

**That Nebulous Geography of Power: Reading
Dictatorship and Governance in Soyinka's Power Plays**

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There are plays in Soyinka's literary corpus that easily pass as discourse of power and politics, especially political power and its dispensation in post-colonial dictatorships. Kongi's Harvest is one of such plays. So too are the television sketches, Before the Blackout and After the Blackout. Dealing with power as they do, these plays are organised as parodies of recognisable social and political idiocies, placing greater emphasis on the parodic strategic of mimicry in all daily activities. While they deal with questions and issues of power, they provoke us, the reader or spectator as the case may be on "new discursive formation, to the transformation of the discourse of an age" (Ana Lopez; 63). These uses of the parodic have been stressed by theorists of parody such as Bakhtin and Foucault.

In Soyinka's power - plays meaning his plays that deal exclusively with power, its acquisition, dispensation and organisation, parody is central to the form. The contexts are often all too obvious. When the content of a particular dramatic text, say Death and The King's Horseman is historical, the need is often to parachute the historical into contemporary events. The ultimate aim is to re-read these events in the light of the contemporary. Wole Soyinka's power- plays deal with history and social phenomena, employing the strategies which the elastic definition of parody defines for literary work, including performances texts. My aim in this essay is to show that the textual practice of parody is itself a political act. This act is serious, leading not only to the laying bare of social events of significance, but also towards creating a new political credo. The new political credo is defined within the parodic practice itself.

Take Kongi's Harvest for instance. This play recalls the political chaos of post-independence Nigeria. Modernity is superimposed on traditionality. But it is a failing traditional institution with all its corruption and ineptitude. It is not a system of governance that can prepare the people of that decadent Yoruba Kingdom for a place in the modern world with radio, brassband and all that. Against these two modes of governance, the play opens up another possibility - the Daodu/Segi coalition anchored in Segi's Night club. This political front does provide succour for dissent, a very important aspect of the political system that aspires towards people-oriented governance. Segi's father has a political place in Isma, currently under the throes of Kongi's dictatorship. He is put in prison for some political reasons. Segi seeks some revenge for this and other reasons. She finds a ready partner in Daodu. Daodu is politically correct, and may well represent Soyinka's political figure who will bring about his holistic idea of governance in post-colonial Africa - the gradual amalgamation of traditional political options and practices with those of the West. However, this is not as simplistic as it seems. Daodu is a very difficult character to define. His rather playful

exterior further complicates matters. His dissension is sometimes tempestuous, depending more on the spur of the moment rather than the bitter logic of each situation. There were, of course, pockets of dissents in political dispensations in traditional Yoruba politics. Examples abound in ancient Yoruba political history. The fall of Alaafin Abiodun, for instance, owed a lot to internal rivalry. It was not merely the impact of the Fulani jihadists that sent this once unrivalled kingdom spinning on its tops. The case of Daodu is not singular in this respect, but it is significant. It carries with it a new modernity.

The Segi/Daodu coalition is modern. The Night Club is not a place for respectable politicians to gallivant. It is an alternative venue for the politically repressed, a classic point, of dissent, complete with the bohemianism of the 20th century political life of Europe which Soyinka knows very well. As a post of the oppressed, the Night Club is a symbol of the political alternative - the new movement. For Daodu this political refuge provides a suitable facade. The Night Club provides a brilliant cover for Daodu's opposition to the decadent political system of Kongi's regime. It also functions from another extreme. The Night Club gives a facade of Daodu as a no-serious- heir to the throne of Oba Danlola. For the habitués of the Night Club Daodu is the progressive man. Soyinka treats him as a possible choice of ruler in the aftermath of Kongi's dictatorship and Danlola's inept traditionality. This is the heart of the matter in the play.

