

Dramatising ‘Recession’ and Total ‘Black-out’ in Nigerian Ivory Towers

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Abstract

Artistic commitments in Africa, Nigeria in particular, have continued to countenance the various socio-political as well as the economic adversities that have plagued the eclectic spheres within which the human agencies constantly attempt to make a meaning of their existence. Therefore, that the various segments in the Nigerian society have entered pervasive moral recessions is not so unpopular, but the fact that other specific clusters unofficially saddled with the responsibility of reasonableness and conscience pricking have discarded such roles is more worrisome and a little appalling. The foregoing is a given in the placement of academic institutions in Nigeria, just like some others all over the world, which started by occupying the front burner in the annals of good governance, probity, accountability and the entrenchment of the rules of law and respect for human dignity. However, the above is no longer the case in view of the fact that the definite lines demarcating the ivory tower from the recklessness of other societal segments have not just been blurred but eliminated. This portends the long-time onslaught and abandonment suffered in the face of government insensitivity and policy somersaults over the years. It is going by the aforementioned that this paper aims to make a critical reading of Seiza Mike Aliu’s play, *Mid-day Blackout* (1998), to interrogate, among many other socio-political engagements, how the ivory tower has shifted and drifted from the high echelon of orderliness to the perilous abyss of disorder and anarchy. The paper seeks to argue that negative elements have a surreptitious manner of eroding those that are seen to be good. It also makes a statement about the little success that the various agitations by a select few who have always chosen to stand at variance with the state, hegemonies and their representatives have recorded. However complicated drawing a conclusion is, the paper paradoxically opines that there might be the need to import some form of impetus from without, that is the bankrupt larger world, in order to reinforce the simmering extant iconoclastic embers within the ivory tower. Obviously, a more rigorous intervention is needed to light up the pervasive mid-day black-out.

Introduction

The fact that every society attempts an improvement in its socio-political configuration is to say that such is needed for the total health of the geographical entity and the individual citizens that exist within it. It is, however, a pathetic fact that the circumstantial realities around us portend a denigration of the geographical space and status quo as the debasement of the various principles that form the underlining current of formation and engineering. More often than not, the different oppositionality that defines human relations is reminiscent of constant tensions, pressure and dissensions. This is more so in relation to the retention of negative abortive contraption and the voracious subterfuges staged against such by the change-desiring groups and individuals. Therefore, from the Marxist notion of dialectic materialism to Gramsci’s trope of hegemony and counter-hegemony, social as well as political platforms have been rife with continuous contestations between the forces of ‘good’ and those of ‘evil’. The ideas of good and evil in this case are not a take of moralistic engagements but the most apparent distinction of forwardness and backwardness, progression and conservatism, revolution and counter-revolution. The above manifestations are more entrenched in climes that are distinctively postcolonial in scope, orientation, and development. While the hegemony and its representatives are wont to be traced to the manipulative cords of some external actors, the elements that are opposed to them are often seen as the unannounced keepers of the destinies of the generality of the masses. This latter group is not commonly described with a neo-colonial interruption by the members but by state agencies that would be bent on discrediting the anti-establishment activities of such group. The seemingly state of flux that is characteristic of the above scenario is elemental to the Nigerian nation state that has been held in intractable claws of political disruptions and socio-economic disjunctions. For the sake of periodisation in the annals of the Nigerian post-colonial state, the various military and political regimes and categorisations experienced so far have in their totality encased disorientation, anarchy and misrule. The implications of such misrules are characteristically linked to the poverty, the huge diseases, unemployment and absolute underdevelopment that have perpetually impaired the people and retarded progressive movements. One segment of the Nigerian society that has seemingly distinguished itself in the faces of the many affronts committed on the psyche and physicality of the people is the academic community, most especially the university, which has invariably challenged despotic

rulers; military, semi-democratic and democratic, at one point or the other. Incidentally, the ivory tower has since reneged on this responsibility as it has more or less melted into the popular pauperisation reigning in the country. It is given this realisation that this paper unpacks the shared misdemeanours between the state, as a general entity, and the academia, from where it is expected that there would be some level of rationality and order within the general state of distrust and disorder.

