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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Crises of Civil Governance and Military Intervention in Postcolonial Nigerian Drama: Towards a Sustainable Democracy in Africa

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| ABSTRACT
Contemporary African drama has been deeply shaped by the continent's turbulent political history, particularly the oscillation between democratic experiment and successive military regimes. African playwrights have consistently deployed the stage as a site of political critique, social memory, and ideological resistance. This paper interrogates how Nigerian drama portrays the bane of democracy—its failures, contradictions, betrayals—and the traumatising legacies of military interventions, with a view to projecting principles for sustaining democracy in Africa. The study adopts qualitative research design, situating dramatic texts within Africa's socio-historical and political evolution of postcolonial governance. It draws theoretical insights from Achille Mbembe's postcolonial theory as interpretive lens to critically discuss selected plays. Three Nigerian plays—Femi Osofisan's *The Discombobulation of a Rookie Patriot*, Rasaki Ojo Bakare's *Rogbodiyan*, and Ben Tomoloju's *Jankariwo*—are purposively selected for analysis based on their ample exemplifications of democratic governance, depiction of the crises of democracy, and the culmination of their plots into military coups and/or rules. The paper avers that the crises of African postcolonial democracy are marked by "the mutual 'zombification' of the rulers and those they rule"—the unhealthy cooperation or intimacy between rulers and subjects which sustains democratic crises through complicity, fear, popular acquiescence, civic apathy, and normalisation of corruption. It maintains that African dramatists not only document political failures, but also foreground the ethical imperatives of social justice, collective responsibility, and conscientious participation of the people in sustaining democratic institutions in Africa. The study concludes that postcolonial African drama serves as an archive of historical memory and sociopolitical commentary, offering a critique of state power while imagining and projecting the imperatives for sustainable democracy.

| KEYWORDS
Democratic governance, Military Intervention in Africa, African Drama, postcolonial theory.

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1. Introduction
Democracy, as a system of government, remains an inclusive mode of governance suitable to channel social energies and resources towards addressing critical issues like inequality, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and oppression. It is a system of government considered to respond better to the needs of the poor and marginalised, because it enables such groups to organise and mobilise within the political process, and allows for harmonising diverse socio-political interests in society. Characterised by freedom of the press, freedom of association and the freedom to criticise, and independence of judiciary, among other feature, democracy seeks to guarantee the rights

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of citizens to participate directly or indirectly in decision-making, and to mobilise human potential towards national development.

Democracy in many African states has been historically unstable, repeatedly disrupted by military coups, authoritarian regimes, and postcolonial political contradictions (Umaru, 2024). African dramatists have long responded to these crises by using the stage as a space for sociopolitical interrogation. The relationship between democracy and military regimes in African drama reveals the complexities of nation-building in the wake of colonial rule. This paper situates these dramatic interrogations within postcolonial theory, emphasising the structural roots of political dysfunction in Africa.

Literary studies on governance, especially on democracy and military rules in Nigeria, have focused on the aesthetics of democratisation, appraisal of Nigeria's literary drama engagement with democratic imperatives, and critique of military rule in Nigerian drama with less emphasis on those factors that bring about military intervention in African democratic governance, and possible panacea for stability of democracy. This gap apparently stems from the data—the plays selected for their studies. This present study purposively selects plays that exemplify democratic governance, depict factors that militate against democracy, and illustrate military coups and/or rules. Plays of Nigerian dramatists, including Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Femi Osofisan, Ben Tomoloju, Bode Sowande, Ahmed Yerima, Esiaba Irobi, and Rasaki Ojo Bakare, among others, have variously portrayed the state of democracy and military rule in Nigeria.

This study explores Femi Osofisan's *The Discombobulation of a Rookie Patriot*, Rasaki Ojo Bakare's *Rogbodiyan*, and Ben Tomoloju's *Jankariwo* to highlight the bane of democracy in Nigeria, the attendance military interventions and consequences, and prospects for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. Although the study focuses more specifically on Nigeria, using selected plays of Nigerian dramatists, discussions apply to democracy in black Africa as a whole, notwithstanding the realisation that situation in Nigeria may not be completely representative of the whole continent.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Nigerian Drama and Postcolonial Democratic Experience

Nigeria's journey since independence in 1960 has been marked by a consistent effort to establish good governance and a stable democratic institution. This pursuit is rooted in core principles such as freedom, openness, inclusive participation, and the equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities across the nation. These democratic aspirations have been reflected and explored in Nigerian drama and theatre (Adeoti, 2002b).

Nigerian drama from its emergence has always depicted Nigerian realities including political developments, starting from the precolonial to the colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. Postcolonial Nigerian dramatists, such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Wale Ogunyemi, and Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ben Tomoloju, Esiaba Irobi, Tess Onwueme, Ahmed Yerima, among others, have use their drama as a mode for interrogating, engaging and negotiating the Nigerian postcolonial politics in a very critical manner. These dramatists have not only projected the challenges of democratic rule after independence but have also portrayed the prolonged military rule that followed. Their plays depict the evils of tyrannical styles of governance. These plays are preoccupied with themes relating to authoritarian tendencies in governance and quest for democratic re-ordering of power relations. They also lay bare disorder and corruption apparent in a supposedly democratic dispensation.

