

Socio Political Reconstruction in Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* and *The Gods and The Scavengers*

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the political landscape of Africa has been bedeviled by turbulent, political transition characterised by manipulation of process, political thuggery and gullible followers. Eradicating these political polemics in Nigeria and Africa calls for conscientisation to change the mindset of the politicians and electorate on perception of power. Potent tools of effecting this reorientation are political education by the agencies of government saddled with the responsibility of regulation and conduct of elections. Among the veritable medium of reaching out to populace for enlightenment are face to face interactive sessions, media and dramatisation. It is in furtherance of this crusade that, this chapter through critical reading examines the Sociopolitical construction in Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* and *The Gods and The Scavengers*. While *Rogbodiyan* dramatises the repercussions of political transition fraught with corruption and bribery, *The Gods and the Scavengers*, satirises the political buffoonery of exploiting the masses after giving politicians the mandate. Subsequently miserable living condition occasioned by appropriation of common wealth instigated the revolt to upstage their oppressors. Among other findings the two plays reinforce the crusade aimed evolving a new democratic culture of imbibing spirit of patriotism by the followership and putting service to humanity above self-enrichment in governance by the leadership in Nigeria and Africa.

Keywords: Political issues, Reconstruction, Drama

INTRODUCTION

Sociopolitical problems in Nigeria including corruption, electoral manipulation, poor governance, poverty, inequality, injustice, and violent conflict are complex and interrelated; they shape and are shaped by the lived experiences of citizens (Transparency International, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Although corruption and poverty are often framed as economic issues, both are deeply social: persistent deprivation leads to poor health outcomes, limited educational attainment, and restricted access to basic services, thereby reproducing structural disadvantage (Adewumi & Ojo, 2022).

Drawing upon the traditions of political theatre (Brecht, 1964; Boal, 1979) and postcolonial critique (Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978), Nigerian playwrights act as what Clark (2019, p. 87) calls the 'town criers' of the polity. Through satire, allegory, and direct confrontation, dramatists expose 'social idiosyncrasy and political buffoonery' with the intent to provoke public dialogue and, ultimately, reform. As Asomba (2018) argues, 'the theatre possesses the persuasive power to evoke, rejuvenate, and redirect the mind toward positive change' (p. 318).

Theoretical Anchors: Postcolonialism, Political Theatre, and Cultural Hegemony

To sharpen the conceptual lens, this article explicitly interweaves three overlapping frameworks:

1. **Postcolonialism** interrogates how colonial legacies persist in contemporary state formation, elite culture, and class relations (Ake, 2000; Achebe, 2012). For example, Fanon (1963) warns that political elites often replicate colonial structures, while Said (1978) critiques the discursive 'othering' that justifies such dominance.
2. **Political theatre** positions drama as a rehearsal ground for social action (Boal, 1979). Rather than

offering escapism, playwrights construct Brechtian ‘alienation effects’ that compel audiences to analyse and act (Brecht, 1964).

3. **Cultural hegemony** (Gramsci, 1971) highlights the struggle over dominant meanings in society. By staging counterhegemonic narratives, dramatists contest elite ideology and imagine alternative futures.

Collectively, these frameworks anchor the literary critique in broader debates about power, resistance, and cultural production.

Post1999 Nigeria: New Fault Lines, New Dramatic Voices

The return to civilian rule in 1999 promised democratic renewal. Yet, successive administrations have been marred by godfatherism, electoral malpractice, and widening inequality (Olorunnipa, 2021). Contemporary playwrights respond by chronicling the anxieties of the Fourth Republic: Ahmed Yerima’s *Hard Ground* (2006) dramatises the Niger Delta crisis; Ben Tomoloju’s *Askari* (2010) interrogates police brutality; Segun Adefila’s community based *Fela: Arrest the Music* (2011) links cultural heritage to civic protest; and Julius Bokoru’s *End SARS Chronicles* (2023) stages the 2020 youth-led uprising against extrajudicial killings. These works demonstrate that ‘theatre is not merely a mirror but a hammer with which to shape society’ (Ogundeji, 2024, p. 44).

Comparative perspectives widen the analytical scope. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977) and Ama Ata Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) similarly critique neocolonial power and gendered oppression, illustrating how African dramatists collectively negotiate the continent’s shared postcolonial dilemmas (Gikandi, 2019).