The Segi/Daodu coalition leaves a permanent dent on Soyinka's treatment of power acquisition and dispensation in post-colonial society. Educated in various modes of political subterfuge, Daodu cannot help but use the strategy of the renaissance intellectual that he is. He is a man of intense intellectual upbringing, wise in the ways of the world, but his ties to the dying monarch denies him an altruistic claim to power and governance. The tension arising from his traditional self and that of his modern posture remains the over-riding character of this political idealist. There is little doubt about Daodu's desire to change the political fortunes of Isma. His sympathy is neither for the dying tradition nor for the decadent modernity. But he is not a practical man of politics either. Faced with odd choices, he vacillates between two extremes of governance, finding no solace in the middle. All we can frankly claim for him in the chaos of Kong's political regime is that he is neither of the two. When the play ends, he gropes between the extremes of political directions which he has drawn for himself, at undecided even in the face of immense political turbulence. In the character of Daodu, Soyinka may well have predicted the political ineptitude and inadequacies of jailed Chief M.K.O Abiola, winner of the 1993 Presidential elections. True to the character of Daodu, Abiola was never sure whether or not he wanted to defend the mandate until it was annulled by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida.

In Kongi's Harvest, one of Soyinka's apt denunciations of the corruption of post-colonial state, what is evident is the obvious parody of independence. He creates a political field of contestations in which he examines the new intellectual approach to the problem of governance and democracy. Yet he does not do this from a partisan perspective. Almost mute in the political debate, the authorial voice regains its vitality only after we understand the total political map which Soyinka draws of our post-colonial situation. While Daodu represents the "free mind", sometimes willing

to give up his feudalistic origin for a free human society, Soyinka does not tell us if the option is free of hitches. Indeed, he seems to be saying that the past must come to terms with the present. In other words, the new Isma, represented by Daodu must look across the frontiers of Isma's political structures in order to build an enduring political future. The sterility and isolation of the Aweri fraternity which Kongi nurtures as his political and cultural tink-tank represents the distance between the governed and the governor. Against this is situated the Night Club. It is interesting that the events that lead to the eventual collapse of Kongism began in the intellectual chit-chat of the Night Club. Although Okpure O. Obuke does not quite recognise the significance of this Night Club, he nonetheless broaches the importance when he writes that "it is perhaps not quite clear what interest in the power structure in the society Daodu and Segi represent, but most probably, they symbolise the power of the common man (1980:136)". It is my opinion that Daodu and Segi represent the first truly intellectuals' attitude towards governance of a democratic kind in a post-colonial society. The Night Club is the site of the new feeling, the new hopes, new governance devoid of dictatorship.

Meaning in Soyinka's work is never a unified "truth", since one meaning generates other possibilities. In his plays, especially those that deal with power, governance and political debate, the last item being an essential part of liberal capitalism of free enterprise democracy, meaning is multi-dimensional. In Kongi's Harvest, as in other power-plays, the idea of one undisputed meaning is even more slippery. For instance, some serious and respected critics have decried the mythic conscious position in Soyinka's plays, denouncing this as the re-enforcement of infallible gods in the affairs of human¹. Yet there are others who prefer to see Soyinka's deployment of Yoruba pantheon in his plays as a mere metaphor used to examine our recurrent stupidities. Simon O. Umukoro holds his view. His reading of *A Dance of The Forest* shows, with vivid ancestors, illustrations, that the play is not simply about ghommids and but an allegorical illumination of a human community meeting to confess itself to its future through a thorough interrogation of its past. To take one of the many imageries of this play, Umukoro tells us. "If the half child represents Nigeria, the dance for it is a symbolic representation of the struggle for Nigeria. It suggests that different forces are struggling to own and control Nigeria". (1994:14). This struggle, S.O. Umukoro concludes, is a contest between communism". "Western democracy, people's democracy, capitalism and *A Dance of the Forest* is the first in the series of serious plays about governance, power and the democracy.

