

## Drama and Society—A New Trend for Arabic Playwrights in Nigeria: Barihi's Baqaun Muqadarun (Born to Survive) as Paradigm

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### Abstract

Drama has been widely acclaimed as a positive medium for mirroring the society. Drama is a representation of life. So while drama entertains, it also educates and informs. This role of drama has been employed by playwrights over the years to make constructive commentaries on the issues and happenings in society and thus suggests and recommends for positive changes in man and his environment. The Nigerian Arabic playwrights are not left out in this direction of literary activities. This paper attempts an analysis of how Nigerian Arabic playwrights are also using drama to make comments on society as well educating the society using *Barihi's Baqaun Muqadarun* (Destined to survive) as a paradigm. We shall also look at the art of Arabic play writing in Nigeria in brief, synopsis of the play, play analysis and conclusion.

**Key words:** Drama; Society; Playwright; Nigeria

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### INTRODUCTION

Drama since its beginning has been committed to mirroring and reshaping the socio-cultural, socio-political and economic structure of all societies in the world. Commenting on the essence of theatre and drama, Dandaura asserts that:

Theatre evolved out of man's desire to cater for the inadequate of nature, hence, to ensure its survival, theatre must continuously champion the development processes of its society and redirect the erring practice of the political actors of its time. (p.3)

Drama as a genre of literature refers to performance and possibly, play text. It embodies a corpus of creative; imaginative works of arts meant to entertain, teach morals, inform and educate its audience. Although literature may differ from one society to the other, it usually reflects the pattern of life that exists in such society, including its problems and aspirations. Nigerian literary scholars, especially the playwrights have used the drama as a medium through which members of the Nigerian society learn to understand themselves and their environments. Drama is an important tool for social education and cultural understanding.

In spite of the limited numbers of Nigeria Arabic playwrights, efforts have been intensified by the little as they seem to write in that reality. Thus, they could still be literarily appreciated for their message about life of the society they represent. The Nigeria Arabic playwrights are not relenting in this direction as they have written plays proffering solutions, redirecting and informing the society on the correct steps to take in bringing peace and transformation to the Nigerian society. It is in this light that this paper attempts to pick one of the Nigeria Arabic plays, *Baqaun Muqadarun (Destined to Survive)* as paradigm for the study. The paper shall also look at the art of Arabic play writing in Nigeria in brief, synopsis of the play: *Baqaun Muqadarun*, play analysis and interpretation and conclusion.

### 1. THE ART OF ARABIC PLAYWRITING IN NIGERIA

Since the emergence of literary drama in Nigeria, there have been avalanche of plays written in the English language. However, recently Arabic playwrights

have begun to spring up to the task of play writing; perhaps Arabic play writing began to pave the way into the Nigerian society. Adam asserts that: "Arabic literary works of Nigerian authorship have witnessed a tremendous development since it started some nine centuries ago and continued to develop with Islam as its focus". (p.1) Meanwhile, the Arabic literary scholars in Nigeria have not really done well or explored the potential of drama and theater in their literary activities except very few persons. Oseni points that:

In spite of the booming theater in Nigeria, scholars of Arabic have not taken advantage of the situation. The reason for that is probably because of some aspects of the theatre which Islam frown at e.g. indiscriminate mixture of men and women, and the polytheist contents of the play (which makes it attractive to the west but unattractive to Arabic and Islamic audience). (p.28)

Although the use of drama in entertaining and educating the Muslims audience was developed and put in use in some private and public Arabic and Islamic schools. Short Arabic plays were staged by these schools on ceremonial occasions such as the *Maulud Nabiyyi* (the prophets birthday celebration), *Lailatul Qadri* (The Night of Majesty); a night in the month of Ramadan, graduation ceremony days and other occasion such as naming and marriage ceremonies. Oseni further notes the above view when he says that:

The only area where drama was developed had been in the private and government Arabic schools. Short Arabic plays were staged by these schools during festivities like *Laylatul Qadri* (27<sup>th</sup> night of Ramadan) and *Maulud nabiyyi* the birth day of Prophet Muhammad). (p.28)

