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Oladejo Okediji's play - Aájo Áje: A

Portrayal of capitalist Economy

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Abstract

One can lay hand on several literary critical studies on Yoruba play texts. For instance Oguneji (1988) critically examined the plays of Duro Ladipo, while Akinyemi (1991) examined the plays of Akinwumi Isola among others. It is on record that none of the early scholars have delved into the portrayal of capitalist economic in Oladejo Okeiji's plays. Therefore this paper is intended to fill this identified gap by critically examining his play titled Aájo Áje written in 1997. The paper will bring into limelight how Okediji portrays the capitalist economy, its influence and consequence on the people within the theory of sociology of literature. The paper concludes that the capitalist economy gives room for distribution of labour and the development of one's potentials, but at the same time causes more problems for the citizen.

Key words: Characteristics of capitalism, the theoretical frame work, the plot construct of the play. Aájo Áje and the features of capitalism in Aájo Ajo

Introduction

Every individual on earth desires to truly live, not just exist. This is the fundamental reason behind the endless struggle for success in life. To fully understand this paper, it is essential to clarify the concepts of *capital*, *capitalist economy*, and *capitalism*.

We must also recognize that literary artists are products of their society. They often set out to comment on, correct, or condemn the happenings within their environment. Like many notable Yoruba literary figures, Oladejo Okediji wrote his drama *Aájo Aje* to illustrate societal issues.

Sociological critics aim to study the social milieu in order to determine how, and to what extent, the artist responds to society through their work. Ogunsina (2006) further explains:

"Sociology of literature sees the relationship between a work of art, the artist, and the society as one of constant interaction, in which each affects and is affected by the others."

Literary artists, therefore, are indispensable voices within society. Through their work, they hold up a mirror that reflects the social, economic, and moral landscape of the time. In this paper, the play *Aájo Aje* by Oladejo Okediji will be analyzed to illustrate this point.

Plot Overview of *Aájo Aje*

The play portrays the miserable lives of gamblers who, in their quest for wealth, end up in worse conditions. Adelani and his friends, the main characters, try various means to get rich through pool betting. Unfortunately, all their efforts end in failure. They even go as far as selling their possessions, hoping for better luck, but instead become poorer with every attempt.

Due to the inadequacy of their salaries to meet basic needs, they fall prey to false prophets in search of divine shortcuts. This highlights another social issue: the commercialization of religion. The so-called prophets exploit their desperation, and by the time they realize the deceit, it is too late. In their continued state of poverty, they turn to an Imam and even a traditionalist (Baba Alawo), but to no avail.

Despite the repeated failures, they remain entangled in societal vices in a relentless bid to be recognized. Their hope that "tomorrow will be better" never materializes. The love of money—characteristic of a capitalist economy—drives most of the characters to ruin.

Features of Capitalism in *Aájo Aje*

One major feature of capitalism, as portrayed in *Aájo Aje*, is the insufficiency of workers' salaries. Adelani and his friends engage in gambling to supplement their income. Their demands for better pay and improved working conditions are seen as unrealistic dreams by the capitalist employers.

Okediji uses the play to accuse employers of exploiting Nigerian workers, suggesting that such exploitation pushes them toward harmful alternatives like gambling. This, in turn, leads to lifelong suffering.

In capitalist societies, wealth is often concentrated in the hands of a few, while the majority live in abject poverty. The play paints a vivid picture of poverty amidst abundance, with workers earning meager wages and struggling to survive. This is reflected in the characters of Adelani and his friends, who gamble in a desperate attempt to share in the nation's wealth.

Everyone—rich or poor, young or old—is after money. As the wealthy seek to increase their fortunes, the poor look for means to improve their living conditions. One such means, as shown in the play, is gambling, including betting and lotteries. Adelani and his friends gamble away all they own and are left with nothing.

Even religious leaders—both Christian and Muslim—commercialize religion. Rather than pacifying the poor, religion is manipulated to exploit them. Prophet Simeon, a character in the play, is an example of this exploitation. He says:

"Oro Olorun lo so pe a le lo maimoni, bo ti buru to ni u lati wa ore fun ara wa...bo ba wa di ojo Ose, e wa ta Oluwa love ni soosi, iye yoowu to ba wu yin. Ife Olorun nbe lara oni didun olore..."
(It is the word of God that says, as bad as money may be, it can be used to win friends... So on Sunday, come and offer your gift in church—whatever amount you wish. God loves a cheerful giver.)

Prophet Simeon manipulates scripture to impose compulsory offerings on his desperate followers, claiming:

"Jehofa ominiposibu o fase si i...sugbon ko ma dabi igba eni ami ororo Olorun n yanbo...ohunkohun ti eda bafi ta Oluwa lore, tifetife ni oba mi oke o tewo gba a."
(*Jehovah the Omnipotent will crown your prayers... Even if the anointed man of God isn't present, whatever is offered to God from a sincere heart will still be accepted.*)

This reflects the type of prophecy common in capitalist societies where everyone is driven by the pursuit of money and comfort.

Moral Decay and Societal Corruption

In such societies, moral values are often disregarded. The main character, Adelani, who claims to be a Christian, is deeply involved in gambling and lies to his girlfriend. The play exposes the moral decadence in a capitalist society, where the focus is on acquiring more houses, cars, and luxuries rather than ensuring collective well-being.

Okediji mirrors Nigerian society in *Aájo Aje*, portraying how politicians deceive citizens to gain power, and then neglect the very people who voted for them. Citizens, in turn, resort to all kinds of vices to improve their lives, as seen in the play.

Conclusion

The play *Aájo Aje* highlights the negative impacts of a capitalist economy. Workers are poorly paid and live under harsh conditions. In trying to survive, they engage in gambling, betting, and other unproductive ventures, which ultimately lead to despair. From the narrative, it is evident that capitalism breeds more harm than good—unemployment, moral decay, class conflict, and the poor welfare of citizens. Okediji's play condemns gambling, false prophecies, immoral behavior, and the mistreatment of workers. The central message is clear: we must value and support those who sustain society—the workers—rather than exploit them.

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