Revisiting the Canon: Soyinka and His Successors

Wole Soyinka’s oeuvre from *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) to *Madmen and Specialists* (1970) established a template for satirising power, exposing war, and warning against tyranny (Akinwale, 2020). Kongi’s *Harvest* captures the tussle between emergent dictatorships and traditional authority, while *Death and the King’s Horseman* links cultural misrecognition to political chaos (Ogunba, 2022). Building on Soyinka’s radicalism, later playwrights such as Femi Osofisan (*Once Upon Four Robbers*, 1984), Bode Sowande (*The Night Before*, 1988), and Kole Omotoso (*The Curse*, 1992) deploy sociohistorical determinism to trace root causes of corruption, student unrest, and material obsession (Gbilekaa, 2016).

Osundare (1994) succinctly defines the writer’s mandate: ‘to reveal not only how things are but how they could and should be’ (p. 12). This moral imperative undergirds the emergence of new radical dramatists, including Bakare Ojo Rasaki, whose plays interrogate contemporary leadership failures.

Dramatic Synopsis and Sociopolitical Resonance of *Rogbodiyan*

Bakare Ojo Rasaki’s *Rogbodiyan* chronicles Ilukoroju’s turbulent search for a monarch after the king’s death. Regent Adegban, proclaiming impartiality, disqualifies her own lineage (Adeakin) from contention, ostensibly upholding fairness. However, rival claimants Asagidigbi and Gbadegesin resort to bribery, occult power, and populist rhetoric echoing Nigeria’s money politics and rogue godfathers (Idahosa, 2020). Asagidigbi’s eventual coronation following the ritual assault of a royal virgin triggers an epidemic that symbolises social decay born of moral bankruptcy. The community’s plea for healing water, conditioned on a peaceful transfer of power back to the cheated Adeakin lineage, dramatizes the restorative potential of accountable leadership.

By staging a crisis of succession, Rasaki invites audiences to reflect on constitutional ambiguity, gendered power (the regent as kingmaker), and the spiritual cost of political expediency. The play aligns with Gramscian insights on coercion and consent: the elite’s hegemony collapses once the masses withdraw moral legitimacy (Gramsci, 1971).

Sociopolitical Issues in *Rogbodiyan*

According to the playwright, *Rogbodiyan* written in 1990 but published in 1994, is prophetic satire of the

transition programme of the Ibrahim Babangida Administration (32). It was written to forecast the possible outcome of the endless transition programme of the regime which ended with annulment of the presidential election of 1993 after the military president was forced to step aside in the wake of protest and agitation with attendant bloodbath that trailed the subversion of people's choice.

Metaphorically representing Nigeria as *Ilukoroju* (a town in disarray or turbulence), the two political parties created by the regime to dictate the direction of party politics and choice of candidates are symbolically captured in the two ruling houses of *Asagidigbi* and *Gbadegesin* symbolized with the horse and the eagle. The ideological bent of the parties according to the military dictator is "a little bit to the right and a little bit to the left". While the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was the progressive party then, National Republican Convention (NRC) was for the conservatives.

Political buffoonery and inordinate ambition of African and Nigerian politicians to win election at all cost for political power is characterised in the game of wits and intrigues that marred the process of selecting a new traditional ruler for *Ilukoroju*. This is typified in greed of the kingmakers in despising the Ifa divination of a people oriented candidate for the highest bidder for the throne. This is also symptomatic of the bribery, corruption and manipulation of electoral process that have characterised transition from one civilian regime to another after the restoration of democratic rule in 1999. This also explains the endless litigation that is now the order of day after each transition election. Perception of elective post as the fastest means of self aggrandisement with commonwealth rather than service to humanity has aggravated this seasonal extension of battle for political power to the court rooms. Closely aligned to this, is the insincerity of electoral umpires in conducting free, fair and credible election without being tempted in cash and kind. This is also common theatrics in party primaries where candidates are not elected or selected on merit but affluence, close affinity to godfathers and parochial interest for pecuniary gains.

