

MUYIWA ADEMOLA'S OWO OKUTA (THE LAW OF KARMA) IN THE CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Hameed Olutoba Lawal,
Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo

Abstract

*Many years after independence, the Nigerian polity is still characterised by political leadership without conscience and gullible electorates. Aspiration for elective offices and appointments are driven by materialistic tendency. This is exemplified in lust for power, obsession for wealth, abuse of human rights and manipulation of electoral process. Textual analysis was adopted as research method and materials as working literacy theory. Marxist theory of materialism contends that reality is material, not spiritual. The material world will show us reality. Instances of class conflict or at the institutions, entertainment, news media and legal, and other systems of society will unfold how the distribution of economic power undergirds the society. Appropriateness of the film, **Owo Okuta** for this analysis lies in its portrayal of selfish interests of a governor at the expense of service to the people. Governor Keshinro (Olu Jacobs) in the film is a personification of selfish leader. The governor who ruled amidst bloodshed planned to enjoy the looted fund with his family after his tenure. But in a twist of fate, that could be described as nemesis, disaster trucks, immediately, he completed his tenure. Major findings include appropriation of commonwealth for self-aggrandisement, kleptomaniac attitude of Keshinro's children, neglect of people oriented projects and perversion of justice.*

Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme defines governance broadly as the exercise of power through a country's economic, social and political institutions in which institutions represent the organisation rules and routines, formal laws, and informal norms that together shape incentives of public service (qtd. in Olu-Adeyemi 167). However, good governance in Nigeria is a much recent and novel idea of democratic governance that found expression in the detailed provisions of the 1979 constitution that contained the fundamental objectives and Directive principles of state. It encompasses among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable, and it promotes the rule of law. It ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the

voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources (Olu-Adeyemi 167).

Conscience on the other hand is an aptitude, faculty, intuition or judgement that assist in distinguishing right from wrong. Moral judgement may derive from values or norms (principles and rules). In psychological terms conscience is often described as leading to feelings of remorse when a human commits actions that go against his/her moral values and to feeling of uprightness or integrity when action conforms to such norms (May 57-67).

Governance without conscience is therefore the exercise of power through a country's economic, social and political institutions by the political leadership in Nigeria without being sensitive to the plight of the ruled. Political leadership is characterised by the ruling class that bears the responsibility of manage affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting territory through different decision making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory. It could also be described as human element that operates the machineries of government on behalf of an organised territory (Ogbeidi 4). It is the abuse of this trust by the political leadership as typified in Governor Keshinro of Gbadura State and the attendant nemesis in the film, *Owo Okuta (Law of Karma)* that this paper explores. The essence is to sensitise ruling elites, upcoming political leaders and the electorate on futility of amassing common wealth for selfish interest.

Materialism

Before applying materialism as a theory to analysis of the film in focus, conceptual clarification is necessary to prevent ambiguity. Karl Marx maintained that it is not our philosophical or religious beliefs that make us who we are, for we are not spiritual beings but socially constructed ones. We are not products of divine design but creations of our own cultural and social circumstances (Dobie 92). To understand ourselves, Marx expatiates, we must look to the concrete, observable world we live in day by day. The material world will show us reality. It will show us, for example that people live in social groups, making all our actions interrelated. By examining the relationship among socioeconomic classes and by analysing the socio-political-environment they generate, will give insight into ourselves and our society. For instance, it is the material world that produced, Governor Keshinro, and it is the material that destroys him. his obsession for accumulation of wealth and flamboyant life style is instigated by the capitalist system he lives, which allows acquisition of assets with common wealth. Ironically, it is the same people that empowered him politically and economically

with their votes that he oppresses with state apparatus of governance as typified in the treasury, judiciary and security.

