gáà* (a sadist head of Òyó Kingmakers in the 18th century) was produced in year 2005. Adebayo Faleti also wrote the screen play and directed it. On Àfònja and playwriting, Ayo Akinwale's *This King Must Die* (2001) and Kunle Adebayo's *Bandits and Beggars* (2001) have the character of Àfònja represented in the two plays respectively. Àfònja is the same Àrè Ònà Kakanfò Àfònja (Governor of Ilorin) in Adebayo's play. The film version of Àfònja with the title *Àfònja* (in a search for Yorùbá unity) was produced and to the delight of the Yorùbá people at home and in the Diaspora in year 2002. Recently too, Toyin Abiodun also places Àfònja on trials with his play, *The Trials of Àfònja* published in 2012.

The two films are rated 18 (for adults) by the Nigerian (National Film and Video Censor Board). While Afan Productions and Remdel Optimum Communication produced *Basòrun Gáà*, Remdel Optimum Communication based at Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria produced *Àfònja* in a "digitality mastered and superb picture quality".

Contextual Discourse on Basòrun Gáà and Àfònja in *Basòrun Gáà* and *Àfònja* Films

The content of the film, *Basòrun Gáà* is not totally different from the oral and written accounts of the Basòrun Gáà's political misadventures in Òyó Empire. This creative documentation starts through the fairly long Opening Montage characterised by incessant drumming, poetry rendition and pantomimic dramatisation in a rustic Yoruba village. This dramatic appetiser suddenly shifts to Májèógbé's wife where she is pleading for forgiveness for insulting her husband, Májèógbé, the then Aláàfin who orders that Ilorí, his in-law and the father of his wife be beheaded. The crux in the beginning of the film, *Basòrun Gáà* is the deception of dictators for populism. Basòrun Gáà's first dramatic counter- reaction to Májèógbé's ill-tempered instruction is important as the film unfolds. Basòrun Gáà sounds sympathetic with the people of Òyó, nodding very painfully that:

Basòrun Gáà: Wón wá gbé orí Ilorí?...
Won ò mòn pé Àna Oba ni?

(So, they chopped-off Ilòrí's head?...
Don't they know he is the King's in-law?).

Answers are provided to the two questions above by Samu, an important Òyómèsì who replies that:

Samu: Wón gbé orí Ilòrí o
Wón mún pé àna oba ni àti wí pé
Oba nàà lóni kí wón ó gbé orí è!

(They chopped-off Ilòrí head!
They know that he is the King's in-law
And in fact, the King himself ordered his execution).

For biting the bullet, Basòrun Gáà laughs hysterically at Májèógbé's action and storms back to his inner chamber like a lion planning to pounce dangerous after surviving a major onslaught. Basòrun Gáà, henceforth, Gáà summarily orders the King to go and commit suicide by opening the calabash of life – a symbolic political de-imagining weapon and the Empire's metaphor of checks and balances used by the Òyómèsì to kill tyrant kings. Summoning courage, Májèógbé insults Gáà's messengers (the Òyómèsìs) whom he sends the message of death. Even at the point of death, Májèógbé shows courage and portrays himself as an Aláàfin who prefers to die than to bow to the wish of Gáà, the old, experienced tyrant and dictator who swallows Májèógbé, a weak tyrant.

The next dramatic action that follows these alterations between the Prime Minister and the King (Gáà and Májèógbé) is the summary execution of Májèógbé with the popular refrain of:

Ìlú Òyó kò oó
Òyó ko Májèógbé
(Òyó people reject you
Òyó rejects Májèógbé).

