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Interplay of art and post-independent Nigerian politics in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*

By:

Dennis Adebayo AKINDUTIRE

Department of English University of Johannesburg South Africa.

220076867@student.uj.ac.za, daakindutire@gmail.com

Akintunde Olaoluwa AKINTARO

Department of English and Literary Studies Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Nigeria.

aoakintaro@lautech.edu.ng, olaoluwakintaro@gmail.com

Corresponding author: 220076867@student.uj.ac.za

Abstract

This paper directs a consideration of facts towards deciphering the nature and composition of politics in Nigeria after the period of colonialism and apartheid rule. Cascading verily from the early part of the post-independence era down to a modern era, a critical analysis will be made of politics through the textual analysis of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*.

This paper makes a thematic consideration of Ola Rotimi's '*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*' and utilizes the storyline which borders superciliously on the political abuse of the post-colonial era and unsatisfactorily shows the extent of disillusionment that accompanied the writing ambience of that time concerning the political sphere.

Ola Rotimi's masterpiece emerged as a descriptive work instigating an exposure of the political era; a time when the political elites became unhealthily preoccupied with power tussle and abuse. Thus, this paper exposes the loopholes by reflecting literally on the theme of Ola Rotimi's play.

Keywords:

Ola Rotimi, Post Independent politics, Post Colonial theory, Nigerian politics, Political elites.



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1.0 Introduction

Ola Rotimi had carved a niche for himself in Nigerian and African literature by distinctively distinguishing himself as one with a penchant for the writing of Nigeria's pre-literate culture. At a time when playwrights demonstrated their approval or disapproval of certain social phenomena through drama writing, Ola Rotimi also shot himself out into the spotlight and evolved with a preoccupation in political engineering (Ajayi, 2012). Many other African writers have captured and influenced the development and dynamism of politics especially in the post-colonial African societies. This is perhaps, because intellectualism in Nigeria, is inherently involved in politics, in that most of the intellectual elites at the time of independence were also political elites.

According to Kolawole (1974), the most sensitive point within a society is a writer. This reinforces the fact that literature in Nigeria often circumnavigates around politics and has reflected the political composition in post-independent Nigeria. Apart from Ola Rotimi, Chinua Achebe is a sui generis example of these writers. Achebe's writings spanned dogmatically and with aplomb from the colonial era down to the period of post-apartheid rule. His pattern of writing in conjunction with politics kept evolving successively as the situation of politics in the country changed.

By instigating a cross-examination of his creative writing, we can paint a mesmerizing picture of the political sphere with a high extent of accuracy. Chinua Achebe's first concurring rebuttal against the political abuse of Nigeria as well as on the role of writers in exposing this malaise in order to help remedy it was staged in his lecture tagged, 'Role of a Writer in a New Nation'. This lecture was delivered with substantial trickle out effects in the year 1964. To Achebe, the post-independent Nigeria was what he called 'New Nigeria' thus, he expected and charged other writers to help build the New Nigeria through constructive critical writing.

According to Ayo Kehinde (2008) the multifaceted colonial and postcolonial understandings of African countries have thrown Africans into sharp relief the saliency and succession of experiences, particularly in societies that experiences failing democracy. In other words, the former colonies, after independence are trying to fully grasp and differentiate their experiences during colonialism, neocolonialism and self-governance specifically in places where democracy is not fully reflected and abuse of political power. Kehinde *ibid* stresses further that, African writers, unlike their western counterparts are committed to discussing and projecting the nagging challenge of elusive good political leadership in their nations. This has constantly being a popular discourse in the academic setting. This research is an attempt to examine the intervention of literature in the political leadership of post-independence African countries, most significantly, Nigeria. It is opined that literature attempts to interrogate the history of Nigeria's politics since independence. Nigerian writers, specifically, African writers do not adopt the mantra of "art for art sake" adopted by their western writers, rather African writers believe in the utilitarian purpose of art. Writers therefore have consistently use art as a means of capturing the post-independence leadership trajectory in Africa. This is done with the satirical deployment of wits, irony, innuendo or outright exposition of leadership wickedness in post-independence African setting. Kehinde *ibid* notes that this is apparent in the works writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Bandele-Thomas, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Bode Sowande among others.