Governance without Conscience in Nigeria

Decades after independence, governance without conscience in Nigerian polity is enacted in absence of people oriented leadership, corruption, abuse of human rights, civil strife and manipulation of electoral process. The perception of political leadership by the politicians and electorates still leaves much to be desired. There is still the mind-set that political offices are the short-cut to riches. The aspiration for elective offices and political appointments are thus driven by the desire for self-enrichment at the expense of services to the people. The narrow minded ones among the electorate aid this attitude with frivolous demand for money to solve immediate personal and family problems instead of communal services and projects. With this greed of the few for crumbs from the table, majority of the populace are deprived of the ideal dividends of democratic governance as typified in health, portable water, roads, education, empowerment schemes and housing.

Closely aligned to this self-centred leadership is problem of corruption that is endemic in Nigerian polity. Corruption has among others been defined as an act of requesting, offering, giving or accepting directly or indirectly a bribe or any other undue advantage or the prospect thereof, which distorts proper performance of any duty or behaviour required of the recipient of the bribe, the undue advantage of the prospect thereof (qtd. in Olu-Adeyemi 169). Electoral corruption is discernible in sell of voting right by the electorate, promises of office, special favour, intimidation and interference in the electoral process, killing and maiming people in the name of election. In the same vein post-election corruption include diversion of fund that is now prevalent. This often results in diversion of public investment on large scale projects, typically military or infrastructural projects, rather than on the provision of necessary public services such as health, roads, housing and education. Dike holds that mostly, the Nigerian government at all levels spends relatively more on large and hard to manage projects, such as airports, or national stadia, to make room for fraud because execution of such projects makes self-enrichment easy (qtd. in Ogbeidi 19)

Human rights situation in Nigeria was nothing to write home about before the restoration of civilian rule in May, 1999. Reflecting on the excruciating human rights situation in Nigeria during the dark days of military rule, Nobel laureate, Professor Wole once remarked that “I smell the sperm of tyranny before the rape of the nation” (qtd. in Olu-Adeyemi 169). While the situation has

improved now, democratic governance has only succeeded in revealing the symptoms and not the cure. The traditional means by which the rights to life and human dignity were abused are manipulation of electoral process, extra judicial killings, political assassinations, arbitrary arrests and detention; kidnapping for ransom.

Reports from Nigerian courts revealed that when these cases are prosecuted, Litigants hardly get redress because of endless trial occasioned by frivolous adjournments and injunctions. This is because judiciary which should be the custodian of human rights has also been influenced with cancer of financial inducement. Cases that exemplified this mortgage of conscience by some judges for money are mostly political cases. Cases involving politically exposed persons, PEPs have become the Achilles of the Nigerian judiciary as judgements are allegedly swayed by the weight of cash or political considerations. This has been the situation since the return of the country to democratic rule in 1999:

The judiciary is thus facing a huge integrity problem with controversial rulings by election petition tribunals. Subsequently lawyers lament that judges have joined the club of billionaires through election tribunals, which they lobby for heavily. In the same vain, cases of embezzlement and misappropriation of fund against some former governors which commenced in 2007 are still in court because of frivolous adjournments and incessant black market injunctions granted by judges. Judgement debts against the federal government have piled up as it is alleged that lawyers negotiate higher amounts with judge at a fee to win cases. (*Tell 19*)

Another major obstacle to governance with conscience is civil strife. Since the re-emergence of democratic rule in May, 1999, many politically ethnically and religiously motivated conflicts have occurred in Nigeria. Prominent ones include Boko-Haram terrorism in North Eastern zone of Nigeria, clashes of Fulani herdsmen and farmers over grazing land and the vandalism oil installations in South-South zone of the country. While it is difficult to differentiate between genuine demands and outright criminality and mayhem, the loss of lives and properties is a distraction to good governance. The implication is that, money that should have been expended on development of human resources and infrastructural facilities is being channelled to internal security.

Empirical Studies of Nigerian Films with the motif of Governance without Conscience.

