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THE INDELIBILITY OF WRITER'S INSTRUMENTALITY TO A CALL TO DUTY: A STETHOSCOPIC JOURNEY THROUGH FEMI OSOFISAN'S *WHO'S AFRAID OF TAI SOLARIN?*

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Abstract:

Writers all over the globe are literary visionaries who place their stethoscope, as it were,on human nature and societal complexities. A writer is able to see the minutest conduct of man with reference to the ethic of neighbourliness.Most humans are selfish, while very few show empathies. The instrumentality of a writer transcends the ordinary in heralding the nature of human behaviour on the planet; also a writer projects the future through the present.This paper aimed to bring into limelight, through Osofisan's Who's Afraid of Solarin?the peculiarities of public office holders and their conduct as far as service to humanity is concerned.A plot analysis of the play was carried out. Critical textual survey revealed the ingenuity of the author in exposing the dirt in the public servants' linen, asfar as discipline and accountability are concerned. It is also an exposure of how and whymost public officeholders swindle the public they swear to serve.

Keywords: Visionaries, Endowments, Neighbourliness, Instrumentality, Accountability.

Introduction

Writers contribute to the social, economic, political, cultural and religious well-being of the society. This is done through literary presentations in the genres of drama, prose and poetry. Ideas presented in any of these genres remain indelible in the minds of readers and society in general.Egbuwalo(2017) states that talented literary artists emerge within the society and shed light on their people's genealogy through their medium of expression. The historical antecedents of the environments also play significant roles in the writer's inclination in writing.

Objective of the Paper

This paper intends to investigate public office holders' dispositions towards their duty and the implications to the (contemporary) society.

Theoretical Framework

No one is an island, entire of his or her own. A writer is in constant relationship with the environment and his themes are usually the products of his milieu. Environmental Determinismtheory has a part to play in the development of the text, *Who's Afraid of Solarin*?Environmental Determinism is the effect of the interplay between human and the environment. The theory was developed in the fields of Anthropology, Sociology and Geography. Its preoccupation is how local, regional and global environmental factors affect and determine a particular society's cultural, economic, political development and evolution. It explains how the physical and behavioral characteristics of people or races are determined by the physical environment in which they live. It encompasses climate, culture, economy and geography.The Chinese philosopher and politician,Guan Zhong is said to have written, in the 7th century, that the nature of major river systems determined the cultural and behavioral characteristics of people living nearby.

Environmental Determinism theory evolved from application of Darwinian evolutionary biology to sociological and cultural development. The 19th century English philosopher, Herbert Spencer, referred to it as *survival of the fittest.* The theory sheds light on the parameters that determine human's reactions towards environmental challenges.

The plot and content of *Who's Afraid of Solarin*? have bearings with the setting of the play. The setting depicts an environment where those (public servants and politicians) entrusted with the responsibility of providing decent and equitable services for the generality of the people are the ones that take corruption, cheating and extortion as their stocks in trade. It is in the interest of Femi Osofisan to expose these atrocities in the view to modeling a society for a better and equitable cohabitation.

Femi Osofisan

Femi Osofisan was born in Erunwon, Ogun State, Nigeria, in June 1946. He is a reputable writer who had made remarkable impacts, among literary icons. He had many awards to himself, among which is the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM). Osofisan is a critic, poet, novelist, essayist and lecturer. His books include, *Morountodun*, *Midnight Hotell*, *Who's Afraid of Solarin*?, *Ajayi Crowther* and a host of others. His major theme is the conflict between good and evil. His works incline towards correcting the decadence in the society.

Synopsis of the Play

Who's Afraid of Solarin? explores the events that played out when a rascally and irresponsible traveler, Isola, is mistaken for the dreaded Public Complaints Commissioner, Solarin. Isola's presence throws panic among the corrupt Officials of the Local Government Council, among who are: Chief James Dada Gbonmiayelobiojo– Chairman; Mr Ayokanmi Olaitan-- Chief Magistate; Dr Bodunrin Alade Martins-- Chief Medical Officer, Chief Funso Fawolu-- Councillor for Education and Works, Mrs Abeni Animasaun –- Price Control Officer; Miss Kaokudi Animasaun-- Councillor for Cooperatives and Agriculture; Baba Fawomi-- Ifa Priest; Lamidi and Lemomu--beggers; and Isola Oriebora-- traveler from Lagos.