In *Death And The King's Horseman*, one of Soyinka's classical texts, I will examine traditional Yoruba politics in contact with European ideas of governance, and in *A Play of Giants* I will be dealing with outlandish dictators of the African continent. The aim, as I have done with the analysis of Kongi's Harvest, is to show both the potential and the suppression of the democratic instincts as well as the kind of practice of good governance which Soyinka favours. I have been to discuss Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman* for the reason for the reason that it represents the most conservative treatment of this author's view of governance and politics, yet it provides us some

clues to Soyinka's attitude to governance. Furthermore, this text is set at some distance from those I have designated as power - plays, and the deployment of the parodic is slightly different. Unlike *A Dance of The Forests*, the dramatic tension in *Death and The King's Horseman* brings into contest two cultural forms of political organisation. The play deals with the period of colonisation at the end of the British Empire.

Wole Soyinka recognises the full import of literature in the course of good governance. He is fully aware of literature's role in the restitution of Africa's cultural past. He has demonstrated in his critical writing the sacred place of the African intellectual in the fight to correct years of colonial cultural degradation as well as providing a political map for the newly independent states. He recognises, as Harry Garuba does that "Africa, as in other part of the world, has been implicated, as witness and participant, in what philosophers of history such as Kuhn and Foucault refer to as the collapse of a paradigm" (64). It is the collapse of indigenous Yoruba political paradigm that this play treats. It is the drama of Elesin Oba implicated in the subject of colonial political discourse.

Death and the King's Horseman comes from a distinct postcolonial context. It was written in the early 70s when Soyinka was engaged in Cambridge University in what one can refer to as an intense period of re-locating his cultural paradigm in the world's cultural map provided the necessarily angst which engendered the questions raised in the play. *Death and the King's Horseman* is parody of this map conceived from "a critical ironic distance", strategy which creates what Linda Hutcheon describes as both "textual doubling" (which foregrounds and reconciles) and differentiation (which foregrounds irreconcilable opposition between texts and between texts and the world).

The indigenous cultural texts, the Yoruba cultural world with all its problems and that which the British colonialist presents, are inscribed as different and irreconcilable oppositions. The Pilkings represents the arrogance and paradox of the colonial text while Olunde and Iyaloja represent the indestructible of indigenous tradition. Both texts present these very well: the Ball and the apparently strange masque performance in which the Pilkingses wear the sacred Enungun masquerade is counterposed with the seemingly intractable logic of Amusa who refuses any dealing with the Pilkings as long as they wear the Egungun costume.

The intellectual explanation for the survival and respect for indigenous political practice is assigned to the witty dialogue of Olunde confronting Mrs Pilkings over the imminent ritual suicide of his father, Elesin Oba, performed to accompany the dead monarch into the other world of the ancestors. For the Pilkingses, the representatives of the British Empire, this act is not only barbaric; it is repressively animist. It goes against the basic logic of Western existence. Soyinka strategically emphasises this ritual practice as the over-riding platform of conflict. Although Soyinka tells us that we should avoid assigning the "facile tag of clash of cultures" to this stunning display of an ancient cultural practice, the subject of the text tells me otherwise. There is, to use Bakhtin's idea of parody, "a semantic intention" that is directly opposed to the dominant colonial text, forming a

system of voicing in which Soyinka's voice opposes, in no uncertain times, the textual one. The entire text becomes a battle field of voices - two voices, the colonial voice, loud in its political importance and the oppositional voice, representing the indigenous voice, vehement in its elegant cultural counter-logic.

The whole story of *Death and The King's Horseman* is structured around a cultural practice. The suicide undertaken by the King's Horseman is constructed as a cultural and political act. The rite itself is made up of movements of carthatic import, keenly watched by the entire society. The political import is the maintenance of a system of order in what Adebayo Williams describes as the ruins of the once powerful Oyo Empire. The textual strategy conceives of it as an oppositional system fighting the colonial havoc to local political practice. The possibility is that if the Elesin Oba fails to reach and pass through the luminous passage into the other hand, the thin thread holding the devastated political world of the Oyo Yoruba people will snap and absolute chaos will reign.