Like the stage drama, the Nigerian Video films have been apt vehicle for reflecting and documenting impunity in governance to prick the conscience of the political leaders and the electorates. This conscientisation drive on the screen dates back to the days of celluloid film, when unfolding events in the Nigerian polity inspired thought provoking themes. The leading cineaste in this crusade is Eddie Ugboma with these titles; *The Mask* (1979), *Oil Boom* (1981) and *Death of Black President* (1983)

The Mask explores political brigandism in Nigeria that followed the transition from military to civilian hegemony. *Oil Boom* which was a follow-up criticises the mismanagement of oil excess arising from oil boom and subsequent corruption, avarice, abandoned projects and direct focus on oil alone at the expense of cocoa, cotton and groundnut which were formerly the main export commodities in Nigeria. Animasaun (25). *Death of a Black President* on the other hand is the filmic enactment of the brutal murder of General Murtala Mohammed who initiated the move towards attitudinal change with his zero tolerance for corruptive tendencies in February 1976. Another film that depicts the mortgage of conscience in governance is Soyinka's *Blues for the Prodigal* (1984). Okome says this film is "a deliberate and contemptuous parody of Nigerian's second republic" (231). To Okome, *Blues for the Prodigal* can be dubbed the first of the underground/radical films that are likely to flourish in the face of political misdemeanour which is fast becoming the hallmark of the times.

After the transition from celluloid format of producing films to home video format in 1990s because of high cost of production, political themes were not immediately embraced by the Nigerian film makers. Among the reasons adduced for this, are fear of censorship and taste of targeted audience for quick returns on investment. However, with the democratisation of the Nigerian film industry like the larger polity, political themes are now satirically and metaphorically dramatized in Nigerian Video films. Video films that exemplified this trend include; Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide* (1999) and *Agogo Eewo* (2002), Fred Amata's *The King Maker* (2002) and Isola Durojaiye's *Asiri Gomina Wa* (2007) (The secret of our Governor).

A critical reading of *Saworoide* (Brass bells) and *Agogo Eewo* (Gong of taboo) reveals a metaphorical enactment of the Nigerian polity. In *Saworoide*, the king perverted the traditional rights to establish the pact with the people. This was to disentangle himself from the responsibilities associated with the pact. He never

intended to serve the people, he only wanted to use the throne to enrich himself and to guarantee the future of his children (Adeyanju 305).

In *Agogo Eewo*, the story continued. After nemesis caught up with the former king because of his obsession for wealth at the expense of services to his people, his successor refused to toe the line of conniving with foreigners to exploit natural resources of Jogbo town. Baffled kingmakers who were instrumental to his installation planned to sabotage his efforts aimed at making services to the people his priority.

The *Kingmaker* is a dramatisation of the antics of the Godfathers in Nigerian polity who always want to be reciprocated with contracts and political appointments by the Godsons (the governor). In the same vein, *Asiri Gomina Wa* (Our Governor's Secret) explored the extent to which politician can go in behind the scenes rituals and sacrifices with human blood to triumph in elections and fortification from opponents.

Synopsis of the Fil, Owo Okuta (The Law of Karma)

Produced and Directed by Muyiwa Ademola in 2008, the story line of *Owo Okuta* revolves around Governor Keshinro Adesuwu of Gbadura state who sees the mandate given to him by the electorate as an opportunity for self-aggrandisement. When his attention is drawn to vital sectors like education for rehabilitation and improved services, he refuses to listen to voice of reason. Governor Adesuwu relishes awarding contracts that will enrich him.

The children on the other hand, particularly first daughter and the second son flaunt the wealth acquired from common wealth with reckless abandon parties are organized at regular intervals to lavish money on musicians and women. Not even the protest from students on the deteriorating state of education in the state can make Governor Adesuwu to search his conscience.

Insensitivity of Governor Keshinro to the plight of the down trodden in the state is typified in his attempt to compensate the parents who lost their wards in the student protest with money. To sweep the criminal case of the son's friend who kills a lady in his desperate bid to force her to bed after a dance contest under the carpet, the judge is intimidated to leave the city for his country home. The diabolical plan of Governor Adesuwu to enjoy his loot after his tenure come to nothing. The Law of Karma avenge the atrocities against his people with calamity of strange ailments and death of members of his family one after the other.