Sensing that the majority of the people of Òyó are not happy with him, Gáà, in his best, informs the people of Òyó that it is Májèógbé that kills himself to assuage their weak souls:

Gáà: Gbogbo èyin Ilú Òyó
Gbogbo èyin Ìjòyè Ilú Òyó

Gbogbo èyin èniyàn agbègbè Òyó
Tí Ìlú Òyó lase dé
Mo kí gbogbo yín o
A dúpé – a réyín odi
Oba lo ó fi gbogbo wa sínú odi
Ejé Májèógbé ó maa lo ba awon ara òrun sèyín odi
Èyín Ìjòyè Òyó – e ó sí nínú òkùn
Sùgbón e jé ká sòrò dié bí Δ lé kún
Ká lè món gbòò bí eni tó wè nínú òkùn...
Ní tò tóó tée bá rí oba ní gbèkùn
Tí asì sàlàyé ohun tó fa sàbàbí e nínú kunkun
Afobaje àsán la jé lójú gbogbo eléti kunkun
Àwon tí wón ògbón
Àwon tí wón o mòràn – won aní...
Gàà pa Májèógbé
Kini Májèógbé se?
Tàbí àwon Ìjòyè pa Májèógbé
Kini Májèógbé se?
Gàà kó pa Ìjòyè
Ìjòyè kó pa Májèógbé
Májèógbé ló dolóyè tó gbàgbé
Pé èniyan ta bá fé omo lówó rẹ eléyun làna ení
Májèógbé ló pa Ìlòrí onílù ní jàbàta.
Omo Ìlòrí ní ba Oba sèfè – ón fawàdà bóba se ifé...

(All citizens of Òyó
All the chiefs of Òyó
All the people of the provinces of Òyó
Where the authority of Òyó is paramount
I greet you all
Let us rejoice
The King has gone and left us behind
Let Májèógbé dwell with the hosts of heaven
You Òyó elders – you are not in darkness
Concerning this matter but let us add a few words of clarification...
so as to Be clean like one who has swum the sea... in truth,
If a king is found in shackles
And we take no pains to unravel the mystery
We will look like king destroyers

To those who don't know – they might ask, once again... Gáà has killed Májèógbé what has Májèógbé done?
Or the chiefs killed Májèógbé
What has Májèógbé done?
But Gáà has not executed Májèógbé
The chiefs did not execute Májèógbé
It is Májèógbé, who, after ascending the throne
Forgot that in-laws are to be respected
It was Májèógbé who killed Ìlòrí, the bàtá drummer
Ìlòrí's daughter was showing love to the king,
While in jest she said the king...).

At this point, a well-plotted flashback is enacted to show the domestic intrigues between the King (Májèógbé) and his wife in which the latter's joke about the small stature ('stunted body') of the King draws the King's anger and this expensive joke makes the King to order his servants to kill his wife's father.

Laughing and smiling casually, Gáà continues:

Gáà: Oba fon mú – obá bínú óní kí won ó lo gbé orí Ìlòrí wá –
okíkí kàn Kómo Ìlòrí lè mòn pé eja tó nǵà nínú ibú kòtó
nkan
Eyin náà tí gbàgbé gbogbo eni Oba wádà sí inú gbèkùn..
Sebí Oba nílá ní fí irú wa kápá won
Nígbà tí eni tó nse ejó ilú bá nífi dà se ilú ...
Nígbà wo ní ilú ò ní tú?...
Oba Lábísí... Awónbíojú... Agbólúajé...
Nibo ní wón rè awon dà
Enikan ò payín lóba
Fúnrawon ní wón yanjú ara won!...
Ìjà èyin ilú àti gbògbo èyin Ìjòyè ilú ní Gáà nǵbè

(The King asked for Ìlòrí's head and there was uproar so that Ìlòrí's daughter might know how powerful he was, our King had put many in jail... only the great king has made us to Tower above them when he who should administer the

state... rules By sword, will the town not be deserted?...
King Lábisi... Awónbiojú... Agbólúajé. Where do they go?
Where are they all now? Nobody has killed them they
Killed themselves... Gáà is defending the rights of the
people).

This "human right defender" as he called himself and just like most despots and ruthless dictators all over the world always look for escapist routes to defending their blood-letting and wicked actions. After this long but relevant speech laden with rhetoric, innuendoes, sarcasm, hyperbole, metaphors and the likes, the people of Òyó and indeed the Townspeople are convinced once again that Gáà is indeed a good leader – a benevolent one but subsequent events prove them wrong. This is because the leopard will not change its spot. To consolidate his hold on the political power of Òyó, Gáà orders that all the prisoners under Májèógbè be set free and temporarily too, peace returns to Òyó.

