

Governance without Conscience in Nigerian Polity: An Edification in Muyiwa Ademola's Film, *Owo Okuta* (The Law of Karma)

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Abstract

*In post independent Nigeria, the perception of political leadership by the politicians and the electorates is that of acquiring power and wealth for self aggrandisement. Political office is thus seen as a short-cut to riches to keep poverty and penury at bay from the families and urborn generations of the politicians. In the bid to occumulate the commonwealth, funds meant for social services and infrastructure are diverted to frivolties. The electorates who should constitute effective checks and balances are collaborators by seeking compensation for their votes through sharing of looted funds, political patronages and appointments. Governance without conscience is what the film, *Owo Okuta* dramatises. Governor Keshinro (Olu Jacobs) in the film is a personification of selfish leader. The governor who ruled amidst bloodshed planned to enjoy the looted funds with his family after his tenure. But in a twist of fate, that could be described as nemesis, disaster strucks immediately. Governor Keshinro completed his tenure, one calamity after the other befell his immediate family. In his period of trial the former governor regretted not serving the people the way his mandate demanded. The rein lies the need to lead with conscience while in political office.*

Keywords: Governance, Conscience, Political leadership, Edification.

Introduction

Governance refers broadly to the exercise of power through 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. UNDP 2009 as cited in Olu-Adeyemi (167) Governance in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period to the present day.

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, effective and equitable, 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 rectitude 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 managing 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.

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 mindset 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 expenses 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 indirecting

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 Kofele-Kale (2006) as cited 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 infrastural projects, rather than on the provision of necessary public services such as health, roads, housing and education. 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. Dike (n.d) as cited 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 raped of the nation”, CDAR (2001) as cited 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 ransome.

Reports from Nigerian courts revealed that when these cases are prosecuted, Litigants hardly get redress because of endless trial occasioned by frivolous adjourments

and injunctions. This is because judiciary which should be the custodian of human rights has also been inflicted 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. Tell (19)

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 lost 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 channeled to internal security.

Scenes of Governance without Conscience in Nigerian Films

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 in Soyinka's *Blues for the Prodigal* (1984). Political rancorous, the filmmaker as quoted in Okome (231) says this film is "a deliberate and contemptuous parody of Nigerian's second republic". To Okome (231) '*Blue for the Prodigal* can be dubbed the first of the underground/radical films that are likely to flourish in the face of political

misdeemeanour 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 targetted 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 dramatised 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 story was about the ancient pact that existed between kings and people of Jogbo town. This could be likened to what early political philosophers referred symbolically as the “social contract”. After the demise of a king, the kingmakers choose another king. The king elected 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 connwing with foreigners to exploit natural resources of Jogbo town. Baffled kingmakers who were instrumental to his intallation planned to sabotage his

efforts aimed at making services to the people his priority. Exposure of the evil machination of the Chiefs through oath of allegiance with *Agogo Eewo* which is the symbol of traditional pact between the chiefs and the people led to ignominious death of the guilty chiefs.

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 governors). The Godfather in the film, Chief Akanji (Olu Jacobs) can be likened to Lamidi Adedibu, the self acclaimed 'strongman of Ibadan politics', Andy Uba of Anambra state and Tony Anenih, a.k.a 'Mr. Fix it' of Edo state in characteristics traits. After the Victory of Governor- Bolaji (Bimbo Manuel) at the polls, the deputy governor's stance that publication of alleged corrupt tendencies should be investigated did not go down well with the governor and his Godfather, Chief Akanji. Chief Akanji subsequently arranged the assassination of the deputy governor to checkmate the attempt to expose looting of treasury through contracts and diversion of fund meant for people oriented projects.

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. In the film, Tubosun came back from America to contest as governor. To win the election Tubosun went through a lot of rituals. After savouring political power and fringe benefits of office as governor, he eyes the presidency. To realise his ambition, the cult Tubosun consulted requested for nine virgins to be sacrificed. One fo the virgins callously sacrificed was the only child of Pastor Martins. The Law of Karma caught up with Tubosun when the pastor invoked the wrath of God on the evil doers. This led to nightmares for Tubosun.

To be delivered, he was compelled to broadcast the evils he perpetrated to become the governor.

Synopsis of the Film, *Owo Okuta* (The Law of Karma)

Produced and Directed by Muyiwa Ademola in 2008, the story line of *Owo Okuta* revolves around Governor Keshinro Adesuwa 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 Adesuwa relishes awarding contracts that will enrich him.

The children on the other hand, particularly first daughter and the second son flaunt 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 Adesumwa 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 Adesuwa 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.

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 advise that, he should quit if his best was 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 dramatised at the birthday party of the first lady (Rachel Oniga) birthday of Pero and dance contest organised by Eytayo (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)

In furtherance of the frivolity of displaying illgotten wealth, the governor's second son, Eytayo and his friends organised a dance contest with a car to be won by any lady who can dance in nudity. A lady, Fadekemi 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 after the prosecution and judgement 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 the attempt to influence the judge (Tabosun Odunsi) handling the case, his 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. Aply 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.

Recommendations

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. To change this mind set in Nigerian polity these recommendations should be taken into consideration.

- (i) There is the need for a rethink on perception of political power and office by the politicians and electorates. The mandate to govern should be for selfless service and not self aggrandisement. The electorates on the other should stop mortgaging their future by exchanging vote for money and crumbs.
- (ii) Democratic governance encompasses listening to voices of reason for caution and guide, arrogance and greed should not blindfold sense of reasoning.
- (iii) Corruptive tendencies of diverting funds meant for people oriented projects to white elephants projects for purposes of siphoning money into private pockets should be discouraged with close monitoring by the electorates. This should be reinforced with effective checks and balances among the three arms of government.
- (iv) To ensure governance with conscience abuse of human rights that are characterised in extra-judicial

killings, political assassinations, denial of political rights, arbitrary arrests and detention and kidnapping for ransome should be nip in the bud. Judges should not mortgage their conscience for money and political considerations.

- (v) Geniue agitations in whatever colouration be it economic, political, ethnic or religious should be objectively addressed before it escalates to divert attention and resources.

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 should 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.

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