

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Theatre

Politics in Nigeria: A Discourse of Osita Ezenwanebe's 'Giddy Festival'

Philip Peter Akoje

Department of Theatre Arts, Kogi State University, Ayigba.

Email: philipakoje@gmail.com

Phone Number: +2347039781766

Abstract

Politics is a vital aspect of every society. This is due to the fact that the general development of any country is first measured by its level of political development. Good political condition in a nation is a sine qua non to economic growth. A corrupt and unstable political system in any country would have a domino-effect on the country's economic outlook and social lives of the people. The concept of politics itself continued to be interpreted by many political scholars, critics and the masses from different perspectives. Corruption, political assassination, greed, perpetrated not only by politicians but also by the masses are the societal ills that continue to militate against socio-economic and political development in most African countries, particularly Nigeria. Peaceful political transition to the opposition party in Nigeria in recent times has given a different dimension to the country's political position for other countries in the region to emulate. This paper addresses the concept of politics and presents corruption in Nigerian society from the point of theatre, using Osita Ezenwanebe's *Giddy Festival*. The investigation is grounded in sociological theory and the concept of political realism. This paper recommends that politics can be violent-free if all the actors in the game develop selfless qualities of leadership for the benefit of the ruled.

KEY WORDS

Politics, Development, Corruption, African Festival, Giddy Festival.

INTRODUCTION

The worst illiterate is the political illiterate. He hears nothing, sees nothing, and takes no part in political life. He doesn't seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour, of rent, of medicines all depend on political decisions...He doesn't know, the imbecile, that from his political non-participation comes the prostitute, the abandoned child, the robber and, worst of all, corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitative multinational corporations (Adetoyi, 239).

-Bertolt Brecht

The importance of politics in any society cannot be overemphasised. The reason being that socio, political and economic stability of any country is first measured by its level of political development. A corrupt and unstable political system in any country has negative effects on the country economic position and social lives of the people. To the ancient Greeks, the concept of politics is the process by which men debate matters concerning the activities of the "*Polis*" (a political community) and take action for the realization of public interest or the general good. After observing political debates in the

ancient Greek city state during his time, Aristotle concluded that ‘Man is by nature a political animal’ (Habib 24). Max Weber sees politics as the operation of the state and its institutions. According to him, politics means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power among individuals and group within a state (Anifowose 2). Politics involves change. Politics is a world of fluctuation, tensions, and transitions: change can be global in its consequences. For instance change of power from one party to another can affect policies concerning foreign relations either for good or otherwise.

Since the world is increasingly interdependent, even those changes that appear essentially domestic in nature may reverberate with international significance or consequences. Politics gives an answer to Harold D. Lasswell’s word: “who gets what, when and how”? It is about deciding who does and does not get access to societal limited resources. The decision concerning the world assets are made by government on how such resources are to be distributed and how to resolve and minimise conflicts. Politics contains governmental decisions that extend life expectancies or shorten them, enhance or reduce access to basic necessities, implement a rule of law or violate such rules. It involves the choices governments and citizens make in shaping the process whereby the world resources are made available or unavailable to the people. It is in reference to these assertions that Bertolt Brecht’s quotation above becomes very relevant. Politics is based on the recognition that our lives are shared, as long as we live in common, public space or territory. The use of public space, obeying road signs, using public library or making use of public gardens by individuals are all political; because such spaces and resources are governed by politically made rules implemented by the state. As we engaged in daily businesses, we are immersed in politics. That is why Aristotle concluded that for one to try to remove oneself from politics would be to remove oneself from the world of humanity (Grigsby 6).

In a press Conference in Lusaka, Zambia, ahead of the country’s general election schedule for August 11, 2016, the Nigeria former President and the Head of the African Union Election Observers, Goodluck Jonathan urged those who want to be voted into public office to quit ‘politics’ if they are selfish (Seun Opejobi, *Daily Post* 9 August, 2016). It is in line with these views that Ellen Grigsby in his book *Analysing Politics* argued that “the challenges of trying to view the world of politics from so many different perspectives have threatened to overwhelm the most experienced and respected of political scientists.”(4).

