

SATIRICAL DRAMA, POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND
DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA: A
REFLECTION ON OLA ROTIMI'S OUR HUSBAND HAS
GONE MAD AGAIN

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Abstract

Since the departure of the colonialists from the Nigerian shores, the elite have been in control of political powers in Nigeria. The corrupt tendencies of this select few, which come in various forms, have in no small measure, primarily been the key factors hampering national development and creating a gloomy atmosphere of insecurity and despair. African writers generally, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Oha* (2008), are "sensitive needles" that record the tensions and conflicts in their ever changing societies. Many African dramatists especially those that wrote after colonialism, have recorded the existence of different acts of corruption among the educated elite in positions of authority. Many Nigerians thought that independence would bring a state of transformation but the reverse was the case as the situation has grown perennially worse. It is in view of the above that this article examines the cankerworm as it is captured in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* (1997) with its attendant implications for national security and development. The paper exposes how the issue of corruption, among other things, is treated with humour and disdain in the text and subsequently explicates how corruption has generally been the bane of Africa's underdevelopment. It submits that as the nation undergoes another transition period, there is need for caution on the part of the populace about the crop of people they elect as leaders because every citizen has a role to play in the crusade against corruption in Nigeria, if national security is to be guaranteed

Keywords: Drama, Corruption, Power, Politics, National development

Introduction

Drama is an imitation of life. Drama is different from other forms of literature because of its unique characteristics. Although it is read it is basically composed to be performed. Hence, the ultimate aim of dramatic composition is for it to be represented on stage before an audience. This implies that it is a medium of communication. It has a message to communicate to the audience. It uses actors to communicate its message. Nwabueze (2011) defines drama as:

A work of art which delineates human life and activity through the presentation of actions by means of dialogue between groups of characters. Though a literary work, drama is mainly designed to be acted on stage. This is why it is referred to as the playwright's art.

Nwabueze (2011) further clarifies that of the three major genres of literature, namely, prose, poetry and drama - drama stands on a completely different pedestal because it can communicate without the spoken word, while the poet and the novelist have nothing but the spoken word, which is linguistic, to communicate meaning. In these genres, depiction of character, emotion, action, thought and setting can only be done through language. The dramatist uses language to depict realities but he or she is not limited to it. There are also wordless dramas which are not necessarily mimes but utilize a combination of gestures, sound effects, movements and rhythm to communicate meaning.

In the same vein, Iwuchukwu (2008) asserts that drama is different from other genres of literature. It has the unique characteristics that have come about in response to its peculiar nature. Really, it is difficult to separate drama from performance because during the stage performance of a play, drama makes life experiences palpable to the audience. It is the most concrete of all the genres of literature. In drama, the characters or actors talk to themselves and react to issues according to the demand of the script. Drama occupies a unique position. It is also the most active of other genres of literature because of the immediate impact it has on the audience. It can be used to inform, to educate, to entertain and in most cases to mobilize the audience.

Dramatists have the ethical responsibilities to use their works to shape the future of society. They can do this not only by reflecting the ugly side of society but also by promoting the positive aspects of the people's way of life that are worth preserving and emulating - each

dramatist, therefore, tries from his or her own perspective, to use the art to enlighten his or her audience on the goodness, imbalances and shortcomings of society. Apart from their thematic concerns, Iwuchukwu (2008) notes that each dramatist, in his or her own style of relaying message(s), tries to highlight his or her cultural background through the use of myths, legends, music, songs, dances, proverbs, riddles and other local materials. In this way, dramatists are also regarded as custodians of moral and cultural values. In mirroring the society, each dramatist decides on a particular perspective. When a play presents an idealized vision of the world as a place where everything is beautiful and orderly, we call it romance. On the other hand, when a play focuses on the ugly, chaotic and the debased view of life in a ridiculous way we refer to it as satire. Satire and romance present extreme and sometimes unrealistic conditions of life. This article focuses on the satirical implications of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* (1997), especially in its treatment of endemic corruption and its effects on developmental strides in the Nigerian society. .

