

Communication**The Playwright's Perspective: X-raying Condescension, as a Matter of Leadership, and of Godfatherism in Julie Okoh's a Haunting Past****Eziwho Emenike Azunwo¹**

Abstract: Humans as the most sensible and socially organised creatures have over the years invested much time and efforts in structuring and restructuring their civilizations. These attempts have seen progressive U-turns in the making of several standardized societies. These social concerns echoing in politics are interestingly the democratic cry of this paper with a fore allusion to the sovereign space known today as Nigeria. Julie Okoh's *A Haunting Past* presents itself as a viable material for the microscopic stance of these broad concerns. Relatively, Vilfredo Pareto's Elite theory expounds this paper towards a hypnotized destination. The researcher's application of the theory comes with its apt-mindedness in view of the topic under consideration. The study discovers that the concept of "godfatherism" is undemocratic and dictatorial; hence, it has a negative bearing on the political, social and economic life of any nation. Godfatherism and other foul plays in politics affect the people deleteriously. The study recommends that democratic endeavours in Nigeria should no longer be boycotted; instead, it should be left to take its core place in the Nigerian political space, without any interference whatsoever. This will bring about contentment amongst the majority and in turn, control the excesses of politicians.

Keywords: Democracy; politics; godfatherism; playwriting; election malpractice; rigging

"Citizens have a duty to obey only legitimate powers. The only rightful rulers are those chosen freely by the people". (Jean Jacques Rousseau)

"Life as it occurs is senseless... for it is the business of the playwright to pick out the significant incidents from the chaos of daily happenings, and arrange them so that their relation to one another becomes significant thus changing us from bewildered spectators of a monstrous confusion to men intelligently conscious of the world and its destinies". (George Bernard Shaw)

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Introduction

Theatre authorities and others who have variously pontificated on different social issues, hence most probably cannot be wrong. Sequel to the extent of their intellectual brooding, properly pontificating with the writer's ideology, hence Utoh submits that;

The role of the playwright as the conscience of a nation, especially a nation in crisis, has given a militant, radical and political edge to most Nigerian plays. It is no coincidence that these plays, which come in the form of dramatic parables, are created in tune with occurrences... and also as measures to combat oppressive forces within the system. (274)

Therefore, in the world today, where everything is measurable and with complete inattentive, art has become the climax of the expression of every material thing which include human interactions of all strata, hence, art is humanity giving life to the society. No wonder Wa Thiong'o once postulated that "every writer is a writer in politics" (5) but the question now is, what and whose politics? This contention was however upheld in the submission of Boal that:

All theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error and this is a political attitude. (IX)

On the other hand, the thought of democracy has been with mankind for centuries, if not millennia. The concept has compelled researchers, academics and other well-meaning individuals into critical postulations in order to broaden the field of study. Maxey cannot be wrong with the assertion that:

The history of human societal politics is a chronicle of the progressive evolution of systems of leadership either by revolution or by the dominant will of the people, as obtained in the fifth century Greek city-state of Athens, whose place in this history is unique. (26)

A system of leadership therefore is not only significant in the political organization of a society because it guides and directs a people's conduct in their situation. Possibly, due to the noninterventionist provisions inherent in the concept of democracy, as a system of leadership, it has therefore become a dominant charisma in global governance, highly appreciated by the world over. Heywood on the other hand submits that the word democracy conspicuously originated in the Greeks' writings around the fifth century B.C". (5) The concept has evolved as the centuries endure; hence, Janda et al. inform that the concept was derived from the

root words: *demos*, which refers to the common people, and *kratos*, meaning power (33). They further inform that “over the years, democracy has become a standard for the judgment of governance in contemporary politics as most people today agree that governments should be democratic. (32) The drive to install responsible governance propelled the former U.S. Republican President, Abraham Lincoln to overtly espouse the concept of democracy as, "a government of the people, by the people and for the people". This standpoint reflects the *raison d'être* for its popular acceptance amongst people. Nevertheless, since the twentieth century there has been the need and clarion call for a critical re-examination and re-evaluation of the democratic theory on the locale of modern social conditions created by the iniquitous leverages demonstrated by an elite minority in the practice of democracy. Apparently conceived from its etymological point of view, Lincoln's definition of democracy suggesting its people-oriented nature cannot be entirely overemphasized, discredited or abandoned. The wide reference the definition receives in contemporary literature of governance, law and politics is a confirmation of its popular acknowledgement. Perhaps, life as the pre-Socratic philosophers articulated is relentlessly in a state of constant flux or unrest, so is semantics, as it appears.