Nigerian dramatists have used their craft to comment and critique the Nigerian postcolonial democratic system. Since Nigerian independence in 1960, it adopted democracy as a system of government. Democracy is believed to be an inclusive system of government which allows for the participation of all citizens in the affairs of the nation. Hence, Lincoln describes it as "the government of the people, by the people, for the people" (1953:23). Democratic ethos is based on popular sovereignty, equity; equality; the peaceful resolution of conflicts, respect for rule of law

and tolerance of dissenting views. Democracy holds a brighter prospect for the actualisation of the visions of post-independence governance.

The inter-relationship between drama and political system of government is reflected in the works of many Nigerian dramatists. Drama is therefore an art form which is a product of socio-political and historical realities, and a representation of human daily condition of existence. Nigerian dramatists have portrayed the political crises that engulfed the nation shortly after independence as corruption, abuse of power, political repression, and nepotism overwhelmed the polity.

As a result of the rampant breakdown of law and order under democracy in Nigeria, there were incessant military interventions. Adeoti (2005:94) observes that the Nigerian military coup of January 15, 1966 culminated from the pervasive collapse of law and order that characterized democratic politics in the first republic. He notes that "The intervention by soldiers in politics not only effectively scuttled first attempt at democratic rule in Nigeria but also made military a permanent feature of Nigerian political scene" (84). The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) is considered one of the indices of the failure of post-independence democracy. Adeoti (2005:97) maintains that Nigerian "dramatists provoke contempt at the anti-democratic conducts of the elite, both civilian and military. Through wit and disdain, they censure the will to narcissism upon which military dictatorship and other antitheses of democracy are founded."

One problem of democracy in many African countries, which are usually multiethnic and multicultural, is the over-consciousness of and extreme loyalty to ethnic identities. Adeoti (2002a) notes that the invidious manipulation of ethic identities, especially by the political elites, in the competition for limited national resources is one of the major factors that has hindered the growth of democracy in many post-independent African countries (1). He observes that division along ethnic cleavages endangers democracy "because in such a context, issues and events are easily prone to ethnic interpretations—from education to development plans, adjustment of boundaries, party formation, finance, trade matters, provision of social amenities and employment" (2002:2). Conflict along ethnic lines have hampered democracy in many African countries, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Sudan.

Democracy is threatened when politicians create tensions along ethnic divisions as politics is a significant ground for identity consciousness and recognition. Hence, conflicts along ethnic identity impede cooperative actions that characterised democracy, even though democracy is supposed to provide mediatory opportunity for inter-group tensions that sometimes arise from unequal relations of power achieved though identity manipulations.

Adeoti (2002a) studies identity manipulation in Ahmed Yerima's *The Silent Gods* to demonstrate how the playwright depicts the travail of democracy in a multicultural and pluralistic nation like Nigeria. He observes that "the basic challenge of democratisation in an increasingly polycentric world is how to encourage co-operation across primordial divides" (6). He highlights how democratic experiments in Nigeria are ambushed by the orchestration of identity and difference in the pursuit of sectarian interests. Like ethnic identity, religious identity and biases have also threatened democracy in many African countries. These factors contribute to the distabilisation of democratic rule in Nigeria. hence, there was the inauguration of military rule through the first coup of Saturday, 15 January 1966. The second coming of military rule in 1984 produced another set of military officers.

Several Nigerian plays have portrayed military government in Nigeria, however without explicit demonstration of the situations that bring about soldiers' incursion into civil rule. Wole Soyinka's plays, such as *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1988), *From Zia with Love* (1992), and *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope* (1995), Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), and *Once upon Four Robbers* (1980), and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1999), and *Who Is a Patriot*? (2006), among others, reflect and artistically satirise soldiers and the military institution in Nigerian politics.

Osofisan (2008) aptly identifies a number sociopolitical factors that have hindered the sustainability of democracy in many post-independent African countries, particularly Nigeria, and the intervention of military. He highlights the corrosive weight of official corruption, ethnic fractiousness and gross administrative ineptitude, inability and unwilling to conduct free and fair elections, determination not to lose the reins of power, and provocation of massive civil disorders in a disillusioned and impoverished populace by incompetent politicians, among others (Osofisan, 2008:8).

As Osofisan observes, the factors notwithstanding, the successive military government in Nigeria was no better than the civilian. Osofisan notes that:

> The army, opportunistic as ever, … proved to be just as equally bewildered in the running of the state as the civilians they replaced. Except that they had the control of arms, and, profiting from this, they turned their weapons into instruments of intimidation and terror against the populace. Systematically they began to loot the state's resources, just like the former colonialists. Of course, many rose to resist the rampaging soldiers, and were brutally suppressed. Then it became a game of musical chairs, as one set of soldiers seized power from another, and began its own looting, till it was chased out by another buccaneering gang. (Osofisan, 2008:8)

In essence, the military's governance was characterised by incompetence and corruption, similar to the civilian regimes they replaced. They used their power to intimidate and terrorise the population, suppressing dissent. Their systematic looting of state resources mirrors colonial exploitation. Consequently, political instability was perpetuated through a cycle of military coups, each driven by self-enrichment.