Actions commence with complaints and arguments among the Local Government Council Officers over the removal of some of the entitlements hitherto being enjoyed by them in their pay packages.Some of the officials have premonitions over their lots for the day, as they were formally oblivious of the situation:

Chairman: "I don't know for sure. But somebody has been sent from the headquarters,and he's travelling incognito" (6)

This information throws jitters among the Council members:

Chief Magistrate:"Incognito! *Sanponna* o! It must be Solarin" (6)

*Chairm*an: "What's worse, he has secrete instructions" (7)

Chief Magistrate: "It's Solarin! We're doomed! I don't think I can continue the game. I'm feeling sick" {7}

Councilor for Education: "I'm on leave, right from this moment! If anyone asks for me, I can't be found" (7)

Councillor for Cooperatives:"And I too, I'm going for treatment- in Cairo" (7)

Councillor for Education: "Why Cairo?" (7)

Councillor for Cooperatives: "The address is in Arabic, who here can read it?" (7)

At this moment they are planning to run away, but the Chairman disallows them:

Chairman: "Stop there, both of you! I forgot to mention it, but no one's going to move one pinch from this place until Baba Fawomi comes".(7)

The reprisal hands of guilt starts to haunt them, as they go into retrospect concerning the atrocities they had perpetrated:

Chief Magistrate: "There must be a hidden motive behind this. I spy the hand of

God. Ah, in my court" (8)

Councillor for Education: "It's a plan like daylight if you ask me. We begged you , didn't we, not to throw that poor man in jail last week. But you said you wanted his wife" (8)

In a bid to ward off the impending doom, they invites Baba Fawomi, the *Ifa* Priest, for divination. He compounds their apprehension, to make sure he has his own share of their loot. He gestures on some materials they must supply for Ifa to prevent the visitor from coming to them:

Baba Fawomi: "Hush, I say! I know everything. That's the final proof! And I beg You, please don't mention the question of professional fees yet, for I shall only be too happy to accept them.----" (16)

Before he starts to name his price some of the Council team had started to mention what they will give to him, provided the burdens on them are removed:

Councillor for Education: "Ten, no, fifteen percent of the contract to be awarded next week for the proposed Cultural centre!" (16)

Doctor: "Free vaccination for you and your family…"(16)

Chief Magistrate: "One year's pardon in advance!..." (16)

Price control Officer: "First choice over any goods seized this month from hoarders"(16)

At this moment, Baba Fawomi halts and scolds them for not giving him room for Ifa to name it's prices. They all apologizes and he continues:

Baba Fawomi: "Sacrifice! That's the only way to redeem your sins. For *Ifa* says he has seen you all, and everyone of you is a rogue. No, don't protest… every act of your life is exposed in these patterns. The fornication adulteries, forgeries, small and big embezzlements! The betrayals. the stupid…No, I won't go on, you all have enough crimes in your lives to justify your posts…" (18)

Chairman: "All right Baba. Tell us how it will cost us to repent." (19)

Baba Fawomi tells each of them what to provide and they all comply. The items include cows, goats, fowls, chickens, bails of white cloth, *yanyan* and so on. They all agree, as long as their fears are allayed. It is ironical for the Chairman and his team to utter statements that foreground their love for the masses they have maltreated and cheated so much. This follows Baba Fawomi's insistence to leave them to their fate on account of poor hospitality when he says:

Baba Fawomi: "Don't bother to shut the door, I am leaving. Giving toilet soap to Orunmila!... He'll soon be arriving." (23)

All: "What, Baba Fawomi! You won't do that ! Not to old clients? Consider our families! Think of the reputation of the town that will suffer. Think of the name of the fatherland!" (23)

Baba Fawomi does not take his leave without making additional demands:

Baba Fawomi: "Let me go, I say! You will see me in my home before I agree to change my mind…you will come properly loaded" (23)

Immediately he takes his leave, a set of people enter and announce that the visitor had already arrived the Pastor's house for some days past without them knowing. The Pastor cannot confirm the true identity of the visitor because he (the visitor) claims to be a traveler from Lagos. He tells the Pastor that he was attacked on the way by robbers who dispossessed him of all his possessions. While argument is still on concerning the true identity of the visitor, the Chairman enters and it is discovered that the visitor is Isola, who they mistakenly assume to be Solarin, awaited Public Complaints Commissioner.Part three of the play exposes the pastor as a corrupt and promiscuous fellow. While Lamidi and Lemomu are searching for the missing money in his room, they stumble into some love letters involving married women. Consider :

Lemomu: "…We've gone through the other room and found nothing. Exceptfor these love letters" (50)

Lamidi: Yes, but they are married women (50).

Baba Fawomi obliges to bail Pastor out of his corruption allegation, only if he can co- operate:

Baba Fawomi: I'm ready to help you, but you have to be willing to help yourself a little. You've got how many pockets … in your own interest , buy them off ! A bribe is a bribe, and all government officials are *susceptible* whether spirits or humans! It's the size that counts—(55)

The Chairman and his team come in contact with Isola, who they mistaken for Solarin. They are so afraid to appear to him that they have to rehearse their order of appearance when he is eventually ready for them:

Chairman: He'll soon finish his meal, and that's a consolation. Remember we are in it together… Now let's go through it again carefully. When he enters, what do we do? (65)

Councilor for Education: We fall flat on our bellies (65)

Councilor for Cooperatives:…we are to courtesy.

