

THE NATIVE DOCTOR IN AFRICAN DRAMA: A CASE STUDY OF BARCLAYS AYAKOROMA'S A CHANCE TO SURVIVE

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Abstract: From Sophocles' Teiresias to Ola Rotimi's Baba Fakunle to J. P. Clark's Bou-Karakarabiri to Barclays Ayakoroma's Native Doctor who calls his god Okirigudagu, the role and position of the native doctor has not received much attention from dramatic critics and theatre theorists especially from the African continent. The place of native medicine in African worldview cannot be overemphasized in the life of the African people. Despite the coming of Christianity and Islam, indigenous religious practices are still very profound amongst African people. The 'Babalawo thing' as it is mostly called in Nigeria, is viewed as a realm of the 'gifted' ones who are metaphysical in operation. As advanced as the world and indeed Africa is scientifically and technologically, African people still accord great regard to native doctors who are either consulted for benevolent or malevolent reasons. *A Chance to Survive* offers a good dimension to the analysis of the role of native doctors in African drama. It is imperative to ask the following fundamental questions: who is a native doctor? What are some of the dynamics of their operation and enterprise? Is native medicine real or a mere speculation? How better playwrights from Africa can position these magic artists in the course of pitching their works? How can governments standardize the practice of native doctors in order to corroborate orthodox and modern medicine? This paper intends to deploy the archetypal/myth critical theoretical framework to analyze and also investigate the role and position of native doctors in African drama. It is expected that there will be an improvement in the portrayal of these crucial characters in African theatre. The paper has suggested ways by which native doctors will not be used for malevolent reasons which should be portrayed by dramatists.

Keywords: Native doctor, African Drama, Metaphysics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Theatre from the classical epoch through the medieval ages to this postmodern era has veered through the spiritual world in connection with human affairs. Drama has captured the fear, joy, pain, despair and regret of generations. It has reflected and mediated through the African traditional institutions that defined how life is lived in the continent of Africa. This includes the spiritual and metaphysical worlds which are linked to the physical world. So the discourse on native medicine and the art of a native doctors or also known witch doctors is not off limit to a theatrician.

Whether as playwrights, designers, theorists or critics, the discourse on the role of native doctor in the theater has not received appreciable attention. It can be stated quite glibly here that only playwrights have portrayed these 'master artist' of the world of healing. Drama prides itself as capable of healing this ailing world of vices and social ills. This is attempted in the resolutions of the conflicts of dramatic works.

The work is an attempt to reflect on the role of a native doctor in Nigerian drama which has not received much attention so far. It is imperative and pertinent to explore this area because in real life situation these artists or healers can be used for purposes that are good or evil since the African person believes in the potency of the witchdoctor's charms and

concoctions. For example, in *A Chance to Survive*, the native doctor in the play is paid for evil purpose, but it turns negative, by affecting the evil doer; it is the same native doctor who in the end corrects the situation.

Dapo Adenugba (1981), writing about the dearth of literature on spirit mediumship and trance in African theatre opines that the study of trance and theatre in the African context can be rewarding. It is rewarding because in 1981 there were fewer or no writing on the topic of trance and African theatre. Today this challenge still abounds, especially in the aspect of a critical analysis of the role of native doctor in African drama.

2. THE NATIVE DOCTOR IN PERSPECTIVE

Just when you are watching or reading Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, you must give the three witches a special attention because they give a new dimension to the play. They have a glimpse of the future and they come in a frightful manner. The same applies to the native doctor who is seen as a seer of both good fortunes and misfortunes. In Nigerian parlance, he is referred to as JUJU man. Dillibe (1977) captures the etymology of the word juju from the French expression *jou jou* meaning a 'doll' or 'toy' and originally came into use to describe the images and charms worn by many Africans for protection against any form of danger. But in its broadest sense, the phrase incorporates all the mysteries of supernatural forces; the world of spirits, omens, curses, spells and above all sorcery. The native doctor is endowed with the supernatural acumen to deal with problems or diseases related to unseen forces. His work is that of invocation and conjuring in the spiritual realm to solve humanity's problems.

Onyeama (1977:11) when clarifying the fact that not all aspects of African life were seriously affected by western complexity says:

But one vital aspect of African culture that perpetually escaped the attempts of the west to erase, it is supernatural world of juju.

He contends that even the missionaries understood that the supernatural forms an integral part of the African's life with the practice of magic mingling closely with his/her religion that it is virtually impossible to separate the two.

