

Teabags and Oranges as Metaphors of Sacrificial Positive Leadership in Africa: A Comparative Study of Selected TV Commercials and Plays

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Abstract

*The general perception that good leadership has eluded Africa has inevitably provoked works of certain fervor, tone or attitude. Theatre and media artists, employing metaphors of positive sacrificial leadership, have particularly been forceful in their campaigns against the deficit of good governance in Africa. This study examines the metaphors of “teabags” and “oranges” in selected TV commercials, and comparatively draws inferences from selected African plays to advocate the significance of object lessons. Semiotics is employed as the framework for this study. Semiotics bears upon the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible actions and influences, which involves creating, interpreting and understanding objects and their respective meanings. This accounts for the investigation of positive leadership, its determinants, capacities, prevalence and the prospects for its sustainability in Africa. Two TV commercials: “Top-tea” and “Fumman Juice”, and two plays: Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, and Tewfiq al Hakim’s *The Song of Death* are purposively selected for this study, and are subjected to comparative, literary and critical analyses.*

Theatre and media artists in Africa have manifested the struggles of a continent undergoing the painful process of political transformation, evolving the paradigms of aesthetic representation, ethical responsibility and sacrificial leadership to argue that a leader can have an impact on the society only if he/she transits. In the selected T.V commercials, teabags and oranges simulate life situation exhibiting very strong penchants for eternal existence through transition. While the teabags cheerfully jump into teacups of very hot water, the oranges passionately and persistently beg some farmers to pick them for industrial use so that they can give their nutrients to man for his healthy living. If they do not give away these nutrients, they will decompose by natural chemical processes. To avoid this

destruction, they transit into profound forms: healthy people. In Death and the King's Horseman, Soyinka locates these metaphors in Olunde who purposively plunges into suicidal mission to save a dying race. The artistic credo of al Hakeem's The Song of Death is an unwavering commitment on these metaphors illustrated in Alwan who submits, first to denunciation then assassination to give life to his people. These characters consider it a disaster beyond human reckoning for a leader to dwell on the tears and sweat of his people yet deny them his own sacrificial death needed for their existence and his own immortality. The selected TV commercials and plays share affinities of pragmatic responsibility metaphysically contained in the engaged emblematic vehicles and the universe of the African mind – the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition. Theatre and media artists in Africa have drawn from the realities of the continent's social-political processes in the finest tradition, exploring ways in which positive leadership can be integrated into the broader continental discourse on governance, tapping the opportunities that present themselves for the renaissance of the continent.

Key words: Metaphors, sacrificial leadership, Africa, transition, iconoclasm, transition.

Introduction

The secret is how to die.

...Dan Brown

Fictional representations of socio-political issues in Africa have attracted much interest, with critics exploring several themes to examine the leadership system in the continent. Theatre and media practitioners, drawing from the existing realities of the continent's social-political processes in the finest tradition have continued to explore ways in which positive leadership can be integrated into the broader continental discuss on governance. Tapping the opportunities that present themselves for the renaissance of the continent, they respond to the paradigms of aesthetic representation, ethical responsibility and sacrificail leadership to argue that a leader can have an impact on the society only if he/she transits. This fundamentally is understanding and interpreting aspects of the African continent such as politics, economy, religion, social conflicts, class struggle

– the general human condition. The selected texts for this study adequately investigate these socio-political challenges that bedevil the continents and recommend sacrificial leadership as the eternal solution by casting light on several of these aspects and the quandaries that are commonly applicable to understanding them in a continent undergoing the painful process of political transformation.

