

Chapter Fourteen



STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA BY PROPELLING CITIZENS INTO ACTION: LESSONS FROM TOR IORAPUU'S *APRIL 1421*

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Introduction

Democracy is a system of governance that allows the participation of citizens at all levels to engage in the selection, voting and governance process of a given nation. Every nation on earth has its form of governance be it Socialist, Communist, Capitalist, Marxist and so on. In democracy, the central core is to have an egalitarian system where the social means of livelihood are provided for the welfare of the masses. Democracy as a system of governance allows the free expression of the fundamental human rights of citizens and it further makes it flexible for citizens to be able to practice all forms of activities provided the activities are lawful and do not have negative implication on the overall peace and progress of the country.

According to Merriam Webster mobile dictionary, democracy is "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections". It is a system of government in which every citizen in a country can vote so as to elect its government officials, a system of government in which everyone is equal and has the rights to vote, make decisions etc. (Longman, 473). Nigeria as a nation was birthed in 1960 and since then, the country has continued to grow with mixed reactions and feelings as to whether or not the people have been faithful to the practice to enhance the growth and fulfilment of the democratic process. To this end, most Nigerians think that the trajectory of Nigeria's democracy is for a select few, who have what it takes to plunge into the journey. The question of whether or not the sail and growth have been smooth or not and why most Nigerians abandon the voyage is the topical issue under discuss. In the words of Ajayi and Ojo:

Nigerian democracy has three outstanding features. First, it is spendthrift. Nigerian democracy is a brand of democracy that spends so much to accomplish little. Second, it invests in comfort of officials rather than in human and material resources. In fact, the welfare of the common man occupies the bottom rung of the order of priorities of the anchors of Nigerian democracy. Third, Nigerian democracy is plagued by hydra-headed and pathological corruption that ensures that the impact of any seeming good policy is either extremely negligible or almost exactly nil (107).

The above expression presents the existential and problematic state of Nigeria's democracy and the state of affairs it has left on the marginalized lumpen proletariat to believe in the practice of political apathy therefore leaving the practice of democracy in the hands of a select few. A few have taken the opportunity from the near or total absence of many citizens from the democratic landscape and they have continued to manipulate the process to suit their whims and caprices, against the backdrop of true democracy. In Nigeria today, democratic participation is a mere activity for a few who are beneficiaries of the system. There is massive voter apathy from all regions of the country;

many citizens see no reasons to participate in elections or democratic activities because the general notion is that "the votes of the masses do not count". The rationale for this voter apathy and non-political participation is built on the many abnormalities that have characterized the entire democratic process in Nigeria.

Since the return of democracy in Nigeria in the year 1999, Nigeria has had four elected presidents and with a 'successful' transition from one democratic regime to another, of a ruling party to an opposition party. The citizens have had high hopes of democratic dividends which remain what Tor lorapuu refers to "Hoping against Hope". The social realities in the country remain the same, the masses are left in deplorable state, institutions of government are weakened by the day, and insecurity has become a yardstick of existence because the value for human life has become a phantasm.

The Nigerian society as it stands today has not fared well democratically because of so many abnormalities that characterized democratic practice in the country; abnormalities like election rigging, vote buying, godfatherism, politics of bitterness, ethnic politics, religious politics and many more. Based on the continued democratic imbalance in Nigeria, many writers have continued to utilize the power of the pen to comment on the social realities of the country. It is these bases that Achebe as cited by Egwemi commented on the role of playwrights cum writers in the society and how they should not be indifferent about social issues but rise to the occasion to communicate worrying issues issued this statement:

It is clear that African creative writers who try to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (78).

Gbilekaa adds that:

Therefore, a socially conscious and realistic writer cannot simply dabble into the philosophy of abstract humanism. He must be alive to the realities and forces operating in his society. In Africa, there has been a symbiotic relationship between writers and politics. This is not simply because African writers incorporate political themes in

their creative works but mainly that the writer and the politician are all rolled into one (2).