Over the years and consequently many writers have come to understand that no society can exist independent of its literature and literature is supposed to circumnavigate around the society. Literature as we know has become a glorious part of the rich culture and heritage of Nigerian society.

In all aspects, especially of nation building, literature has interplayed all cards and fulfilled its worth of uniqueness. It is logical to say that literature that does not enhance exposure of the socio-political status quo of a country becomes nothing.

According to Aristotle, man is a political animal, thus, politics should be placed in the limelight of literature. In underscoring the works of Ola Rotimi, insightful consideration will resuscitate the fact that he grappled with the issues of politics and sovereignty in his literary works. Essentially, Rotimi was constructive in addressing the political affairs of post-colonial Nigeria without initiating a razzmatazz in the literary sphere. In Ola Rotimi's plays, he presents post-colonial politics in Nigeria as a form of bureaucracy which levels dogmatically on the synergy between absolutism and the limited feudalism.

Apart from Ola Rotimi's 'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again', other plays engage with issues of post-colonial Nigeria. In *Odewale, Odewale*, tragic presence and characteristic pessimism initiated a course through which he walked to his doom. In a similar vein, Kurunmi sets a track record of dignified pride which still sets ablaze his masculinity in a fire of defeat while causing his frustration and defeat to have a trickle-down effect on the supporters of his course. Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'* like these plays also majors and the post-coloniality of politics circumnavigated around the excesses of Lejoka Brown. His excesses transcend his political misguidance and cascades into polygamy. Thus, corruption in post-colonial Nigeria is satirized in the personality of Lejoka Brown who stands out as a tragic hero in the game of vote and party followership. This paper on that note seeks to analyse the nature of politics in the post independent era of Nigeria with Ola Rotimi's hero Lejoka Brown as a referential element of study.

2.0 A Synopsis of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'* is a satire which circumnavigates typically around Major Lejoka Brown and his household. In the play, Lejoka Brown was a soldier before returning from the United States of America and also a man of many wives. While fighting in the Congo he met Liza and wedded her in the registry thereby legalizing their union. Liza is unaware of Mama Rashida, Lejoka's wife inherited upon the death of his brother. Still, when Lejoka Brown returns to Nigeria to venture into the game of politics, he acquires Sikira for himself. Shikira is the daughter of the president of the National Union of Nigerian Market Women, thus, Lejoka Brown acquires her as a wife not for love but as an object of political expediency.

Liza returns rather smartly to unravel this hidden mystery. With these revelations, the regular discordance common in polygamous homes set into the household of Lejoka Brown and breeds enmity which is transmogrified to power, something beneficial to the women folks all thanks to Liza.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

To understand the status quo of politics and its nature in the post-colonial Nigerian system, it is best to decipher the distinctions among pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Unlike the pre-colonial Nigeria which is the pre-literate era drenched and immersed in the traditions and cultures of historic Nigeria, the colonial era in the Nigerian history saw the introduction of eurocentric perspective and ideologies which obviously almost evicted the already established traditionalisms of the territory now called Nigeria (Sthil, 2015).

These established values of traditionalistic propensities were considered by the apartheid rulers as beliefs propagated by impudence in opposition to liberalism and modernism. In Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'*, the thematic spotlight is casted on the hero as a product of the pre-colonial and colonial process, only that he is given a privilege of service in the post-colonial era within which he dabbles with the issues of corruption in politics (Darnes, 1999).

It creates an analysis of the post-colonial politics of Nigeria through a textual analysis of Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'*, thus, it is most appropriate and plausible to ostensibly utilise the postcolonial theory. The post-colonial theory becomes essentially considered epistemically and highlights the core value which is opined as a classified body of fundamental opinions and thoughts concerned with the pernicious effects of eurocentrism on the various areas of politics, sociology and even economy (Krieger, 1963).