Dramatic criticism has to do with analysis or assessment of drama texts or performance. It has to do with looking at both the strength and weakness of literary work of arts and its application to a particular society. “The work of a critic is to analyse, assess, appreciate and review for the purpose of explanation and interpretation”(Nwabueze107). Criticism is not only about the limitation, but the appraisal of the literary work by giving in-depth analysis for possible appreciation from different perceptions. It is in line with this notion that Osita Ezenwanebe’s *Giddy Festival* is critically appraised using the theory of political realism as applicable to Nigerian political condition.

Political realism has its assumption that power ought to be the primary end of political action, whether in the domestic or international arena. The proponents of this theory include Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who believed that nations and politicians ought to pursue power for their own interests. The approach focuses on the fact that politicians must ensure their survival by securing their own needs and interests before they look into the needs of others.

POLITICAL ISSUES IN GIDDY FESTIVAL

Nigerian theatre has responded greatly to sociopolitical and economic challenges in the country. Adie (13) posits that “Nigerian theatre explores dramaturgy for the purpose of documenting history about events in Nigeria; ranging from the animosity displayed in the process of power shift to the political pogrom the country is experiencing now.”

Festivals in Africa are periods of celebrations, merriments, exchange of gifts, eating and

drinking. In Nigeria, some festivals are to mark the beginning of harvest period; New Yam Festival is one of them. But *giddy festival*, is a festival of shame, death, assassinations, political manipulation, injustice, penury and robbery. These are thus, the political conditions that shape Nigeria political system and metamorphosed to giddy festivity. The lopsided socio-political system as the result of this festivity engaged by African leaders, particularly Nigeria, continues to have negative effect on the political and economic system of the country. The festival of corruption and political assassination in Nigeria often result to the enthronement of political misfits who canvass for people's votes or rig their way into public offices and display a carnival of disgrace in the international arena. *Giddy Festival* is a microcosm of African political democratic experiment, particularly in Nigeria, which centres on selfish political opportunism and assassination through which the present political and economic woes have metamorphosed into economic recession. It is a satire on the corrupt political practices in Nigeria.

Its setting is at Jilanje Street, located at Gabo, Gedu. The story centres on chief Aggrandi, the protagonist who is nominated as the flag bearer of the local government election under the platform of People Fortune Party (PFP). In response to the high level of political rascality, assassinations, and depravity that characterized the Nigerian political arena, Osita's *Giddy Festival* comments on the level of disorder and deteriorations that are championed by the supposed custodian of law and order. Chief Aggrandi uses political thugs to harass and assassinate those he classifies as political enemies. The first incident in the play is the outcome of the pandemonium earlier carried out by the Aggrandi's saxe men. Chief Aggrandi's determination to assassinate anyone that stands as hindrance to his political ambition brings to the fore how the play is politically realistic to Nigeria political environment. Two residents of Gabo area Sese and Tiko, stumble on a corpse on a street of Jilanje, instead of reporting to the police, they focus on robbing the dead body. *Giddy Festival* exposes societal decay in respect to sanctity of human life. Sese and Tiko represent the youths in Nigerian that engage in social vices such as robbery, kidnapping and ritual killing; in fact, those who are obsessed with 'get rich quick schemes'. *Giddy Festival* lampoons Iya Boroki and her customers for showing total disregards and indifference to the corpse in front of food canteen. One of the customers-Apala even eats his food behind the corpse. The youngsters are not left out of looking for material things without any effort of theirs. Gboko sees the white cloth that is used to cover the dead body as a waste of material resources. He is also guilty of robbing the dead. This could be deduced from the conversation between him and his mate.

GBOKO: who did this?

YANJI: what?

GBOKO: who did this?

TINA: who did what?

GBOKO: imagine wasting a piece of immaculate white cloth on a corpse. They must be out of their minds. It will make a beautiful bed cover. (*Takes the cloth and fold it*). (26)

Gboko's action of taking the cloth and intending to use it as a bed cover makes a caricature of the mind of the youth who are also guilty of corrupt practices for selfish gain. That is why, the concept of political realism that looks at power for selfish gain, is not only applicable to politicians alone, but to all those who cannot look beyond themselves because of selfishness. These are present situations in Nigeria society, where ritual killing is more define and engaged by the youth.