In spite of the greatness of Nigeria in terms of its vast resources, massive population and quantum of personnel and high intellectual capacity, corruption and its destructive effects have not allowed the country to develop appreciably with its great potentials. Oha (2008) believes that corruption is the act of exploiting the society by taking undue advantage of political power to accumulate commonwealth as personal property. Corruption could lead to a tense state of insecurity in any society. The fundamental issue of corruption has, over the years, been treated like leprosy. Yet, those who profess the abhorring of the vice and those who profess to fight the cankerworm, oftentimes find themselves swimming in the ocean they cast aspersions on. Umaru (2009) asserts that political corruption is not a recent phenomenon that pervades the Nigerian state. Since the creation of modern public administration in the country, there have been cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment. The rise of public administration and the discovery of oil and natural gas are two major events seen to have led to a litany of ignoble corrupt practices in the country. Over the years, the country has seen its wealth withered with little to show in living conditions of the common man.

Characteristically, Oha (2008) reveals that apologists for the failings of African governments have blamed colonialism for the pervasive corruption. According to this view, the nation's colonial history may have restricted any early influence in an ethical revolution. Throughout the colonial period, most Nigerians were stuck in ignorance and poverty. The trappings of flashy cars, magnificent houses and success of the colonists, might have influenced the poor

to see the colonialists as symbols of success and to emulate them in different political ways. A view commonly held during the colonial days was that the colonialists' property (cars, houses, farms, etc.) were not "our" property. Thus vandalism and looting of public property was not seen as a crime against society. This view is what has degenerated into the more recent disregard for public property and lack of public trust and concern for public goods as a collective national property. However, Falusi (2014) argues that corrupt practices in Nigeria manifest in various forms: bribery, manipulation of political roles, rigging, financial misappropriation, stealing from public treasury, giving of nonexistent contracts, among others. One of the most endemic problems African nations have been faced with since the exit of colonialism is high level of corruption. African leaders have been exhibiting all types of corrupt practices that have hampered the development of African states. There have been underdevelopments in many African countries due to cases of financial misappropriations and abuse of power. African writers have, therefore, been recording with much accuracy the changing tension and political insecurity in their societies. After the colonial experiences, there was hope of a new beginning.

There was hope of a greater tomorrow among the new African leaders after independence. The effect of these corrupt practices resulted in poverty, unemployment, insecurity, inequality, social decay, economic crisis, violence and a spate of crimes, instability, infrastructural decay, gross underdevelopment and borrowing from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). African dramatists have however, been writing on the spate of profound and widespread corruption in their societies and the implications for development. Some writers have identified different potential causes of flagrant and penurious grafts of corruption that exist in the country. Many blame greed and ostentatious lifestyle as a root-cause of corruption. To some, societies in love with ostentatious lifestyle may delve into corrupt practices to satisfy the lifestyle and also embrace a style of public sleaze and lack of decorum.

Joining the struggle and campaign against corruption in Africa, especially in Nigeria, drama and other literary writings have become veritable tools. Dramatists expose corrupt practices in the society through their works. They can also advocate positive changes in the society through their works. In this way, drama contributes meaningfully towards political emancipation and social change. The society is made up of different people; therefore, a playwright has both ethical and pedagogical responsibilities to his or her society (Adeoti, 2007). According to Yerima in Bunu (2016), happenings in the social political

sphere often impose a burden on the dramatist, especially the one who is conscious of the social responsibility of an artist. The role of the dramatist was relevant only as much as he or she could contribute to change within the society. Yerima further affirms that the role of the writer is to look at problems and attempt to proffer the way out. This is incumbent on him or her as a storyteller. It is in this connection that this study explores how corruption is perceived and treated in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* and its development implications.

Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*: A Synopsis

The play begins and ends in Major Lejoka-Brown's house. Lejoka-Brown has three wives; two live with him and are well-bred while the third wife lives in America. The first wife, Mama Rashida, was married for him by his late father. After the death of his brother in a train accident, the second wife, Sikira, was married by Major himself in order to win the women's votes. Sikira is the daughter of the president of the Nigerian Union of Market Women. The third wife, Liza, and Mr. Lejoka met in Stanley Viller during the Congo War; she was a medical student when they met. She wedded him in the registry, which indicates that she is legally married to him.