The search for a new king begins and this leads to succession crisis because would-be-kings and qualified princes from the next ruling house are leaving the town in droves. In fact, Gáà is so powerful that all the chiefs resolve that Gáà should be the king. Instead, he rejects their decision claiming that tradition is sacrosanct for peaceful co-existence. He nominates Abíodún Adégoólú, a young Prince and crowns him after Adégoólú runs away and escapes several times.

Servants and members of Gáà family under the control of Gbagi and Oláiyótàn are also causing havoc in Òyó. They kill with impunity, rule like kings and in one particular instance, Gbagi and Oláiyótàn insist that they want to see whether human neck is made of bones or something else. To achieve their aim, they chop-off the head of a commoner caring load for them. This particular incident draws heavy condemnation from the Townspeople. Attempt to punish Gbagi and Oláiyótàn meets serious resistance from Gáà who, in anger, beats Sàmù, an Òyómèsi instead. In summary, Abíodún Adégoólú pays homage to Gáà every morning to appease him. This unexpected deconstruction of tradition succeeds temporarily. Or, how can it be heard that Alááfin, the second to God and the Lord of the Empire is now paying homage to his subordinate, the Prime Minister, Gáà? Gáà succeeds in using Agbònyín, Abíodún Adégoólú's only Daughter for sacrifice when he confirms that Adégoólú is planning to install her, a female (another attempt and taboo) as king after his demise.

The death of Agbònyín makes Adégoólú to seek external assistance from the then Generalissimo of the Empire, Àrè Onàkakanfò Òyábí. With heavy causality on both

sides and with the dwindling influence of Gaa and the initial assault that he suffers from Alinkunmi (Agbonyin's fiancé) who hits him with a poisonous charm that turns him to a lame, Gaa finally bows to the very intrigues that he has weaved several decades ago. He accepts the supremacy of the Alaáfin and he is left at the market square where the Townspeople cuts his body little by little until the despot gives up the ghost.

Typical of most power play performances, the film, *Afonja* is also loaded with intrigues. Most of the real events of the life and time of Afonja – one of the greatest warriors in Yoruba history are captured in this epic film. Starting from a flashback where Afonja (Peter Fatomilola) is consulting the oracle to direct him on the series of nightmares that he is having of recent, Afonja is warned by his first Diviner from onset that he will be famous and wealthy but he must heed warnings otherwise all his offspring will end up as slaves!

The next dramatic action is the crisis of economic survival through constant raiding led by Basorun Warriors who loot and kill the Townspeople in the market. Iyalójà reports this to Alaáfin Aólè and Aólè is surprised when an Islamic Preacher and Fish-seller runs to the palace fuming in adulterated Yoruba about his stolen Qur'an:

Mallam: Àlùkùràní tẹ̀mí tí ẹ̀mí nífi òkẹ̀ pé
Olóun Oba: gbogbo rẹ̀ ni wón ti kó.
 Tésibiyù tí ẹ̀mí, wón ko Àlùkínbà
 Temi, tí mo fi ñja ogun lójú ọ̀nà ẹ̀sìn,
 gbogbo rẹ̀ ni wón ti kó...

(Even my Qur'an with which I worship my God
They have removed.
My rosaries and even my war Tunic, they removed all of
them...).

The Islamic Preacher is not bothered about all the items stolen in his house or in the market. His main request is for Aólè to assist him in ensuring that his main weapon, his Qur'an is returned to him. However, Basorun returns the Hausaman's material items and insists that he will not return the Qur'an. This scenario marks the beginning of the real clash: the clash between Islam and Yoruba tradition. For supporting a common Hausaman, Basorun gathers Òyómèsì to his side and gradually, he plots the fall of Aólè.