2.2 Postcolonial Theory and Achille Mbembe's Ideas of the Postcolony

Postcolonial theory provides the analytical tools for understanding the political crises portrayed in African drama. It involves actively engaging with and challenging the discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies that were established by colonialism (Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996:2). Its primary concern is how colonial history shapes the political, cultural, and ideological conditions of contemporary African states. Achille Mbembe is one of the most influential contemporary theorists of the postcolony, whose work, particularly *On the Postcolony* (2001), redefines how power, subjectivity, violence, and everyday life should be understood in African postcolonial contexts. The core of his theory is that the postcolony is not simply a continuation of colonial domination; rather, it is a distinctive zone of entanglement where power, violence, and desire intertwine in paradoxical and intimate ways.

Mbembe argues that the postcolony is marked by "the mutual 'zombification' of the rulers and those they rule" (Mbembe, 2001:128). He describes postcolonial life as a condition of interpenetration, where "the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic… a world of a subject who is at once a victim and accomplice of the power that dominates him" (Mbembe, 2001:102). This entanglement means that domination is not one-directional; everyday subjects participate in, reproduce, and sometimes mock or subvert the very power that oppresses them.

Mbembe's concept of 'commandement' in his *On the Postcolony* explains the mode of rule inherited from colonial authority, now embodied by postcolonial states. He describes commandement as "a power that seeks to impose itself as a power that stands above society" (Mbembe, 2001:24). However, unlike colonial rational bureaucracy, the postcolonial commandement becomes theatrical, spectacular, and grotesque. Mbembe famously calls this "the banality of power and the power of the banal." (Mbembe, 2001:43), where power becomes both arbitrary and performative, expressed through rituals of excess, violence, and absurdity.

Mbembe's theoretical insights are relevant to this study as they offer a critical lens for interrogating the crises of civil governance and recurrent military interventions represented in postcolonial Nigerian drama. His conceptualisation of the postcolony as a distinctive formation of power marked by entanglement, excess, and commandement, where the authoritarian logic of colonial rule is reproduced and reconfigured in the post-

independence state is particularly relevant to the selected plays in their portrayal of cyclical collapse of civilian governments and the justification of military takeovers as corrective regimes.

3. Methodology

The study adopts qualitative research design, situating dramatic texts within Africa's socio-historical and political evolution of postcolonial governance. It utilises both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data are drawn from three (3) Nigerian plays—Femi Osofisan's *The Discombobulation of a Rookie Patriot*, Rasaki Ojo Bakare's *Rogbodiyan*, and Ben Tomoloju's *Jankariwo*, while the secondary sources include relevant books, journal articles, and the Internet. The three plays are purposively selected based on their ample exemplifications of democratic governance, depiction of the crises of democracy, and the culmination of their plots into military coups and/or rules. The plays are subjected to critical literary analysis. Theoretical insights for the analysis are drawn from Achille Mbembe's postcolonial theory.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Democracy and Politics of Violence in Femi Osofisan's The Discombobulation of a Rookie Patriot

The Discombobulation of a Rookie Patriot (henceforth *Rookie Patriot*) is Femi Osofisan's stage adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, a political novel published in 1966. The novel is a depiction of a newly independent African nation, apparently Nigeria, which has steeped into political unrest as a result of corruption, abuse of power, political decay, and struggle for leadership and competition for limited national resources.

The play was first staged on 5th November, 2015 as part of the 22nd International African Writers' Day (IAWD) Celebration commissioned by the Pan African Writers' Association (PAWA) in celebration of the life and works of Chinua Achebe. The play was performed by Abibigromma Theatre Group (Legon, Ghana) at Ghana's National Theatre in Accra, and directed by the playwright together with Grace Adinku. It was at the same event that Osofisan's adaptation of Achebe's *Arrow of God* titled *Arrow of God, The Wounded Man* premiered on 7th November, 2015, performed by the same theatre company at Ghana's National Theatre in Accra, also co-directed by the playwright and Grace Adinku.

Rookie Patriot presents the experience of Odili Samalu, a young and idealistic school teacher who becomes disillusioned with corrupt leadership and whom Osofisan portrays as "a rookie patriot"—a neophyte in politics. Odili narrates the sociopolitical circumstances that lead to his hospitalisation and eventual military takeover of the nation's leadership. The protagonist-narrator relays his encounter with Chief Nanga, the Minister of Culture, who was once his teacher and a man loved by the masses because of his charisma and generosity, but who once gets to power becomes deeply corrupt—misusing public funds, engaging in nepotism, bribery, and exploiting his position for personal gain. Odili sees through the façade and becomes critical of the political system. He joins an opposition movement to challenge Nanga politically. The conflict intensifies as elections approach, marked by intimidation, violence, and manipulation. Consequent upon the widespread violence that greets the elections and the chaos and corruption that have consumed the nation, the government is overthrown by a military coup.

The play is one of Nigerian plays that explore political crises in African civilian dispensation and whose crises culminate into military takeover. The play demonstrates the prevalence of corruption and abuse of power that characterised Nigeria's first democratic experiment in the First Republic between 1963 and 1966. The first Republic of Nigeria was ruled by different leaders representing their regions as premiers in a federation, with Abubakar Tafawa Balewa the Prime Minister, and Nnamdi Azikiwe the Nigeria's first president in 1963. Regional infighting and tension during the period escalated into Nigeria's first coup d'etat that took place on January 15 1966. Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, along with other rebel soldiers primarily from the south led by Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, launched a violent takeover, assassinating key political figures, including Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Northern Premier Ahmadu Bello, Western Premier Samuel Akintola, and Finance Minister Festus Okotie-Eboh. Following the coup, Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi assumed power as the first Head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria on 16th January, 1966.