Abuse of power that is the lot of leaders (military and civilian) who attain political power though undemocratic means unfolds in *Asagidigbi*'s defiling of the virgin, the sacrifice carrier to appease the gods for peace and progress in the land. The defilement in a state of stupor dramatises how, at the peak of savoring fringe benefits of leadership, services to the people is abandoned for trivialities. Repercussion of such abuse of power and mismanagement of human and material resources is the metaphoric epidemic that afflict *Asagidigbi* and his subjects with different form of disabilities. This scenario could be likened to reoccurring cases of corruption and misappropriation of funds meant to provide basic social amenities in our larger political space. The multiplier effects of this on the masses are discernible in poverty, low level of education, poor health and lack of access to basic amenities that make life worthy a living.

Sociopolitical Reconstruction in *Rogbodiyan*

Satirical portrayal of the Nigerian polity and the politicians in the play, *Rogbodiyan* is a reminder and historicisation of the inglorious days of long military rule. In an attempt to checkmate accesses of the Nigerian politicians and gullibility of the electorate, the Babangida military regime resorted to undemocratic practice of restricting the choice of politicians and the electorates to two parties. However, with this restriction to the two parties, Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republic Convention (NRC) the politicians still played into the hands of the reluctant military junta who in dilly dallying the process of restoration of democratic process all aligned with their civilian collaborators to truncate the drive towards a democratic culture in Nigeria. This is aptly captured in the metaphor of *Ilukoroju* and the ruling houses to the exalted throne with the symbolic names, *Asagidigbi* (Eagle) and *Gbadegesin* (Horse).

Metaphoric representation of Nigeria as *Ilukoroju* with the attendant political instability and antisocial vices that pervades the political landscape of Nigeria then and now is succinctly voiced out in this narration:

They are now victims of self inflicted disaster because the 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 hyporites and political sychophants, *Koroju*, where intelligence, means nothing and the academically

brilliant is a potential 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 false acquisition of them is encouraged is bound to be stricken by Rogbodiyan (Rogbodiyan 7).

Worried and disturbed by the space of this political polemic and antisocial vices that has retarded the development of country due to wrong choice of leadership, mobilization and sensitization of the Nigerian politicians and electorates by the playwright unfolds in metaphorical allusion to leadership qualities with symbolic animals of the horse and the eagle. This plays out in the address of the contestants to the throne of *Ilukoroju*, *Asagidigbi* and *Gbadegesin* to the people:

Asagidigbi: My honourable friend calls himself the horse. Yes, the horse. Now we all know what a horse is. A stupid animal which allows every idiot to whip it. To ride it. No my friends, if we allow a horse on the throne our enemies will do with us as they like. Corruption reign supreme. Our treasury will be looted, and all these criminals will go free because the horse will do nothing to stop them. But the eagle ... the eagle is a powerful bird and that I am. I am the Big Eagle with big power. I am the big eagle with influence. Let me be the king and all shall be well. I ask you to give me your vote. *Rogbodiyan*(14).

In response, to this denigration of the horse, Gbadegesin appeals to the conscience and psyche of his people with this comparison of the eagle and the horse:

Gbadegesin: My people, it is true that the eagle is a bird with strength but what does it do with it? 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 horse also has strength and what does it do with it? The horse uses its strength to serve the people. That is why the eagle does to the chicken what it does, and the horse carries on its back, you and me. The horse is helpful and serving animal, that is what he is (pointing to Asagidigbi). He is like the eagle and like the eagle he shall oppress and reap where he does not sow. I am like the horse and like the horse I shall help and serve the people. But it is true that the horse is a stupid animal? Who does not know how powerful the horse will serve you but also know who to kick. Give me the crown and you shall be served. (*Rogbodiyan* 15 – 16).

After this though provoking delivery of the two candidates, the kingmakers and the people are torn between choosing the eagle or the horse. They there then and go spiritual by consulting the Ifa priest, Fadele. The shocking divination rejects the two candidates with this submission:

Fadele (Shakes his head), in plain language, none of the two candidates may rule this land. Ifa says they are old wine in new skins. Put any of them on the throne and the problems of the land continues. Ifa says the people should search for a king who is honest and truthful (*Rogbodiyan*27).