Basòrun finds ally in Àfònja (Àrè Ònàkakanfò) who is a cousin to Aólè and sensing this unholy alliance, Aólè sends Àfònja to capture Ìwéré Ilé (a sacred town in Yorùbá history that no man can conquer). At this point, the beauty of dramatic transposition is witnessed through the aesthetics of duality in the culture of Yorùbá people. While the people of Ìwéré Ilé are celebrating, singing and dancing for the essence of re-living; the warriors on the other hand are planning on how they will destroy the town. When it dawns on the warriors that they are being sent to Ìwéré Ilé, Àfònja orders that the Baálè of the town should be beheaded and this is unachievable owing to the Baálè's courage and diplomacy. He reminds them that:

Baálè Ìwéré: Enikan ò gbodò fogun kó Ìwéré! Ìwéré Ilé ekéè omo
akítí kata...
Elo bèrè lówó Àrè?
Ìwéré Ilé náà ni ilú Ìyá Oba
Àjàgbó, Ìwéré Ilé náà sì ni ilú Ìyá
Oba Abiódún, Oba Àjàgbó sì ti sépè
Wí pé Àrè Ònàkakanfò jówù tó bá sígun wo ilú Ìyá òhun, Àrè
Ònàkakanfò òhun kò ní fowó rori ku!
(No warrior invades Ìwéré!
Why don't you enquire from Àrè?
Ìwéré, ekéè children of great warriors!
Go and ask Àrè?
Ìwéré is the place of King Àjàgbó's
Mother, as well as the hometown of King Abiódún's
Mother, and King Àjàgbó had rained a curse that
Whichever Kakanfò brings war to his mother's town,
Will not die in peace!).

The fact of history and its prompt recall saves Baálè of Ìwéré Ilé from the lion's jaw. Aólè, the permanently cursing King (this is against Yorùbá tradition) also embarks on revenge mission to Apòmù, a town in the present Osun State, Nigeria. He sends his emissaries to behead the Baálè of Apòmù for beating him when he was a mere Prince while at the same time, he is expecting the death of Basòrun and Àfònja in particular. Basòrun storms out of Aólè's palace and informs him that "Òyó people have rejected him". At the point of Aólè's suicide, he shoots seven darts to the Northern part of Nigeria with his repeated refrain that: "May peace never be in Yorùbáland! May there never be love between the children of Yorùbá! May disunity reigns supreme". The army of Àfònja subdues that of Aólè and Aólè falls gallantly after the great historical curse that hunts the Yorùbá race to date.

Having a temporary relieve through the death of Aólè, Àfónja goes back to Ìlorin, his town to face the challenges of administration and the rebellion within. He works for, and achieves independence for Ìlorin from Òyó, the Headquarters of the Empire. Àfónja's friendship with Álími is cemented in the film by Solagberu, Àfónja's old friend. The summary of the intrigue is that Álími, the spiritual and calculating leader of Islam fortifies Àfónja with his spiritual power, understudies his weaknesses, allows his own Army (Jamaa) to fight for Àfónja while ensuring that Àfónja (against several warnings) disbands his own original but brave Army. In a well-planned palace coup, Àfónja falls gallantly to Álími's political calculation and Ìlorin, an important town in Yorùbáland falls into the hands of the Fulani people where the Emirate Institution is established and the Yorùbá's monarchical system disbanded to pave way for the Islamisation of the town. Recalling from history, and from other Historians; Nnenyelike (109) contends that "it will be unfair to discuss the history of Ìlorin without making reference to Òyó Empire, concluding that Àfónja, the son of Láderin, a grandson of Aláàfin was made Àrè Ònàkàkànfò around 1783".

Ritualisation and Deritualisation of Power Equation in *Basòrun Gáà* and *Àfónja*

A critical interpretation of the oxymoronic combination of ritualisation and deritualisation in *Basòrun Gáà* and *Àfónja* will lead us to power and powerlessness. It is our contention that ritual narrations in Africa whether in poetry, prose and drama should be seen as the real celebration of the African essence. This is because the people of Africa, even in their closet are essentially ritualistic. Perhaps, this is also the African man's way of looking for power and his desperate bid to dominate his environment.