Nevertheless, it is not for nothing that Okoh integrated Lincoln's designation of democracy as an epigram in her *A Haunting Past*, where she calls to mind some fundamental questions thus; is the epigram a sarcastic reference to the Nigeria democracy upon which the action is actually set? Could it be that Nigeria democracy is a parody of Lincoln's view of democracy? Or is it meant to remind the native reader and critic, who is the primary target audience, the basic tenets of democracy that the trajectory of his society's political system has far long lost direction? Whatsoever purpose the epigram in particular aims to serve, one point remains critical to address: if Nigeria is truly a democratic polity in relation to her political reality, x-rayed in *A Haunting Past*, then the concept of democracy is, indeed, in a dire need of a “critical re-examination and re-evaluation”.

Theoretical Framework

This research is carefully driven to its destination point by means of Vilfredo Pareto's Elite theory. Elite theory is one theory that is particular to political science and is floated with a notional perspective that a community's affairs are best handled by a small subset of its members and whereas, in modern societies such, an arrangement is in fact inevitable. These two tenets are ideologically akin but logically detachable. In content however, Pareto's design clearly argue but in grieve that power is rotated among the elite class, this simple explains that those in governmental positions are mainly there in inheritance based on their elitist background. They substitute these reputable offices for their like kinds. Fatima Ahmed informs righteously by stating thus;

It is understood that this idea was begun by Pareto and Mosca in 1935 the law of elite rotation, in line with the above assumption and to support the argument elite theory sees elites as players governing the state and national resources and occupying key positions relating to power networks. (32)

By implication however, it is by this deduction that the researcher is set to say that the elites and the ruling class are controlling everything, both power and labour. Hence, in coloration with the research's topic, it is perceived that the boycotting of democracy and the obvious foul play act of godfatherism is largely a strategy of maintaining the elitist reign in important political office meanwhile in consequent effect; the majority remain at the mercy of the ruling class from generation to generation.

An Overview of the Action

Okoh's *A Haunting Past* is set in the country house of Mr. Beberu under a tensed atmosphere of a gubernatorial election in the Zingala state of the *Republic of Reginia*, a hypothetically African nation. According to popular agreement, Mr. Beberu is the favourite in the election, even though his party's primary election is yet to be conducted. This is because he had endeared himself to the electorate by taking his campaigns, whereas, "they were only told,' erstwhile, 'to vote for a palm tree, a cocoa tree, a cork, a bundle of yam, a horn, or something else, without really meeting the faces behind those symbols". On the eve of his primary election, Mr. Beberu hosts party supporters in his house with a firm belief of becoming his party's gubernatorial flag-bearer the next day. Conversely, his *godfather* arrives and informs him privately that Great Dada, a colossal character and the most

prominent figure in the National Democratic Party, has ordered him to step down for Robnus, his unpopular rival in the primary election. After a nervous contention against the order, Mr. Beberu hesitantly concedes and steps aside for Robnus to become the party's unopposed gubernatorial flag-bearer. But, afterwards, Mr. Beberu confines himself indoors, clearly miserable and depressed at his unfair twist of fate.

Again, Mr. Beberu's Uncle and his godfather solicit support from Great Dada on his behalf and secure a senatorial slot for him, as a form of compromise for his terminated gubernatorial ambition. But, in turn, Mr. Beberu is expected to end his solitary confinement and assist in Robnus' gubernatorial campaign to muster adequate public support for victory. Afraid of the possible implications of Mr. Beberu's reluctance to fulfil this demand, his wife, Mrs. Beberu, takes up the mantle and rallies for Robnus in the state, in the company of her spouse's Campaign Team. Her effort, however, fails to sway to Robnus' favour the public appeal the candidate of the rival party had acquired, probably since Mr. Beberu was forced to step aside in the race. Yet, Robnus goes on to inquisitively win the election in the end. Straightaway, the Beberus surreptitiously leaves the country, afraid of the repercussion of the malpractices made in the election; and the play ends with the screams of the *PRO* as his colleagues in the Campaign Team drag him away in order to conceal their foul involvement in the election.