There is a need for the character of a native doctor to be given some perspective in African drama. Even in the world theater space the aspects of mysticism in the characterization has not received serious critical attention. There is need to know how the character should be pitched in relation to other variables that determine its viability, vibrancy, aesthetic variation and relevance in terms of societal morality.

3. NATIVE DOCTOR IN DRAMA

Although the term 'Native doctor' has not been used in any narrative related to classical Greek drama, but the character of Tiresias falls within this category of esotericism. At the origin of drama in the 6th century BC, the Athenian society was enmeshed in pure idealistic belief typified by strict mythological pantheon. Dramas of the three famous tragedians also captured this fact. Tiresias became very influential as a personage or medium persona close to the gods, hence the need to be reserved to some space in the drama of that time. He even makes a dramatic appearance in the *Odyssey*, which Odysseus calls the spirit of the dead. "So sentient is Tiresias, even in death"

As a seer "Tiresias" was a common title for sooth-sayer through out Greek famous history. That is why he appears to be the name of a recurring character in several Greek tragedies. He appears in Euripides' *The Bacchae*; he is also a prominent character in Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*, who reveals why Thebes is in distress. He also appears in *Antigone*, warning King Creon on the need to allow the burial of Polynices.

Shakespeare also introduced the characters of the three witches who give the play, *Macbeth*, a unique dimension. In *Macbeth*, the three witches display knowledge of the future and their powers to control future happenings using their astral powers. They talk of where the three of them will meet again, in thunder, lightning or in rain, upon the heath. This usually transcends the realm of the physical world and gives the audience an aura of unusual strangeness. This is not different from the Ghost of Hamlet that appears to the guards at the palace. It intensifies the prevailing dramatic atmosphere.

Worldviews differ, that is why the development of the character of the seer in *The Gods Are not to Blame* is different from Tiresias in Sophocles' drama. For instance, Baba Fakunle casts his 'opele" and says the child would kill his father

and marry his mother (Rotimi 1971). This is not what Tiresias does in Sophocles' Oedipus. Modes of divination differ. Again, the child's legs are tied with strings of cowries indicating sacrifice to the gods. This does not happen like that in Oedipus.

J.P Clark also shows how resourceful the African continent is in his play Ozidi. In the play Ozidi is guided by his grandmother, Oreame, a super natural being who is fate. He wins his battles under her wings and also supported by the god, Tamara. Also worthy of note is the frightful character of Buakarakarabiri.

Clark, despite using western style/technique in his drama, he still incorporates relevant elements such as myths, religion, and folklore of his people. He also utilizes masks, drum rhythms, and dance as part of what add flavor and fragrance to his drama.

4. MYTH/ ARCHETYPAL, METAPHYSICS AND THE NATIVE DOCTOR

Myth/archetypal theory imply the recurring myths and images found within a work of art. Archetypes generate the form and function of literary works (Abrams, 1993). These recurring myths can be seen in narrative, symbols, images and character types in literary works. The character of the native doctor fits these forms/items mentioned.

Metaphysics which implies going beyond the physical and material world is crucial in this discourse. Metaphysics contributes a fundamental level of understanding derived from experience and advanced intuitive knowing on how things "really are". The concerns of metaphysics touch on religious and spiritual areas. It has become one philosophical variant that continues to host a lot of minds because of its propensity for escapism.

Kant (1781) opines that all our knowledge begins with experience. No knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it. This goes to coincide with the mythical/ archetypal persuasion of this writing. Recurring symbols, images and archetypes meet with the need to experience beyond the material world. If there exists on any subject a philosophy (that is, a system of rational knowledge based on concept) then these must also be for this philosophy a system of pure rational concept, independent of any condition of intuition, in other words, a metaphysics (Kant, 1780).

Metaphysics and archetypal areas give this discourse a premise upon which analysis and investigation into the nature of reality of the function and operation of a native doctor in drama. The native doctor depends not on what can be empirically evaluated, but he/she veers into astral world beyond matter. This is why rational inquiry is what is palpable in this regard. Metaphysics goes beyond physics; native doctor makes what is matter to be a subject of his operation. Its aesthetics lies in the invocation of the native doctor's creative power beyond physical space of visible creativity. His creativity occasioned by the creative powers of his/ her creator (dramatist) are emitted from among other sources, the ontology and cosmology abound within the limits of his/ her experience and knowledge.