In *Basòrun Gáà*, for example, two events can be used to discuss the process of ritualisation and deritualisation of power equation. The first is the coronation scene where Iba Olóngbò (Akinwumi Isola), a Chief in Òyó Empire is instructed to stop the performance of some rituals meant for the spiritual fortification of Adégoólú. At the point that he is praying for the destruction of the new King's enemies and wishing him a successful reign, Gáà surprisingly stops Iba Olóngbò. The message is not lost because Gáà has made it clear from onset that he is going to be the King's main enemy. The aesthetics of deritualisation here is intended to weaken Adégoólú and indirectly fortifies Gáà. The second scenario in the film is the scene where Májàógbé (just like three Kings before him) is led to the ritual groove for execution. This particular event is concealed from the Townspeople through the use of

masquerades as symbols of joy and death. The masquerades are dancing yet; they are leading their own King to the gulag under the supervision of Gáà.

Paradoxically, Gáà is a daily ritual merchant – fortifying himself by seeking for more power so as to become a rock that can swallow small pebbles. In *Basòrun Gáà*, Gáà turns to elephant and in his life time, he was reputed to have the power to turn to lion, a girl or boy. The peak of his inhuman ritual bizarre is when Àgbònyín, Adégoólú's only Daughter is used by him for sacrifice instead of a deer. The power of political kingdom that Gáà controls is thus expanded to the economic front. He is wealthy, influential and he even keeps a powerful Diviner permanently in his house for the Diviner to constantly give him more spiritual power through series of rituals.

Àfónja film also portrays to us, the essence of the externalisation of ritual in African society. While searching for power, Àfónja engages the service of an Islamic Preacher – Ááfá Álími, a Fulani Jihadist who fortifies and makes Àfónja more powerful through Islamic rituals. At this point in Àfónja history, he rebuffs successive Alááfins after dealing with Aólè, his former Lord. For efficacy, this is another point in the ritual process. It is assumed that users of rituals should go out of their original culture and tradition to search for, and use other people's rituals. This is to avoid their rituals from been neutralised or rendered inefficient.

Àfónja in *Àfónja* film fails to change his old ways of using human beings for rituals. He serves many gods and he is a confirmed polytheist. This is antithetical to Islamic monotheism. Àfónja eats all the snakes (rituals) under him by receiving handsomely from Islamic culture through Ááfá Álími. This singular action of Àfónja is his attempt at globalising himself and his environment. His midway approach to religion seriously undermines him. The Muslim Jihadists through Álími plans seriously to dethrone him by deritualising him through superior Islamic rituals. Aólè's curses in *Àfónja* can also be seen as a hero's last minutes celebration of tragic flaw, where leaving permanent but destructive marks on the sand of history cannot be over-emphasised. Within our contemporary reality, the story of Idi Amin of Uganda and his passion for eating human flesh through ritual meal is legendary. Wole Soyinka has made a serious artistic menu out of this sad experience through his plays; *A Play of Giants* (1984) and *King Baabu* (2002) which is mainly devoted to the Nigerian former military ruler, Sanni Abacha. Abacha was also reputed to have used Human Beings to feed his Crocodiles. Sexuality and its essence in the ritual process is also a subject of discourse during the regime of the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo. He was celebrated sensationally (though unsubstantiated) by the Nigerian press as a father who sleeps with the wife of his son, the then Moji Obasanjo, his former

girlfriend. The same Moji Obasanjo was also reported to have slept with her father, Alex Onabanjo – a good friend of Obasanjo.

Lawal (56) describes the unsubstantiated claims between father and son's wife infidelity/daughter and father's incest as bad, acrimonious and tagged the eventual divorce between Moji and Gbenga Obasanjo, the divorce of the century. Although the two actors in this web did not accept this episode, the truth in this family squabble is that this scenario created bad blood between Gbenga Obasanjo and Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria. It also made Gbenga Obasanjo to divorce his wife, Moji Obasanjo. Writing on the same subject, Olanshile – Alfred (20) recalls that:

Moji and Gbenga Obasanjo were joined in holy matrimony on Saturday April 29, 2000 at Archbishop Vinning Memorial Church, Ikeja, Lagos. It was expectedly a colourful event attended by those who matter in corridors of power in Nigeria. The union had two lovely kids (Bolu and Wura) to show for it. Their marriage, however, crashed in 2008, when Gbenga made a mind-boggling allegation of infidelity against Moji. Through the court, both went their separate ways.