Governance without Conscience in Owo Okuta

Scenes of governance without conscience are enacted in Governor Adesuwa's preference for contracts that will enrich his pocket than people oriented projects, his refusal to listen to voice of reason, Kleptomaniac attitude of the children, intervention in judicial matters and belief in spiritual fortification.

In the early phase of his regime in the film, the advice of one of his commissioners on the need to increase sectoral allocation to education fell on deaf ears. He defended his stance by insisting, that, there are many sectors competing for his attention. Later student's protest on the inadequacies in the educational sector is resisted with an order to the security guards to dispatch the protesters to save the life of his daughter, Pero (Mosun Filani) who ran into them in her jeep. Shots fired by the security guards to ensure the safety of Pero snuffed life out of five of the protesters. This neglect of education sector for elephant projects that enrich the governor at the expense of the masses affirms his obsession for wealth. In the same vein intimidation of the vocal youths with the state security apparatus captures insensitivity of the political leadership to the plight of the electorates.

On his second visit to the governor, the commissioner (Yinka Quadri) drew the attention of the governor to the fact that, the collapsed building that killed a student was one of the ones slated for rehabilitation. The governor, who did not see reason with him shouted him down. He thereafter tendered his resignation letter in protest. At home in a private discussion, Lanke (Muyiwa Ademola) first son, and his father ruminated over the plight of the masses but he insisted the, 'I am doing my best'. The advice that, he should quit if his best was that not enough infuriated him. In the same vein when Lanke again advised the father to make up for the inadequacies of three years in the remaining one year, the governor, who was of the conviction that no amount sacrifice can please the people planned to make more money for a secured future through frivolous contracts.

Flaunting of ill-gotten wealth in the midst of millions wallowing in poverty were dramatized at the birthday party of the first lady (Rachel Oniga) birthday of Pero and dance contest organised by Eyitayo (Femi Adebayo, second son). At the birthday party of the first lady, there were lots to eat and drink. In the dancing session the musician was lavishly sprayed. This same scene was replicated at Pero's birthday party. The popular musician that performed at the party realised the sum of Five Million Naira (₦5,000,000.00). The frivolity of spraying money appropriated from commonwealth amount to oppressing them with funds that should be channelled to development projects pervasion of justice that followed in a case involving the governor's son dashed the hope of commoners from getting justice, when cheated or deprived.

In furtherance of the frivolity of displaying ill-gotten wealth, the governor's second son, Eyitayo and his friends organised a dance contest with a car to be won by any lady who can dance in nudity. A lady, Fakekemi who was enticed by the bait of the car won the contest. In a desperate attempt to have sex with her after the contest by one of the organisers (Afeez Eniola) she died. To cover up the criminal act, the culprit is to jet out to America, while a proxy is to serve the prison term with a monthly compensation of One Hundred Thousand (₦100,000). In his own attempt to influence the judge (Tabosun Odunsi) handling the case, the life was threatened by unknown gun men suspected to have been sent by the governor for his refusal to compromise. In frustration and fear, the judge retired to his country home.

For his security and that of his immediate family against the wrath of the oppressed and exploited people, the governor combines physical security with the spiritual. In one of his security meetings with spiritualists, they were served with sumptuous meal and assorted drinks backed up with lump sum packaged in brown envelopes. Aably represented in the team were the Muslims, Christians and the traditionalists as personified in an Alfa (Deji Aderemi), Pastor (Adebayo Faleti) and Ifa priest (Peter Fatomilola). Later at the meeting of the Ifa priests, with delivery of money from the governor, they resolved to make all necessary rituals and sacrifices to overcome oppositions and tribulations. Physical and spiritual fortification of the governor with tax payer's money distanced the governor from the electorates that gave the political and economic power.