5. THE NATIVE DOCTOR IN A CHANCE TO SURVIVE

Before a discussion on the character of the Native Doctor is done, there is a need to make it clear that the paper's concentration is on the Native Doctor, as he is called in the play. However, his role is discussed here in relation to other characters, as he cannot be discussed in isolation.

Barclays Ayakoroma is trained in drama and theatre. *A Chance to Survive* is one of the plays among the three attached to one anthology. The other two plays are: *The Rejected Ones*, which talks about the waste of human resources by opportunists and the inability of the abused and oppressed to organize themselves into meaningful ventures. The other play is *Beyond the Camp* which is a good attempt at the need to have confidence in people as the wellbeing of the individual subsequently translates into that of the society at large.

A Chance to Survive explores the theme of power at two different levels of leadership and followership (Ayakoroma, 2011). At the first level, the play is a fierce onslaught on the despicable manner in which Nigerian traditional rules cling tenaciously to political and economic power even when their unparalleled greed cause untold hardship for their subjects. This is typified by His Royal Highness (Dr) Kurokaki, the great Ibedaowei, supposed custodian of tradition and protector of his subjects, receives twenty million naira from oil company as compensation for gas explosion. Kurokaki, rather than do an equitable distribution of this amount among his subjects or spend the money judiciously for the benefit of his people, end up wasting it on taking a record seventh wife, as well as 'purchasing' an honorary doctorate degree. The

youths get wind of this. They exercise power at another level by organizing themselves under the leadership of Oloye who confronts HRH Kurokaki.

Livid, agitated and worsened by the knowledge of Oloye's romance with Princess, HRH becomes desperate and seeks the service of the native doctor to eliminate Oloye like he did to the father through 'Black magic'. The Native Doctor attempts to conjure the spirit of Oloye to appear in the shrine so that Kurokaki can use the weapon of his choice: a cutlass, a knife or a dane-gun; to kill him. But this boomerangs, the whole engagement threatening to become Kurokaki's petard. Instead of the spirit of Oloye to appear, it is that of his late father that shows at the great spiritual battle. Kurokaki in an attempt to kill the apparition of Oloye's father gets knocked down unconsciously, when the spirit hurls an invisible object at Kurokaki. Fainted at the moment, Kurokaki needs three electric fishes as a shock treatment to resuscitate him. The fishes can only be gotten from Oloye's pond because the communal lakes do not have such species of fishes. This is because the fishing rights do not belong to the people of the community; they belong to outsiders.

After much plea, Oloye gives HRH Kurokaki a chance to survive by providing the three electric fishes. This is in spite of the chief's earlier antagonism and hatred and his refusal to allow Oloye to marry his daughter, Princess. The play development signals the settlement of the feud with the hope that the leaders would correct their ways and carve an enviable future for the people. This is because the proposed marriage of Oloye and Princess and the resolution of the conflict of Kurokaki should be able to make the latter see life from a new perspective.

It is in Act one, Scene Eight that Kurokaki appears in the shrine of the Native Doctor for such a sinister act of killing Oloye. The power of the realm that the Native Doctor operates from is made known to Kurokaki when he says:

ND:(Not turning to the entrance) Remove your shoes before you come in! (HRH obeys quickly). You can now come in and greet the gods of Okirigudagu (p.46).

This reminds one of the call of Moses in the Bible after he sees the burning bush. The Bible says: "Moses! Moses!" and Moses said, "Here I am"... "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground," (Bible, 2011)

From that moment in the play, the aura of solemnity and tensed atmosphere are invoked. Some power is above others; this is why Kurokaki removes his shoes and come into the shrine. He becomes a subject to the cosmic powers that control the Native Doctor. The Native Doctor is a medium persona. The Native Doctor's power is beyond the physical world.

The next show of authority is when Kurokaki tries to explain what is happening to him, the Native Doctor stops him abruptly. Native doctor tells Kurokaki:

ND: Tah! (Feigning anger) You want to try me? You want to do my work for me?

HRH: No, I am sorry.

ND: I know why you are here. You are in the presence of Okirigudagu, the all-seeing one... the one who sees even in the dark. (He does a little divination) Aha! (Smiling). A little mosquito is buzzing in your ear...

HRH: Seriously! It does not want me to drink water (p.47).

Oloye and the other youths are pursuing a just course but Kurokaki feels threatened and challenged, meanwhile he claims to have killed Oloye's father in the recent past. He dares to eliminate Oloye again. But Kurokaki must give the gods a 'fee' in order to solve his problem as demanded by Native Doctor.