It is in light of the foregoing that this chapter aims at deconstructing the idea of political apathy by strengthening democratic participation through the propelling of citizens into action. To achieve this objective, lessons from Tor Iorapuu's April 1421 are taken as a dramatic creation that is aimed at achieving the objective of social mobilization of the masses and giving them a voice to speak against the social maladies that bedevil the Nigerian state.

Conceptualizing Democratic Participation in Nigeria

The voyage of democracy in Nigeria has not been a smooth sail. This is largely because of the inherent turbulent waves that have continued to slow the pace and speed of the sail and has made the passengers (citizens) on board wonder if at all they are sailing to a destination or merely a trip to nowhere. This turbulent circumstance of democratic practice in Nigeria leaves Achebe with this striking position:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise up to responsibility, to the challenges of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership (1).

This has given us a perceptible insight into the discourse of this chapter. Nigeria's democratic practice can develop beyond the imaginable limits, if only those in leadership are willing to rise up to the responsibility of developing the nation, instead of stunting and dwarfing its growth by embezzling the wealth of the nation. Achebe states again that:

The countless billions that a generous providence poured into our national coffers in the last ten years (1972-1982) would have been enough to launch this nation into the middle rank of developed nations and transformed the lives of our poor and needy. But what have we done with it? Stolen and salted away by people in power and their accomplices. Squandered in uncontrolled importation of

all kinds of useless consumer merchandise from every corner of the globe. Embezzled through inflated contracts to an army of party loyalists, who have neither the desire nor the competence to execute their contracts (2-3).

It is indeed very sad to admit that it has been over forty years since Achebe made this lamentation of the state of affairs in Nigeria and the reality of this lamentation has continued to play out in democratic practice in the country. Arising from the above, many Nigerians have lost faith in the practice of democracy, many people assume that it is a government of the rich, by rich and for the rich and so, have little or no interest in it. Given this circumstance, Kukah was quick to reveal that:

If you want to conduct a survey on what ordinary Nigerians imagine democracy means to them, there are many chances that the researcher will be faced with great derision. This is irrespective of whether it is on the street or the classrooms. Most of the respondents will, proverbially, do what Nigerians love doing best: answering questions by asking other questions. Thus, in responding to a question like, what is democracy; most Nigerians would simply shoot back, Na democracy we go chop? (Can democracy feed us?) Or wetin be dat? (What does that mean?). On the other hand, some other respondents might just find the acerbic Fela Anikulapo Kuti's definition of democracy as dem-all-crazy (They are all crazy) to be a much more befitting summary than any preoccupation with Platonian, Aristotelian or Athenian concepts (1).

The nature and character of democracy as it is practiced in Nigeria is what Kukah has graphically presented in his thesis. Many Nigerian citizens will openly say without mixing words that there is no democracy in Nigeria. This is duly because of the failures that the practice of democracy has witnessed in the country within the metrics of its operationalization.

The birth of Nigeria's democracy in 1960 came with a lot of expectations after the rough experience of political 'pregnancy' and 'childbirth'; the baby was conceived in 1914 and in 1960, the baby was given birth to. The British colonialists handed over power to Tafawa

Balewa and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as first and only Prime Minister and Governor General respectively. Okuchukwu provides us with this striking perspective:

Immediately after independence in 1960, when the 'Green, White Green' was hoisted in the air and the sound of gun salutes barely a month, the state of the country was threatened as things began to go worst. As the country's political system was plagued by tribalism and ethnicity which threatened the future of Nigerian democracy and led to a brutal ethnic cleansing and civil war in 1967-1970, many lives and properties were destroyed (13).

Ogbeidi in Awojobi corroborates Okuchukwu's statement and noted also that "The First Republic under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe, the president, was marked by widespread corruption, as government officials looted public funds with impunity. Federal Representatives and Ministers flaunted their wealth with reckless abandon"(151). This unfortunate circumstance since the 1960s has continued to play out in Nigeria's democratic practice. Issues like mismanagement, ethnicity and abandonment of projects, tribalism, and nepotism and above all, bribery and corruption have continued to litter the path of democratic journey, thereby, creating underdevelopment. Today, insecurity has become synonymous with Nigeria's democratic journey. This scourge has and is still threatening the stronghold of the nation in different ways. Security challenges arising from Boko Haram terrorism, herdsman-farmers attack, banditry, kidnappings and insurgency, etc., have contributed in no small measure in tearing the nation apart and negatively affecting her democratic practice.