Some of the factors that bring about military coups in Africa, especially Nigeria are projected in the play. It should be noted that Nigeria had never experienced any military takeover before the source novel was published. It was some weeks after its publication that the first military coup occurred in Nigeria, and that was 15th January 1966 military coup d'état. Femi Osofisan, in *Rookie Patriot*, thus offers a deeply reflective critique of post-independence African politics, showing how democracy becomes fragile in the hands of corrupt politicians, complacent citizens, and weakened institutions. The play demonstrates that democracy does not collapse suddenly—it erodes gradually through social, moral, and political decay.

Postcolonial leadership and followership failures have contributed greatly to instability of democracy in Africa. Chief Nanga represents how African leaders after independence became self-serving, prioritising wealth over nation-building. Politicians, as exemplified in Chief Nanga, present themselves as "men of the people," who only feed the public with crumbs while they enrich themselves. The play illustrates a decline in moral standards within a society where corruption has become normalised by the people. Citizens often commend leaders who exploit them, anticipating personal advantages in return, thus highlighting their complicity in corrupt practices. This dynamic mirrors Achille Mbembe's concept of the "mutual 'zombification' of the rulers and those they rule" in postcolonial contexts, where individuals are simultaneously victims and accomplices of the power structures that govern them (2001:128). Mbembe describes the postcolony as a "chaotically pluralistic" environment characterised by this interpenetration (Mbembe, 2001:102). The play thus underscores the importance of citizens' critical engagement with elected officials, emphasising that true democracy relies on the active participation and scrutiny of the populace regarding governance decisions, policies, and laws.

Political corruption and abuse of power are significant threats to democratic sustainability. Chief Nanga and other leaders treat national offices as personal estates. Public funds are diverted for private comfort—building mansions, embarking in needless foreign trips, buying traditional and academic titles, marrying new wives and engaging in debaucheries, and all sorts of corrupt practices including bribery. They consider national assets national cake that they can share among themselves, families and cronies. That is why Chief Nanga initially invites Odili to his ministerial manson in the capital city of Bori to come and enjoy his "own share of national cake too" (14). He uses his political wealth to acquire traditional chieftaincy and academic titles. Nanga says: "I am planning to go to the United States in about two months. *[Confidentially to him, but loud enough for everybody to hear]*. You see, I have to go, because they are going to give me doctorate degree in America. Doctor of Laws, LL.D. *[A roar of admiration all around]*" (14-15).

Nanga, like many African political elites, does not only use state resources to acquire titles, he also takes advantage of it to marry new wife. It is after Nanga becomes a minister that he thinks of marrying another wife in the person of Edna, a girl young enough to be his daughter. This is the same way he engages in debaucheries, including sexual immorality with young girls among whom is Elsie, Odili's girlfriend. He bribes his ways into many personal benefits. This institutionalised corruption undermines trust, making democracy hollow and ineffective.

The detrimental nature of patronage politics and clientelism is demonstrated in the play. This concept describes how the electorates support leaders not for competence but for what they can get materially—gifts, cash, and jobs, among others inducements during campaigns. These are exemplified in characters like Pa Samalu, Old Man, and the masses in the play. Pa Samalu, Odili's father, believes that "the mainspring of political action was personal gain" (36). That is why he asks Odili if his new party is ready to give him enough money to fight Chief Nanga. Indeed, Pa Samalu believes that Odili's engagement in political opposition is for his personal gain. Hence, he says "When you came home with a car I thought to myself: good, some sense is entering his belly at last" (42). Pa Samalu is fascinated by the scholarship and two hundred and fifty pounds Chief Nanga brought to him in order to silence political opposition that Odili raises against him (38-39). He tells Odili: "If the money he was offering was too small why did you not say so? Why did you not ask for three of four hundred?" (42).

One other factor that enfeebles democracy is manipulation of electoral process. This includes vote buying which has become a common practice—a political strategy for winning elections in many African nations. Osofisan amplifies

this in the play. Max understands so well that to win election against Chief Nanga's led People's Organisation Party (POP), vote buying is inevitable, which his party does not want to engage in, and of course cannot afford. Hence, the party's strategy is to "leave mass bribing of the electors to P.O.P. and P.A.P." (23). This exchange of loyalty for favours replaces informed political participation with transactional politics. This practice weakens accountability because voters are 'bought' rather than convinced; hence, political loyalty depends on personal gain, not ideology or development.

Nepotism constitutes a bane of democracy in many postcolonial African nations. As Adeoti (2002:1) observes, "One major factor that has hindered the growth of democracy in many post-independent African countries is the invidious manipulation of identities, especially by the elites, in the competition for limited national resources." Ethnic affiliation has been used as a weapon by elites in postcolonial politics to gain advantage in competition for state power, which endangers democratic principles. This is evident at a campaign by the Odili's Common People's Convention (CPC) in Urua where the people's support for Odili and his party is solely because he is their kinsman. Old Man exemplifies this political parochiaism through his remarks:

> The village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No man in Urua will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very back yard are we not saved the journey? […]. Last time we elected a Member of Parliament from Anata. Now it is our turn here in Urua. A goat does not eat into a hen's stomach no matter how friendly the two may be. Ours is ours but mine is mine. Our own son, Odili Samalu, is our candidate! Have I spoken well?' *[A loud chorus of 'Yes.' Lights die off the Old Man.]* (46).