ND: You will put down the consultation fee.

HRH: You can go ahead. I will pay you very well.

ND: Uhn uhn! Even the gods are careful now since men have cultivated the funny habit of deceiving even the immortal, with boldness. And they get away with it! Money first...

HRH: ah, don't you trust me? (P. 47)

Native Doctor tells Kurokaki that Okiriguda has taught him to trust only himself. This shows the level of sacrilege and de-ritualization that a lot of African traditional practices are going through as a result of the actions of human being. The attitude of not paying sacrifices to the gods for appeasement. But Kurokaki has given more than expected by Native

Doctor. The irony is that he has not shared the twenty million naira compensation with his community people, yet he gives Native Doctor more than a normal fee. By that he has opened the hands and mouths of the gods.

Native doctor warns Kurokaki that he has seen so many things. It means that there is no reversal of action once it has started. Native doctor calls Okirigudagu, god of his father to conjure the spirit of Oloye, while Kurokaki calls Oloye to come. The practice of a native doctor, whether in actual life or drama goes beyond the physical world and is shown here by Ayakoroma where forces of nature obey and accompany a serious and cataclysmic exercise such as this. The stage direction says, 'there is lightning and thunder and in the midst of the confusion, a figure, clad in the cloth, appears in the circle. Now Kurokaki panics on seeing the face. Native doctor too is afraid, not knowing what is happening' (Ayakoroma, 2011). Native doctor asks with panic:

ND: What is this? Who is this?

HRH: This is the spirit of his dead father! I am finished!

ND: Then, kill the spirit! Go ahead! (p. 49)

Kurokaki asks a question that is sensible and correlates with the African world view of the metaphysical world.

HRH: He is already dead! How do I kill a dead man?

ND: You have to help yourself. This is your fight...

Do it! Nooow! (p. 49)

The intensity of such a moment is shown clearly by the continuous use of the exclamation mark by Ayakoroma. Now how is it Kurokaki's battle alone? This is because they see a guest from the spiritual world on a mission of justice, as the ghost of Hamlet appears at the palace to the guards. The figure laughs as Kurokaki picks the gun and tries to shoot the apparition. The figure also raises his hand and stones Kurokaki, His Royal Highness, with an invisible object. It is clear that even Native Doctor does not see the object. Perhaps what is not seen is more powerful than what is seen-metaphysics.

The stage direction states that as this happens, the figure vanishes with the eerie sound and red light and scene becomes normal. But the attack leaves Kurokaki spread eagled on the floor, unconscious, leaving Native Doctor prancing about in the shrine (Ayakoroma, 2011). This shows clearly a battle of justice and injustice; good and evil; whether in the physical world or the spiritual. The play does not indicate the source of the power of the dead man, or perhaps Okirigudagu delays to come or he is intercepted on his journey to the physical world.

Interestingly and amazingly, the show down between these two wills show how benevolent spirits always defeat the malevolent ones. If the subscription to the theory/myth/archetype of the cyclicity of the African worldview is anything to go by, it is the conviction of this paper that, Oloye's father, having lived according to morality, norms and traditions of his community, his spirit was hovering to bring the course of justice to bear on his community. He is more than a spirit; he is an ancestor. He is back at the moment of need.

The cure to the shock suffered by Kurokaki reveals the fact that there is a consensus in their way of life within the community. The chiefs tell Princess that they consult native doctors for herbs sent by their ancestors, but this generation visits hospitals for modern medicine. Even at the moment of trouble and distress, Okirigudagu is still invited to come for help and to resuscitate Kurokaki, using the three electric fishes. Adedeji (1987) argues that the ritual fervour and ethical dimension are intertwined and pressed to a point where their potency permeate the ritual experience to pave way for a new vista of life. Perhaps Kurokaki needs something shocking to happen to him from the realm he so much believes in for the lasting change to come to his community.

6. THE ROLE OF A NATIVE DOCTOR IN AFRICAN DRAMA

Drama is meant to impact on the society positively towards raising awareness about an idea, a person or a phenomenon. The native doctor helps the society and also adds value to drama. He/she is a character consisting of some aggregate attributes. He or she comes with the strip of extra-sensory perception (ESP). He is an artist that is out of the ordinary. He/she speaks and it happens whether according to his wish and that of the power that he/she relies upon or apposite of it.