The unfortunate state of democratic practice in Nigeria has left both male, female and the youth underdeveloped because of marginalization from the tenets of democratization which allows for equal participation by all citizens. Orokpo as cited by Oboaye submits that:

A critical evaluation of Nigeria's political history shows a great marginalization of women in politics and appointments. Right from the time of independence up to the present political dispensation in Nigeria, the domain of politics seems unfeminine because of the

fact that the women substantially do not participate in politics. With politics engaging the consciousness of the nation's leadership, women found themselves in arms against a political system that sought to promote the interest of only the male... (75)

Writing on the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC's analysis of the 2019 elections, Premium Times of 29th September, 2019 quoted the INEC chairman thus:

During the elections, only five out of the 73 candidates who ran for the position of President were women. Also, 1,668 men and 232 women contested for the 109 senatorial seats while 4,139 men and 533 women contended for 360 seats in the House of Representatives. At the end of the election, only seven women won senatorial seats and 11 were elected into the House of Representatives, while four were elected as Deputy Governors."

This figure is far less than the 35 % affirmative action proposed for women participation in politics. Some of the reasons that account for this include lack of political education, lack of financial empowerment as well as the social constraints and negative perceptions against women's participation in politics. This is equally applicable to the youth who are denied the rights of participation in democratic process. The President Muhammadu Buhari-led administration was magnanimous in its wisdom and signed a bill tagged "Not-Too-Young to Run". In reality, the bill is operational only in principle because in practice, the youth have no say in political happenings in the country.

Tocqueville as cited in Iorapuu is of the impression that "It is evident to all alike that democratic revolution is going on amongst us; but all do not look at it in the same light" (26). One may be tempted to ask whether the captains and crew members have had adequate knowledge of compass and where the ship is heading to. This notwithstanding, for effective and efficient democratic participation to take place in Nigeria, citizens MUST be well schooled with the reality of politics and its principles. To effectively have a working democratic practice in Nigeria, Shively's submission comes handy, "it is a pattern of community interaction that produces desirable attitudes of efficacy and trust, and

that gives people practical experience in persuasion and collective action that helps them to function well in a democracy" (166). No society of the world can make any meaningful progress if the citizens of such a country are not well informed about the socio-political happenings of their nation.

This explains while Shively's dictum is very apt in conceptualizing democratic participation in Nigeria. Citizens must deepen community interactions and mobilization, by so doing, a preponderance of the citizens will be aware of the unspoken narratives of democratic practice in Nigeria. This knowledge and awareness will strengthen democratic participation because the citizens will now actively engage in democratic process not as mere participants but as actors in the entire process.

Appraising and Strengthening Democratic Participation in Tor lorappu's *April 1421*

Many playwrights have engaged themes of democracy in their works; Tor lorappu is one of such writers who have creatively engaged this subject matter in *April 1421*. The distinction between Tor and other playwrights of his kind is the fact that Tor is a community organizer who has used the instrumentality of Theatre and Community Organizing to deepen democratic participation on the citizens. The play itself was birthed from several engagements with communities on voter education in Nigeria just before the 2007 election. The Youth, Adolescent, Reflection and Action Centre (YARAC), an NGO based in Jos, Plateau State carried out massive sensitization of the rural people in States like Plateau, Benue and Nasarawa. The rationale was to ensure that citizens are well equipped with the fore knowledge of democratic participation in Nigeria.

In the *Preface* to the play, Tor established the fact that:

The play *April 1421* reveals many issues plaguing Nigeria's steady development. One among the issues is the extraordinary struggle in Nigeria's historical march for democracy. The world focused on Nigeria electronically just as there was an astonishing human presence to monitor the elections. The United States sent an extraordinary delegation to witness an extraordinary election. The

Commonwealth, ECOWAS (Economic Communities of West African States), the European Union, Local Observers, other friends of Nigeria rushed to Nigeria. April 14 and 21 were the dates for the 2007 general election (viii).