Art and the Acts of Socio-Political Engineering

Art is believed to putatively reflect the society. Apart from this notion of reflection or refraction as the case may be, literature, drama inclusive, has the potential to transcend the level of reflecting to engage with issues and realities in a particular society and in the process achieving some castigation or imploration towards taking specific actions. Even though the work of art might not be overtly judgemental, such is often recognisable within the letters of the written medium and the aesthetics of both the lettered and that performed. It is in the light of this that this article would make a critical evaluation of Seiza Mike Aliu's *Mid-Day Blackout* (1998). In spite of the misgivings around the direct relevance of literature to the contemporary world, the view of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2002:435) encapsulates the place of concreteness that writers occupy in the society when he makes reference to the "magnetic field of tensions and conflicts" they share with respective hegemonies. Ngugi (ibid) had earlier affirmed that "the war between art and the state is really a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state" (434). Therefore, while drama can be used in the construction of hegemony, it can also be used by the marginalised to deconstruct and challenge the dominant power as well as contest marginality (Gbemisola Adeoti, 2005:94). Other than being the chronicler of the memories of events that define the lives of his/her people and how they respond to them, the writer goes a step further from the domain of lamentation to artistically and effectively engage with the material conditions of the people with a view to evaluating how things went wrong and the possible way out of such quagmire. Drama particularly throws up actions which often cohere with that which is present in the actual world "and thus constituting an efficacious enactment of social transformation rather than just an entertaining representation of fictional action" (Loren Kruger, 1999:5). It is noteworthy that any verisimilitude noticeable from the interactions of the real and the fictional is to be laid on the altar of make-believe for effectiveness. Regrettably though, the dramatisation of the unacceptable conditions of the people in both colonial and postcolonial Africa has only produced remarkable results in a place like South Africa where political theatre functioned as a barometer to measure the inclination of the apartheid government and to sting it to a point of inconvenience. The suspected limitations of drama in post-independent African countries notwithstanding, it is still very diligent in the quest for conscientisation and mobilisation.

Synopsis of the Play

Mid-Day Blackout is set in the community of Harubo, which latter turns out to be a metaphor for a disjointed postcolonial society like Nigeria, or what Leon de Kock (2004:18) calls "a fertile ground for foundational binary inscription, a place of blatant dualism ...". Apart from this, there are specific manifestations that are pointedly indicative of socio-political realities in the Nigerian state. The play-text opens with a mythical narration of how three members of a clan migrate and melt into other communities. These clans are later depicted as the three major tribes in Nigeria (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa), who are in turn accused of marginalising other smaller units in the geographical space called Nigeria. No sooner had the three major principals settled down to a communal life and a concentration to getting beautiful women to assuage their sexual urges than a combusive civil unrest broke out, leading to the displacement of people, most especially women and children. Amidst the political corruption that put the people against the state and vice versa, the academic community was cited as an integral part of the mess created by bad leadership and total misrule. The various problems plaguing the educational system are highlighted copiously to include poor remuneration for teachers, incessant strike actions and profound devaluation of the teaching profession at all levels. In turn, the constant disruptions in academic activities make students vulnerable as they get involved in anti-social activities which by extension impact negatively on the society, signalling the beginning of the mid-day blackout that pushes the country to the precipice. Along the trajectory of engagements with dramatic tropes like the use of songs and narrations, a twist is introduced to the plot when GMT,¹ the personification of the teaching profession as a 'touch bearer', stumbles on a tattered bag in a gutter which later turns out to contain huge American dollars. This 'breakthrough' turns his fortune around for good, socially and materially. GMT, even though open to the moral question around integrity and sincerity,

¹ GMT is an acronym of The Grand Master Teacher. The acronym is used inconsistently with and without dots in the play. However, the paper sticks with the variant that has no dots in-between the letters.

chooses to deploy the money substantially, having hugely transposed his wife to the height of material suicide, to advance the position of teachers and the teaching profession. The mobilisation project embarked on by GMT to precipitate a total black-out in the educational sector and the society at large is meant to press home the usefulness of teachers as the bedrock of development in the society, on which every other endeavour is predicated. GMT strives towards more credibility as he wades off all attempts being made to compromise him by the government.