During the electoral campaign, Chief Aggrandi comfortably seats on the shoulder of the hungry looking men campaigning. Who may have given him power to run for public office? In a democratic electoral process, popular support by the masses is the only legitimate avenue to gain people's mandate and win an election in order to serve the people. But chief Aggrandi's mandate is not from the people but instead, he bribes his way through what one of the residents describes thus;

IFEEJIKA: the kingmakers in this place, the royal fathers and mothers, the area boys and girls, the vigilante group, the party kingpins, the political godfathers and mothers, the supporters' club, the ethnic militia, the religious brotherhood

and sisterhood, the fraternities and... (31).

These are the people that are otherwise tagged ‘political investors’. They are the ones that would want returns on their investment. In order to achieve their aim, according to Durotoye:

Since they have put down so much money, they will do everything possible including getting rid of the opponent to ensure that their candidates win. In order to meet the expectations of the investors therefore, some politicians resort to maintaining killer squads to intimidate the opponent or resort to political assassination as a last resort (240).

These are the ones that chief Aggrandi represents in the society. It is important to note that since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999, many politicians have been assassinated, even those that are at the helm of affairs. These include Chief Bola Ige, Nigeria’s Justice Minister and Attorney General who was shot dead in his home in Ibadan, in the south-western state of Oyo, on December 23, 2001. Harry Marshall, the National Vice Chairman for the south-south zone of the then defunct All Nigeria’s People’s Party who was assassinated on March 5, 2003. Funso Williams, a leading governorship aspirant in Lagos State under the platform of People’s Democratic Party, was strangled in his home, on July 27, 2006. It is estimated that no fewer than 38 political assassinations were recorded as a result of politics from 1997 to 2007 alone in Nigeria. Although many of the perpetrators of these crimes may not have been caught, those caught have not been prosecuted. It is important to recall that prior to 2007 general election, the then incumbent president Olusegun Obasanjo claimed that election is a “do or die” affair, a view that undermined the country’s democracy in the international arena. It was not strange when Human Right Watch claimed, in a report on Nigerian fraudulent and violet 2007 election that:

The conduct of many public officials and government institutions was so pervasively marked by violence and corruption as to more resemble criminal activity than democratic governance (Suberu, 260)

The above scenario that characterises Nigerian political atmosphere out rightly gave birth to *Giddy Festival*. More so, Aggrandi’s refusal to give food or money to his supporters shows the level of neglect of the masses by Nigeria political leaders. When he is even informed by one of his loyal party members, Prince Bekola, that those who supported him during campaign were outside and they are supposed to be given food, the chief displays arrogance.

CHIEF AGGRANDI: did they say they are tired of waiting? Where are they rushing to? They have no job, when they see one that involves waiting, they complain.

IYA BOROKI: Chief, we still have plenty things in the bus. Can I serve them? They will be really hungry after the entire campaign match

CHIEF AGGRANDI: Please! Please! One thing at a time. Let the officials eat first and they can do with whatever is remaining (37)

Here the play draws our attention to the insensitivity of politicians to the plight of the people; adhering to the principle of political realism in the society where political leaders satisfy their needs to the detriment of the people they claim to govern. *Giddy Festival* ridicules Aggrandi and his cohorts for not taking positive steps to alleviate the distress of the masses. This representation of Nigerian democratic setting is not peculiar to *Giddy Festival*. In Emeka Nwabueze’s *Parliament of Vultures*, the Parliamentarians are more concerned about food, drinks and inconvenience allowances than the normal parliamentary job of law-making for the state. The funds that are meant for infrastructural development and poverty alleviation are instead cornered by few individuals for self-aggrandizement. In a similar vein, Uslander opines that:

in 1999, Senators extorted approximately \$6,000 in exchange for votes for Evan Enwerem as Senate President. Four years later, Ministerial nominee Mallam Nasir El-Rufai and the present Governor of Kaduna state in the Northern part of Nigeria, claimed that 54 senators demanded almost \$400,000 to back his appointment (214).