The playwright makes bold to say that the April 14 and 21 general elections of 2007 were elections that the whole world looked forward to. The reason was because of the narratives that followed the preparation to the conduct of the expected elections. The elections were to be conducted at the expiration of the then President Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure as the president of Nigeria. Obasanjo as the sitting president had done everything within his reach to ensure that he gets a third term in office which is against the constitution of the country. The expectations of the people within and outside the country were that Obasanjo was going to usurp power as the incumbent president without recourse to the provisions of the constitution, hence, the interest shown by international players in world politics. Writers are always in service to the people, either to rewrite history or comment on social realities of the society. Tor Iorapuu, having watched how the events of the elections played out as a civil society advocate, practitioner, activist, citizen and a writer, decided to recreate the stories in a dramatic form that he metaphorically titled *April 14/21*. The thematic preoccupation of the play is built on the democratic practice in Nigeria and its intention is to overhaul Nigeria's democratic process by strengthening citizenship engagement in political practice.

In this attempt, a character in the play, Mrs. Akpambo mobilizes the marginalized masses whose mandate has been stolen by a privileged few and are subjected to servitude and inhuman treatment under the watch of the Foreman. The masses are made aware of their plight and want to revenge by setting on fire one of the perceived enemies of the people. Poised by moral rectitude, she warns the angry mob thus:

Mrs. Akpambo: Please don't, I beg you in the name of God. Let us not behave like them. They do not respect life. They snatch away everything at gun point. As we have discovered, the construction is a perfect image of our future. God has brought us together as unlikely components, individuals who want to live together but who are as

different as concrete and insulation, as opposite as reinforced rods and planks in one country (28).

In the above lines, Mrs. Akpambo conscientizes and educates the construction workers on the need to reject any form of subjugation and oppression that they are made to go through. While the people opted for violence, she teaches them the need to avoid violence as it only destroys but not build. With a revived spirit, the workers resolve to henceforth, fight for what is theirs on the construction site. It is imperative to note that the construction site is only a metaphor for Nigeria as a country. The citizens of the country Nigeria can change the narratives if they are united and properly mobilized.

To further strengthen the bond between the construction workers and deepen their resolve, Mrs. Akpambo says to the workers "We do not want to poison your thoughts, just remember the great nationalists. Remember their efforts. They laid down their lives so that you may have free air to breathe; free education; free and clean water to drink" (2). This clearly shows the power of an avid member of the construction site who is part of the sufferings and injustices that the citizens face from unpatriotic leaders. Mrs. Akpambo's counsel to her fellow inmates in the construction site is to make them very strong and firm in their resolve. She says to them that "So we need your time, energy, talent and brain; and above all your understanding to liberate ourselves from all forms of oppression and injustice in our country" (29). Consequently, her reiteration of the issue, is to make the citizens aware of the fact that the struggle for liberation is not an easy one and the people should be prepared to make sacrifices of all kinds if freedom must be attained.

As the events of the play and the conversation in the construction site continue, the masses are becoming more aware of issues surrounding their welfare and existence. Mama Friday, one of the women in the site is motivated by Mrs. Akpambo's acts of courage and motivation to the people. Hear what she says in appreciation of the awareness Mrs. Akpambo has brought to the construction workers:

Mama Friday: Thank you Madam. Since I lost my husband and my two children, it is only today that I feel human again. You are God's sent. Now, you all looked surprised because all you care about is free

kunu. Mama Friday, I beg, I go pay when they pay me; okay, add all and tell me... bla-bla-bla. But have you asked where the Friday is? All you want is sex. I look like an illiterate, don't I? Oh, I look strange right? We all need someone to make us look strange; to make us acknowledge we are sleeping. Yes sit down because you need this story to open your ears so you can hear; to open your eyes so you can see; to open your arms so you can embrace one another; to stretch yourselves to support one another particularly on this journey of collective freedom (31-32).