Communality: Drama and the Audience

Mid-Day Blackout brings to the fore the social/educational relationship that exists between theatre and the practitioners, on the one hand, and members of the audience, on the other. The two narrators in the play, Mamasay and Papagee, demystify the stage by blurring the estranging distance between the actors and the audience. Apart from this, the narrators reiterate some of the functions of drama as they declare that “drama is concerned with critical view and social commentary on human beings – their aspirations, their predicaments and some seeming disappointments” (*MB*, 5). In furtherance of the explications on the communicative model of drama, the audience is reminded of the cooperation that is required from it: attentiveness and alertness. Added to these, elements like drama, songs and music are valourised as veritable instruments in performance. While the audience is encouraged to relate very closely with the actors and actresses, a caveat however nudges them to be wary of possible misadventure with them, which would be counter-productive. By and large, the approach favoured by the playwright is reminiscent of participatory theatre. This participation creates in the audience identification and ownership needed to receive the message in the art and perpetuate whatever ideas that are propagated. This self-referencing by the staged drama is an instance of metatheatre. “Metatheatricality”, according to Brian Crow (2002:133), is “the capacity of stage text and performance to refer to and comment on its own nature as an artistic medium ...”. Looking at the way metatheatre operates in Western theatrical discourses, Crow (2002:134) opines that “on the African continent dramatists have explored the metatheatrical not so much to chart the lineaments of the existential self as to expose and condemn social and political conditions that are deeply repugnant to them”. To drive home the fact that what the playwright desires from the audience, used here to represent members of the public, is total support, Papagee the male narrator, towards the end of the play, tells the audience:

But why sit there indifferent to the teacher’s plight? Doesn’t the education of people in this country concern you? Or do you want the real mid-day blackout to strike? Join us at the square where we shall table our problems” (*MB*, 64-65).

A platform for this interaction, synergy and collaboration between the teachers (actors and actresses) and the public (audience) is established in the play when members of the audience join the actors/actresses on the stage to sing and dance Fela Anikulapo Kuti’s song, titled ‘Ayakata’ (*MB*, 28).

The mythical narratological device used to open the play is reminiscent of those associated with the origin of almost every town and village in Africa. Such myths of the beginning and belongingness are often hugely woven around the stories of migration, conquest and settlement. The evolutionary trends recognised by most of these social settings have been used principally to capture the gradual melting and coalescences which supported the various compartmentalisations that were later to be seen as communities of difference and sovereignty. At the same time, communities of location and that of citizenship are integrative to those built around social and political manifestations. The Nigerian nation, like most others on the continent of Africa, has been engrossed in one form of socio-political and economic debacle or the other. While it has been argued copiously at several quarters that the bane of development in Nigeria, like those others in her shoes, is largely due to leadership irresponsibility and outright ineptitude, such executive recklessness has in turn impacted negatively on vital areas of human endeavour, including the educational system and other sundry human developmental initiatives. Just like military interruptions have been blamed variously for the debilitation of the staggered stable developments occasioned by colonial rulers and committed first set of post-independent indigenous leaders, it is saying the obvious that the educational sector in Nigeria was not immune from the retrogression that came to define the antics of military rulers. Other than the dearth of funding which crippled the operations of the education sector, the ‘conscription’ of students of various institutions of higher learning to confront the monstrosity of the military juntas at different periods produced an army of disenchanting able-bodied young men and women who wasted their energy, time and ‘temerity’, required for capacity building, on sustained campaigns and insurrections against irresponsible dictatorial leaders. While some of these students came out with their best in the face of tyranny, some others were initiated and schooled in the culture of betrayal and consumerism. The

latter traits are today some of the characteristics the Nigerian nation is struggling to obliterate in her socio-political realities.

Textual Analysis

Aliu's *Mid-Day Blackout*, as pointed out earlier, is a satire of the Nigerian socio-political, economic and educational life. The playwright's personal experiences, ambitions and sentiments, no doubt, must have been brought into play in the drama. This is a possibility generative of his life as a teacher, for the greater part of his career, at the Federal College of Education, Kano, Nigeria, which is in a region noted for more incessant socio-political and religious crises. The name of the community/country, Harubo, is an aggregation of the names of the three characters, Habu, Kurunmi, and Chibo, who are representatives of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Habu stands for the Hausa community, Kurunmi for the Yoruba cluster, and Chibo for the Southern Igbo conglomerate. The play however negates the myth of the evolution of the Nigerian state as it advances migration rather than the notion of British-conceived and implemented amalgamation that has become problematic in post-independent Nigerian political interactions and permutations. Harubo is described in the biblical light as the land of "milk and honey", blessed with natural resources and reflected in details like "the marine riches of the coastal region, the unceasing harvest of timber, cocoa, rubber, kolanuts, and fruit bearing palms of the rain forest ... the groundnut pyramids, the endless heaps of cotton bales, the grains and the hide and skin products of the savannah belt ..." (MB, 16). In spite of these abundant 'blessings' from nature, the land of Harubo is enmeshed in socio-political scuffles which are blamed redundantly on the *eshu*'Satan'.² This opinion and other religious sentimentalities like the use of the phrase, "you will live and not die" (MB, 34) depict the sense of a highly religious country that is lurked in the throes of self-deceit. For instance, rather than for successive governments to channel proceeds from the natural resources to improve the wellbeing of the citizenry, the culture of the 'survival of the fittest', which Papagee, one of the narrators, calls "the primitive order of the animal kingdom" (MB, 23), has been instituted over the years. The resultant effect of this has been trenchant monopolisation of opportunities and resources to the detriment of people who are isolated and consigned to the position of the subaltern.