When the play opens, the entire community gathers at the market place to see the Elesin Oba go through the final act (ritual suicide) which his "great forebears" have gloriously performed. The market in Yoruba cosmos is according to Williams "a signal cultural, political and spiritual position in Yoruba world" (72). It is significant that it is in this charged area that Soyinka dramatises an important history of the Yoruba in a colonial background. The entire narrative therefore focuses on what Adebayo Williams describes "as the creative equivalent of a return of the oppressed" (72). Elesin Oba fails in this important social assignment, creating a personal and communal disjuncture in the political and spiritual well-being of his society. Olunde, the son and heir to Elesin Oba, hurriedly comes back from London, sees the mess which has gone on, takes his life, ostensibly in place of his vacillating father. Iyalaja, the spokesperson of the traditional standards could not be bothered about the son's death. The son cannot take the place of the father, so the son's death is a waste, even abominable in the sight of the people. Surely certain purificatory ceremonies ought to take place to clean the society of this guilt. The entire plot is structured as a political quest in which three forms of political orders complete for the dominant place. At the centre of this quest is Olunde, whose death functions, not as a negation of life, but an affirmation of another life, the political utopia. Trained epistemology which provides the philosophical thrust for colonialism. But he is young, brash, intellectually immature. He understands his cultural roots, but this he does from a partisan position, situating everything in the background of the angst of colonial inconsistencies. And because he could not understand all of this, the importance of his cultural roots weighs over the inconsistencies of Europe. The action leading to his act of suicide is fast, heady and partisan. In the historical reality, the action of Olunde may have taken a couple of days. In Soyinka's text, the impression is that the actions leading to his suicide occur within the space of hours. Olunde returns from England, encounters Mrs Pilkings, makes the famous defence for the desecration of the Egungun masquerade (50) and the "I discover that you have no respect for what you do not understand" speech, goes in search of his father, finds and berates him and then takes his life; the momentary result of an unspeakable anguish. This act results in nothing. Olunde gains nothing.

The society gains nothing. The collective psyche goes further down the moral drain. What the Praise Singer makes of these is very obvious:

Elesin, we place the reins of the world in your hand yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil stranger tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness - you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future. Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life (75).

Soyinka seems to be saying that Olunde is the paradox of the new intellectual engendered by the first real contact with European political order. Soyinka may have some sympathy for Olunde, but the suggestion seems to be that he does not tolerate Olunde's act of suicide. Olunde is only a victim of that complex colonial order. As a political figure eager to chart a neo-traditional political order while maintaining a cultural past with all its rituals and symbols, Olunde cuts a pathetic figure. He is rooted, but somewhat sequestered from this root. In a desperate bid to prove his rootedness, he unconsciously displays his unrootedness. He commits suicide to assuage what Iyaloja describes as an act of "honour for his household and of our race" (73). The culture rejects this act. The act is sacrilegious, and so couldn't be part of the solution to Elesin Oba's intransigence.

At another level, Olunde's suicide can also be interpreted as a shortening of the impending political death of the traditional order. Who takes over from Elesin Oba? Olunde's stay in England as a medical student toned up his power of rational thinking in purely European manner, his analytical sense is sharpened, his sense of justice and equity embossed, but his understanding of his Yoruba root dwindles in his haste to prove a point. His death is more a political action, not a cultural one.

This act, to use Williams phrase, is a backward-looking political order (75). This explains why Williams concludes that Soyinka leaves us without doubt that "if suicide is the ultimate option available to African revolutionary intelligentsia in the struggle for cultural revaluation of the continent, it must be embraced without flinching" (75). Can we then dare read *Death and the King's Horseman* as a parody of two critical points in the political history of the Yoruba people in which three political voices can be easily discerned: the colonial, the indigenous, and the neo-tradition? Soyinka favours the neo-tradition with its humanistic disposition.