This, of course, is one fundamental role literature, with its numerous components, plays. By its very nature, literature strives to achieve the ideals in all human conditions using a critical lens to examine situations which exist in a society with a view to drawing attention to deficiencies and lapses in human endeavours. Rockwell posits:

To a greater extent than is generally realized, the lessons of socialization...are thought by presenting a series of fictional actions and the consequences. The inference, which may never have been formulated but is justified empirically by the universal use of the method, is that a fictional model is an effective guide to action, whether through imitation or avoidance. (Rockwell, 1986)

In other words, as Said said, there is no way to get past texts in order to apprehend reality directly. Texts are worldly, to some degree they are events...a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. In other word, they have didactic qualities. This didactic utility of initial socialization is a key to the values of the society which produces it. It is intended to influence behaviour to conform to the norms, and this confirms what the norms are. To achieve this, it uses a critical lens to examine situations which are in the society with a view to drawing attention to deficiencies and lapses in human endeavours since society itself is an agglomeration of the hopes and aspirations of the people. As Osofisan posits:

Art, born of society, comments back on that social matrix, and by commentary I am implying here both the possibility of consolidation and erosion, of reaffirmation as well as contradiction. Sooner or later therefore it must collide or collude with authority, whether of state or shrine, or pulpit or classroom. Everywhere, whether in the close intimacy of domestic life, or the expansive space of

social being, no hegemony is sacrosanct to the probing impertinence of art. (Ososfisan, 2001:108)

With “Object Lessons” as the surrounding substance, this study investigates the probing of leadership in Africa theatre and media practices. By “Object Lessons” here we mean, drawing inferences from objects for didactic purposes. It develops from the passion of a committed social crusader or scholar to attend to the pedagogical challenges that may emerge in the track of scholarship. It is designed to teach not only children but adults alike to make careful observations of discrete objects and their own surroundings through a language deduced from the objects acting as the impetus to deepen and widen the insight an individual has of his/her world by closely attending to and following the paths of physical objects. Thus it employs some fundamental metaphors for effectiveness.

Metaphor is a figurative application of objects or a figurative statement which asserts that an object is something else which, in a literal sense, it is not. It usually attributes a property or some attributes to an entity that does not strictly possess them. By asserting one object’s figurative connection to another, a metaphor establishes an association that may be compelling, funny, illuminating, or strained. The purpose, however, is to illustrate the existing realities in the society. Thus, the selected texts, dealing in metaphors, capture the reality of the African power system as they fuel intellectual curiosity about positive leadership to advocate the premise: “The secret is how to die”, (Brown, 2009: 1). However, the secret also has always been how to live because, “without contrary there will be no progression”, or without dying there will be no living. That is the fundamental tenet of leadership.

Synopses of the Selected Texts

Top Tea

Top tea commercial is an animation of the brand, *toptea*. In this commercial, teabags, having some human attributes, cheerfully jump and summersault into teacups of very hot water and automatically find the environment an easy nesting or a comfort zone that they unwind themselves in it. In the process, they secrete their nutrients to make tea. And when a man takes it, he is energized both mentally and physiologically to attend to daily businesses.

Fumman Juice

In Fumman juice, some farmers are seen plucking fruits to produce juice. These fruits, mainly oranges with some human features, passionately and persistently beg these farmers to “pick” them for this purpose. Some that are initially ignored by the farmers feel terribly hurt that one asks the mother in a tone suggestive of deep grief as the face manifests the inner passion to satisfy humanity: “Mummy, why wasn’t I picked? I also want to be a Fumman juice”, and the mother consoles with a smile, that he will “definitely become a Fumman juice” when he is mature and ripe. He is happy to hear this as he smiles. And, finally, when he is picked, he celebrates: “I finally made it!”

Death and the King’s Horseman

Based on real events that took place in Oyo, the ancient Yoruba city in the present Nigeria in 1946, this play details how a well meaning District Officer, intervenes to prevent the ritual suicide of the Yoruba Chief, Elesin – a sacrificial suicide demanded by the death of the king, but more by the harmony, existence and survival of a race. The King has died, and as the tradition demands, the Elesin (the King’s Horseman) must, honourably, commit suicide to keep the society together. But in his gullibility, Elesin chooses the path of ignominy and decides to toy with the lives of a people. Instead of him to commit suicide, he chooses to “commit death” aided by the District Officer – a Whiteman. His son, who realizes the consequences of this action if successful, returns from the England to commit the very necessary suicide.