It is, therefore, a struggle between jobless starving masses and mindless, greedy, and selfish haves. While such instances of disadvantageous living is pronounced in the socio-economic conditions of individuals, the idea and frontiers of marginalisation has been taken to the levels of ethnic colourations and considerations. Therefore, it will be right to argue that the adventures of the existence of these tribal groups is characterised in open conflict (Henriette Rika Benveniste and Costas Gaganakis, 2000:8). Agencies of government and democratic evolution like the judiciary and the media that should support the wellbeing of the masses are deployed by the authorities in *Mid-Day Blackout* to perpetuate the exploitation of the downtrodden. The excerpt of a newspaper editorial on pages 63 and 64 in the play reflects not just how 'conquered' the media profession under most repressive governments is but the propagandist follies that the noble profession is reduced to. Even though many countries in Africa, for instance, keep buying into the idea of the liberalisation of the media, such has mostly promoted media ownership that supports mediocrity and 'hagiographies'.

Drama, Songs and Social Commentaries

One way through which *Mid-Day Blackout* is able to realise its satirical commitment is through the use of songs/music, most especially the creation of the character of Dee Jay. The Dee Jay is used in the play to complement the efforts of the two narrators as he is invited at intervals to make commentaries that both illustrate what has been said earlier as well as narrate new stories. Songs have been used in traditional and modern African societies to goad, praise, mourn, lampoon, and tell stories. When the thematic concerns of such renditions are sardonic, songs provide the room to ventilate sorrow and encourage the broken hearted. However, the character of Dee Jay transcends the traditional mode of singing which would have favoured songs with communal authorship. The Dee Jay in contemporary life, by the operational details of his/her commitment, is at liberty to aggregate from existing popular music/songs with identifiable authorship. Such an open-ended privilege allows selections that are appropriate to given situations. Other than the 'Ayakata' song used by GMT and Elejo, mentioned tangentially above, to critique the confusions in the land of Harubo, Dee Jay uses songs to comment on socio-political and medical issues like smoking and drinking, the usefulness of the teaching profession as well

² It is important to note that 'eshu' is a god in Yoruba mythology associated, mischievously, with evil. Such association is sequel to the pursuit of having a personality that could equate the character traits of the biblical Satan. The word is borrowed here from the play being interrogated.