According to proponents of this theory, the claims are invariably rejected against the barricades of colonization and European modernism. According to Kumar (2011), the region of Europe is most often considered specifically as a functional instigator of eurocentric influences especially on colonized territories. Even though the principles and ideologies of eurocentric seasons are anti-universalist in nature, it advocates for the imitation of western values and its replication in the aspects of individuality, human rights and the tenets of secularism on many territories.

Thus, eurocentric values can be used interchangeably by many as meaning nationalistic, xenophobic, chauvinistic and even ethnocentric because of its similarity with diversified interpretations and conception.

Hopsin (2012) describes eurocentricity with different yet similar terms as an ideology that has a biased view imposing western values on non western territories and subordinate regions. To that extent, when used from the historical perspective, the term can apply with a dosage of principles to Europe and the entire Western world (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Dating back to the late 1970s, the ideology of eurocentrism was of frequent application especially in the context of colonization and European development. Thus, the theory of post-colonialism is of significance in this analysis as the political nature of post-colonial Nigeria is an aftermath of eurocentric influence during the colonial era. It is as Shepphard (2005) opines, postcolonial politics is equivalent to colonial Nigeria and innovations.

By applying the postcolonial theory it becomes a conspicuous fact that the post-colonial Nigerian politics is a clear reflection of the colonial system. This suggests that traits of eurocentrism are found in the political structure of post-colonial Nigeria. No wonder in Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'*, Lojeko Brown is pictured remarkably as a subject around which the play's thematic effulgence revolved. The themes; political corruption, misjudgement, polygamy and feelings of chauvinism are textually highlighted by Ola Rotimi, but of significance is the traits of chauvinism, misjudgments and political corruption that were constantly associated with Lojeko Brown.

4.0 Post Colonial Politics in Nigeria

The most important element highlighted in Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'* is politics which arguably engages the fact that selfishness and greed for much gain were all that

governed politics. The negativity of politics is portrayed in the character of Lojeko Brown, a military politician who possessed the character of corruption and selfishness (Uji, 2001).

Post-colonial politics in Nigeria is described as corrupt and full of corrupt entities who consider politics and its career as a course of self-aggrandizement and political gain. The political elites do not engage in politics because of their panache to serve the people but because of their lust for undue gain.

Ola Rotimi also puts into play the fierce competition that exists in the Nigerian political sphere. The big elites feel insulted when beaten to the game by those who they feel are unworthy political opponents.

Lojeko Brown: I lost a by-election to a small crab, a baby...

In the play Lojeko Brown considers his worthy opponent as unworthy of his victory even though his pride was shifted aside by the defeat. Lojeko Brown is textually highlighted as an ex military officer who abandons his profitable business and returns to civilian politics with arrogance displayed to the core. Thus, politics in the post independent Nigerian system is governed by self-interest and by arrogant infidels who perpetrate evil in the name of governance. Ola Rotimi presents yet another element in the post independent politics of Nigeria which is the belief in superstitious practice not just for initiation into power but for the continued grip of the power sceptre (Jegede, 2019).

In the play, Lejoka Brown ties belief in the power of the snake which he keeps under his bed. This expresses a connivance with the fact that even with the advent of scientism and modernism, most Nigerian politicians rely on supernatural mediums in order to acquire and maintain political power. Still, Lejoka Brown defeat in the election is a thunderous fall from the apogee of his political career and this questions the potency of such supernatural means in the game of Nigerian politics. In the play, Liza represents the eurocentric influence in Lejoka Brown's life and political career which lays bare a point and addresses an issue in the political sphere. She mobilises the women in Lejoka Brown's life in an attempt to resolve the gender conflict (Rotimi, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*).

Ola Rotimi presents the bold truth using Sakira, his character;

Sakira: men and women are equal..

The issue of gender inequality has long been a significant one in the politics of Nigeria. Even with the tenets of modernity, many male politicians in Africa still cling to the archaic mentality that politics is no game for a woman and that women should not be engaged in the politics of their country. There is no doubt that the masterpiece presents a satire on politics intertwined with military mindset.

Indirectly, the play underscores the fact that having military officers in democratic politics does not translate to pure democracy but to near totalitarianism. The conflict instigated in the play comes to a gradual resolution when under Liza's tactical play, Sakira joins politics.