Apparently, the first published Arabic play in Nigeria is *Al-Amid Al-Mubajjal* (The Honourable Dean) in 1994 by Prof Z.I Oseni. Adam states that: "in Nigeria today, there is what a writer describes as culture of corruption which eats deep into the fabrics of the nation with negative consequences on national growth and development". (p.2) in this play Oseni used the potential of Drama to demonstrate how playwrights can educate the society on culture and morality. The play is a satire of the corruption scandal in the Nigerian universities admission system. The play portrays the story of a university lecturer, whose corruptive lifestyle has been described as a bad egg among the seriously committed and humane lecturers in the faculty of Humanities, *Kakaddu* University, *Kakadu*. Professor *Akhuli*, the lead character in the play was oppressive not only to the staff, but also to the students as well as the people of his village *Abalolo*. His evil character was illustrated in his selling handout to students. He equally threatens to deal with those who refuse to buy his handout with failure in his course. Down in his village where he hails from and whose education was sponsored by the villagers, he collects money from them all in the name of getting admission for their children which he didn't. His corruptive attitudes lead him to meet his waterloo when some influential

students seek recourse of the state security service that get the lecturer arrested.

The second published Arabic play is *Ustadh Ragima Anfihi* (A Teacher in Deviance of him) by Shaykh Mas'ud Abdulganiyi Adebayo. Oseni has also published two other plays captioned *Al-Tajir wa – Sahibu al-mat'am* (The Trader and the *Restaurateur*). In 2005 and *Al- Tabaqat Al-ulya* (The Upper Class) in 2006. Dr. Abdulbarri Adetunji also published a play title *Baqau – Muqaddar* (Born to Survive) in 2005 which is the paradigm of this study. Also, is Abdulganiyi Alabi Adebayo who published a play with the title, *Qad Gharat al- Nujum* (The Stars had Set) in 2005. There is another play recently published by the same author titled *Al-Mutaba'ru Wal-itihad* (Continuation and the Consortium) other plays are *Jallatatul Qadi* (The Mighty Judge) by Saeed Ahmed Gambari and *Atalibul-Mugtarri* (The Deceived Student) in 2009 by Ibrahim Lanre Amin.

However, all these Nigeria Arabic playwrights in Nigeria deserve commendation and encouragement for not allowing this aspect of Nigeria drama in Arabic to go into extinct on the surface of Nigeria academic research, and for their effort in educating the society through their plays, because all these have socio-ethical themes rooted in Islamic cosmology.

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## 2. SYNOPSIS OF BAQA'UN MUQADARUN (PLAY)

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The play is a four act play written in Arabic Language. The play is about the evil deeds of a wicked step mother Bilqis who nearly sniffed life out of Bashir. A child who is caught in the web of matrimonial rivalry and chicanery. He lost his mother at birth and he is brought up by his father, but unfortunately he is disappointed in his father who from all indications is supposed to be the only hope for his success in life. The father marries a woman who is very wicked. She controls the husband. When the boy shir is suppose to start school, she refuses her husband to seek admission for the boy instead her own daughter who is younger to Bashir should commence school while she suggests that Bashir should be sent to the village to leave with the grandmother of her husband but the husband refuses to accept that ugly suggestion by his wife. Meanwhile, she equally suggests that Bashir should be sent to Ibadan to stay with her own friend as a house boy.

The play has four principal characters. The first is Bashir who is destined to survive, despite all plans by his step mother to eliminate him from the surface of the earth.

The second character is Ummu Rahmah (Bashir step mother) while the third is Bashir's father and the fourth is Rahmah (Bashir step sister).

Ummu Rahmah used all sorts of threats, evil spirits and physical challenges to make life difficult for Bashir

but at the end the consequence of all her evil deeds turned against her and affected her own daughter. At the end, Rahmah got blind and was later cured by Bashir who eventually became a clergy man by the grace of God.

### 3. PLAY ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The play commences with Bashir and his age mates Majid and Aishat. Bashir informed his friends on the intention of his father to enroll him into school very soon while Majid was not amazed about the information given to them by Bashir because he knew the step mother will never allow that to happen instead she will want her own daughter to start first.

**Bashir:**My father said: I shall start going to school next week.

**Majid:**Is that the reason why you are happy? I will be surprise if you overcome these problems.

**Bashir:**why are you thinking that? Am I not up to the age? Are you thinking I will not understand what they will teaching me in the school.

**Majid:**not those reason you mentioned, but my fear is the representative of your family. Don't you know that your step mother may not permit you going to school at early stage because she will want her daughter to start school at early stage or before you.

**Aishat:**I reasoned the same with you AbdulMajid, and Bashir never know the nature of his step mother. And that step mother would want her daughter to start going to school before Bashir. It is only Allah who can help Bashir in his life. (Barihi, pp.12-13).