So, like yesterday and like today, the issue of ritualisation and deritualisation is real and its approximation can be properly located within man's desperate search for power. The women folk are the worst for it. In some African communities, to sleep with a virgin is seen as a sure way to cure H.I.V. So also, if a man sleeps with two sisters of the same mother or mother and daughter, he is assumed to have acquired real spiritual power. All these permutations on sexuality may, however, be difficult to prove scientifically.

From Stockholm Syndrome to Philosophical Suicide: The Case of Some Victims and Victimisers in *Basòrun Gáà* and *Àfònjá*

In literary discourse, Stockholm syndrome is a situation where the psychological state of mind of victims develops emotional bond with their victimisers and even defend them (Fasure 2). Victims, in the light of the two films are the captured, oppressed and the helpless citizens in Òyó and Ìlorín, the two towns where the real events of the films took place. The victimisers are the heroes who initiate and executive the capturing of the victims.

The first Stockholm syndrome personality in *Basòrun Gáà* is Aláàfin Abíodún Adégoólú. He is a toothless King and a captured victim of Gáà. With time, he

develops special interest in the affairs of Gáà by going to his house every morning to pay homage and praise him as the real king behind his throne. Gáà begins to respect Adégoólú but he also starts to calculate more on how to deal with Adégoólú. This action of Adégoólú is unexpected and it is part of what Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* sees as "absurd sensitivity that can be found widespread in the age" and this is also extended to mean man's "truly serious philosophical problem" which is suicide (Camus 1). The victim (Adégoólú) loves his victimiser (Gáà) and later, the victim begins to die slowly and he takes this philosophically when he discovers that no amount of love can change Gáà who kills the victim's only Daughter, Àgbònyín. The metaphor is clear: "the tyrant terrifies his subjects. Spying balefully on the world from his strongly fortified palace" (Machiavelli xv).

Ironically, the victimiser (Gáà) also becomes a victim at the point that Adégoólú begins the process of self-assertion. The victim (Adégoólú) that Gáà (the victimiser) initially loves now plots, with external aids, to deal with Gáà. This reversal of fortune is part of the dynamics of great tragic works. In *Basòrun Gáà*, the victim (Adégoólú) and the victimiser (Gáà) pay dearly for their political machinations. Adégoólú loses his only Daughter while Gáà, in the twilight of his life, pays the supreme but painful sacrifice of death.

The first Stockholm syndrome victim in *Àfónja* is Aláàfin Aólè. Sadly enough, he becomes his own victimiser through rash actions by raining curses which he has been seriously warned against. Second also, he becomes a victim to Àfónja who he installs as the Àre Ònàkakanfò. He loves Àfónja but the struggle for political domination makes two of them to kiss the dust. Aólè is the first to commit philosophical suicide before the real suicide. Importantly, the Jamaa (Àfónja soldiers) that he, Àfónja procures from Álími kill him. Interestingly, Álími emerges as a victorious victim because his soldiers destroy Àfónja, the victimiser and the Lord of Ilorin town through the use of "selective honesty and generosity" (Greene x). Certainly, political actors, through the tragedy of the human race which they often mismanage have no place to rest as can be seen through the two films under discourse.

Artistic Challenges in *Basòrun Gáà* and *Àfónja*

Apart from the problem of a few wrong casting (Larinde Akinleye) who plays the role of Akinkunmi in *Basòrun Gáà* is elderly. The role of a young suitor, even from the original play-text is specified for a Youngman. Álími (Yemi Amodu) in *Àfónja* also battles frantically with Hausa accent (he didn't know when and how to separate it with Yorùbá language). This is obvious from his bad interpretation.