This sends an uncommon message that as against the status quo of Nigerian politics in which women are uncommon entities, gender equality can be initiated properly in post independent Nigerian governance.

4.1 Direction of Play in Analysing Politics in Post Colonial Nigeria

Ola Rotimi strategically employs literary language in his '*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*', to create a mirror reflecting the status of the society. Ola uses relatable scenes to draw on the authentic and realistic language which he utilizes to represent and present the ills of the society, not just regarding politics.

Ola Rotimi's key character, Lejoka Brown is a tragic hero portrayed as an ex military officer who is built with the traits of pride and unyielding arrogance. He is a representative factor of the political elites who fail to acknowledge the opinions of others or women in national affairs.

The use of the character, Lisa as an element literary campaigning for gender equality in the Nigerian politics and other areas of the Nigerian culture (Dudley, 2005).

Thus, Ola's choice of character is carefully achieved to present a full and realistic interpretation of the issues in the society.

4.2 Trends in Post Independent Politics of Nigeria

Ola Rotimi's '*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*' evolves from the need to provide a substantial amount of literature to present the society's status with accuracy and the theatricalism. The Nigerian federation was accorded absolute independence on the first day of October 1960 under a legal allowance that ensured self-governance of the entire country. Following this period of freedom, Nigeria slipped into an entirely new phase in 1963 declaring itself a Federal Republic with former Governor-General Nnamdi Azikiwe as its first president. It was during this phase that Nigeria fell into the military rule following the assassination of the prime minister and regional premiers.

Nigeria continued its journey into becoming a second and third republic. Ola Rotimi's hero is set to begin his political escapade during the time when Nigeria becomes the third republic and its political system translates into a civilian rule giving an opportunity for political elites represented as the Lejoka Brown to selfishly amass much wealth from the oil boom that occurred during the third republic.

4.3 Nigerian Post Colonial Politics - A Reflection of both Pre-literate and Colonial Rule?

Many proponents of the post-colonial politics have asserted with dogmatism the political atmosphere in post-independence Nigeria is verily a reflection of both pre-literate cultural system and colonial rule. They argue that the ideologies of eurocentrism had not successfully eliminated 'the Nigeria before westernization' but had only modified it. They accentuate this perspective with Ola Rotimi's '*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*' by overemphasizing Lejoka Brown's use of traditional powers in a bid to secure and continue relishing in the affluence and excesses of power. They question ideologies criticizing the potency of traditional powers that Lejoka Brown ties his beliefs to and argue that the traditional powers did not seem effective for the success of Lejoka Brown because 'the gods despise his person'.

Categorically speaking, Adenike (2013) proposes that the Lejoka Brown's dependence on traditional powers represented as a snake under his bed testifies with concord to the fact that post

independent politics is a reflection of both pre-literate and colonial ideologies and not just a consequence of one. Thus, even though many politicians of the post-independence Nigerian era follow due electoral process and even try to influence it to their favour, they also trust in the black ways (Oladipo, 2008).

Speaking in conformity with Oladipo's view, Raphaél (2000) continues, 'Africa is a domain of the black people and even after years and decades of eurocentric oppression, the black people still cling to the black ways - they believe in their true identity. Ola Rotimi father drives the storyline and pushes forth Lejoka Brown's practice of polygamy. In the pre-literate era of Nigeria, polygamy was a sine qua non to masculinity and social status. Men with many wives were seen as gods while men with one wife were considered as lesser gods.

Thus, especially in the Yoruba and Igbo cultural scenario, men of great repute and prestige such as warriors, traditional rulers, princes and traditional custodians were often identified with many wives. This is even in line with the proverb of the Ibibio people of South Nigeria, 'a man who can control his wives can control the world'. Polygamy then is far identified with pre-literate Nigerian ideologies than it is with the ideologies of eurocentrism. To that extent, it is logical and accommodating to understand why many do not really see post-colonial politics as just an aftermath of colonial rule.