The negative practices of step mothers against their step sons raised in this play are obvious of what is obtainable in almost all societies. Though the author of the play mirrored the Yoruba communities. We see two friends of Bashir showing their concern and sympathy for him based on what they know pertaining his predicament. They knew that Ummu Rahmah has been maltreating Bashir and will never allow Bashir's Father to enroll him into school when her own daughter has not yet starts to school. This is a practice that does exist in perhaps, most of our communities in Nigeria especially in Igala land where polygamy is practiced. Furthermore, the father who is supposed to have mercy on his own child is also bewitched better still, hypnotized by the wife who now controls the affairs of the house. Let us see the reaction of the father of Bashir.

**Bashir:**Father, they said you are calling me.

**Father:**(After deep thinking, he answered) yes, yes my son. Look for a sit and sit down.

**Father:**Hhow old are you?

**Bashir:**Am seven year old.

**Father:**That means, you must start a work in your life

and in reality I have been thinking of what you will do.

**Bashir:**Do which work? O father, it is time for me to start school like my age mate.

**Father:**Amazing! You want to go to school and this is a fine idea, but do you think I will be financially capable to send you and your sister to school while I am afraid of sending two of you to school at the sometime? Certainly, one of you must wait for the other. This is the truth of the matter.

**Bashir:** Who goes to school and who wait?

**Father:**You wait for your sister Rahmat, while she go to school. (Barihi, pp.14-15).

Obviously, Bashir faced a lot of tribulations and humiliations in the hands of this wicked step mother and his father after the demise of his mother. Bashir who was supposed to start school at early stage with his age mates was denied that opportunity by his own biological father who is been controlled by diabolical spell.

No doubt, this is exactly what is happening in most of Nigerian societies where polygamy is invoked today. Barihi mirrored to us exactly what is prevailing in the society especially in polygamous home. The playwright through the above exchange between Bashir and his father made us to understand the earlier fear by Bashir friends (Majid and Aisha) that, the step mother will never allow Bashir to go to school while her own daughter stays at home. Looking at the discussion between Bashir and his father, it shows that, the decision that Bashir should wait while his step sister goes to school was taken already before calling Bashir for discussion.

Meanwhile, Bashir step mother did not stop her evil plight against Bashir success in life. She suggested that Bashir should be taken to Ibadan to live with her own friend as a servant.

**Ummurahmah:** Maybe Bashir should follow my friend to Ibadan.

**Father:**Ibadan?

**Ummurahmah:**Yes, Ibadan

**Father:**What is he doing there?

**Ummurahmah:**Working as a service boy and that would fetch us some money monthly.

From the lines above, her assertion becomes the signal for both Bashir and his father that, this woman doesn't want Bashir in the house. Even when the husband tries to reject the idea, she threatens the husband that she and her daughter will leave the house for him and Bashir, saying that, one day Bashir will put poison in their food. This evil act of this woman can be perceived in our society as most women prefer another person's children under their custody to be suffering while their own children go to school, such children were engaged in hawking.

The playwright as a sociologist and literary genius used this play to reflect the pattern of life that exists in

most societies in Nigeria in particular and the world entirely. According to Adam: "Although literature may differ from one society to the other, it usually reflects the pattern of life that exists in a given period particularly its problems and aspirations. Literature is an important tool for social education and cultural understanding"... (p.2).

Bashir became perplex and dumbfounded about life due to the bitterness and acrimonies that he is passing through. After this assertion of his step mother, he begins to experience several nightmares which made his father to take him to an old man who later suggests that Bashir should be taken out of that house for safety. Even when Bashir was taken to Ibadan to stay with a clergyman, this woman continue her spiritual attack on the boy through witchcraft, if not for the sake of God and the man Bashir was staying with, she would have succeeded in taking life out of the poor boy.

But, there is a popular saying that says: "He who destroy others in order to succeed, there is destruction waiting for him at the point of his own success". All the plans of this woman to make her own daughter succeeds in life and destroy the life of this motherless boy turned against her. Her daughter became blind as she planned death for Bashir, then she confessed all her evil deeds against Bashir and his late mother and as well remotes her husband, how she has been given money and rams to medicine men. She never knew Bashir is alive. Let's hear her confession:

- What type of life is this?
- I was the only wife with my husband
- We were two before
- And I cost the dearth of the senior wife during child delivery
- And her child who was alive became a threat
- I was afraid of competition
- Now Bashir is dead and Rahmah is blind
- I have spent much money on this girl
- And the calamity is still on
- We have given rams, goats, red oils and white cloths to medicine men and soothsayers as sacrifices to defend us from calamities, yet it was of no benefit
- What type of life is this?