Nepotism is therefore a major problem of democracy in many African countries. Nigeria, for instance, as a multiethnic and multicultural nation, is a 'victim' of over-consciousness of and extreme loyalty to ethnic identities as exemplified in Old Man. This demonstrates how many Africans choose leaders based on loyalty to ethnicity, religion, among other divides.

Dynamic political opposition is a remarkable characteristic of democracy. Weak opposition and internal divisions among political oppositions have manifested as a bane of democracy in Africa. Osofisan describes and of course portrays Odili along with his party as "a Rookie Patriot". Although Odili and Max form CPC as an opposition to corrupt government, the movement lacks structure, experience, and unity. Some join for personal gain rather than genuine ideology. Weak opposition gives ruling elites free rein to entrench dictatorship.

Witch-hunting and oppression of the oppositions by ruling political elite stiffles democratic institution in Africa. Because Pa Samalu chooses to be in the opposition against Chief Nanga's POP, the party uses state powers and apparatuses to fight him. The party in power impose heavy tax on him: "They say they made an error in the old calculation. That it was based only on your known pension of eighty-four pounds a year. Now they've found that your real income in fact is five hundred pounds derived from 'business'" (54). The ruling party (ab)uses the repressive state apparatuses, especially the police to arrest and oppress the opposition.

Electoral intimidation, violence, thuggery and fraud are common vices that have bedeviled democratic process in Africa. Opposition candidates like Odili Samalu face harassment, beatings, and threats. In order to silence Odili as an opposition, Nanga sends thugs to molest him. He hires thugs to carry placards to soil his name (42). Odili is viciously attacked during the election campaigns, which lands him in the hospital. Max is killed during the elections by the Nanga's POP thugs, while their leader Chief Koko watches—the thugs run Max down with a car. Consequently, Max's fiancee, Eunice, shoots Koko dead. Instead of free and fair elections, the ruling class employs thugs, bribery, ballot rigging, and political violence. The ruling POP massively rigs the elections which leads to protests and riots, including burning and looting. This demonstrates the impossibility of stability of a democracy built on fear rather than choice.

The ultimate threat to democracy is military coup. In the play, the military exploits political crises to seize power, violating democratic processes. Journalist recounts: "The elections were held, but they were massively rigged by the ruling POP. So protests followed. Riots everywhere. Burning and looting everywhere. And in the end, the army stepped in" (64). The soldiers take over the power, dissolve the government, and most of the ministers, including Chief Nanga, are clamped in detention. The play shows how people often rejoice when the military take over, apprently because of their harrowing experience in the hands of the civilian rulers, prevalence of corruption and sociopolitical crises. This, however, does not come without concerns as highlighted in the conversion between Journalist and Odili:

> JOURNALIST**.** You are not happy?
> ODILI/NARRATOR. Well, I suppose we should be grateful to them for at least chasing away those robbers. But will they be better? Will they allow the people to be free? Especially free to choose our own leaders?
> JOURNALIST. We don't know. Only time will tell. For now, anyway, it's been wild jubilation on the streets! (65).

The above dialogue demonstrates that when democracy is abused, the military becomes an alternative although dangerous and undemocratic.

4.2 Democracy, Electoral Manipulations and Authoritarianism in Bakare Ojo Rasaki's Rogbodiyan

Rogbodiyan (1994) is a political satire that depicts the chaos that characterises a corrupt democracy. It depicts how the ruling elite gain and sustain their power through violence, propaganda, intimidation, and the manipulation of electoral system, foregrounding the complicity of the populace in the corrupt system which deepens their suffering and accelerates further descent into chaos.

The play chronicles the manipulation that attends the electoral process of a new leader during military transition in the fictitous nation of Ilu Koroju, the chaos that greets the reign of the authoritarian ruler that emerged from the election, and the return of the military to power in the land. The transition government of Regent Adebunmi is set to return power to the people of the land by installing a new ruler; she introduces two imposed candidates—Asagidigbi and Gbadegesin—and orders the Kingmakers to choose from the two candidates.

The two candidates resort to bribery, populist rhetorics, and violence in their struggle to emerge the new leader. Asagidigbi eventually emerges and is coronated as the king of Ilu Koroju. He becomes power drunk, violates established customs and traditions of the ancestors, and oppresses the populace. Consquently, there is a mysterous epidemic that plagues the land, resulting into pain and suffering for the entire land, inlcuding King Asagidigbi who is now blind. At the consultation of the oracle, it is revealed that the king must go to the land of the ancestors to bring water from a sacred river to heal the people. However, it is impossible for the king to do so because of his condition. Adeakin, the son of Regent Adebunmi subtly volunteers to disguise as a king in order to go and get the sacred water. On his return, he subverts the throne and take over the power.