The screen play of *Basòrun Gáà* is also badly edited. Some important scenes in the play-text such as the scene of the witches, *Gáà's* endless but deadly generosity, and his passion to transform to lion and others are omitted in the filmic version. The destructive activities of servants and family members of *Gáà* are also under-played in the film. All these are factual errors.

The Choreographer of *Àfónja* (Yeside Dosumu) did a very good job, our little grouse with her is her non-delineation of dance movements, forms and patterns. She combines traditional dance movements and forms with contemporary dance patterns especially during war and the Jamaa dances. Make-up in *Àfónja* is on average level. Performers are most times sweating profusely and this takes a credit away from the make-up concept of Rose Orjiji, the Make-up Artist.

Generally speaking, acting, speech production, pantomimic dramatisation, chanting, praise-poetry, body movement, the use of cooperating and operating gestures are very good in the two films. The ageless *Gáà* (David Ojedokun) shows class and superlative interpretation of role playing and characterisation. *Àfónja* (Peter Fatomilola), *Baálè Ìwéré* (Larinde Akinleye), *Basòrun* (Ayo Akinwale) and other actors are simply fantastic and they are indeed multi-talented in the two films. The Crew Members of the two films have also shown that it is possible to do good epic films where the fact of history is creatively combined with the poetic vision and license of the playwrights/directors. The two Crew Members have succeeded in initiating productions whose reception even within the non-Yorùbá audience are excellent.

To be honest, the Research Team of the two productions did a yeoman job and the two films have again shown the beauty inherent in the gown meeting the town. We have Professors of international repute and University dons that acted and contributed positively to the making of *Basòrun Gáà* and *Àfónja*. Professional theatre groups also sent some Crew Members and Actors to give a definitive interpretation to the two films which globalise the very essence of the Yorùbá culture through their moments of joy and tribulation.

Conclusion

Gáà and *Àfónja*, the two political celebrities of yore that we have used to internalise the performance of power and the poetics of herotisation in this work have shown that despots and tyrants have no particular ideology for the emancipation of the masses. Even if they pretend, their only ideology is the one that promotes their political and economic powers. No matter how despots and tyrants try, they cannot

accept the vanity of power because most of them are usually consumed by their oppressive tendencies and social subjugation of the people that they are ruling. The concept of class struggle, we must reiterate, is a discourse that will continue in a society where the *haves* are dominating and suppressing the *haves not* through political manipulations. Consequently, we are in support of one of the core tenets of Marxism that "class as a structural analytic category constitutes the primary determinant of identity; social conduct and relationship, political affinities, and associated forms of expressions" (Smart 34). *Basòrun Gáà* and *Afonja* films have thus shown that "even when a theatre focuses on an ethnic issue or group, it attempts to go beyond ethnic loyalty" (Dugga 172) to embrace national and international politics. It has also come to the fore in this work through the two Nollywoodian films that in a performance of power, political intrigues, hero-worshipping, betrayals, loss of human dignity, perfidies, corruption, ritual permutations, killing and war are some of the major negative tendencies that the human race have to contend with when despots and tyrants are let loose on the society.

It is hereby recommended that we should not forget our historical pasts. It is important that we go back to the Empires, Kingdoms and the Emirates to draw inherent African theatrical aesthetics in content and context with the hope of theatricalising them for contemporary artistic consumption. The past is actually gone but we must learn from the past because history has a way of repeating itself if we fail to learn from it. This work has also shown that the misuse of power noted with heroes has no barrier of age or culture. It is not an ancient phenomenon but the reality of our recent past and immediate existence. Since man will become history, we want to conclude by warning present leaders to heed the series of warnings through most of the dirge-like poetic songs in the two films. They must learn to be honest, sincere, merciful, benevolence and judicious in their use of ephemeral power.

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A publication of the Department of Theatre and
Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University,
Zaria.



Printed by Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd.,
P.M.B. 1094 Samaru, Zaria, Nigeria. Tel. 09065949711.
E-mail: abupress@abu.edu.ng ;
Website: www.abupress.com.ng

ISSN 1596-8998