Recently, the 8th National Assembly members upon resumption of plenary were paid nine billion naira as wardrobe allowance. (*Punch Newspapers*, June 17th, 2015). Other huge allowances include furniture, travels, training and staffing all of which encourage politicians to aspire for such positions and other financially rewarding public offices. The class of Aggrandi and *the vultures* are the epitome of Nigerian parliamentarians. The stories of juicy committee membership and exotic car allowances are common notions in Nigeria political system. It is because of this, that despite cash crunch, Nigerian Senate illegally voted N4.7 billion for exotic cars for Senate President and other 108 other senators. (*Premium Times*, Dec. 12, 2015). "Padding" is no longer a popular fashion trends in Nigeria, but a political jargon that delays the passage of budgets by National Assembly. The language that turned law makers to corrupt celebrities in the face of economic down turn and suffering of the populace.

In addition, Chief Aggrandi and his party members are at the point of putting human face in their manifesto. The chief's direction is that such matter should be 'treated with the seriousness and urgency it deserves'. The play uncovers how politicians clash among themselves in an attempt to discover the practical ways of putting human face to their manifestoes. When Mr. Thickbob suggested that money should be made available for him to inscribe a beautiful face of a child on the front of his vests and Aggrandi's face in the back, the Chief reacts thus;

CHIEF AGGRANDI: (*jumps up angrily*) why should mine be at the back? Why should my face be inscribed at the back of the vest? Why Thickbob, why? (*Sits abruptly*).
(40)

Aggrandi wants his face to be inscribed on the vest because he believes that, when his face is in the front of the vest, he would be at the centre of attraction and his candidature would be considered by the masses. Like Kamini in Wole Soyinka's *Play of Giants*, who wants his image to be displayed in the United Nations Secretariat prior to the U.N. General Assembly because he believes that with his statues placed in strategic positions, delegates passing through the General Assembly will be forced to start talking business with him? It is that representation of the society of ours that *Giddy Festival* presents.

Government officials are exposed as the culprits behind the corrupt political system; the sanitation officials who are supposed to evacuate the dead body that lies by the side of an open dustbin of Iya Boroki, the food seller, play the ostrich but only accuse her of polluting the environment because of her uncovered dustbin. When she tries to bribe them, they collected the money and still complain that the money is not enough. The play points out that corruption is not limited to government officials and the rich alone, the poor also involve in corrupt practices. This means that tackling corruption from the top without proper reorientation at the grassroots would only be likened to a proverbial man whose determination is to uproot a deep rooted tree, but ended cutting the branches which only stabilizes it. Commenting about corruption in Nigeria, Uslander opines; "in practice, the people feel locked in the society where so many people suffer and struggle in order to survive" (203). In the same vein a landlord turned politician wants to intimidate his tenants to take an oath of allegiance that he would vote for him and if he fails to do so, his rent will be increased from #20 to #30 or face eviction in his bid for senatorial seat as contained in Ola Rotimi's *If*.

Ofong and Deje discuss their ordeal as party followers and henchmen for Chief Aggrandi as they lead the party aspirant through the campaigns, without food and water in return for their labour. The two friends also share the profit they gain from being assailants. As Deje describes the dead body is a fall out of *Giddy Festival*. The play satirises their action as they are not even satisfied with the proceeds

from their criminal activities; they also rob the dead body of its white cloth.