Sometime your evil plan against somebody may even serve as an exit from sorrow to happiness for him. Bashir later became the source of cure for his step sister. Surprisingly, Ummurahmah has no option than to seek forgiveness from her step son and the husband. She holds bashirs leg while lying on the floor seriously begging for forgiveness.

**Ummurahmah:**Please forgive me, I have learned my lesson.

**Bashir:**Surely forgiveness is with Allah alone and I have nothing against you. Thank be to Allah, Rahmah can now see again.

Bashir forgives her and said that it is the wish of Almighty God that all these things will happened.

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## CONCLUSION

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The playwright through his play informed and educated his reader about the reality of the society because the drama has been a vehicle of information, education and entertainment. No wonder Folorunsho submits that:

Thus drama mirrors life and by this means it has to do with life. With man and society, drama is the enactment of life or mirror of life in a society. It is the enactment of the cultural traits of the society that present it. Thus it is hard to separate drama from society. The source of drama of a society is obtained from the society, it functions to entertain, instruct and warn the society. It records the cultural traits of the society that has it. (p.99)

This play also warns the society against evil did as the consequence must surely come to the planner and doer. The play justifies the argument about the relationship between literature and social science. G.H Bantock in Bamidele restates that:

All novel and plays and fair amount of dramatic or narrative poetry may not be understood without their enviring context because they focus their attention on characters and incidents that bear close parallels to imitation of an action with the highest consciousness of the age in which they are written. (p.2)

Drama and society can not be separated, because drama as an aspect of literature in its aesthetic form creates a fictional universe where there is a possible verification of reality at the experiential level of man living in society. Bamidele asserts that:

Literature and sociology are the best of friends, whatever is the operational difference in their methods of talking about society. Literature in its aesthetic form creates a fictional universe where there is a possible verification of reality at the experiential level of man living in society. It could be stated that imaginative literature is a re-construction of the world seen from a particular point of view which we may refer to as the abstract idealism of the author or the hero. (p.4)

The above goes to show the ultimate concern between drama and the society. Infact the author has used his play to arouse the consciousness of individual who read his book with a view of reawakening them of the happenings in the Nigerian society and as well to be aware of individual responsibilities as members of the society and then be conscious of the consequence of our evil deed against our fellow human beings. This makes it obvious that a playwright can employ drama as an effective tool for social and cultural commentary. Ebo states that: "playwright world over use their works to show the ills inherent in their society". (p.109) and Sofola is also quoted by Odiri as saying that the artist is: "one who is an embodiment of truth, sound moral, articulate and upright, a gadfly of society and one who strives at all times to warn society whenever is adrift". (p.251) this goes to say that the characters that must be represented in the body of plays that portray the society and its attendant issues must have the aforementioned qualities.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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Many people see Arabic language as a language of Islam alone and have to be learned only in the understanding of the religion. Though we can not separate Islam from Arabic because it is the language of the Quran and the language of prophet Muhammad (SAW) but yet it is a language spoken by some persons in Nigeria. There are people who understand Arabic language more than English language in Nigeria especially in the northern and southern parts of the country. And the need to use the language for education, information, entertainment and social commentary among the people as other languages are used is now inevitable. Therefore the following recommendations are made:

a) The playwrights should not relent their efforts in educating the masses through their plays because people need enlightenment about their day to day activities and this can be done through drama.

b) Pupils and students should be encourage to develop the habit of reading drama books as that will help them in understanding the society they live and as well help in developing their language skills.

c) Arabic Drama as a course or subject should be making compulsory in the schools. That is the subject should be taught independently right from the primary school down to the university with Arabic language, because it has great impact in developing the students.

d) Scholars in the field of Arabic literature should try as much as possible in producing many reasonable drama books because the available plays in Arabic are very scanty.

e) All departments of Arabic language in Nigeria Universities should collaborate with department of theatre arts in their institutions so that they can be borrowing some technical knowledge from them in order to enhance their skills in this field.

f) The available plays in Arabic Language like the play discussed in this paper should be staged for people to watch, so that the impact of drama in Arabic can be felt in Nigeria.

g) Scholars should stop condemning theatre and drama but should educate the artists on moral ethics that they should exhibit in their performance because they are teachers.

h) Government should make Arabic language compulsabictory in our schools because Arabic has the potential of contributing to national development.

i) Lastly, Arabic and Islamic schools in Nigeria should always train their pupils and students in order to entertain their guests with short plays in Arabic language whenever they have any occasion in their schools. Through this the teachers can also identify students' talent and they can be encouraged to become an artist.

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