It is in this sense therefore that one finds it easy to agree with the position of Adedayo William on the matter of the politicalness of *Death and The King's Horseman*. Here is the classic example of a particular ritual that, in a historical pressure, transcends its original cultural goal to assume a greater political and spiritual significance (73). Elesin Oba tire of the tradition of ritual suicide, and still "earth-bound" to the things of the flesh, becomes a negation of the political will to revitalise and sustain the collective existence of the Yoruba people.

Olunde recognises this will, holds on passionately to it and seeks to protect it by every means possible. But it seems to me that Olunde's recognition tilts more towards that part of the will favouring the political, rather than the spiritual. It is evident from these cultural confrontations subsumed with the Pilkings that culture (and its spiritualism) is under the politics of bare existence in the face of another cultural onslaught - Europe's. Olunde therefore represents the liberal humanism for which Soyinka is very well associated. In Elesin Oba's discourse of failing will, Soyinka inserts the boisterousness of the neo-traditional option of Olunde, playing down father for son, emphasising the inserted discourse overtakes weak symbol of the parodied past.

In a significant way, Olunde reminds one of the renaissance figures - Hamlet. Olunde is a complex and paradoxical figure. As a political figure, he is eager to chart a neo-traditional political path, but there is little evidence in the text if he knows his culture inside out. His lone act of courage may have stunned many, but this has little or no spiritual value of the entire community. *A Play of Giants* is about political power and the abuses to which it has been put in the African continent. This drama of the politics of the continent, in our time, opens with cruel African dictators talking about (not debating) power as they have come to conceive it.

While this talk, banal and infantile, comes around to the acquisition of power, once in a long while, it pretends to look beyond it into the world of governance. But this is only briefly. Even when the talk gets this far, it veers off almost without warming. As Soyinka tells us in the introductory pages to this play, no serious attempts are made to hide the true identities of these "players of power", they are no others than President for Life Macias Nguema (Gunema in the play) of Equatorial Guinea; Emperor for Life (ex) the Field Marshal El-Haji Dr. Idi Amin of Uganda (Kamini in the text). This is one of Soyinka's few play texts dealing directly with living leaderships, the other being *From Zin With Love* which deals with the Military regim of General Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon (1983-85).

The need to be unambiguous in denouncing the political state of the continent and of its rulers has for Soyinka become very urgent. *A Play of Giants* is an attempt to understand how these grostetue figures maintain themselves in power on the continent. The play opens in the Bulgarian Embassy in the United Nations with Kamini presiding over the sculptor who is sculpting the lifesize group sculptures of the three "crowned heads" - Kamini, Kasco and Gunema. Gunema opens the talk trying to make some distinction between seeking power (governance) for its own sake and acquiring power with all its responsibilities. Gunema begins by using the instance of guerrilla fighters who threaten his power. He denounces them as misfits who do not know the responsibilities of governance.

For Gunema, beyond politics lies power (2); "politics is not power", concluding rather hastily that we (meaning this assembly of ignoble rulers) exist, "I think in the rare space which - power", For him therefore power is not equated to or linked in any sense with politics. Power belongs to certain gifted people, those who live in that "rare space". In the same vein, power does not have anything to do with good governance; if anything, power is divinely apportioned to those gifted to rule.

Kasco clarifies this talk on power, its acquisition and dispensation when he responds to Gunema in the opening drama of the politics of rulership. "If you think first of responsibility and governing you give up search for power. Lust for power, *oui*. But lust *lust for responsibility* - I never know of it". (2).