as education as light, the culture of consumerism or what Dee Jay calls “The Millionaire Mentality” and the evils or consequences of brain-drain. With GMT constructed as a smoking and alcohol addict who trivialises the medical warnings for smokers in the play, Eleojo, his interlocutor, calls on Dee Jay to give the former what he calls “a special advice about” his life style (*MB*, 31). Noting that “truth is a disease to the ignorant mind” (*MB*, 31), Dee Jay links smoking and drinking to diseases such as “liver problem ... kidney problem ... cardiac proble! ... (sic) ... hyhypertensive problem!” (*MB*, 32). The diseases highlighted above present a huge irony as substances that are deemed ordinarily to bring pleasure and satisfaction become sources of worry. This is analogous to the general negativity the state and its representatives pose to the people they are supposed to care for and the reversal of the gains of education as light to being the harbinger of darkness. The commitment of Dee Jay in this instance is reflective of the efforts that contemporary Nigerian singers make to discourage anti-social acts and popularise government programmes in their music. At another stage, Dee Jay sings a song to praise teachers as the bedrock of societal development. Using English, pidgin English, spiced with a Yoruba word, which allows for quick, short phrases, Dee Jay adduces the emergence of good leaders and notable professionals to the good work of teachers, and concludes that “people way no see the light in you/ Such people don loss patapata” (people who fail to see the light in you are lost forever *emphasis mine*) (*MB*, 41). The mixture contained in Dee Jay’s comments above reminds us of the kind of audience the play has in my mind. These statements are devoid of any sophistication that might be associated with either the elite or the middle class, most especially when the audience is seen as a conglomerate of the different tribes in Harubo, mostly the major ones identified in the play. ‘Patapata’, as against the English substitute, ‘forever’, has a more reinforcing linguistic property that helps convey the sense of finality or absoluteness that the user has in mind. This is similar to what Niyi Osundare calls “phonological puns” which also have some semantic implications. Osundare (*ibid*) further holds that “Yoruba is full of repetition, reduplication ... To emphasise a word or structure, it has to be repeated”.³ Dee Jay’s song, “The Millionaire Mentality”, exposes the shallowness of the reasoning of the people who use their wealth for self-serving ventures like womanising (the accumulation of women), gluttony, reburial ceremonies, and the ‘purchase’ of chieftaincy titles and honorary degrees “from famished universities” (*MB*, 52). While it might not be that Dee Jay stands to reprimand people who deploy their riches for personal comfort, he is unequivocal about the material tragedy and the principle of consumerism that define the decisions that this parodied millionaire makes. For instance, this priggish millionaire is interested in ‘accumulating’ wives for exploitative purposes. His position smacks of the tendency in most African cultures to reduce women to the level of material property. Furthermore, he is poised to live like a wasteful glutton amidst people manacled by hunger and poverty. The reburial ceremony of his unknown grandmother that he seeks to do is that of someone who died “for lack of means to obtain medical attention (*MB*, 51). Most painfully, the universities where he hopes to get undeserved honorary awards are those that have been starved of funds, possibly due to the corrupt activities of people in the mould of the millionaire. The millionaire’s song, as a satirical piece, makes a social commentary about a postcolonial nation like Nigeria where monies meant to provide infrastructure and amenities are used to line people’s pockets and ‘exported’ to Swiss banks. The last rendition by Dee Jay to be looked at here is that about education as light, and the possibility of a blackout coming as a result of brain drain. Harubo is constructed in the play as a nation passionately in love with darkness (mid-day blackout), instead of the light that education brings. Because of the lack of commitment that the Harubo community shows towards its teachers, the sooner they make a headway in their personal academic trainings and advancements the sooner they are attracted by countries like “Zimbabwe, Botswana, America and Europe” (*MB*, 56). The draining of brains as a result of economic migrations by the best of brains from any country is worse than the practice of the slave trade. While it is not the intention to support the atrocities of the diabolical Slave Trade, loosing resourceful people at this age of express globalisation is an invitation to perpetual socio-political and economic drudgery. In this wise, it is not only that such a nation loses people, but she also forfeits the huge investment committed to the training of people that have to emigrate.

Education as Light or ‘Darkness’?

The oppositionality created by the teaching profession as light against the ineptitude of the government which is tantamount to darkness runs through the plot of the play from the beginning to the end. GMT is not just the face of the teaching profession, but a personification of the indignity associated with it in the community of Harubo. Esohe, GMT’s wife gives an overview of the socio-economic condition of an average teacher in one of her lamentations about her decision to marry GMT thus:

³ See <http://westafricareview.com>. Accessed 02/02/2010.

You will say I nag too much. Well that's your own personal opinion, but for me I don't. All I do is tell you the basic truth about you and your wretched teaching profession. I have always stood by the fact that it was a misfortune that I married a teacher in this country. You have "Master's degree in your relevant field of specialization and have spent twenty one years serving the nation, trying to educate the people, but what do you have in return? Nothing but insult and snobbish reactions from your ex-students who now occupy prominent positions in the land and lord it over you. (MB, 37).