As People Fortune Party are in another giddy festivity back with a lot of heavy drinking and eating as they deliberate about putting human face to their manifesto. Dejejoin the festivity and suggests to Chief Aggrandi that one of the ways to boost his popularity and win the people confident is by removing the dead body at Jilanje Street. By doing so, the masses will think that he is people's oriented. But the people's condition is caption in the word of Prince Bekola, hence;

PRINCE BEKOLA: and the people at the centre are being crushed from all sides, all around them, the institutions tower like giants closing in on , crumbling on their heads; the same institution that are meant to serve them. This is too bad. (38)

The last incident shows the display of hypocrisy and shame as Chief Aggrandi poses for a snapshot in an attempt to remove the dead body. The display of hypocrisy in a bid to win an election is also evident as a retired military major; Rahman TaslimLekoja-Brown as he marries Sikira the daughter of the leader of the market women in order to secure the vote of women in Ola Rotimi's social satire, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Just as the 'Di Major' could not win the people confidence, chief Aggrandi turns to the onlookers smiling and waving, a big explosion was heard.

Although festivals in African setting are marked by celebration, Giddy festival is that of oppression, injustice, and politics of hypocrisy. These are the social ills addressed in *Giddy Festival*. Any society that dances to the tune of the drums of this kind of festivities is most likely to fail. The play succeeds in using artistic elements in transferring these socio-political realities to address the country's present situation.

But adherence to democratic principles of periodic free and fair election in Nigeria since 1999 shows that there is progress in Nigerian democratic experiment. Nigeria former President Goodluck Jonathan in consonance with this notion states that "Democracy is a journey that every nation mindful of advancing the liberty of its citizens must undertake...Nobody's political ambition is worth the blood of any Nigerian" (*The Guardian*, 28 March 2015). Acting towards his believe of politics with 'equal opportunities and partnership', he was able to peacefully hand over power to opposition party after he could not maintain the people's mandate to return to power in 2015 Nigerian general election. He thus set a new, high political pedestal for not only Nigeria, but other African politicians. Would the shift of power to opposition be able to exceed people's expectation and keep to the criteria for people oriented democracy? That is a question for another intellectual discourse. Commenting on the success of 2015 general election in Nigeria, Araba & Braimah asserted that:

...the elections were reported in the international media as having run smoothly with relatively little violence or voter fraud in contrast to previous elections. It was one exercise that showed that election should not be a do-or-die affair as in this clime. The election exposed the supremacy of the interest of the nation above that of self or cabal in Nigeria...the incumbency factor did not confer any undue advantage... (5-6).

This shows that, though the height of good governance is not yet achieved, other principle of democratic governance is closely followed. Selfless leadership is visible in the character of Prince Bekola whose personality is in juxtaposition to Chief Aggrandi's and other party members. He is morally clean and believes in rendering selfless service of quality leadership to the people. He is not arrogant, not corrupt, he is leaned, wise and people oriented. His feeling for people makes him to identify with them. Although, other party members continue to dance to the tune of giddy festivity, Prince Bekola is an exception like Citizen 2 in Emmy Idegú's *Beloved Odolu Kingdom* as described by Adie thus: "Citizen 2 serves as the icon for questioning and interrogating the political animosity, self-centeredness and political aggrandizement of a people" (15). His political ideology is worthy of emulation by political leaders for the progress of any society.

CONCLUSION

OsitaEzenwabe's *Giddy Festival* is a realistic play that is suitable for analysis from different perspectives. From sociological point of view, it presents the political reality of any society with socio-political ills like corruption, political assassination, injustice, greediness and illegal quest for materialism, backed with general deterioration of the society and activities of political miss fit. It is influenced by Nigerian political culture that is geared toward selfish motive. Although there are setbacks, the progress made through periodic election has given a positive outlook to Nigerian political experiment. It recommend that political position is for service to the society, those seeking such office should not allow their personal interest to override the interest of the people they intend to serve. Otherwise, they may resort to violence in order to win election. *Giddy Festival* serves as both a snapshot as well as a didactic corrective for the existence of corrupt political practice in Nigeria for a better future.