Lejoka Brown was a soldier before he came back from the the United States of America (USA) to take care of the cocoa farm which his father left behind; he later became a politician. At the beginning of the play, he discusses what led him into politics with his friend Okonkwo when Polycarp brings a cablegram which was sent to Lejoka by Liza telling him that she will be coming back to Nigeria. Lejoka feels disturbed; he wants her to remain there until the election is over. Also Liza was not aware that he had two wives before marrying her. Lejoka-Brown thinks there is going to be trouble on her arrival.

Liza arrives as promised and meets Mama Rashidat and Sikira while Lejoka Brown and Okonkwo have gone to fetch her. She claims the plane arrived earlier than scheduled; there is a conversation between Mama Rashida and Sikira before the arrival of Liza. Mama Rashida asks Sikira to tidy up the house, that the third wife is going to arrive from America same day. Sikira makes jest of her when they hear a knock at the door. Alhaji Mustapha comes in and asks of Lejoka Brown and leaves a message behind. The play ends with Lejoka-Brown failing to win the elective position and Sikira contesting for the post instead, claiming that men and women are equal.

The Play and Corruption

Our Husband has Gone Mad Again is a satirical comedy of the political terrain of Africa as well as of those who run it. African politics, the contest for acceptability of the people is an aggressive one. Ola Rotimi being critical of the ills; is out to condemn the corrupt tendencies in Nigerian society through the vehicle of laughter and mockery. It is a comic or mild satire because the play characterizes the actions of some of the characters which tend to make people laugh. Individuals, institutions and the society as a whole are also ridiculed in it.

In the play, we witness an attack on the ex-military personnel in Nigeria attempting to go into civilian politics with the same military mentality. The drama specifically satirizes the political corruption associated with the Nigerian society; the major object or subject of attack and derision in the play is Lejoka-Brown. He is an ex-military officer, a veteran, who believes so much in his military intelligence in outsmarting everybody. Rotimi makes fun of Lejoka-Brown because of his 'military madness'. The playwright lampoons his protagonist's idea about politics with military intelligence and sagacity. That is, in fact, why Lejoka-Brown insists that politics is a source of wealth-making. In *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*, politics is seen as a profession where one loots public fund, a social transformer and image raiser for whosoever is involved in it at the expense of the masses and national security. In the discussion between Lejoka-Brown and Okonkwo, the former has this to say why he takes to politics:

Lejoka-Brown: are you there? Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, you want to be famous? Politics, you want to chop life? No-no- you want to chop a big share of the national cake? Na politics (1997).

From the above, it is very clear that Lejoka-Brown's motive in joining politics is not motivated by his sense of patriotism and service but he sees politics as a means to an end. This informs why he decides to go any length to secure political power. In view of this, Ola Rotimi mirrors the political strategies adopted by the political class to manipulate the electorate and win elections at all cost because of the material gain expected by this class; to them, politics is an investment, and not the process of securing power for good governance, national health and security.

Ejeke (2001) is of the view that Rotimi portrays the corruption of the Nigerian politician who conceives politics and political offices in terms of the material gains and social influences they will acquire from such positions. It is an avenue for political and economic empowerment,

which will guarantee a lifestyle of affluence arising from the sharing of the 'national cake'. The likes of Lejoka-Brown are the political cancers, which have become the bane of underdevelopment and insecurity in Africa. This set of politicians refuses to appreciate the fact that the society is dynamic and would require committed efforts to be able to cope with the challenges of governance; rather they cling to archaic ideas, they are certainly myopic, ideologically barren and too ridiculous to be leaders of the people.

In exposing Lejoka-Brown's inordinate motive, Ola Rotimi is subtly indicting the decadent Nigerian political gladiators. By making jest of Lejoka-Brown, Rotimi is indirectly attacking our greedy, selfish and pleasure-seeking leaders in the Nigerian society. Lejoka-Brown speaks:

It is a war; politics is a war ooo. I am taking no chance at all. Last time I took things slow and easy and what happened? I lost a bye election to a small crab (Our Husband has Gone Mad Again, 1997).