It is important to note that Mrs. Akpambo has uncovered the veil of ignorance that has covered the faces of the masses that has continued to make them unable to see the direction which the ship of democracy is taking them. In the above lines, Mama Friday has made it very clear that over the years, she had remained quiet and non-participatory because of the unfairness of the society. But through the reawakening sermons of Mrs. Akpambo who she refers to as "A God's sent" and the stimulating acts and speeches from Mrs. Akpambo, has been able to provoke the thoughts and actions of the workers who are now aware of their problems and are now ready to reclaim their stolen mandate. Mama Friday has made a revealing proposition that indeed, democracy has taken a lot from the people and as the case is, the people must be willing to unite as one whole unit to be able to dislodge every single structure that stands against the progress of the country.

In another instance in the play, the Youth Leader 1 is conscripted into helping the politicians rig the election, just as the law enforcement agencies are aware of this and yet could not do anything. The Youth Leader 1 is killed after helping in rigging the election. This is corruption of the highest order. The case of the youth leader is a very salient case that has characterized politics and its practice in Nigeria. Virtually every viable and well known politician in this country have personal aids inform of thugs whose responsibility is to intimidate and even kill perceived enemies of their boss. The youth leader's untimely death is also a propeller for the younger generation, it is a propeller because through the lenses of Tor's dramatic overture, the citizens are strengthened and made aware of the issue that keeps them perpetually

to the ground. In the 2023 general elections and the preceding ones, young people like Youth Leader¹ that Tor has created in this play will serve as a warning to youths who have the propensity to join the bandwagon of election riggers for their pay masters in whatever form.

The above circumstance faced by Youth Leader 1 reminds Mama Friday of her husband and son's deaths. These are her words of lamentation:

Mama Friday: Mister, first they killed my husband. He won't allow the losing party to rig the April 1421 election in his ward. They followed and shot him right by his door. My son, Friday was also shot dead by some uniformed men. You all know him. He is the young man Mrs. Akpambo spoke about (33).

In this interesting episode, Mama Friday goes further in building the resolve of the masses on the construction site and to further expose the ruling class who cares less about the wellbeing of the people. Her words are meant to encourage the people to know that their destinies are in their hands. The revelation is paramount in the struggle for survival that the masses in this country face. This goes to show how many people are killed in the country by either Boko Haram, kidnappers, religious bigots, farmers/herders or even the law enforcers themselves and no case is made about the development perhaps because the ruling class is supposedly safe from these unlawful killings going on in the country.

Mama Friday's husband and son are only a representation of the whole society. Through this motivating revelation, the construction workers are well informed and propelled to take actions that can redeem their lot and bring sanity to their existence. She goes further to say that "We are wounded for democracy. My son helped them to stuff the ballot papers for the Dishonorable Senator and they awarded him a death certificate" (33). This is really disturbing but it is indeed a reality in our democratic experience. Many able bodied men and women of this nation have lost their lives on account of helping the ruling class rig election. In the interim, Mama Friday is only a creation of the playwright's version of the reality of the society.

To justify Mama Friday's verdict of what the 'dishonorable Senators' did as she refers to the sub unit of the total ruling class comes these

reinforcing words from Youth Leader 11:

Youth Leader 11: That is their strategy: clean the tracks. Send a letter bomb; set your house on fire or quarantine you because you are a virus likely to threaten the operating system. And to complete the circle, the execu-thieves have exchanged batons with the legis-looters" (34).

This is an incredible revelation as far as the playwright is concerned. He creates these lines in this character to serve as a mouth piece to the people. The people are made to know that the ruling class is selfish and does not care about the system. This is not falsehood so long Nigeria's democratic process is concerned, in Nigeria those in power decide what happens to the citizens. In recent past, the Buhari government declared the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra, IPOB, a self-determination group as a terrorist group for demanding for their State. In the worst case scenario, Boko Haram that is a deadly group killing and meting out all forms of hardship on the citizens are reintegrated into the society under the cover of 'haven repented'. This is the picture that Youth Leader 11 paints in his lines.

The people are becoming more aware of the social reality of democratic participation in Nigeria and Mama Friday appraises the role Mrs. Akpambo has played in the following words:

Mama Friday: Mrs. Akpambo, I am delighted to have formally met you today. I hated everything I heard about you from my son. I personally felt you were misleading my son. But my husband had a different view, which made me hate you more. Come to think of it we were a privileged people living outside the construction site. I know my husband was under pressure many times to do illegal things but he insisted on the right path. However, I do understand better today. Many of us are vulnerable because we are wounded. And because we are wounded, there are gaps in our lives. We can only heal these wounds by making the right choices and decisions (36).