The Song of Death

In “The Song of Death”, similar events occur. There is discord between two families in Upper Egypt which claims lives of the most successful figures in both families by assassination. It tells of the challenges a young scholar, Alwan, who attempts to put an end to this discord: his mother who has waited patiently for him to return from where he has gone to study and kill the man who kills his father, is not happy with him. She has kept the same knife with which his father is killed for him. Alwan, who realizes the implication of these succeeding assassinations, decides to take the road not taken in both families to make his people live together as a people.

A Brief Biography of the Selected Authors

Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka, the first African to win the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature, is a renowned and universally celebrated professor of literature who is very vast in many academic fields. Born in 1934, in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria, Soyinka received a largely Western-style education before entering the University College in Ibadan. After two years, he transferred to Leeds University in England where he studied Western Literature and also took a course in world drama. While in England, he worked for the Royal Court Theatre as a script reader and participated in dramatic improvisations. Some of his early plays were written during this time. Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1960 and rapidly emerged as the driving force of the modern Nigeria theatre while he held various university teaching posts. In his unmatched influence in the modern Nigerian drama, he established two theatre companies, the 1960 Masks and the Orisun Theatre, to promote his own and other African plays, thereby vitalizing English-language theatre in the continent of Africa and beyond. He is an active participant in African social and political life, a regular commentator and an outspoken critic of political tyranny. His prolificacy is better demonstrated in his predominantly tragic ritual dramas particularly *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). (Gilbert, 2001: 48-55)

Tawfiq Ismail al-Hakim

Tawfiq Ismail al-Hakim, the most famous playwright in Egypt and the Arab World, was born October 9, 1898, in Alexandria to an Egyptian father and Turkish mother. His father, a wealthy peasant, worked as a judge in the judiciary in the village of al-Delnegat, in central Beheira province. His mother was the daughter of a retired Turkish officer. Tawfiq al-Hakim enrolled at the Damanhour primary school at the age of seven. He left primary school in 1915 and his father put him in a public school in the Beheira province, where Tawfiq al-Hakim finished secondary school. However, due to the lack of proper secondary schooling in the province, Tawfiq al-Hakim moved to Cairo with his uncles to continue his studies at Muhammad Ali secondary school. A Cairo theatre is named after him. He has written over seventy plays, a number of which have been translated into most of the European languages. "His Song of Death" is contained in his collection of plays with the title: *Fate of a Cockroach and Other Plays*, (1974).

Teabags and Oranges as Metaphors of Sacrificial Leadership in Africa

These plays and the selected TV commercials share affinities of pragmatic responsibility metaphysically contained in the engaged emblematic vehicles and the universe of the African mind – the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition. While the plays represent the existing realities of the malevolent leadership in Africa internalized in selfishness, egocentricity and revenge, the objects in the commercials manifesting the two heroes (Olunde and Alwan) in the selected plays, simulate life situation exhibiting very strong penchants for eternal existence through transition by giving away their nutrients. These characters realize how futile it is if they do not give away these nutrients to man who tends the domain where they reign, they will decompose by natural chemical processes. To avoid this destruction, they transit into profound forms: healthy people or race. As Adedun (2010) puts it, advertisement creates a favourable climate for the sale of goods or services as it promotes ideas for the purpose of imparting information to the consumer. He particularly stresses that TV commercials have very powerful effects on the audience because of their ability to show completely the potentials of a product. It has the properties of sight, sound and motion that traditionally set it apart from other media such as radio (sound only) or print (sight only). With its three-pronged assault on its viewer's senses, TV is able to create broad awareness for a product. (Adedun, 2010:414). Speaking on the sociopolitical benefits of TV commercials, he posits that advertisement is a powerful and key medium in social communication. It transcends its traditional areas of application to goods and services. “Advertisement can help government and even the people to build a better attitude to work and address the ills and oddities in the society,” (p. 419). This is the focus of this paper: to identify that part in the select commercials that can help government and even the people build a better attitude to work and address the ills and oddities in the society. That part is the sacrificial leadership.