4.4 Corruption - A Rule in Post Independent Nigerian Politics

Ola Rotimi's satirical drama 'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again' is a masterpiece that shows without restraint of elements that since the end of the apartheid rule and dynasty, the elites have been the sailors of the Nigerian politics. According to Jegede (2015), the corrupt tendencies of this select few has created a gloomy atmosphere of dysfunctional systems and social despair. Many dramatists and playwrights have traced the corrupt practices in politics to the colonial era and have identified this closely with the colonial masters.

As an exposure of Nigeria's political terrain, the play informs of the aggression employed by politicians to sit on the seat of power. As was said earlier, the motives of politicians in this post-independent era as was observed in the colonial era is not to help the poor masses or instigate any refulgent effort towards development but to aggrandize themselves and act with wanton cruelty while creating a saint-like picture of their person to the public.

These wherefores are highlighted in Lejoka Brown's words.

Lejoka Brown: Are you there? Politics is the thing now in Nigeria. You want to be famous? Politics! You want to chop life? No-No-No, you want to chop a big share of the National cake? Na politics.

Critically considering Lejoka Brown's statement, we see that corrupt propensities were birthed by the unholy desire to attain fame and wealth. This has made corruption to erase every sense of nationalism and community service and has clothed politicians with a garment of greed.

Ejeke (2001) tenders his proposition on the basis that politics is a game for material gains and social influences. In creating an exposure of post independent politicians and their inordinate motive, the play initiates a subtle indictment of Lejoka Brown. Thus, like in the protagonist's case, aggression is oftentimes normalised.

Lejoka Brown: It is a war. Politics is a war oo, and I am taking no chance at all. Last time I took things slow and easy and what happened? I lost the by-election to a small crab.

As an archetype of the corrupt political entities bedraggling the system, Lejoka Brown takes advantage of the system and intends not just to turn public treasury to his personal property but to increase the havoc that his predecessors had instigated. Thus, it can be said that Nigerian politics in the post-independence era share a deep consanguinity with corruption.

To understand the theme of corruption as highlighted in Ola Rotimi's satiric work, it is best to decipher the assertion by Damilo (2010) that the condition of corruption is a devastating illness that spreads softly and is difficult yet possible to cure. Herein this proposition, corruption is difficult to cure yet this cure is not impossible.

Ola Rotimi understood this no wonder he highlighted this in his play with a view to exposing this illness for a possible solution. Thus, corruption is a common trait in the political system of Nigeria and politicians continue to relish in the false image of patriotism they create. Lejoka Brown, Ola Rotimi's hero is evidently such a politician who indeed has a tyrannical influence over his family and members of his household. This domineering propensity is authorised by Ola Rotimi to show that the deployment of totalitarianism whether on a small scale in a democratic setting is corruption.

It is always said that 'power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely', so with a military mindset, Lejoka Brown seeks to dominate his political office in toto; an approach deemed as corruption. According to Anigala's (2007) view, Lejoka Brown is a mighty colossus who pervades the political terrain with domineering force and influence.

The root of power corruption is directed from Lejoka Brown's household by Ola Rotimi. In Lejoka Brown's opinion, women are domestics meant to run errands while he, the man, must be saddled with absolute power to oppress and instill fear. No wonder he required Sikira to kneel before her lord when greeting while he engaged in a tête-à-tête with Okonkwo, the man. Ola Rotimi satirizes this subservience and wife acquisition for political expediency as being corrupt and unpatronizing in the attitude of literacy; he summarizes the domicility of women by culture in Sikira's words, 'a slave, that is what I am. Did he marry me because he loves me or because of his crazy politics' (Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, 1997).

Still on the theme of corruption, the satire with saliency shows that the apartheid rulers upon their decampment had set up groups of elite members of society to serve as political figureheads; those who would serve as their puppets in perpetrating their selfish interest while they were away. With cordiality, Oha (2008) is of the assertion that many have accorded blame on the apartheid rulers for the pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria's post-independent era stating that Nigeria is not absolutely independent as it still bends knees to eurocentric representatives and entities.