Rejection of the two candidates for a neutral candidate by the oracle did not deter them in currying the favour of the kingmakers with money. The due process to usher in a new leader with new vision for the advancement of *Ilukoroju* is subsequently compromised for self-enrichment at the expense of communal interest. This is akin to monetisation, manipulation of electoral process and compromise to favour preferred candidates in our national polity. Repercussion of such criminality of circumventing the people's mandate are not far seek as satirised in nemesis that caught up with Asagidigbi in desecrating the carrier of the sacrifice to appease the gods for peace and progress. Calamity that befall *Ilukoroju* inform of disabilities that afflicted the usuper and his subjects conscientises African leaders and followers on futility of seeking power by hook and crook. Corollary of the disabilities in *Ilokoroju* in African political space are typified in corruption, poverty, low level of education and health and lack of basic amenities.

The Play, The Gods and The Scavengers

Bakare Ojo Rasaki's *The Gods and The Scavengers* is a metaphorical exploration of the dynamics between rulers and the ruled, with "gods" representing the political elite and "scavengers" symbolising the common people. The play centers on Anago, the chairman of a local government, who publicly claims a commitment to delivering the dividends of democracy but privately subverts this mandate by acquiring the only land that sustains the livelihood of the masses for personal gain. This duplicity is mirrored by his councilors, who exploit their offices for self-enrichment rather than facilitating grassroots development.

Despite Anago's rhetorical gestures toward good governance, his hypocrisy becomes apparent when he fails to embody the ideals he espouses. His councilors, driven by greed, oppose any effort to promote transparency or accountability. They further destabilise the council by orchestrating communal conflicts along religious and ethnic lines to divert attention from their misdeeds and protect their illicit gains. The situation intensifies when Andy, the chairman's special adviser, aligns with the oppressed masses, catalysing a popular uprising aimed at dismantling the corrupt leadership structure.

Socio-Political Issues in *The Gods and The Scavengers*

The play employs metaphor and satire to critique persistent socio-political dysfunction in Nigeria's democratic space. The "gods" symbolize elected officials who, having secured the people's mandate, become detached from the realities of those they are meant to serve. Anago's acquisition of the only viable communal land is emblematic of elite land grabbing and expropriation under the guise of development (Okonkwo, 2021). Similarly, the councilors' embezzlement of funds earmarked for essential services—such as road rehabilitation and market upgrades—reflects the endemic corruption plaguing local governance (Transparency International, 2024).

The chairman's rhetorical integrity is undermined by his actions, echoing the disconnect between political promises and practice. His failure to lead by example, coupled with the councilors' manipulation of ethno-religious sentiments, highlights how elites perpetuate division to maintain power (Ikelegbe, 2013). The climax of this dysfunction is powerfully symbolized in the pantomime of Movement One, where the scavengers, representing the disenfranchised masses, scramble for scraps in a garbage heap. This visual metaphor underscores the indignity and desperation of the electorate, trapped in cycles of exploitation and neglect.

Ultimately, the revolt led by Andy and the masses reinforces the Gramscian notion that hegemonic legitimacy erodes when the subaltern refuses consent. Rasaki's dramaturgy thus articulates a postcolonial political vision where true leadership must be grounded in justice, equity, and collective empowerment.

Tears, sorrow, blood and death that trailed the war of attrition among the masses compelled a rethink to stop the senseless fight and unite to confront their oppressors who indoctrinate with divisive vices of tribe and religion. This change of mindset unfolds in this reasoning of scavengers 4 and 3;

SAV 4: How can you make yourselves so cheap for the rogues to manipulate? They come telling you stories of how they have been fighting for your rights and how it is the other man who is frustrating it, and you draw daggers at one another. Common; these folks are common thieves, they are not fighting for anybody's interest. *The Gods and The Scavengers*, (59).

SAV 3: So, my people these criminals have a common fate. They are rich and powerful. We also have a common fate, we are poor and hungry. Our differences are not in tongue or tribe, but the side of the ladder one belongs to. Hungry people from all homes should come together and confront their oppressor no matter the language the oppressor speaks. Brothers and sisters, you have an opportunity to change your destiny today, will you join the struggle? *The Gods and The Scavengers* (60).