Findings

In this study, the characteristic traits of lack of conscience in governance had been identified using the film, *Owo Okuta* to illustrate. These are exemplified in wrong perception of governance by the politicians and the ruled, arrogance and greed, obsession for wealth, corruption and abuse of human rights. Critical reading of the film in focus revealed the following:

- (i) Negative perception political power and office as short cut to amassing wealth closely related to this, is the gullible attitude of the electorate who look forward to distribution of wealth instead of services.
- (ii) Arrogance and greed blindfolds sense of reasoning. Constructive criticism is misconstrued for subversion.
- (iii) Corruptive tendencies of diverting money meant for people oriented projects to white elephant projects for purposes of siphoning money into private pockets is pervasive in Nigerian polity.

- (iv) After pleading for mandate from the electorates before the election, communication gap widens after the election with physical and spiritual fortification acquired with tax payer's money.

Conclusion

In conclusion, edification in *Owo Okuta* on futility of seeking political leadership for self-aggrandisement affirm the potency of the screen in sensitising on attitudinal change by politicians and the electorates. The edification here lies in nemesis that will catch up with those who govern without conscience as characterised in reversal of fortune and calamities that befell governor Keshinro of Gbadura state in the film. On the other hand, for the electorates who aid and abet looting of public treasury for momentary dividends, the opportunity cost is the neglect of roads, health, education, water and infrastructural facilities that can transform communities.

Owo Okuta is therefore a moral lesson for the faithful politicians and the electorates to be guided by their conscience in governance. In taking decisions and embarking on projects, the soul searching questions will then crop up: is it morally right or wrong? Is it in the public interest? And who are the beneficiaries? For the unfaithful ones, the film sermonises on essence of being faithful to God and humanity.

Governance with conscience can therefore inculcate moral uprightness and honesty in Nigerian polity; A political leadership willing to serve the electorates. A polity devoid of electorates aiding and abetting corruptive tendencies as typified in manipulation electoral process, political assassinations, nepotism and diversion funds meant for public services to infrastructural projects and abuse of human rights.

Works Cited

- Adeyanju, A. Mojisola. "Home Movies in Nigeria and The National Question: An Examination of *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*." *Nigerian Theatre Journal* 7 (2004): 300-314. Print.
- Agbo, Anayochukwu. "Money: Judges Fatal Attraction." *Tell* 23 Nov. 2015. 17-21.
- Animasaun, Kayode *NOSRA THEORY on Gazetting and Analysis of Nollywood Movies*. Ibadan: Kraft, 2011. Print.
- Dobie, A. B. *Theory into Practice*. Boston: Wadsworth, 2009.
- May, L. "On Conscience." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983): 57-67. Print.

- Ogbeidi, Michael M. "Political Corruption in Nigeria Since 1960: A Socio-economic Analysis." *Journal of Nigerian Studies* 1.2 (2012): 1-25. Print.
- Okome, Onookome. "The Rise of Folkloric Cinema in Nigeria." Diss. University of Ibadan, 1991.
- Olu-Adeyemi, Lanre. "The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria." *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences* 5.12 (2012): 167-171. Print.

Filmography

- Asiri Gomina Wa*. (Our Governor's Secret) Prod. Ishola Durojaiye. Dirs. Segun Ogungbe and Waheed Ijaduade. Perf. Odunlade Adekola, Yomi Fash-Lanso, Kayode Akindina, Bolaji Amusan, Toyin Afolayan, Lanre Hassan, Dele Odule, Tubosun Odunsi, Gemini Films and Marketing Nigeria Limited, 2007.
- Owo Okuta* (The Law of Karma) and 2 prod/Dir Muyiwa Ademola. Perf: Muyiwa Ademola, Olu Jacobs, Bimbo Oshin, Femi Adebayo, Mosun Filani, Peter Fatomilola, Racheal Oniga, Yinka Quadri, Afeez Eniola and Adebayo Salami. Epsalum Movie Productions, 2008.
- The Kingmaker*. Prod. Lufodo Productions/Dir Fred Amata. Perf: Olu Jacobs, Bimbo Manuel, Joke Silver, Zulu Adigwe, Bukky Ajayi. Lufado Productions, 2002.