In the selected commercials, the objects sacrifice their lives in an unusual way: they are very happy to die. Dan Brown, in his *The Lost Symbols* (2009) says: “The secret is how to die” (P.1). It is apparent in these commercials that these objects have that secret. And, the secret is to see the living that follows the dying. The teabags happily jump into hot water and the oranges celebrate sacrificing their lives because they want to transit,

they want to reincarnate in a profound form; they give out their lives to have their names stenciled upon the memories of succeeding human generations. This is the secret of leadership: dying to live. Dan Brown, in the chapter one of his *The Da Vinci Code*, 2003, says: “Symbols are a language that can help us understand our past”, appreciate our present to mend our future.

Health Benefits of Tea (top)

Promasidor (Pty) Ltd. 32 Bruton Road Bryanston 2021, South Africa, quoting William Gladstone says, “If you are cold, tea will warm you - if you are too heated, it will cool you - if you are depressed, it will cheer you - if you are excited, it will calm you.” - William Gladstone. For 5000 years, the Chinese have used tea to treat many ailments, from colds and coughs to body aches and headaches. More recently, researchers have discovered tea's association with the prevention and management of certain illnesses, including heart disease, cancers of the digestive tract and skin, and osteoporosis. A serving of tea generally contains about 40 milligrams of caffeine (less than half as much caffeine as in coffee), but the actual levels vary depending on the specific blend and the strength of the brew. Decaffeinated tea is also available. Tea is also a natural source of powerful antioxidants known collectively as flavonoids. Antioxidants help protect the body from the damage caused by harmful free radicals. The amount and type of flavonoids in tea depends on the variety, the amount of tea used in the pot or cup, and brewing habit.

Health Benefits of Oranges

According to the production manager, FUMMAN JUICE, citrus fruits, as such, have long been valued for their wholesome nutritious and antioxidant properties. It is scientifically established that citrus fruits, especially oranges, by virtue of their richness in vitamins and minerals, have many proven health benefits. Moreover, it is now beginning to be appreciated that the other biologically active, non-nutrient compounds in the citrus fruits such as *phyto-chemical antioxidants, soluble and insoluble dietary fiber* helps in cutting risk for cancers, chronic diseases like arthritis, obesity, and coronary heart diseases. In the selected ads these objects give all these benefits to mankind because they can only have it when they give it away.

Given the irresponsible attitude towards leadership which bedevils the African continent, the selected texts pictorially capture the brazen assumption of power and evince timeless lessons about dictatorship and the need for the African continent to be conscious of its antecedents so as to supply the missing logic in our fate. That missing logic is the sacrificial leadership represented in the proverbial tales of the selected TV commercials. But, parables no longer derive from the imagination, but from the daily reality of a straightened existence. This is because signs and symbols provide mental exercise in understanding and studying the meanings and messages that lie behind the signs and their effects to individuals as they interact in the society. This makes one realize that meaning is unconsciously cognized and aroused by the active process of interpretation as it answers why semiotics offers practical value especially in the context of cultural and socio-political studies, for it is very useful in leaning about intercultural communication differences. That is why semiotics is employed as the systematized body of knowledge to carefully observe and study not only the signs, symbols and their meanings but also other factors that affect them such as the encoder, interpreter, culture etc.

Signs and symbols are not only limited to visual representation but can also vary from language, to actions, gestures, mannerisms, and facial expressions. This is why it is argued that semiotics gains strengths through the positive benefits that it provides. It has a very specific goal of study which is signs, the object, and its relationship as individuals seek for its interpretation and how it was created providing positive heuristic value, (Campbell & Cao, 2001). This increases people's concern not only in rich imagination but as well as linguistic signs specifically in the context of visual communications, illustrations, photography and audio-visual media.