Perhaps, Mama Friday has exposed the fact that she and her family were privileged people who lived outside the construction site. Her

revelation is that she has tasted the other side of life (power and wealth) and knows what it feels like to be in the shoes of the poor masses in the construction site. She also makes a salient revelation that she hated Mrs. Akpambo because of her radical ideas of a progressive society that should be egalitarian in nature. This is the case with the Nigerian state; those who are pro-government in their thoughts and actions are hated and persecuted for standing for justice. Now that she is part of the people, she has realized that indeed, Mrs. Akpambo was a "God sent" to strengthen the masses and propel them to take action in order to better their living condition. This also is the concern of the playwright; he envisages a situation where the citizens will become more aware of their situations and rise up to the occasion to redefine their living conditions.

Mrs. Akpambo reinforces the construction site workers with the following words:

Mrs. Akpambo: We must keep this fire burning forever and ever. Please, note that if you remain united the enemy will be frustrated eventually. I feel extremely fulfilled because of these three...Mama Friday, cry no more, this young man is your son. This Madam Fire is a great personality, she is your friend. You can take over from me. You are already a member of the construction site. Please, keep the energies together and make sure you recruit more members (137).

As crazy as the above lines sound, it is very clear that the masses are aware of the issues that affect them as a people. Mrs. Akpambo, is urging the construction site workers never to give up but remain resolute and strong together. Hear what Madam Fire tells the Foreman who feels he is in charge of the construction site "We beg you not to do anything silly. We are all victims of your poli-tricks. Your business is to do the dirty job. We are prepared to help you clean the mess. And the first item to clean is you" (37). This goes to tell that the masses are very much in control of the happenings around them and will leave nothing to chance to ensure that they clean the system from the scavengers (bad leadership) that has actually violated their fundamental human rights.

Mrs. Akpambo is happy with the progress and level of awareness in

the masses but cautions them in a most solemn way that:

Mrs. Akpambo: I can see you are all charged but please do nothing violent. Violence is initiated by the rich and not the poor. And let me warn you all: be prepared for greater provocation. The testimonies you heard will not match what will happen during the next voting (38).

This indeed, showcases an outstanding quality of a good leader who is poised to redeem the yearnings of the people. She is aware of the fact that those who determine the way and manner things happen in the country will not be happy with the new orientation and awareness in the masses and above all, the citizen's demand for a better lifestyle. In this wise, she has told them to expect the unexpected as they will be facing more molestations in all forms for standing up for their rights. She asks the foreman softly "After this dirty job, where will you run to? Cameroon? Ghana? Oh yes, South Africa. (She begins a song) Today, today, tomorrow no more, if I die today, I'll die no more!" (38). Mrs. Akpambo is a symbol of hope for the masses. Her passion for the liberation of the construction workers (the Nigerian State) knows no bounds.

The playwright also presents corruption as one of the canker worms that has continued to leak water from the ocean into the ship which has made the ship heavy and nearly stagnant, if not at the point of sinking. Democratic practice in this country is actually on a snail pace; citizens are not feeling the dividends of democracy as they should. In happening three, police Sergeant and a corporal who are symbols of Government extorts money from innocent road users; from motorists, cyclists, and even pedestrians. Sergeant orders Corporal to shoot any of them who does not cooperate. Listen to this unfortunate circumstance as practice by Nigeria's law enforcement agents:

Sergeant: ...Do you think it is for the love of this country that I am here? So, do not provoke me. Any money wey you collect must orderly reach me. Listen to me, this na check point. You must koro koro do that thing you did on April 1421. Any motorist, cyclist, bicyclist or even waka passist who does not obey, shoot. Is that clear? (17).