Interestingly , Isola is aware of all their intrigues and he is ready for them. He says:

Isola: Ah, they are beginning to come. All the better' if they arrive one by one. My dear you have to excuse us.(69)

Chief Magistrate: Oh Lord, I know I've made careless remarks about you but, as one judge to another, you can't let me down. I'll take the first step, take the second one for me…(69)

*Isola:*Do sit down. So you are the Magistrate here?(69)

Chief Magistrate: Yes, sir. I was promoted to that position some years back after due recommendation by the Fraternity. I've always been faithful to the cult's charter and paid my dues regularly…(69)

This is one of the reasons many of those in positions of authority (politicians or public office holders) misbehave and are inclined to satisfy their 'spiritual' dictators rather than serving the interest of the masses that voted them in. The Magistrate offers an envelope:

Chief Magistrate: Oh, nothing… I swear, a…a handkerchief (70)

Isola: You dropped an envelope… full of brand new notes.(70)

Chief Magistrate: Oh Lord, bail me out (70)

In turns the Council Officers offer hands of fellowship to Isola:

Price Control Officer: I have the honour to present myself. Mrs Abeni Mailo, Daughter of the late Reverend Durosimi, the famous pianist-composer, graduate of Isabatudeen Secondary Modern School, Ajilete. I am the Price Control Officer here (71)

Isola: Well come I've heard of you. I'm glad to meet the daughter of such a famous person, the late Reverend Mailo (71)

*Is*ola:Madam, you've heard of my engagement, no doubt?

Price Control Officer: Your Highness…I hopeyou'll count me as one of your friends. Let me prove it with this, if your Highness will do me the honour of accepting?,,,,,(72)

Isola: Oh thanks, very much! I'm lavish with my friendships when I see the proof! (72)

It is common for people to hide under the reputations of 'REAL' HONOURBLE, DIGNIFIED and DISCIPLINED individuals, present and past, to secure positions of honour, especially political positions. They usually behave contrary to revered conduct of such personalities whose names have been used to climb to the top. A very good example of such opportunists in the play is the Price Control Officer. In turn, Isola receives inducement from the Council members until he decides to act like the good/real Public Complaints Commissioner when it ,,is the Doctor's turn to appear to him:

Doctor: I have the honour to…to, excuse me, to present myself before you, your Excellency—Dr Bodunrin Alade-Martins…the…the

excuse me, Chief Medical Officer in charge of the hospital (76)
Isola: Isola: What's that in yourbag? (76)
Doctor: It's… it's some of the latest equipment we acquired recently… I thought you… excuse me, I thought you would like to examine it (76)
Doctor: You know, your Excellency! A widespread disease…of the pocket… (76)
Surprisingly, Isola flares up:
Isola: You're in a deep trouble, doctor. Trying to corrupt an official of the state (77)
Doctor: I…am so-r-r-rry, your Excelle-n-n- excuse me, please, they told me to… to do it. I was misled (77)
Isola: Quiet! Who misled you?
Isola: You are lying, doctor! You want to implicate responsible and decent officials. Doctor, I am going to make sure you're properly disciplined. A man in your position should know better (77)

Following this development, confusion sets in and Isola chases the Doctor. Instantly, Baba Fawomi enters with Isola's diary, which reveals that Isola is not the Solarin being expected, but a fake one. Within a spate of time, Lamidi appears with information:
Lamidi: Excellencies, there's a visitor outside. (85)
Lemomu: A gentleman in brown khaki shorts----(86)
Chairman: What! (86)
Lamidi: The inscription on his car will surely interest you (86)
The Chairman gives money to Lamidi and Lemomu in order to extract information from them:
Chairman: All right, take this! What inscription?
Lamomu: It says, 'Office of the Public Complaints Commissioner'.
There comes the dreaded cat let out of the bag!
All: What!!!
Chairman: Oh my God! Oh my head!
Lamomu: He's here, ladies and gentle men! He's arrived (86)
Lamidi: Yes, the real Public Complaints Commissioner has arrived.(86)

Conclusion

A stethoscopic consideration of the content of the play brings to limelight certain recurring issues that affect society and people as far as a call to duty and service to humanity are concerned. The main bane in the progress of the society is corruption. This cankerworm is laid bare to the reader at the beginning of the text---- where the Local Government Council Officials accuse one another in connection with what dirty corners each of them had cut in their respective duty posts. The Chairman, no less than the entire officials of the Council, is involved in myriads of corrupt practices during the course of his duties.Baba Fawomi (*Ifa* Priest) takes monetary and material bribes in his intention to prevent the visit of the Public Complaints Commissioner to the Council. Polycap (Chairman's boy) collects naira notes from Isola and divulges information to him. Isola (fake Public Complaints Commissioner) takes the advantage of the Council Officials' money and material gluttony to extort them. The Pastor is accused of adultery and fraud.

In a nutshell, people saddled with the responsibility of working for a better society in general are those swimming in the pool of avarice, covetousness and egocentricity. It is not far from the plain truth that replicas of the Local Government Council Officials depicted in this text abound all over the place. Femi Osofisan's *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* has presented a subject matter that will forever remain indelible in the minds of the readers.

Those in position of authority should be responsible and be above board in their day to day dealings with the peoplethey are saddled to serve. One's call to duty should be handled with the highest sanctity, so that the society will be better for all of us.

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