WORKS CITED

- Adetoyi, Olabode. *The entrepreneur: An autobiography of Prince Olabode Adetoyi*. Ibadan: Safari Books. (2019).
- Adie, Edward Ugbeda, "Documenting History and Propheying through Drama:Emmy Idegu's Beloved Odolu Kingdom as Paradigm" *The Leajon: An Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. Vol. 6, 1 (2014):13-21. Print
- Affiah, Uwem. "Vulturs in Parliament: Perspectives of EmekaNwabueze" *American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities*. Vol. 2 (6) (2012): 375-383. Print.
- Akaenyi, Jacinta Nkiruka. "Beyond Sheer Entertainment: A Voyage AroundEmekaNwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures and OsitaEzenwanebe's Giddy Festival" *A Lion on The Ijele Dance, A Festschrift in Honour of Professor P. Nwabueze*. Ed. AnyachonkeyaNgozi. Abakaliki: Ojiaka Press. 2015:122-130. Print.
- Anifowose Remi. "The Nature and Scope of Political Science", *Elements of Politics*. Ed. Anifowose Remi and Enemuo Frances. 2nd ed. Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publications. 2015: 1-15. Print.
- Araba, Akeem A. Braimah Joseph O. "Comparative Study of 2011 and 2015 Presidential Election" *Global Journal of Humanities and Social Science: Political Science*. Global Journal Inc. 2015. Web. 7 Dec. 2016. https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume15/4-Comparative-Study-of-2011.pdf
- Auslander, Philip. *Theory for Performance Studies, A student's Guide*. New York: Routledge. 2007. Print.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Political Quotes*. Web. <https://www.google.com.ng/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=bertolt+brecht+political+quotes> 6 Dec. 2016.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Literature as Equipment for Living." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Harcourt New York: Brace Jovanovich, 1971. Web.
- Durotoye, Adeolu. "Politial Assassination and Nigerian's 4th Republic: 1999-2007" *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*. Vol. 3, No. 11: July, (2014): 235-242. Print.
- Enemuo,FrancesChigbo. "Political Ideas and Ideologies" *Elements of Politics*. 2nded. Ed. Anifowose Remi and Enemuo,Frances Chigbo. Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publications. 2015:60-84.Print.
- Ezenwanebe, Osita C. *Giddy Festival*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited. 2009. Print.
- Fisman, Raymond and Miguel Edward. *Economic Gangster, Corruption, Violence and Poverty of Nation*. New Jersey: Princeton. Princeton University Press. 2002. Print.
- Grigsby, Ellen, *Analyzing Politics, An Introduction to Political Science*. 4th ed. Mexico: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009. Print.

- Grube, George.M.A. *Aristotle on Poetry and Style*. New York: The Boobs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1958. Print.
- Habib,Rafey. *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory from Plato to the Present*. Maldem, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2005. Print.
- Krishi, Musa Abdullahi. Juicy Committees. Daily Trust, 22 October, 2015. Cio. Web. McManus, Barbara F. *Outline of Aristotle Theory of Tragedy*. N.p. n.d. Web.
- Nwabueze, Emeka. *Studies in Dramatic Literature*. Enugu: Abic Books and Equip, Ltd, 2011.Print.
- Opejobi, Seun. "Quit Politics if you are Selfish" *Daily Post* 9 August, 2016: Web. 20 Nov. 2016.
- Rotimi, Ola. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press. 1977. Print.
- Soyinka, Wole. *A play of giants*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd. 1984. Print.
- Suberu, Rotimi T. "The Travails of Nigerian Anti-corrupt Crusade" *Corruption, Global Security and World Order*. Ed. Rotberg Robert I. Virginia:RR. Donnelley. 2009. Print.
- The Guardian. *President Goodluck Jonathan and his top political quotes*. 28, March 2015. Web.
- Tukur, Sani. "Exclusive: Despite Cash Crunch, Nigerian Senate illegally buying N4.7billion exotic cars for Saraki, other Senators." *Premium Times* 12 Dec. 2015. Web. [6 Dec. 2016.http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195022-exclusive-despite-cash-crunch-nigerian-senate-illegally-buying-n4-7billion-exotic-cars-for-saraki-other-senators.html](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195022-exclusive-despite-cash-crunch-nigerian-senate-illegally-buying-n4-7billion-exotic-cars-for-saraki-other-senators.html)
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today, a User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1999. Print.
- Uslaner, Eric M. *Corruption, Inequality and the Rule of Law*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2008. Print.