First performed in 1992 under the title *They Shall Return*, the play historicises the transition programme of the Ibrahim Babangida administration in Nigeria, and arguably, prophesies the cyclical nature of military rule in the country. Babangida, who seized power from General Muhammadu Buhari in 1985, pledged a swift return to civilian governance but remained in office for eight years. His government organised gubernatorial and legislative elections in December 1991, with the presidential election set for June 12, 1993. The presidential election, featuring MKO Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC), was fraught with crises. Despite Abiola's widely perceived victory, Babangida controversially annulled the election citing electoral fraud. Scheduled to fully transition to democracy on August 27, 1993, Babangida resigned a day prior, leaving behind the annulment crisis. He appointed an interim government led by Ernest Shonekan to complete the democratic transition. However, Shonekan's administration was short-lived, as General Sani Abacha ousted him in November 1993, establishing a new military dictatorship.

The play utilises the symbolic representation of two ruling houses, Asagidigbi and Gbadegesin, to depict the two political parties, National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), respectively. Asagidigbi embodies the NRC, symbolised by an eagle, while Gbadegesin represents the SDP, emblematised by a white horse. Like the two parties were established and financed by the military government as part of a controlled transition to civilian rule, the two candidates are introduced and imposed on the people by a dictator regent in the play. Their manifestoes and organisational structures are similarly overseen by the regent just as the military government did for the two parties. The play thus reflects a period in Nigerian history where political parties were heavily influenced and ultimately controlled by the military.

The play's initial title *They Shall Return* 1992 is symbolic. It suggests the recurrent phenomenon of military interventions in Nigerian politics as a result of its weak democratic institution. The play explores the potential consequences of a prolonged and ultimately failed transition programme, mirroring the events surrounding the annulled 1993 presidential election, which led to widespread protests, unrest, and violence, ultimately forcing the military president to step down. The play serves as an artistic commentary on the challenges and crises facing democracy in Africa, using the specific historical context to illustrate broader themes of political instability and the subversion of popular will.

Democracy thrives in freedom—freedom of choice, among others, by the citizens. In true democracy, the citizens have right to choose their leaders without fear, intimidation and manipulation. Bakare demonstrates the contrary in the play to establish the trouble with democracy in Africa. Imposition of political candidates on the electorate to choose by 'force' negates democratic imperatives. The two candidates—Asagidigbi and Gbadegesin—are imposed on the people to choose from by the transition government of Adebunmi; even when there is a protest against such approach, the protest is silenced with state power (12). This mirrors the political situations in many African nations where party structures determine political candidates for elections, regardless of credibility, competency, honesty, and goodwill. Fadele, the diviner in the play, reveals the unsuitability of the two candidates 'selected' and presented for leadership:

> No child of the gun is a friend, the bullet kills the powder maims […]. (*Shakes his head*) In plain language, none of the two candidates may rule this land. Ifa says they are old wine in new skins. Put any of them on the throne and the problem of the land continues. Ifa says the people should search for a king who is honest and true. Search and search sincerely (24).

In spite of their outright rejection by Ifa that symobolises the voices of people, the system still fields the two candidtates for elections. The implications of this are apathy among the electorate, and emergence of incompetent, insensitive, and pernicious leaders. When people have no choice of credible candidate, they withdraw from the electoral process, afterall 'there is no child of the gun that is a friend', all are injurious to the wellbeing, growth and development of the people. This practice negates the principles of democracy; it paralyses the institution of popular participation.

Similarly to systematic imposition of candidates on the electorate is perpectuation of national leadership by some class or elite. In what is discribed as democracy in some African countries, political leadership is dynastic. There is a perpectuation of rulership by the same line of descent—powerful group or family maintaining or rotating political positions for a considerable length of time. Bakare projects this undemocratic practice in the two candidates who are from extant ruling houses and whose fathers or grandfathers have once ruled the land, of course poorly. Asagidigbi is the first son of the former King Elempe, while Gbadegesin is one of the descendants of Ogbegun, a former ruler of the land (13). This illustrates political recycling of leaders in African politics, which is unjurious to growth and stability of democracy. Apart from subtle manifestations of this across African states, there are stark instances of family dynasties that have ruled for more than fifty years in Gabon and Togo, resulting to political dynasty. Political dynasty descends to abuse of power, authoritarianism, corruption, and retarded socio-economic and political growth. It breeds exclusive leadership and inequitable distribution of national resources among the different units of the federation, thereby creating agitation and chaos that threaten democracy.

Authoritarianism and abuse of power are characteristic of leaders who attain political power though undemocratic means. Bakare illustrates this through Asagidigbi who becomes power drunk after his coronation. He does not violate due process in the selection of the young maiden who is to carry ritual sacrifice for the peace and progress of the land, but he also defiles the virgin. He engages in extrajudicial killings and imprisonment of his subjects. Asagidigbi symbolises a pattern of authoritarian leadership prevalent in some African nations, including figures like Yahya Jammeh of Gambia, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Charles Taylor of Liberia, Francisco Macías Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt, and Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, who are characterised by authoritarian rule, human rights abuses, and suppression of dissent. Their regimes are marked by extensive secret police networks, outrageous proclamations, the persecution of intellectuals and minorities, extrajudicial killings, and the use of national resources for personal enrichment. Under Asagidigbi's rule, the state apparatus—law enforcement, judiciary, traditional institutions, and even the intelligentsia—are reduced to tools for enforcing personal power.