The quest for political victory, which is indeed the apposite to democracy, is the incentive driving the plot of *A Haunting Past*. The general penchant of the characters' impulse towards this end gives victory a conquest demeanour herein. This is because, as it appears, only a winner takes it all. Thus, all of the characters could be observed in their frantic anticipation of self-aggrandizing stakes: for Great Dada, it is political consolidation; for Mr. Beberu's godfather, it is political survival; for Mr. Beberu, it is political glory; for Mrs. Beberu, it is pomp and grandeur; for Mr. Beberu's uncle, it is the benefits of political inducements; for the Chief Campaign Strategist, it is the joy of a fulfilled "dream"; and for the rest of the Campaign Team, and everyone summarily, a "prosperous future". Hierarchically, the members of the Campaign Team may be seen as the crony characters in the play, but it is on their shoulders that the greater brunt of duty for the procurement of victory lies. One could easily observe the dissipated proclivity of their characters in tangible terms, yet it would be unfair to discourse their deeds without reference to the influence of their elite superiors in whose hands they are mere instruments.

To understand the philosophy of elitism, Dye and Harmon submit that:

The disintegrating effect of elites' leverage in a democratic society is a theme well reflected in the action. It may be true that the concept of elitism is central in every political organization since all societies are run by elites (2).

Taking the concept of elitism further, Janda et al. inform thus; "Advantaged by their vast wealth and business connections, the elites influence important government decisions" (49). It is instructive to submit that change in government virtually never affects the powerful and the privileged, they enjoy in the polity, because as critical political stakeholders, they cannot run for elective positions, they rather sponsor their loyalists onto key positions in the government to rule in their stead. This according to Dye and Harmon is particularly to ensure that changes in public policies will remain incremental rather than revolutionary (3). On the contrary, Ujo asserts that, the relationship between these elites and their surrogates often turn sour whenever the latter fails to dance to their tune (324). This, in particular, is the rationale behind Mr. Beberu's political Waterloo in the action.

Mr. Beberu had previously served in the cabinet of Great Dada as a minister. However, in the course of his service, he failed to exhibit adequate marks of commitment to the administration and loyalty to Great Dada who had appointed him. His political mentor, Godfather, reveals thus:

He said that all the time you were a junior minister, and next, a minister, you never for once opened your mouth during cabinet meetings. The only time you did was when he asked you to say the opening prayers. Then, you kept going on, and on, muttering something to yourself that nobody could understand. When you finally said 'In Jesus' name', everybody quickly shouted, 'Amen!'

As previously noted, it is significant for the elites (who we will, henceforth, ideally address with the godfather's appellation for contextual convenience) that their surrogates maintain absolute allegiance to them in both actions and inactions. Although it is not said that Mr. Beberu had acted disloyally towards Great Dada, but his infamous inaction in his master's service, nonetheless, was quickly spotted as a perfidious act by the shrewd politician, Great Dada.

Typically, there usually exists competition for power amongst godfathers, wherever they are found, demonstrated as a clash of interests. This could be seen in the subtle rivalry between Great Dada and Mr. Beberu's mentor. Mr. Beberu, who nurtures a repugnance attitude towards Great Dada, had previously found himself

precariously situated between a petulant disputes of the pair, and had allowed his feeling of preference to ruin his stake in the business of power. Greene, in his iconic text: *The 48 Laws of Power* observes that:

Oftentimes when a conflict breaks out (between contenders of power), you are tempted to side with the stronger party, or the one that offers you apparent advantages in an alliance. This is a risky business. First, it is often difficult to foresee which side will prevail in the long run. But even if you guess right and ally yourself with the stronger party, you will find yourself swallowed up and lost, or conveniently forgotten, when they become victors. Side with the weaker, on the other hand, and you are doomed. (153-54)

Mr. Beberu obviously failed in this “business”. Not only had he taken side in the dispute between the moguls, he aligns himself with the weaker side who happens to be his godfather. Having made his preference, however, his godfather ever since has been supportive; embracing his political cause as he would for a son. He quickly points out this fact when Mr. Beberu questions his honesty for imploring him to give up his gubernatorial ambition for Robnus at Great Dada’s behest thus:

I call you my son. You have been very loyal to me. Even when everybody abandoned me when I was having some problems with Great Dada, you stood by me. How can I now sell your trust in me?

Inarticulateness and reclusion are traits that cannot be innately pinned to the character of Mr. Beberu. His unreserved temperament is attested to by the people-oriented nature of his gubernatorial campaign and his candid outbursts of anger against Great Dada’s order for his gubernatorial resignation. However, when Mr. Beberu decides to concede to Great Dada, reluctantly albeit, he develops strange traits of reservation and reclusion, in order to protest his godfather’s evident alliance with Great Dada. This shift in character resembles Mr. Beberu’s erstwhile manner of silence while in Great Dada’s cabinet, as a result of which Great Dada perceived him as a disloyal disciple. Although Great Dada points to a certain corrupt deed of Mr. Beberu while he was a minister, which is the rationale of the play’s title, as the reason why he must step down from the gubernatorial race in Zingala state, Great Dada had seen through Beberu and knew he was not committed to him and his emergence as a governor would only make him a formidable foe. Being an erratic character himself, Great Dada obviously knew Mr. Beberu’s tongue-tied attitude while in his service was a demonstration of his displeasure invariably towards his authority. Hence, in regards to Mr. Beberu’s

gubernatorial aspiration, Great Dada questions his political aptitude, as revealed by Beberu's godfather, for, as it appears, a disloyal disciple cannot make a "worthy" leader:

When I first hinted him that I was proposing you for the post, he retorted: 'That man! How can he be a governor? Or, are you telling me that in the whole of your state, there are no people more worthy of that position?'

Utter loyalty is the law mandated on loyalists in their conducts concerning every affair of interest to their godfathers. Like a puppet, a loyalist remains the sheep, his godfather the shepherd. Hence, for the sake of strategic guidance and invaluable supports, the former listens to the latter's voice alone, irrespective of whatsoever command it conveys. Mr. Beberu knows this so well, and would not claim ignorance while in Great Dada's cabinet. However, he reveals his only observance of this law in the service of his godfather afterwards instead when he said to his godfather, "...in the past, I served you obediently. I committed every kind of atrocities to prove my loyalty to you".

Politics in Africa is "murky water" that African playwrights know too well not to dive into, but to wade in step after step. The inclemency of its current in the face of Africans' explorations of the dramatic art is heightened in contexts of categorical reference to some *larger-than-life* identities in a manner that exposes their dirty linens to public scrutiny. Essentially for this reason, the playwright Okoh seeks to diffuse the setting of *A Haunting Past* onto a dissimulating continental expanse by stating definitely in the opening stage direction thus, "...as much as possible, the (other) characters in the play should wear exotic African costumes from different parts of Africa ...to make it difficult to tell what part of Africa they are from". However, to set facts straight, Okoh's *A Haunting Past* is set in Nigeria, and probably in the atmosphere of the 2007 elections in the country, as revealed in a number of innuendos scattered randomly within the action.

Content and Contextual undertone in Okoh's *A Haunting Past*

Nigeria became an independent state on the 1st of October 1960 after years of colonial experience. Wright observes that "Ever since, it has had four different constitutions and democratic republics, each periodically truncated by, sometimes bloody, military coups" (468). In a related development, Ujo and Alli inform that "The First Republic began with the 1963 republican constitution and was abruptly terminated following the military overthrow of the civilian government on 15th

January 1966 by Majors Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Emmanuel Ifeajuna clique (22 & 208). Wright continues thus, “The Second Republic was launched in 1979. But, like its predecessor, it shrank gradually with extreme corruption” (468). This informs Nnamani to submit that “Eventually, it fell with re-entrance of the military following an incredible election in 1983” (187). Enefe was not wrong when he observed that:

The Second Republic was expected to be an era of rising hope coming not long after the demise of the heroic Murtala and morally bankrupt Obasanjo regimes. However, the politicians of the Second Republic appeared to have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing from the military interregnum that consigned them to the background. It is difficult to understand the attitude of the politicians, but then it might have stemmed from the fact that the Nigerian political elites as have as their main mission in politics, in the first instance, wealth accumulation to match their imperialist created tastes (105-6).

The 1993 elections that followed were expected to launch a new and economically viable republic. However, this republic ended abruptly following Ibrahim Babangida’s annulment of the presidential election in which Chief Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim businessman, was the obvious winner (Wright, 468). Finally, on 29th of May 1999, amidst much fanfare, a Fourth Republic was birthed by the transitory regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar after an electoral protocol in which the soldier turned civilian Olusegun Obasanjo emerged winner (Enefe 197). Till date, Nigeria has continued on the path of *democracy* with a constitutional provision for periodic elections.

Although democracy is not only about free and fair elections, free and fair elections are the heart of democratic governance (Nnamani, 187). Nigerians were apparently disenchanted in their state due to the acts of hog-wild heads of state during the days of juntas. But with the promises of democracy in the prospective in the Fourth Republic, everyone believed that free and fair elections is the only way to restore public confidence in the Nigerian government and salvage the nation from its skulking doom. However, prior to the publication of Okoh’s *A Haunting Past*, Campbell notes, “none of the elections-1999, 2003 and 2007 that have taken place since the nation’s ostensible return to civilian rule has met international standard for credibility” (115). As touching the 1999 election, Maier observes that:

There were widespread reports of cheating, ballot box stuffing, phantom voting booths, and consequently an impossible high turnout. Some districts recorded a

turnout of hundred percent even though observers reported that voting had been light. In others, voters turned up to find the polling station closed and all the ballots marked. Even Obasanjo's friend Jimmy Carter could not endorse the proceedings. 'Regrettably', he said, 'it is not possible for us to make an accurate judgment about the outcome of the presidential election'. It was as many Nigerians say, not an election but a selection (38).