To that extent, corruption which is manifested in diverse forms ranging from bribery, electoral thuggery and manipulation, appropriation of ghost contracts and misappropriation of public funds has been a barricade hampering the growth of the country.

4.5 The Protagonist as An Archetype of Post Independent Nigerian Politician

In Ola Rotimi's *'Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again'*, his protagonist is the character of Lejoka Brown who fittingly is a representation of lampooned political elites. Lejoka Brown is arrogant and proud, the qualities which make him cling to the belief that others, especially women, are subservient and should be dominated and domineered as objects of pleasure or political maneuvering. This negativity of attribute is highlighted by Ola Rotimi in the storyline as a relationship between the Lejoka Brown and Sikira who is directed to address him as her Lord.

The term 'Lord' is a phrase Lejoka Brown demands for use in addressing him because he believes it attests to his seemingly absolute power and lordship over his household. This chauvinistic feeling is not just limited to his demonstrations and dealings with members of his household but also to members of his political cabinet. When Lejoka Brown lost the by-election, the terms he used to describe his victorious opponent also showed to a great extent how subservient he thought she was to him.

In his words lay bare the supercilious tendencies;

Lejoka Brown: I lost a by-election to a small crap, a baby...(*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, 1997).

Within the statement, certain phrases describe the kind of man Lejoka Brown is, a proud and arrogant man who engages in an opinionated personality disregarding the views of others and considering them lowly placed or irrelevant.

Like Lejoka Brown, political elites in Nigeria's post-independence era consider themselves the big dogs of society and disregard every view that contradicts their ulterior motives. They trade with chauvinism and get infuriated when they lose in the game of politics to those who they consider unworthy opponents. The game of politics is played with so much aggression by the political elites who do anything and everything to grapple the sceptre of power from the hands of their opponent or even predecessors.

In the story line, Lejoka Brown was a soldier before returning from America to cater for his father's cocoa business, however, he still abandons his cocoa business to venturesomely engage in politics. The reason for these move is evident in his words to Okonkwo.

Lejoka Brown: You want to be famous? Politics. No-No-No you want to chop a big share of the national cake? Na politics (*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, 1997).

According to his words, Lejoka Brown's motive for switching from business to politics was that he considered politics a shorter way to overnight wealth and fame. He saw politics as a more convenient way to get wealth that he did not work or labor for. This selfish motive is most likely embedded in the hearts of political elites today. These big dogs are not interested in serving the masses in whose hands real power is supposed to lie. Rather, they engage in politics, play the game to their advantage and loot the public treasury. For every road they do not build, for every hospital they do not build and for every school they do not build, they ensure that the masses lie in impecuniosity and remain helpless against them.

In the storyline, Lejoka Brown is seen to marry Liza at Congo even when he is already married to the one domiciled by culture - mama Rashida. He wedded Liza before returning to Nigeria

while Liza leaves for the United States to pursue her career to finality. Liza returns rather too soon to meet Sikira and Mama Rashida and Lejoka Brown fears there will be trouble.

Sikira, the daughter of a political unionist is acquired by Lejoka Brown as a tactic to win the elections, however, Sikira sees Liza as a threat because she thinks Liza is more formalized and educated than she is and the story goes on. The theme here highlighted in this area of the story is deceit. Liza's ignorance of Lejoka Brown's true marital life boils down to the deceit initiated by him. This shows that the political elites use deceit as part of their most precious weapon to get the masses into giving them the mantle of power in ignorance.

Lejoka Brown is a fitting entity representing the uncongenial elites of the political system in which corruption seems to be in perpetuity.

5.0 Conclusion

The play actually shows the follies and fables of the entire Nigerian political atmosphere in a bid to correct some of its anomalies. It lampoons the tragic hero whom Ola Rotimi chooses to call major Rahman Teslim Lejoka Brown, an ex officer in the military who takes to politics with a motive that is in consanguinity with the ideological misfits accommodating the political landscapes of Nigeria. The preoccupation of Ola Rotimi's play focuses thematologically on democracy using satirical techniques. Thus, reflecting on the Nigerian political dilemma, the play's action results from the action of corrupt political elites who play the dirty game of politics.

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