The complicity of the electorate in the entire crises of leadership and attendant choas in many African nation is brought to fore in the play through sublte military takeover. In deed, like the narrator comments, people are the "victims of self-inflicted disaster, because the people dine and wine with with injustice" (7). He queries further that "a people get the kind of leader they deserve? And now, the rain of retribution has wet our seed of corruption and we must reap the fruit" (40).

4.3 Democracy, Tyranny and Insensate Leadership in Ben Tomoloju's Jankariwo

Jankariwo is a politically charged satirical drama that interrogates the abuse of power, corruption, and authoritarian leadership in postcolonial African states. The play exposes the contradictions of leadership in societies where those entrusted with power become agents of oppression, greed, and moral decay. Tomoloju, in the play, gives a panoramic view of a society plundered by its caretakers—people elected to oversee the welfare of citizens and resources, revealing leadership profligacy and how that impoverishes the society and makes people lose hope in democratic establisment and leaders.

An archetype of African epic theatre tradition, the play revolves around Anjuwon Owonifaari, a corrupt and lawless political leader. He governs the state of Olumoroti with an iron hand, sustaining his authority through intimidation, manipulation, and violence, rather than democratic consent. Councilor Anjuwon is insensitive to the plights of his people—the teachers, factory workers, and especially the farmers whose supports he enjoyed at the polls (40). He allows the attraction of his office to becloud his reasoning to the extent that he relinquishes his social and familial responsibility to his househelp. The wife, Remilekun, gallivants around the globe in the name of looking for goods to sell to his impecunious citizens at exorbitant prices. Her junketing is subsidised by the bureaucracy. Anjuwon and his cronies, exemplified in Alhaji Babulukudi, enjoy themselves, looting government treasury, mismanaging and diverting public funds for private purposes. The execiveness of these civilians brings about the military takeover of the government, thereby, putting them on the run.

Set in fictional nation of Olumoroti, the play graphically illustrates some factors that have imperiled democracy in Africa. One of the factors that have contributed to the crippling state of democracy in Africa as depicted in the play is ostensive extravagent lifetyle of political elites. Remilekun, Anjuwon's wife, exemplifies how people in political position lavish limited public resources on personal enterprises. She junkets around the world, from Asia to Europe and America, squandering public funds, while those they govern at home suffer hardship. She travels from Hong Kong to United States of America, Japan, and Moscow. She flaunts:

> I know I am living high
> Trotting around the world
> Sometimes you find me in New York, Rome or London
> Trying to find my kind of Paradise.
> Some people to go to Mecca Some to Jerusalem
> With Foreign Exchange abundant I can do that too

To shop out my god in big supermarket (28-29).

Similar display of public wealth is demonstrated in Alhaji Babulukudi and his daughter, Rekiya. Tomoloju illustrates how children of political elites like Rekiya get unrestricted access to public fund and do what they like with it, while the citizens who truly own the resources struggle for peanut: "Rekiya […] dips a hand in his (Alhaji Babulukudi's) pocket, grabs some wads of currency notes and runs away. Alhaji sprays the chorus with crisp currency notes. Members of the chorus stampede one another to pick some notes…" (43).

Diversion of public fund for personal businesses by postcolonial African leaders at the expense of the sufferring masses is a point to note about the crippling state of democracy in Africa. Councillor Anjuwon and Alhaji Babulukudi do not only recklessly lavish the nation's commonwealth on their individual aggrandisements, they also divert workers' salaries into their private enterprises while the workers live in misery and harrowing hardship, their children suffering hunger and dropping out of school, with future full of despair. This misdemeanour is artistically captured in the dialogues between Anjuwon, Alhaji Babulukudi, and Bank Manager:

ANJUWON: […] Bank Manager, what is the position of things?
BANK MANAGER: Well, Councillor, money for the teachers' salaries has been deposited in the School's Board's account in my bank. Total is N638,000.11K.
ANJUWON: And the money for the farmers' loan is half a million naira. Put together the two will go a long way in securing the machines for the new factory. We've already obtained import licenses.
BANK MANAGER: But there is so much passion in town about the unpaid teacher's salaries and the delay in granting the loans to farmers. I have a hunch that fulfilling one of these obligations would save us from unnecessary embarrassment.
BABULUKUDI: That is book-talk my friend, What are you saying? Who is going to embarrass Alhaji Babulukudi in this country? When we bought the land on which the factory is now being constructed, who embarrassed us? Look, transfer the money into the Councillor's account and let's go on with the business.
ANJUWON: That is what I want to hear. How soon can you do that, Mr. Chibuzor?
BANK MANAGER: As soon as you want it.
ANJUWON: Today, Mr. Chibuzor. Let the teachers starve to death, I don't care. Let the students grow fungi in their brains, I'm least concerned. My business, Mr. Chibuzor, my business must grow, you heard that?
BANK MANAGER: Quite clearly.
ANJUWON: Our business, Alhaji Babulukudi, our business must grow. […]. (44-45).

This practice exhibits a gross violation of workers' right and public trust entrenched in democracy. This does not only deprive the labour their wages as and when due but also impede economic growth and development of the nation. The consequences of the deprivation of civil servants their salaries are evident in incessant workers' strike actions. The play thus depicts the cause of incessant strike actions by civil servants. It shows why various labour unions, especially university lecturers and school teachers go on endless circle of strikes with government showing least concern. The Anjuwons and his cronies in government do not care if "the teachers starve to death" or if "the students grow fungi in their brains" as a result of prolonged industrial actions embarked upon by workers due to unpaid salaries; all they care for is their private business and wealth (45).