Even though one cannot gainsay the fact that Esohe is materialistic, going by her decision to allow GMT to do anything he likes with her (MB, 50) after she had resisted his seemingly sexual moves and following the realisation that GMT has suddenly become a 'rich' person, her position on the working and social conditions of teachers is instructive. It is through her regrets above that we get to know the level of education that GMT has attained. At a latter time, she also describes GMT as an idealist and a philosopher who is in love with tenets like dialectical materialism. This gives the strong suspicion that GMT, for all he cares, must be a Marxist, which was in vogue at a period in the Nigerian educational space. Esohe reveals that GMT is not only unable to meet his responsibilities at home, but that his condition has plummeted economically. While his former students are now successful in their various callings, with enhanced socio-economic privileges, GMT regresses to a level that his car becomes grounded, begins to patronise 'second-hand' products with his shoes falling out of shape like that of, as described by Esohe, "Maidandoko" "onyeburu" the "alaaru"⁴ of Oyingbo" (MB, 39). As much as Esohe appreciates the diligence of GMT as a teacher, which the latter has demonstrated in the acquisition of academic certificates, conference and workshop attendance, journal and book publications, she is however on the edge that all these do not translate to a good life and possibly properties to bequeath to one's children. Most of Esohe's apprehensions are consequent on the popularity that the idea of the 'self' enjoys in this community. Other than the fact that it is expected that the state should do that which duties, justice and reasonableness impose, the individual self is configured in the play in such a manner that it dissolves every sense of communality, in success and in peril. Therefore, what rules Esohe principally in the play is the evolving self, which is a gradation from the embodied self. The latter is strongly affected by the decisions that the community has taken hitherto. What she tries to do is, apparently, a reaction to the subaltern space she, as well as the husband and their children, have been confined to. Esohe's agitation would be best understood when considered in the context of the view of Carol Delaney (2004:35) that "space is, perhaps, our primary means of orientation in the world – physically, socially, and cosmologically". That also explains why the changing 'self' in Esohe applauds the possibility of sending their children overseas for studies and the general improvement in their living standard. She spends her post-poverty life lazing around watching television and putting herself at the mercy of GMT, sexually.

Corruption and the Inducement of Lopsidedness

The satire introduced in *Mid-Day Blackout* by the mysterious, or better still accidental, graduation of GMT to the circle of wealthy people is typical of the corrupt tendencies through which people 'appropriate' their share of the national cake. It is stating the obvious to reinforce the popular belief that the Nigeria clime provides great opportunities when one can wake up poor and retire to bed later in the day with stupendous riches. The dastardly nature of this trend is reinforced by the fact that the academia which is expected to provide responsible leadership has buried itself in the sands of superficial, 'miraculous' benefits. The commonality of corrupt attributes provides every Tom, Dick and Harry the leeway to abuse national economic sensibilities with little or no opposition at all. The trend was reflected in the educational system, for instance in universities, where many vice-chancellors became demi-gods and "built fiefdom for themselves" in an atmosphere where it was "a crime to be knowledgeable" (Said Adejumobi, *ibid*). Amidst the mismanagement of resources in the educational institutions and all other standard impairing tendencies, therefore, one constant decimal in the Nigerian educational system is the untold hardship caused by incessant disruptions in the academic calendars over the years. However, it is out of place to blame this only on the inglorious insensitivity of government as other reasons such as cultism and agitations by educational workers for improved welfare also combine to put institutions under lock and key at different times of the nation's history. The degeneration of campuses into theatres of wars among cult groups has always been traced to the emergence of a pressure group, the Pirate Confraternity, at the then University College, Ibadan. Even though the principal actor in this venture, Wole Soyinka, has vehemently absolved this group of the precarious security situation in our institutions, one can argue that the establishment of this confraternity marked a watershed in the history of Nigeria and provided the platform from which salvos could be thrown by disgruntled students against fellow colleagues, staff and

⁴ These are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba words to describe a market potter or carrier.

institutional representatives.⁵ The cataclysmic proportion that cultism has attained in the Nigerian academic space is better imagined today than experienced, given the maiming and killing of people and the destruction of property. As cultism attained notoriety too, the political class after the hiatus created by military interjections has taken advantage of the rudderless youths to recruit thugs and machineries who are used for self-serving purposes. The consequence of this is the infiltration of the larger society by young hands who have been dangerously armed to terrorise innocent men and women. By so doing, the citadel of learning that is expected to provide the needed catalysts for positive change and vision ends up corrupting and violating the community that is the site of its social responsibility. While members of the extended community wriggle under the pain of youthful/student terrorism, players in the academic courts are stripped of the dignity of protecting the essence and spirit of the academia as they are often brutalised and killed, losing their hard earned resources to wanton destruction.