One of the roles or duties of a native doctor is his /her emphasis on the mythology of society. He/she hails or claims a particular worldview different from those of other societies. Mostly, the native doctor's beliefs show his world beyond the physical one. He believes in his mythological pantheon and acts as an intermediary or a medium persona. Native Doctor in *Second Chance* calls his preferred god, Okirigudagu to foster his trade.

Drama thrives on the action and the spoken word. But when silence comes with exceptions and suspense, then it is unique to drama. Sound and silence are potent in the practice of a native doctor. Healing comes when the gods, spirits and ancestors are invited within the atmosphere required or demanded by them. Some of the spirit would prefer silence than the forbidden sound.

The role of the native doctor comes with esoteric language. A good playwright realizes that the words spoken and other components of language change with characters that operate beyond the physical world. The three witches in *Macbeth* are given a new rhyme scheme that is unique; instead of the usual iambic pentameter, they are given trochaic tetrameter (Parolt, 2010). Shakespeare introduces them at the beginning of the play to fill Macbeth with ambition. Their dialogue is some sort of chant. This is not different from chant of incantation when divination is going in a shrine. Native doctrines claim to converse in a client's presence with spirits and deities. Expressions by these characters are mostly in a difficult language, hard to decipher.

A native doctor's role elevates the atmosphere of the drama. It becomes intense because something is always at stake before he/she appears. One can imagine the atmosphere and dramatic intensity in the shrine at that moment the figure appears to Kurokaki and Native Doctor. It is not something ordinary that gets a native doctor confused. Even the spectators would be touched by the happening at the shrine.

The trade of the native doctor in drama can borrow from some of the festival traditions or ritual practices like *Izara* festival of the Amo people (Obidah, 2016) or *Bori* ritual dance (Ogunbiyi, 1981) that provide healing to people. For *Bori*, once the performer starts dancing to the music, she gets taken away in a trance. That is the moment of healing. The native doctor can sing and dance for the joy and entertainment of a higher power from which healing comes to the land.

The role of the native doctor involves pointing to the usefulness of the ecosystem. These herbs of medicinal value must be protected by communities. It is said jokingly that the abodes of the spirits are rocks, trees and water. But these features of our environment have been tampered with and the demons, malevolent spirits and the like have migrated into the human communities, bringing plaques and all kinds of ailments. These spirits travel in wind and no trees to arrest them.

The character of a native doctor provides greater vision above that of other characters. The native doctor moves attention of audience to the invisible realm. It makes theatre more larger than life. All attention moves to areas above the comprehension of spectators expect those with extra vision.

The character of the native doctor emphasizes on the primacy of sacrifice as a basic ingredient for harmony among the three worlds- living, dead and unborn. Drama and film remains the two effective avenues for the crucial communal duty of sacrifice. This is why harvest festival, planting festivals, initiation festival etc should not be allowed to fade out. The gods must be appeased in order to receive bountiful blessings from the greater realms.

The native doctor is a custodian and a medium of connection between mortality and immortality. He/she should be just and sincere. Native Doctor in *A Chance to Survive* fails in this regard, hence the twist in result of his enterprise. Instead of being the minister of truth and light, he chooses to be that of darkness and injustice. But the situation gets corrected by the healing that Kurokaki receives through his enemy's three electric fishes.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

There are two things that are at stake here: there is trouble with the trade of the native doctor in the society, and drama should attempt correcting it. In 2013, two brothers were killed by a native doctor in Lokoja as a result of 'failed' charms for protection. This is one case out of many in Africa. It is the duty of drama to put this practice into perspective, so that human life can be rescued. A lot of human sacrifices have been made for the reasons of wealth and politics which have been engineered by native doctors. It is the duty of theatre to correct such ills.

Drama cannot be silent in the face of any cultural practice that creates wounds rather than heal them in the society. There is no practice that is sacrosanct to the probing drive and quest of art, not even that of native/witch doctors. This is why

Ayakoroma and many other playwrights have ventured into it through art. The service of the native doctor becomes the last resort of most Africans in moments of trouble and distress. It ought to attract the critical attention of dramatists and theorists in theatre and film.

8. CONCLUSION

The role of the native doctor has not received much attention from dramatists and critics and native doctors are busy with their trade, hurting people and even killing others. This practice which is part of the cosmology, anthology and mythology of the African people has been hijacked by crooks, desperadoes and ill-mannered people. It has to be rescued. If not, people will continue suffering silently while those that should rise against it are quiet.

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