One of the implications of political maladministration of democratic imperatives is high increase in school dropout and its attendant social vices, such as hooliganism, cultism, drug dealing, armed banditry, kidnapping, robbery, and vandalism, among others. Tomoloju depicts how students in the 'nation of Olumoroti' turn to gangsterism, causing mayhem across the land in school uniform as a result of indefinite school closure occasioned by misgovernment. The students "dispersed on the streets, idle and everyday forming a pact with the devil. The boys are a bunch of wild derelicts. The girls are potential preys of lecherous men. […], hope for the future is stilled" (61). They become bandits, so uncontrollable by the security operatives in the land and disturb the peace of the entire populace. This is

an apt representation of the sad situation of many postcolonial African countries, especially Nigeria where the play is set.

Deprivation and/or violation of human freedom under civil dispensation hamstrings democratic establishment. Freedom occupies the core of democracy as it is centally entrenched in it. Freedom is superior over tyranny as democracy over dictatorship. However, what is prevalent in many postcolonial African nations is tyrannical leadership as exemplifies in Councillor Anjuwon. Achille Mbembe describes this as 'commandement', a mode of rule inherited from colonial authority and now embodied by postcolonial states. Commandement is a power that seeks to impose itself above society, which often manifests as theatrical and arbitrary, differing from the rational bureaucracy of colonial times. Mbembe calls this "the banality of power and the power of the banal," the notion which highlights the performative and often absurd nature of power in postcolonial contexts (Mbembe, 2001:43). Many Anjuwons in government exert oppressive power of the state over the populace. Anjuwon exhibits attributes of a tyrant. He calls himself a god and behaves as one—he regards his mansion as "the sacred shrine of a god presiding over [his subjects'] fate", asking the farmers during protests to "speak to a god [...] while he has the time to spare" (37). The protests of farmers, teachers, and factory workers meet authoritative resistance from him.

Anjuwon symbolises a pattern of authoritarian leadership prevalent in some African nations. He rules the nation of Olumoroti with an 'iron fist', outrageous proclamations and threats against the people, and violation of the citizens' rights; his repressive regime is complicit in severe human rights abuses. The repressed citizens have no other place to turn than to go spiritual as many Africans are wont to do as 'the last hope of the common man'—religion, Karl Marx (1978:54) argues, is "the opium of the masses." The playwright, in a sense, thus aligns with Marx's perception of religion as an expression of real suffering, and a protest against that suffering. Although democracy allows for peaceful demonstrations against oppression, these have proven abortive and ineffective under tyranical regime, as of Anjuwon.

Like several cases of military coup d'états recoreded in Africa, the excessiveness and high-handedness of Anjuwon's administration leads to military takeover, perhaps the effect of the joint spiritual actions embarked upon by the cross-section of the populace, representing Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Belief. The intervention of soldiers is widely received with initial general jubilation among the populace. The coup is presented as a product of a long-term study by Idaamu, Anjuwon's supposed househelp who is indeed a military undercover—"Lt. Col. Jang Abisogun, a member of the new military junta who conducted an investigation into the live and life-style of members of the last administration" (67). The intention, according to Lt. Col. Jang Abisogun, is an urgent need for the redirection of the nation. The play is thus a reminder to insensate leaders that despite their powers, the inevitable could still happen, even in a democracy.

5. Conclusion

The article has examined the crises of democracy and military intervention in Africa post-independence elite politics. The study shows how Nigerian dramatists use the stage to critique authoritarianism, expose neo-colonialism, and advocate for genuine people-centered democracy. The plays examined demonstrate that drama serves both as political commentary and as a tool for ideological reconstruction. The three plays foreground the fragile nature of democracy in postcolonial Africa, and illustrates that democratic governance is threatened not just by corrupt leaders, but by complicit citizens, weak institutions, patronage politics, suppression of opposition, and the normalisation of corruption. Through complex characters, the playwrights emphasise that the sustainability of democracy requires accountability, civic awareness, strong institutions, and collective moral responsibility. It finds and recommends that for democracy to thrive in Africa, the populace must actively and critically engage in the political system. Citizens must as a matter responsibility critically engage with elected officials, as true democracy relies on the active participation and scrutiny of the populace regarding governance decisions, policies, and laws. Again, there should be multi-party system with good number of credible andidates from whom the electorate can freely choose without fear or intimidation. Democracy thrives in freedom. The right of the citizens to choose their leaders without fear, intimidation and manipulation should be protected. There should be electoral reform that disallows perpetuation of national leadership by a specific class or elite—a dynastic political leadership, where

power remains within the same family or powerful group for extended periods. Inclusive leadership fosters popular participation and allows for equitable distribution of national resources that engender peace and harmony. In addition, strong and constructive oppositions are required to checkmate descent of the ruling party into authoritarianism and abuse of power. In all, there must be maintenance of the rule of law, protection of human rights, avoidance of ethnic and cultural discrimination, autonomy of institutions, and transparent and cooperative political atmosphere to sustain democracy in Africa.

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