In the conspicuously stage-managed 2003 presidential election that followed, Wright submits that "Olusegun Obasanjo emerged winner once again over a fellow ex-military leader, Muhammadu Buhari" (468). Alemika however brings to bare that

Despite a record of maximum turnout in the collation of the elections' results, the report of the postelection survey conducted by the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division and the United Nations Development Programme (UNEAD/UNDP) for the 2003 elections revealed that the fear of violence prevented a significant proportion of the electorate from voting (135).

Subsequently, in the 2007 presidential election, International and domestic observers estimated total turnout at no more than 14 million, and some observers argued that, in fact, it was as low as 5 million. Yet, the Independent National Electoral Committee (INEC) announced Yar'Adua, an unpopular candidate, winner of 24 million votes; Muhammadu Buhari about 6.6 million votes; and Atiku Abubakar, the incumbent vice-president, about 2.5 million votes—a total of more than 33 million ballot, Campbell observes. 105 Despite this widespread of hoax, the 2007 elections were flawed by a momentous rate of brutality. Consequently, Campbell avers that:

The Human Rights Watch revealed in its 2009 World Report that 300 people died during the 2007 elections due to „election-related-violence". In the light of these inglorious antidemocratic occasions, there was a consensus that the elections of 2007 were the worst since the specious restoration of democracy in 1999, despite embarrassing and patently false claims to the contrary from President Olusegun Obasanjo, President-elect Yar'Adua, and the INEC Chairman, Maurice Iwu (107).

Electoral violence has been a classic template in Nigerian democracy. Perhaps, this is because the stakes of victory are high, Alemika observes. (124) in a related development, Amieye-Ofori upholds that:

The national polity has been a dark recess of untold riches, since the boom in oil wealth was first witnessed in the 1900s. Therefore, in order to acquire political

relevance and gain access into the riches, there has been an unbridled quest for power, and ruthlessness against perceived political opponents has been a norm. (42)

In this regard, owing to the ethno-religious tensions prevalent in the Nigerian society, politicians have for years vigorously manipulated the people by sponsoring violence for personal aggrandizement. This has prompted World Report thus, “since the end of military rule in 1999 more than 12, 000 Nigerians have lost their lives in ethnic, religious and political clashes” (95). Sequel from the foregoing, Ojo submits that:

This violent propensity of Nigerian politicians is notably one of the vestiges of the nation’s political military past—the soldiers in governance during the days of juntas obviously influenced politics in Nigeria through their world views and philosophy which does not leave room for opposition (633).

Kukah however supports Ojo when volunteers that “More so, by gaining legitimacy through violence, the soldiers psychologically elevated and institutionalized violence as part of the artifacts on the altar of the quest for power”. (4) Conspicuously, since the first entrance of the military into the Nigeria’s political sphere in 1966, the Nigerian military has developed an unquenchable thirst and hunger for political and civil power, Alli informs (208). Therefore as the political space advanced, what seems like a civil reappeared in the political space, thus, Ojo supplies that, “So, with the return of democracy in 1999, a significant number of the former military Generals retired and metamorphosed into civilians, in order to become eligible for elective posts in the new democratic dispensation” (633). The success of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military head of state, in the 1999 poll indicates the residual power of military leaders in the present republic, and, curiously, the subsequent presidential election in 2003 was contested by two former military leaders, Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari, with a third, Ibrahim Babangida, bidding his time for 2007 election”, Wright submits. 468). Just like the military leaders in the past had pointed to corruption as a reason for their takeover, Bienen provides that; “these civilian Generals pointed to the ‘urgent need to combat corruption’ in the country and an alleged dearth of integrity amongst *bloody civilians* in politics as the reasons why they should principally appeal to the electorate” 234). In this regard, the holier-than-thou self-image of this class of politicians, Alli the former military governor of Plateau State and retired Nigerian Army Major General affirms that:

The Nigerian military has since the introductory coup of 15 January 1966 come to savor the spoils of conquest over the political class. It continues to seek to retain political authority with a single-mindedness and adroitness that could not be duplicated on the battlefields of Liberia and Sierra Leone—without an equivalent preciseness and audacity. Being military men accustomed to exercising power and authority, we have tasted the succulent fruits of dripping political power, and therefore are unwilling to let go. We even have the effrontery to suggest, and in fact, impress on the Nigerian and world communities, that unless a soldier rules the Nigerian state, it is certain to collapse under the weight of intrinsic problems. Unfortunately, we are not telling the world that we created most of these problems and nurtured them inadvertently, from our self-righteousness. We were told that unless General Babangida continued as self-styled president, Nigeria would disappear into thin air. We heard the same balderdash over Sani Abacha's transmutation rigmarole. Not surprisingly though, the Nigerian loves to exhibit office and exercise power, why not the Nigerian soldiers also? We are all Africans after all, better still, Nigerians. (209)

Nigeria's form of democracy has almost defiled all forms of democracy as practised world over. Thus, Held submits that "As the protective theorists of democracy rightly said, the essence of democracy is its intrinsic capacity for citizens to replace one government by another and, hence, protect themselves from the risk of political decision-makers transforming themselves into an immovable force" (166). The Nigerian political class seems to have quashed the whole system as they have found a way to protect themselves against this „intrinsic capacity for citizens" in Nigeria's democracy. In order to acquire the flexibility for a third term in office, President Olusegun Obasanjo had proposed an amendment of the constitution which only has a provision for a maximum of two terms. This practical attitude prompted his deputy, Vice-president Atiku Abubakar to openly oppose the plan, and the legislative arm of government, in the long run opposed the so-called constitutional reform. In swift reaction, the People's Democratic Party suspended Atiku Abubakar and handpicked Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, at the behest of Obasanjo, as the successor of the president in order to scupper Atiku's presidential ambition. Notably, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was the brother of Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, the general who deputised General Olusegun Obasanjo "first missionary journey", that is between 1976-1979 in military government.

Though Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was largely unknown amongst the national electorate in comparison to the other candidates which include Peter Odili, Atiku Abubakar, who had decamped from other parties, his anonymity mattered less as

one with Obasanjo appeared to be the majority. This informs Falola and Matthew to submit that “unsurprisingly, Yar’Adua swiftly became the frontrunner in the election following Obasanjo’s endorsement and the eventual winner in what was a massive presidential victory for PDP, as usual. (275) This is an evidence of the ability for political elites to influence public consensus in Nigerian democracy. This art has, however, been in vogue before now. Bienen provides that “In the past, the juntas created institutions in which civilian politicians could participate, but where they would also be used and controlled to influence the opinion of the masses in the country (197). In the present republic, the political elites sit at the apex of Nigerian politics as larger-than-life personalities, dictating the pendulum of public policies directly or through their surrogates. The lists of these godfathers usually include Abdulsalami Abubakar, Danjuma, Ibrahim Babangida, and, of course, Olusegun Obasanjo, Amieye-Ofori informs (45). Notably, only Danjuma was not a former head of state (Campbell 27). In the course of seeking political domination in the polity, frequent rivalries usually exists amongst the godfathers, customarily to the detriment of the helpless masses.

This trending political style which has not benefited the continent positively has in many ways resulted into sleaze at the climatic level. Thus, Sofola submits that “Wielding of power by godfathers, upon whom the brunt of leadership falls, is a West African political tradition which has not necessarily been associated with corruption” (13). On the contrary, Campbell volunteers that “But the Nigerian style of godfather domination, fuelled by corruption, emerged from the confluence of the militarization of governance and the immense, sudden amounts of oil wealth” (24). Nevertheless, not all godfathers in Nigeria today have been military officers or politicians. There are personalities amongst the class of *bloody civilians* who have made ascent onto the prominent sphere of the national polity as revered godfathers. Conversely, Campbell avers that “there are powerful civilian godfathers at the regional and state levels, who from time to time subordinate themselves to the godfathers at the national level” (Campbell 27).

This occasional coalition between the godfathers in the state and federal levels is witnessed in the questionable political union of Mr. Beberu’s godfather and the colossal Great Dada. From his exalted post in the Republic of Reginia, Great Dada decrees that his godson, Robnus, should stand unopposed in the race for gubernatorial victory in the National Democratic Party (NDP) even when Robnus was unpopular amongst the electorate, unlike Mr. Beberu who is “the choice of people”. However, in order to strengthen his political base in the state amidst other

aggrandizements, Mr. Beberu's godfather concedes to Great Dada and aligns his endeavours to his agenda at the expense of Mr. Beberu interest.