What comes out in the first pages of the first part of this rather depressing play in the buffoonery of two ignorant diabolic leaders ranting about misconstrued ideas of power and governance in the very place. (the United Nations Office) which is the symbol of world peace and democracy. The geography of power which these leaders map out is nebulous; it is the very negation of the spirit of democracy, of civilised governance, so that when Kamini says "I have no guerrillas in my country. Only bandits" (2), we perceive immediately the insertion of the author's (Soyinka's) discourse situated within this irresponsible talk in order to ridicule the warped sense of their responsibility. This prepares us for the next and accurate portrayal of the diabolic Kamini ("We call them Kondo". I catch my Kondo, I make him smell his mother's cun't). He is cruel, sadistic, foolish and ignorant.

There are also the large insertion of Kamini's superstitious self which Soyinka makes incorruptible and overwhelming all of which is the negation of real and humane idea of governance. Kamini's sexual process and preference is also very well-articulated in the first part of the play. But this is done as a re- statement of European stereotype of the blackman. Once more, what is emphasised is the irony which this inserted discourse of stereotype holds for Kamini, the Chief architect of despotic madness on the African continent in the 70s, and indeed all those who represent his idea of leadership Kamini boasts of his sexual prowess. He hates what his Scandinavian collaborator, Gundum, (an possibly sex-mate) calls "Cissy, homosexuals". For Kamini this group of sexual beings constitutes the space of discourse which is referred to as "subverts", the "Kondos". Kamini abhors this group of people. The narrative other, counter-voice, presents this as an irony because Kamini refers frequently to Europe, the source of the Blackman's insatiable sexual stereotype as "imperialist". While Kamini's position is seemingly oppositional to the politics of black representation that Europe knows and perpetuates, his actions reinforce Europe's discourse of his continent and of his kind. This strategy of utilising irony as means of re-affirming the duplicity of African leaders is well thought out. After all, it is essential, according to Kamini, for "a leader to have many wives" (4) so that the discourse of sexual prowess inhabits nebulous geography of power which according to Kasco "is indivisible" (4).

Gunema's response to Taboum's description of his acquisition of power and how this is maintained is very interesting indeed. Gunema says "Power is something I must experience another way, a very different way". This is because Gunema inhabits the "nebulous geography of power". He searches to taste it. To quote him at some length: "To seize it a la boca roll and roll it in the mouth and let it trickle down inwards, like an infusion. Once, only, I think I succeed" (21). Just before Kamini calls for a lunch break, requesting that the sculptural positions be suspended briefly, Gunema had given his other famous speech on power: "Power is the greatest voodoo and voodoo is the greatest power". (26). Many important narrative digressions occur before Gunema reveals

how he achieved power through sexual means: Kamini's sacking and torture of this chairman of his Central Bank; the persecution of the European sculptor and the laughable upgrading of the 3rd secretary to the position of 1st secretary are only some of the examples.

This is how Gunema describes that singular moment of glory: It happened finally, I tell you. It happened like this. I sentenced one man to death who I suspect of plotting against me. While he is in condemned cell, his wife come to plead for him. She is waiting all day in the house and when I am going to dinner she rush through my guards and fling herself at my legs, I am sorrow for her. So, I invite her to have dinner with my family. Well, I make long story short. I tell her what husband has done, that he is an enemy of the state and that the tribunal is correct to sentence him to death. She cried and cried, I feel sorry for her but justice is rigid span to power, it must not be bent. My wife is silent.

She know she must not interfere in affairs of state. That night, after my family retire, I take her to bed. Perhaps she think by that I will reprieve her husband, I did not know. We did not discuss it. But I take her hand she follow me to my private bedroom. When I made love to her, I taste it at last (58). Kasco asks if he (Gunema) reprieved the woman's husband after all. He replies: "He was hanged on the appointed day. I pull lever myself". Afraid after this act, Gunema could not keep the relationship with the hanged man's wife. He garrotted her. While Gunema defines the source of his power in "sexual tasting" and the extensive use of voodoo, Kasco himself beyond "the intrigues and mundane of politics, because "Power comes with death of politics". (21). Power, its acquisition and dispensation, is for these despots a matter of personal myth, not the needs of the governed own, for or the collective good of the people. Power exists on its its ownd end and for the egotistic massage of these ignoble characters. Soyinka's portrayal is true to life. It collectivises that for gruesome democracy, era of megalomania that overwhelmed the human desire It was for individual freedom, for the freedom of speech. indeed a period of the negation of human needs for freedom, for a free society.