Lejoka-Brown's statement above is ridiculous. Yet it goes to show how crude and ruthless he is. If Lejoka-Brown is taken as a symbolic representation of Nigerian leaders, it would then mean that the playwright is critical about the Nigerian leader's use of brutal force to achieve political ambition. Also, it is clear that Lejoka-Brown lost in the last political contest, but this time around, he vows he will not take any chances and lose the way he lost the previous time. He, therefore, decides to go any length so as to win at all cost regardless of whose ox is gored. Lejoka-Brown's 'surprise and attack' campaign strategy elicits the playwright's mockery. Although, Lejoka vigorously explains to his party members the nature of his political strategy, he only succeeds in dramatizing his hollow mentality. According to Lejoka: "gentlemen, our election campaign plan must follow a platform of military strategy known as surprise and attack ..." (Our Husband..., 1997). From Lejoka's campaign plan, he exposes the fact that he is incredibly ridiculous. Rotimi portrays him as a man who fails to understand the difference between a politician and a soldier. It should also be noted that there is as well a satire on those who run African politics.

Apart from Okonkwo who we know as a lawyer, we only get to know that there are some other educated elite in the NLP when Lejoka-Brown berates them saying that he does not impress them because he had not been educated at America-Toronto and England-Oxford (Our Husband..., 1997) Lejoka-Brown, the leader had abandoned his flourishing cocoa business to join politics because the nature of

our politics is one which easily transforms the political class overnight. Each time he makes a promise of a better life to Liza he ties it to the material benefits he expects to accrue to himself once he wins the forthcoming elections. Madam Ajanaku who insists that the next leader of NLP should be a female has her daughter, Sikira, in mind as she makes the point. The playwright, therefore, seems to be saying that Nigerian politics and indeed African politics is a strange and funny one, not just because of how it is approached by its participants but also the calibre of those who are at the soul of it.

It should also be pointed out that the domineering and tyrannical influence of Lejoka-Brown over his own family, especially his wives, is also satirized. Lejoka-Brown is so over-bearing in his matrimonial home such that one begins to imagine what the situation would look like if he transfers such leadership style to the management of the post he is contesting for. Arrogation and deployment of absolute power in itself is corruption. Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. This dictatorial tendencies or power absolutism is on its own a form of political corruption and Lejoka-Brown is seriously guilty of that. He acquires women in the play not for the purpose of caring for them but to boost his personal ego, to feather his nest and for his political advantage.

In this regard, Anigala (2007) observes that Lejoka-Brown is presented as a mighty colossus who pervades the political terrain with domineering force and influence. The woman, on the other hand, is conceived as a 'Lilliputian' who is completely domesticated. Lejoka Brown is the boss, who must be obeyed and served. He rides on both political and traditional platforms to wield his absolute power. While he discusses important issues with Okwonkwo, Sikira, his wife, runs errands and provides comfort for her lord. Sikira, who must kneel down while greeting her lord, is regarded as a mere property, a thing recently acquired by Lejoka-Brown as a wife for political convenience while mama Rashida has been domiciled by culture.

Thus, both women are subservient, enslaved by the law of tradition and illiteracy. Ogunyemi (1998) claims that women are made to provide food and run errands for men, while men on the other hand, deliberate and formulate policies and attend to the matters of the state. This set-up remains in place with male dominance prevailing. Sikira also takes critical look at her position in the house and returns a harsh verdict on herself - a slave. This verdict is an expression of the despair and frustration arising from the patronizing attitude of Lejoka-Brown. She sees herself as a mere possession acquired by her husband for political expediency. Her frustration is reflective of the plight of women who are purchased, caged and inhibited from

political aspiration by a male-dominated society. She speaks, "in this house? A slave that is what I am. Did he marry me because he loves me or because of this crazy politics" (Our Husband..., 1997).

Considering the implication of the above statement, Anigala (2007) believes that, Sikira has no right of her own. Her right has been stolen by Lejoka-Brown's high handedness and despotic attitude. Sikira is, therefore, to live in servitude under the autocratic hands of her husband. This is the prevailing situation in Lejoka-Brown's house where the 'long rod' is wielded threateningly by the macho man; whose word is law. This role can only be discarded, if Sikira rises to a new level of intellectual consciousness that will set her free from the shackles of slavery. Thus, she needs a mentor, who will prod her into obtaining self respect, dignity and independence. These qualities will provide her with the strength and courage, to be able to 'stand tall' in the presence of Lejoka-Brown.