Endless Strikes as Metaphor for ‘Mid-Day Blackout’

Other than the disruptions caused by monsters that have been moulded in students, various struggles by members/workers in the academic community to pursue their legitimate goals of enhanced welfare through industrial actions – popularly called strikes – have, at one time or the other, evoked closures in our institutions. The spate of strike actions witnessed in our citadel of learning was largely fallout of government abandonment of the educational system. Said Adejumobi attests to this when he submits that the crisis in the educational sector was triggered by the state, “especially by successive military regimes, but ... has assumed new and frightening proportions”.⁶ Specifically, the military era was noted for institutional corruption, amidst which capital flight was popular at the expense of pressing socio-political and educational responsibilities. The decade that could be best described as an interregnum also witnessed unwarranted stagnation and retrogression in infrastructural facilities. Roads in educational institutions, just like the sordid tale in the larger society, wore potholes and buildings lost the aesthetics that heralded their ‘births’. Laboratories became nests for rats and bugs, with library books decorated with moths. These different shades of dilapidation were described by what Niyi Osundare in his valedictory ‘homily’ at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, as a case of the universe leaving our universities, or the ivory leaving our tower.⁷ Speaking further on Osundare’s assessment of the University of Ibadan as a microcosm of the Nigerian state, Reuben Abati opines that the “university is one of teachers' strikes, workers' protest, students' unrest, students' cultism, and the devaluation of all known standards. The Nigerian story, nay the African story has been reproduced in UI (referring to the University of Ibadan, *emphasis mine*) in such a painful manner”.⁸

As mentioned before in the analysis of Dee Jay’s song, the rot that took over the institutions in Nigeria saw many academics seeking ‘refuge’ and fulfilment, or better still greener pastures, in more organised and stable countries. While this brain drain in our educational institutions has been decried by concerned individuals, agents of the state have at one time or the other whittled it down to the level of unnecessary apprehensions. To this latter group, the present drain is thought to be readily there to be gained at any time. Other than the fact that these people are forced into economic exile, the Nigerian state that has invested in them either directly or indirectly is deprived of the opportunities that their expertise offer. This is not to mention the psychological dislocation that these migrants suffer as a result of their forced migration. And going by the continuous precariousness at home (as a result of the dearth of infrastructure), the academic exiles are not in a hurry to embark on a return even when their stay in their exile communities is unbearably discomfiting. Only time will tell if the perpetual longing of the exiles would be met by improved conditions back home in Nigeria.

⁵ The issue of cultism in Nigerian educational system has consistently been a nagging one. Christopher Odetunde in an article establishes the fact that confraternities/fraternities exist in every area of human interactions; social, religious, professional, etc., which do have a commitment to improve on the lives of the people. He defines cultism as “an unorthodox or spurious deviation from the tenets of confraternity ... formed, at least in Nigeria, for the sole purpose of destroying, pillaging and usurping violent powers inherent in the new found cults for political intimidation and extra judicial killings”. In contrast, Odetunde reiterates the view of Wole Soyinka about his definition “of the fraternity he formed over fifty years ago” to the effect that “the members of his original group were young and idealistic men”, and that “their fraternity was formed to counter colonialism which still exists in Nigeria of today but under a different aegis”. However, the fact remains that this group has been bastardised by both military and civilian predators who exploit the situations of students who are products of idleness, poverty and disorientation in families to perpetuate their selfish ends. See <http://www.nas-int.org>. Accessed 5/02/2010.

⁶ See *The Guardian*, Thursday, October 08, 2009.

⁷ See <http://nigeriavillagesquare.com>. Accessed 02/02/2010.