While the first part of the play describes in vivid and shocking terms the horrors, which these "crowned heads" instituted on the ruled, the second part of this drama of idiotic rulers discusses the relationship between the troubled and bestial rulers of this continent Russia. with the diplomatic policies of Europe, the United States and Soviet Russia.

The text utilise two main narrative strategies to achieve this. The first one comes from the pathetically ignorant figures which these figures cut as leaders who know next to nothing about international politics. This strategy derives from the brutality of their acts and superstitious beliefs in the acquisition of power outside the collective consent of their people in a democratic atmosphere to that foolishly and infantile attachment to the histories of erstwhile colonial masters.

Under the pseudo-intellectual atmosphere in which these leaders discuss power and politics, they often refer to their European mentors as springs of inspiration. The partial exception of this bogus claim to European ancestry is Kamini, who then displays an even bogus claim of Chaka, king of the Zulu. In Kamini's utterances about the super-powers, there are sparks of pan-Africanism, an

ideology which inhabits the intellectually correct sphere of public debate about Africa's relationship with super powers in the 70's. However, it is obvious from Kamini's action that his talk about this relationship is only a means to a personal acquisition and perpetration of power for its own sake.

Besides Soyinka invests in Kamini's opinions about the relationship the wry humour which makes Kamini's utterances continuously laughable. The counter-voice in Kamini's narrative seems to be asking the question: how can these fools talk with rulers of the developed world when they cannot even talk constructively with their own people, or about their own situation? This may be the reason why Soyinka makes these African leaders talk, not to their European or American counterparts, but to low ranking diplomats of the foreign services of the developed world.

The second narrative strategy is to pit one superpower against the other: the Russians against the Americans and one European nation against another or one European nation against one of the two super-powers. The whole of the second part of this play is overwhelmed with the self-interest which these super-powers display. The Russians rush to see Kamini after hearing of the intention of the "crowned heads" to make and display life size portraits of themselves at the United Nations.

Although the Russians think the idea is stupid and that only ignoramuses such as Kamini and his fellow "crown heads" are capable of such idiocy, these Russian diplomats rush to see Kamini, praising "his rule for being able to fight the machinations of the Western world in various guises" by keeping faith with the spirit of great Africans such as Lumumba, Jomo Kenyatta, Nkrumah and others. But this is only a ploy. The Russians simply wanted to beat the Americans to it. While the Russians are anxious to keep the friendly link with Kamini open, they reveal their utmost disgust for Kamini. It is through Professor Batey, the complacent pro-Amin political that ideologue who sees pan-Africanism in Kamini's rulership the Russians' double-talk becomes obvious. Agitated that the first Russian who speaks in Russian who speaks in Russian pours scorn on Kamini, describing the leader as "the overgrown child", "the buffoon", Professor Batey's deadly situation only because Kamini's mood favours it. But Kamini insists on detaining these diplomats against their wishes. Not even the favoured Professor Batey could prevail upon Kamini to change his mind on this matter.

While all of this is happening, more and more people are deserting Kamini. The latest is the Ambassador, who cleverly plots his escape and then announced the coup against Kamini. Agitated, Kamini becomes insane. Soon the US delegate who has been waiting for an hour is forcefully brought in, accused of being part of the coup to oust Kamini. The US delegate who came earlier to outsmart the Russians, is delayed. On learning of the coup the US delegate begins the whole range of politics to outsmart the Russians. The US delegate immediately gives Kamini the pledge of recognition in the face of the coup, but this time handing down a condition, "The only condition we attached to our support was that the statute of our own nation - founder, George Washington be given appropriate..." (61).