The scenario in this dramatic universe satires the mindset of exploiting the masses for self-aggrandizement by the political elites from the restoration of democratic rule in 1999 to date. This is typified in the chairman, Anago

not walking his talk, while he warned against abuse of office and corruptive tendencies, he displaces the masses from communal land for personal enterprise. In the same vain, obsession of councilors for life of affluence amidst poverty stricken masses is not different from the political dealers in the legislative chambers of federal, state and local governments of the past and current political dispensation in Nigeria.

Fatalistic idea of resigning to fate over misfortune caused by corruption, inhumanity and injustice is decried in the rumination of the scavengers (electorate) over the lost of communal land and depletion of commonwealth to the Gods (politicians). This rethinking occasioned by the miserable life of the scavengers amidst opulence life of the Gods is voiced out by Andy, who out of betrayal and frustration led the revolt of the people against their oppressors. Andy to the scavengers.

Andy: We chose Anago with our votes and our prayers. Leave the gods out of this. We never asked them to give us what they desire. We limited the options and prayed specifically for Anago. We made the gods and they gave us the desire of our heart. *The Gods and The Scavengers* (48).

To the condemnation of being blasphemous, Andy reacts thus:

Andy: Even if the gods chose Anago, it is either that the gods are criminals themselves or by now they are thoroughly ashamed of him. But people, we make our destiny. We are what we choose to be. We are the final deciders of whatever happens to us... *The Gods and The Scavengers* (50).

Sociopolitical Reconstruction in the Gods and The Scavengers

In a simplistic language and decodable metaphor and symbol, political satire of the hypocritical political elite and the docile electorate, the playwright sensitises on the need for checks and balances to checkmate banditry of their elected representatives, the political leadership at all levels of governance as characterised in the embattled chairman, Anago and councilors are conscientised on the implications of amassing wealth from common wealth at the detriment of toiling masses. Selfless leadership in governance is also advocated in chains of reaction that trailed the acquisition of communal land by the chairman from the politicians and the commoners.

On the part of the electorate, the need to be guided by common interest rather religious and tribal sentiments in choice of leaders and followership is canvassed in their change of mindset after the senseless war of attrition. This is thus an edification on unity of purpose of the electorate that will always triumph over indoctrination and divisive propaganda of the politicians. Just as the playwright avers that, "unequivocally, *The Gods and The Scavengers* prescribes ideological awareness and effective political mobilisation as tools with which the downtrodden can free themselves from the shackles of oppression" (36).

To prick the conscience of the oppressors and the oppressed in larger polity of Nigeria and Africa, pathetic living condition of the electorate of different classes in the society is pantomimed with songs and thought provoking diction in movement one of the play. This gory sight of the scavengers at the dump site of the gods is not different from the scramble for the left over the politicians by the electorate from common patrimony in the Nigerian political landscape. The idea of resigning to fate amidst this betrayal and miserable life by attributing the calamities of leadership failure to what the gods have destined is lampooned in the reawakening crusade of Andy, the former special adviser to the chairman who led the revolt.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the plays in focus, *Rogbodiya* and *The Gods and The Scavengers*, the playwright dramatises political polemics of turbulent transition, power tussle and poverty of leadership that has characterised the political landscape of Nigeria from the days of military rule to the present political dispensation. In a language, metaphor, symbolism and plot devoid of obscurity, the reader is edified on implications of manipulating political transition process, political banditry of instigating violence and blind followership based on primordial sentiments.

To prevent boredom of dialogic drama, the crusade to change the mindset of leaders and followers on their perception of political power at all levels of governance, is fused with songs, dances and pantomime to enhance characterization and advance the plot. While the greedy ones among the leaders perceive people's mandate as shortcut to wealth, their cohort among the followers see them as Godsent messiahs. This trinity of drama, dance and music to sensitise and mobilise aligns with the playwright's doctrine of performative trinity. To the playwright, "performative trinity are potent tools in the context of solving societal problems especially when deliberately deployed for that purpose (Bakare 7). The therapeutic efficacy of their properties of the performative trinity, the playwright contends, "stems from their influence on thought process and interactive and highly engaging nature" (Bakare 7).

However, while these performative trinity properties of drama, dance and music transcend language barrier in communicating with the targeted audience, the audience base can still be widened by translating the plays into the three major languages, screen adaptation of the plays could also be worthwhile exercise.

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