Amidst other things, one noticeable feature in the eventual conduct of the gubernatorial election in Zingala State is the defective performance of FEDECO, the electoral commission charged with the superintending elections in the Republic of Reginia. Therefore in response to the attitude of the FEDECO officials towards the thugs sent by the ruling party, NDP, to snatch ballot materials and disrupt the conduct of the poll, the Manager of Mr. Beberu's campaign team conjectures, "With their bank accounts smiling broadly, they must have operated fully with the boys". This confident speculation echoes the popular distrust of Nigerians on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which oversees elections in the present republic. Nevertheless, FEDECO is christened after Nigeria's now defunct Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) that oversaw the infamous 1983 elections that served as a rationale for the military sack of the Second Republic. The decision of Okoh to employ FEDECO in *A Haunting Past* instead of INEC is, perhaps, to make vague, through alienation, the categorical political actuality that served as the backdrop of the action. However, just like the Fourth Republic elections which were marred by high levels of fraud and misdeeds, the 1983 elections conducted by FEDECO was blemished by reports of irregularities and malpractices which were sufficient to question the validity of the election results as a whole. Yet, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), like NEC and INEC after it, claimed that the elections were free and fair, Maitambari informs (70). Arguably, therefore, it does not really matter who the playwright employs, FEDECO, NEC or INEC, to expose the wild fraudulent propensities of Nigeria's electoral commission in her contemporary superficial democratic dispensation since both NEC and INEC are chips off the old block.

In respect to the dearth of democracy in the Republic of Reginia as result of the acts of unscrupulous politicians, the Public Relation Officer (*PRO*) of Mr. Beberu's campaign team pointed to the corruption in political system which he claims is the "legacy we inherited from the military regime". Afterwards, the Campaign Manager precisely points out that the "directive (which) came from above" that the "election was a do-or-die affair" was the basis for the anti-democratic deeds that tainted the Zingala gubernatorial election. This assertion is in consonance to the revelation made by Mrs. Beberu concerning Great Dada while convincing her spouse to yield to the directive of the political mogul:

He said: 'Winning this election is a do-or die affair!' So, I am afraid. If you fail to help, he will not let you go scot-free. Remember what happened to Aloba Egi, to the Zanza of Megara and a host of others. They were all eliminated for stepping on Great Dada's big toe. So, we must not aggravate him or give him any reason to doubt our loyalty.

This directive from Great Dada bares him as the character sketch of the Nigerian ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo. Having failed in the bid to alter the country's constitution in order to make legitimate his bid for a third term in office, just like Great Dada, handpicks Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who was his loyalists, as his successor in order to maintain his influence on the polity through the surrogate after he steps down. To ensure the victory of Yar'Adua in the presidential election, Alemika writes, Obasanjo "insisted and advocated that the 2007 election was a 'do-or-die affair'" (124). In obeisance, the People's Democratic Party, which was the ruling party, and the Independent National Electoral Commission unsurprisingly allied in a mutual understanding that led to an election marred by sequential rigging at every stage of the balloting, counting and tabulation process that culminated in an incredible *final* vote totals (Campbell, 108).

The representation of Nigerian democracy in Okoh's *A Haunting Past* remains a painful oxymoron in reality till this day, and it is extraordinarily eye-catching to observe the influence of crooked politicians over the elaborate electoral malpractices and irregularities obtainable in its practice. The dispensation of this brand of democracy is, unmistakably, an utter disappointment and regret of Nigerians' expectation of democracy in a Fourth Republic. Thus, Amieye-Ofori brings to light that, "it is considered a wasted effort trying to exercise one's franchise today in an election whose results have been pre-determined" (42-3). As a corollary, it is in all probability fair to say that Nigeria's political elites, both the bloody civilians and the civilian Generals, have failed the masses (Wright 467). If this is indeed the unfortunate situation, who do the helpless masses turn to for guidance and progressive direction in Nigeria?

The Playwright and his Society

A playwright and his society naturally relate mutually. First and foremost, the society provides the playwright the blueprint for his creativity; and this is the *raison d'être* or underlying principle for the maxim that "Drama mirrors life". However, society in this sense is relative. It is the life coloured by the nature of a

particular society that fashions the appearance of a playwright's artistic expression. The playwright does not write in a vacuity. Even when he speaks of a universal phenomenon like the wind, he speaks in respect of that invariably affected by the topography of his society. This bears witness to the sense of relativity in the dramatic dispensation of an artist's creative muse-in this sense, different playwrights in different societies who write about the wind will only reproduce that which is relative to each other's societal reality.