⁸ See <http://nigeriavillagesquare.com>. Accessed 02/02/2010

However, while some academics contemplate migrations across borders, others simply degenerate with the system. At the same, time some others bury their dignity to take up appointments under military leaders as well as (latter), civilian dictators. This is close to the description of the teachers by Papagee that they "... dissolved into the main-stream of the society" (*MB*, 62). Most, if not all, of these academic jobbers behaved in manners that totally negate the attribute of the major character in the play under examination, GMT, who deploys his opportunistic wealth to engender positive mobilisation, as they align with the state to further perpetuate the negativity and the reversal of the fortune of the academic industry. As mentioned before now, central to the abandonment of the ivory tower by academics is poor remuneration. The systematic 'popularisation' of poverty by successive administrations in Nigeria has sharpened the resolve of many academics to do anything that will release them from the claws of disempowerment. The foregoing might explain the close to spontaneous willingness on the part of this set of people to terrorise belligerent members of the academic community, most especially committed members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to challenge anti-people/developmental policies. For almost two decades the Union consistently warned respective government players against bowing to World Bank and IMF policies that, among many other things, recommended the deregulation and 'privatisation' of tertiary education in Nigeria. The polarity created by ASUU and the government has allowed the former to lay claim to the authorship of masses oriented initiatives while the latter is consistently struggling to shed the toga of tyranny and wickedness towards its citizens. However, it is far from being true that the assumed positions given to the two contenders are a true reflection of their ideals. This is more so since details of their preferences do not typify absolute classification along the trajectories of positivism and negativism. A common ground can be attained by the two groups if certain conditions are met to form a template and a platform for the reengineering of the educational sector. In spite of the optimism that a possible commonality in opinion raises, the edgy behaviours of government 'practitioners' pose a strong threat to achieving any betterment in the educational sector. One painful event that comes to mind here was the avoidable chaos created at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, with the sack of 49 members of the teaching staff under the administration of a civilian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, who best passed for a dictator as far as democratic norms were concerned. The supreme court ruling that ordered the reinstatement of the sacked teachers and the payment of their salaries for the eight years the protracted case lasted vindicated those who believed in the standard practice dictated by the rule of law and exposed the recklessness of tyrannical government and the fickleness of university administrations who are factotums per excellence. Suffice to know, however, some individual and group of individuals are of the opinion that the institutional repression experimented by the University of Ilorin administration is the desirable initiative required for stable academic calendar in Nigerian Universities.

Mid-Day Blackout takes the consequences of disruptions in academic activities beyond the obvious reason of brain drain to other possibilities of 'darkness' which has a far-reaching effect not only on the country but the individuals who represent the hope and the future of the country. One of the negative implications of incessant strikes in schools is highlighted in the dialogue between two characters, Akpan and Nayivi. Akpan hinges his revulsion for the ongoing strike in the play on the fact that "young boys and girls are wasting away at home, planting the seed of mid-day blackout" (*MB*, 54), while the latter identifies the greatest domestic mischief his son has been engaging in as the impregnation of a co-student who is also a victim of idling. The action of Nayivi's son has not just ruptured the educational plans of the lady, Ekaete, but has the capacity to mar his own aspirations considering the fact that he is just in the first year in the university and too early to consider marriage. Apart from this, some other male students are said to have constituted themselves to gangsters who invariably become thorns on the flesh of already depraved people and system. Mamasay sums up the consequences of the strike thus: "For many students, it was a matter of idle hands grabbing offers from demonic fantasy, the get-rich-quick syndrome. Juvenile delinquency and all sorts of crimes crept in. The mid-day black-out was set on its marks" (*MB*, 62). The overall effects that a breakdown in education has on the larger society reinforce the underlining theme of a blackout. The moral degeneration, most especially the materiality that governs the lifestyle of young men and women in contemporary Nigeria is believed to have started with the systematic collapse of the educational sector.

Conclusion

It is saying the obvious that the Nigerian educational sector, just like every other sphere of life, has, for about four decades now, been in the throes of neglect and decay. The 'starvation' caused by under-funding and the gradual infiltration of the citadels of learning by the materialistic tendencies that are popular in the wider society have ignited a blackout that is now pervasive in every aspect of human endeavour. While some concerned

players are still struggling to sustain the ideals and quality of education, under a stringy condition, the case of the educational sector is best described today in the words of Papagee, which is “Garbage in garbage out” (MB, 53). With the new fashion of training one’s wards abroad, both middle class and ‘money-missed road’ parents are simply throwing away hard earned foreign exchange and starving the local educational industry of needed funds to re-engineer it for sustainable development. As the mid-day blackout persists, no conjecturing can signal when a ray of light would come up in the Nigerian educational horizon. The chaotic manner in which the play ends is reminiscent of the quick-fix approaches that are being contemplated to rescue the sinking system, customary of the hurried manners things are done in the country, Nigeria, which is apparently reflected in the text. However, the dramatic collaboration between the actors/actresses and the audience that the play anticipates will only be duplicated in the actual context when an overarching effort is made to attack the challenges headlong. No matter what, the ivory needs to return to the tower in the Nigerian education system.

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