This is better captured in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* where Olunde, the son of the King's Horseman, purposively plunges into a suicidal mission to save a dying race. He introduces this heroic exploit of the well-learned young man at the point the unity and existence of a race is threatened. His father, Elesin – the King's Horseman, has eaten all the good things of life that come from the tears and sweats of the people as a leader of the people, because he is to die for them to live. But the African leader schemes something else – he wants to give them death in return. First he asks: "How can that be? In all my life as Horseman of the King, the juiciest fruit on every tree was mine. I saw, I touched, I wooed, rarely was the

answer No. the honour of my place, the veneration I received in the eye of man or woman prospered my suit...”(p.18). And second, the true African leader claims: “I am master of my fate,” (p.14) – the “fate” that once fed on the fertility of the destinies of the entire people. And so, he must deny the people the existence they bargained for. Ignoring every warning, Elesin chooses to manipulate the society as he begins a “rapid dialogue with his legs,” (p.11).

Evidently, when a leader thinks he is larger than the society that breeds him and makes attempts to manipulate it, he invites anarchy. Amusa, the native, police working *with* the White man but *for* the good tradition of a race where he belongs, suspects that Elesin is to “commit death” as against the needed suicide. Soyinka hides under the linguistic incapability of this character to voice the truth about the action of the King’s Horseman when Amusa reports to the English man and his wife that: “...the Elesin Oba, is to *commit death*... as a result of native custom,” (p.26) (Emphasis is mine). Dell Hymes, explains this that a sentence must be appropriate in relation to the context in which it is used, and that the speaker must have communicative competence even if he does not have the grammatical in the language of transmission – a knowledge of appropriacy. Appropriacy to context is related to a number of situational factors, summed up by Hymes by the acronym SPEAKING: *setting*, *participants*, *ends* (aims and results of the communication), *acts* (the form and sequence of the message), *key* (the manner of delivery), *instrumentalities* (the channel of communication) *norms* (conducts of the participants) and *genre*, (Hymes, 1972b).

Commit, in this context, means: *entrust*, *assign* and *obligate* death with the responsibilities of erasing a race because if he (Elesin) does not die, a grave taboo has been committed. And the consequence is grave – I mean grave and mass grave. This is what the young scholar who has just returned from England where he has gone to equip or perhaps acquaint himself with the *superior* culture of the White for four years, emerges to defend the “ancestral mask” the White are destroying. His position is: “...I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand” (p. 50). And what the White do not understand is that the King has died, and as the tradition demands, Olunde’s father, the King’s Horseman, must also die and be buried with the king to run errand for him. It is a tradition that has been keeping the people together as a people in league with their ancestors. It is all about belief. It is

a strong feeling that something or somebody exists or is true; it is the confidence that something is true or right.

Bloch and Whiteley, in their book: *Complete Leadership*, (2003) explain how belief drives behaviour and distort perceptions: “We have strong internal voices prohibiting some forms of behaviour, including some that would be helpful to us,” (pp. 92-4). To buttress this point, Dan Brown says: “How we view the past determines actively our ability to understand the present.” To this he asks: “So how do we sift truth from belief?” (Pp. 1-3) But because the English do not understand this truth about the African life hidden in public view, they think it is falsehood to acknowledge suicide as a cord of unity and fraternity. Hence they make frantic efforts to stop this awesome will of fate and faith – to stop his father from dying the sacrificial death. But Olunde knows the implication. He says, “I don’t want him to incur the enmity of our people. Especially over nothing,” (pp. 51-2). No one can undertake what he does without the deepest protection mind can conceive. “What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people?” He curtsies, however, “...I appreciate what you tried to do. I want you to believe I can only tell you it would have been a terrible calamity if you have succeeded,” (p.58). His reason for this is the question asked by the Praise-singer of the King’s Horseman who realizes that there is only one home to the life of a river mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of African race. However, if that “world leaves its course and smashes on the boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter? (p.11). This is the disaster the son has come to avert by dying the ritual death. He “brings his head slowly down to look on” his father, and denounces and disowns him: “I have no father, eater of left-overs”. And “He walks slowly down the way his father had run. Light fades out on Elesin, sobbing into the ground”, (p.61). Trying to exonerate himself from this leadership deficit, Elesin accuses the English man who only plays on his (Elesin) gluttony:

You did not save my life District Officer. You destroyed it.... And not merely my life but the lives of many. The end of the might’s work is not over. Neither this year nor the next will see it. If I wished you well, I would pray that you do not stay long enough on our land to see the disaster you have brought upon us. (p.61)

He realizes how stupid he had been to have subjected his reason to the cheap teaching of the White man who has always encouraged African leaders to be very corrupt in various ways.