On the other hand, a society depends on its playwrights for moral strength. As a result, the end of the dramatic art is the edification of the society. To this end, Chekhov informs that "plays purify the morals and uphold the values of a society. (23) So, the call to dramatists is invariably a call to vigilance. The playwright, therefore, is attentive to the conducts of the members of his society in order to exalt rectitude or to expose their foul deeds, whenever found, in the therapeutic air of didactic compositions. In consonance, Yetunde observes that:

The *playwright* is the watch man in his society. He is the people's secret police. It is his duty to shift out information and to bring the *culprits* to the people's court. The court in this sense is the open theatre where the hidden, the concealed and the guarded are exposed not for the people's pleasure but for their information and if possible necessary action. (52)

This does not mean that drama is all about learning alone; pleasure being useless to it. Pleasure, as a matter of fact, is central to the free spirit of relaxation upon which the conscious manifestation of man's instinct of imitation is witnessed. But it becomes a full-fledged derivative with the unification of the various elements of dramatic art, galvanized not for pleasure chiefly, but for the edification of the people's mind. Without pleasure, however, drama would be a hackneyed representation of mundane and humdrum life with no spectacle to hold the audience who should be reasonably horrified to witness for the second time the affliction of ordinary life. Nevertheless, Gbilekaa inspires that "as Aristophanes contented: the duty of the artist is not only to offer pleasure, but to teach moral and political lessons" (1). Hence, edification of the mind remains the chief pursuit of the playwright; pleasure being the by-product, sometimes generated inadvertently in the playwright's pursuit. The playwright is, therefore, the moral watchdog of his society; exposing the acts of citizens in the illumination generated by the elements of the art for all to perceive in complete dimensions the just or ignoble deeds of men so as exalt propriety or impound impunity to sin and effect decorum amongst the people. Recognition of the scenic conditions of the dramatic atmosphere is

invariably the rankest impression that a citizen experiences in the work of an indigenous playwright who has fulfilled his duty through his play. So, just as Lorca, Federico García (1899-1936) said of theatre, a play which „does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine colour of its landscape and its spirit, with laughter or with tears” (59), cannot call itself a play. It is no longer a new idea that every message is oriented towards a definite audience and is fully realized in the consciousness of that audience (Lotman, 380). Accordingly, Okoh’s *A Haunting Past* would strike a conscious Nigerian with a familiar countenance because therein is a „slice” of life not only germane to his society but categorically identifiable in its political clime. When the characters come alive before his eyes he may even attempt to scan his memory in search of the identities behind each one of them. This is because, as a native recipient of the art, he feels the action in full breath and is, thus, „better equipped than anyone else to appreciate the creative genius of his own society”, Lindfors offers. (2)

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is significant to invoke Rosmini’s insight that “As a matter of fact, the society is made for the sake of all its members” (35). Therefore, when there is an evident exercise of impunity by a few who see themselves as the elites in a society in such a manner that the participatory rights of other members in the society is encumbered or even obliterated, there is bound to be a feeling of cynicism and lethargy or lassitude among the people which will inversely hinder the progress of a society. This is evidently the reason for the political gloom in the Nigerian society today. Nigerians had agreed that the path of democracy is the only way forward for the country, yet, from the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 until this day, the Nigerian democracy has scarcely yielded expected dividends. The self-seeking behaviour of Nigerian political elites have not only led to the moral bankruptcy of the society, but to the bankruptcy of its democracy and associated economy. Therefore, the attempts to revive the system do not only beckon on the shoulders of the Nigerian playwrights who must teach the people by exposing the moral weaknesses of the society as demonstrated in Okoh’s *A Haunting Past*, but on the Nigerian government as well. It is not for nothing to state that if the Nigerian government wishes to demonstrate its enthusiasm and strength of mind to put Nigeria on a democratic track, it should progress to reorder and restructure the nation holistically, beginning with education, economy,

judiciary, politics and the economy, in such a manner that the citizens will be provided with legitimate opportunities to better their lots without dependence of the benevolence of unscrupulous politicians only interested on manipulating the citizens as instruments for their selfish agenda which is corrosive to the true principles of democracy. More so, without the liberal provisions intrinsic to democracy, its practice would become untrue to its root. On this note, the Nigerian government must ensure that the rights of citizens are guaranteed and that each man's vote is accounted alone in the conduct of periodic elections. If citizens are unable to enjoy the conditions for effective participation in the polity, then it is unlikely that the marginalization of the large categories of citizens in the democratic process will ever be overcome and "the government by the people" will exist in name alone, as it is today (Held 278).

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