Kamini is too distraught to listen. Even in this dicey situation diplomats of the superpowers still manage to maintain their interests, defining their political needs without giving a thought to Kamini's position. When the coup plotters, including enemy soldiers of a neighbouring state, finally over-run the Embassy, it is laughable to see how the "invisible" "crowned heads" go crazy to find "safety" falling flat on the face of the floor.

In *A Play of Giants*, the dominant discourse is the unintelligible talk of African despotic leaders in which Soyinka inscribes a semantic intrusion, creating many streams of the discourses of power and politics, some of which are intellectually problematized, and each invested with its own counter-discourse. What this does is the erection of a complex body of counter-discourses, each existing on its own merit, fighting the dominant discourse. What remains harrowing is the debilitating social canvas which Soyinka paints of the African continent. Residing precariously in this political canvas, these leaders, together with their subjects, suffer and live the social contradictions of dictatorship, poverty, superstition, ignorance, greed, avarice, moribund corruption and acute political shortsightedness.

Where does all this mess lead, but to a political coup d'etat? This is what eventually happens at the end of the play as all actions are frozen on the announcement of a new (fresh) coup d'etat, putting an end to the megalomania of Kamini, the profound buffoon - leader of African continent. While Kamini retains his vicious individually as the irrepressible dictator, he becomes a type, a scourge; a parody of the worst leadership on the continent. The degeneracy of the continent is therefore tied to the mental desertification of these leaders who invent dubious political space suffused with superstitions, ignorance and their megalomaniac turn. In the later part of the 20th century close to the beginning of the 21st century, African leaders, typified in Kamini (Idi Amin) herd the African peoples and their collective destiny deep into that indescribable political darkness.

The picture Soyinka paints in these plays is pathetic, very disturbing. Parody does invoke laughter, eliciting critical distance which makes critical thought possible. But knowing the real situation (the devastated world in which Africans live), it is difficult for the Africans to laugh at this. The pain and pang associated with this life overwhelm and critical distance. For those who live this situation, the picture is all too grim, it is a firm but grim portrayal of their lives, their continent; their poverty, their miseries.

Yet at important points in this misery as David Hecht and Maliqalim Simon point out in their book, *Invisible Governance: The Art of African Micropolitics*, the people of this continent frustrated but undaunted seek the alternative political order, the micropolitics of the slums and signs shanty towns of big cities and towns. These are the most telling of what dictatorship of the Amin kind has brought upon the continent. So while these leaders think that they are in charge, a micropolitical regime which totally ignores them emerge in the slums. But all of this also leads to the political and economic dead end.

This kind of political regime, like that of the despot, is only an alteration. Unfortunately for Wole Soyinka, a democrat and lover of justice and fair-play, his country is yet to witness an absolute

and genuine move to free democratic principles. His country, Nigeria, only attempted this political goal during the 1993 Presidential Election. But this was aborted by the Regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. The purported winner of that democratic election is the man now in jail, Chief M.K.O. Abiola. In November, 1994 Wole Soyinka went into exile because of threats to his life. Soyinka is surely paying for his strong desire to see democracy take root in Nigeria. Nothing positive has occurred on the Nigeria's political front since Soyinka's post-Nobel play on power and politics in Nigeria, *From Zia With Love*.

NOTES

1. The most trenchant of critical analysis of Soyinka's work has been formulated around the limit of his political vision or lack of it in some cases. Biodun Jeyifo is at the forefront. His materialistic reading of *The Road*, Soyinka's existentialist play, about the quest for the meaning of life in death, for instance, concludes in a somewhat hash tone, decrying the conspicuous neglect of street urchings, miscreants and tauts as testimony of his bourgeois bias. See Biodun Jeyifo's, *The Truthful Lie*: Jeyifo's analysis of the class war in *The Road* is particularly interesting to our discussion here. Prophetic about the collapse of communist Soviet Union, *Play of Giants* was published a few years before.

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