The artistic credo of al Hakeem's *The Song of Death* (1999), is an unwavering commitment on this metaphor illustrated in Alwan who submits, first to denunciation then assassination to give life to his people. Like Olunde, he confesses: "I have come... for something great!" (P.82) And that is putting an end to the succeeding "enmity" and age-long "rivers of blood [that] have flowed... between the Azizis and Tahawis" whose origin nobody can trace, (pp. 83-4). His own father is the last person killed while Alwan is a boy. Now, he is a man with experiences. He, like Olunde, has just returned from the cradle of global civilization (Cairo) where he has gone to study. And the expectation of his mother is for him to come and kill the man who killed his father with the same "knife" his father was killed. Bringing "a saddlebag which she throws down in front of her son" she says: "Seventeen years I have kept these things for you!" (p.82)

[It is the saddlebag] in which your father's body was brought to me, carried upon his donkey. In this pocket I found his head, in the other the rest of his body cut into pieces. They killed him with the knife he was carrying. They put the knife with his body in the saddlebag. Look, this is the knife. I kept it like this with the blood so that it's gone rusty. As for the donkey which brought your murdered father, making its way to the house it knew, its head lowered as though mourning its owner, I have been unable to keep it for you; it has died, unable to bear the long years. (pp.82-3)

But, because Alwan knows that he will "commit death" if he carries out the instruction of his mother by killing the man who "murdered" his father, he asks trying to avert future occurrences:

Alwan: And has this ... Tahawi a son?

Asakir: He has a son of fourteen.

Alwan: Then I have no more than four or five years left.

Asakir: What are you saying?

Alwan: (continues) Until he becomes strong and does to me what I shall do to his father.

Asakir: Are you afraid for your life, Alwan?

Of course, he is not. Like Olunde, he has only come to ensure that his people live together as a people. As he speaks:

For so long I have thought about my village and its people, despite my long absence. In the free time from lessons... when fellow students gather together... overcome by yearning for the land where we have been raised, we ask ourselves longingly: when will our people... live like human beings... The attainment of this goal is not difficult for them if they unite and help one another," (p.86).

Disappointed by this stoic confession, his mother denounces him: "I am not your mother. I do not know you. No son issued from my belly... God's curse be on you until the Day of Judgment," (P.88). To demonstrate her repulsion for the boy, she commits another man, the boy's cousin, with the responsibility to kill her own son with the same knife the boy has refused to employ: "Plunge this knife into his chest," (p.90) she orders. And Alwan dies to "unite" not only the two warring families but also the entire people that they may "live like human beings," (p.86).

Conclusion

As I have argued, Africa has experienced a huge deficit of good governance. This is due to the existence of an unpatriotic and morally bankrupt political class, which has no vision and no conscience. "Its god is mammon; so much so that its consuming passion is the satisfaction of its own inordinate greed and ambition," Olusanya (2002:36-7). Its second nature is corruption, which now permeates the continent, making it impossible for any institution, public or private, and even individuals to fully fulfill their potentials. Fafowora *et al* (1995) see leadership as implying a purposeful direction of the affairs of the led – some movement towards definite and defined goal which will be to the benefit of society and such leadership is characterized by imaginativeness (i.e. possessing ideas which can be translated into reality), courage (to stand on principle and by its decisions so as to be able to provide moral, social and motivational climate for its followership) and discipline.

The need for good governance has become imperative, hence the conclusion drawn from the foregoing discussion that the selected texts have provided paradigms for positive leadership, within the framework of our definition of leadership: sacrificial leadership.

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