The foregoing analysis clearly shows the fate women are subjected to in their matrimonial homes in many parts of Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Apart from the political advantage which Lejoka-Brown wants to gain by getting the woman (that is, Sikira), his high handedness over the women is derided in the drama as an absolute power, which is tantamount to being a corrupted person. Unravelling the evil of acquisition of numerous wives to get political advantage, Ola Rotimi clearly satirises the polygamous system of marriage in Nigeria by exploring the usual sentiment that easily divides women - and this is envy and jealousy. This often creates the feeling of resentment among women. Ola Rotimi dramatizes the incessant quarrels and arguments between Sikira and her co-wife (rival) Liza who live a dog and cat's life, constantly fighting one another. Sikira and Liza's relationship is that of fear and mutual suspicion. Sikira fears that Liza might overshadow her. Sikira thinks that Liza being more educated than her would make the latter more domineering and overbearing than herself. She expresses the fears, thus, "will our husband care for me now that miss world is coming here?" (Our Husband..., 1997).

When Liza eventually arrives into Lejoka-Brown's house as his most educated wife, Sikira picks quarrels with her at the least provocation. Lejoka-Brown's household is in reality a fictional representation of what actually happens in most polygamous families. In extending his satire to such a home, Ola Rotimi is indirectly cautioning prospective polygamists of the consequences of such a marriage form - especially acquiring them to fulfil a corrupt political advantage.

The play under analysis has revealed the ills endemic in the political life of a people especially the perpetration of political

corruption. Politics is life, and human beings being political animals find themselves inextricably linked to the political discourse of their generation. Since drama is a mediator of life, political drama has come to characterize contemporary theatre in modern era and the effect of satirical works such as *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* cannot be underestimated. This powerful attribute of drama has been employed by Ola Rotimi to make constructive commentaries on the happenings in society in order to effect some positive changes among men, women and their environment. The dramatist is to arouse the consciousness of individuals in society, with a view to making them aware of their responsibilities as members of the society whose duty it is to take their destinies in their own hands and make the world a better place.

The play under investigation also saliently speaks to how colonial administrations created black elite groups to succeed them and perpetuate their political and economic interests in the post-independence Africa. This links African drama of the two periods because neo-colonialism is the result of a historical process of class formation by colonialism. Central to neo-colonialism, is the formation of classes or strata within a colony which are closely allied to and dependent on foreign capital, and which forms the real basis of support for the regime which succeeds the colonial administration. It is clear that African elites are imitating the characteristic behaviours of their colonial masters who have inculcated the act of corruption into them. African dramatists have responded to this social malaise. They have recorded in several ways the different manifestations of corruption in their countries. They have created works of fiction out of their social and political experiences to decry the very acts of corruption. The play, *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*, examined here has represented the theme of power corruption and domination in Africa by revealing the various causes of such ills. It is clear that *Lejoka-Brown* is a product of foreign cultures in Africa.

Conclusion

Our Husband has Gone Mad Again is, no doubt, a satirical attack on the political and domestic corruption in Nigeria. Many Nigerian playwrights consider it a point of responsibility to comment on and discuss the issue of the excesses of the political leaders and Ola Rotimi is no exception. Until his death, Ola Rotimi was an acknowledged political analyst and a strong advocate of social change. He has explored cultural, historical, religious and social means of bringing about the type of change, which places emphasis on the welfare of the masses. He has used the play to avail his audience of the knowledge of the past for the reconstruction or social engineering of

the present and the future. In the process, he frequently denounced the political elite as being corrupt, exploitative, oppressive and self-centred. His call for social change has been the subject of discourse by many emergent dramatists. The play is indeed a satirical drama blending a critical attitude with humour and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity. It holds up a society to ridicule and shows the foolishness of an idea or custom in an amusing manner evoking laughter, scorn or contempt.

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