As funny as this may sound, it is a reality of the deplorable state of our failed security system whose personnel continue to extort and harass road users at various check points around the country. It is no longer news that our checkpoints have long been converted to pay points or points of sale, POS, on the highways, even within the cities. It is quite sad that these demeaning activities are done openly without recourse to moral rectitude. The sergeant even reminds the Corporal that he should discharge the duty of extorting from the people like it was done on April 14 and 21, referring to the general election of the year 2007. This comparative analysis goes to show that election in question was characterized by irregularities of all kinds.

Similarly, the Honorable Senator having returned from the senate wants to take over the position of the foreman at the construction site. Even though he had not returned home to check on the workers in the construction site since he was voted by the same workers to represent them at the senate. Hear the Hon. Senator as he patronizes the people:

Hon. Senator: These tears shall be wiped away permanently if you accept to elect me as your new foreman at the construction site. I actually appointed foreman to stand in for me (53).

This is the usual trick of "Poli-trickers" or "Poli-thieves" as the playwright refers to them. Imagine someone who has spent so much time at the senate without recourse to the wellbeing of the people who sent him to represent them, coming back to demand a chance to take up the foreman's job in the construction site. Our politicians crisscross to other political parties just to ensure they get the mandate to rule. If denied mandate in one party, they move to the next and use their stolen money "the people's money" to acquire whatever position they want. This has played out in Nigeria in several elections and elective positions. The twist in this play is that, this time, the people have been fully informed and educated about the state of things and are prepared to defend their mandate by whatever means.

The playwright, through the character of Mrs. Akpambo, has graciously laid out the pathway to propel the citizens into action. The once docile masses are now very much aware of the social realities that befall them as a people. They are no longer unaware of the fact that the

leaders they elect as representatives in public offices are rather greedy and corrupt leaders but they are also aware of their antics and ploys to continue to marginalized them. The play and its propelling theme is a wakeup call for all those who have lost faith and hope due to corruption, leadership failure, insecurity and other vices that there is flicker of hope for all is not lost yet.

Conclusion

There is a general maxim that no writer creates in a vacuum, every writer is motivated by the happenings within the society and the happenings often serve as the propelling motif for the writer. In this chapter, we have done a rereading of Tor lorapuu's *April 1421* and the concerns raised therein. The play presents democratic practice in Nigeria and how unproductive democracy as practiced in the country is characterized by several irregularities that are responsible for the failure of the system in various ways. The playwright carefully and tactfully coined the fight and struggle for fame and popularity among the colours to represent the struggle and quest for leadership in Nigeria as it has continued to thrive since independence. The struggle has thrown the nation into chaos giving room for several factions that have made the nation vulnerable to external and even internal attacks of all kinds. This chapter equally brings to the fore, the issues that have continued to cause the retrogression in the country.

From the takeoff, a perspective on the nature and character of democratic practice in Nigeria is laid bare and the ensuing narratives that follow democratic participation in Nigeria are lucidly discussed. To demographically do a critical analysis of this issue, Tor lorapuu's play is used as a lens through which unhealthy democratic practice in Nigeria is exposed to the citizens. The critical analysis of the play shows that the playwright has a full grip of political happenings of the Nigerian state and as such, he has been able to adumbrate these issues in a clearer manner. The thing worthy of note is the fact that through the lenses of Tor's *April 1421*, the society is made to see her ugly face. Not just made to see her ugly face but the citizens are reinforced by the playwright through the created characters to begin to take actions by demanding for social justice.

Recommendations

This chapter recommends that for Nigeria to have a smooth democratic practice, the rule of law must be made to prevail. The viability of the rule of law should be enforced in such a way that any erring citizen who violates electoral process of any kind either by vote buying, election rigging, use of thugs or other electoral related offenses should be severely punished by the law. If the law is strong enough and punishment is meted on offenders without fear or favour to anyone, either on the bases of ethnicity or religion, Nigeria as a country will begin to witness credible democratic process that the citizens will be proud of.

It is also the conviction of these researchers that if playwrights such as the one whose work this chapter examined are contracted by the government and other organizations to create more of these works that have the potency to propel the citizens into action, the society will witness tremendous change in the democratic process. This is because the masses will become aware about the issues that affect them as a people and their democratic life.

There should be a more conscious effort by the government to ensure that plays such as *April 1421* are included in educational curriculum of both tertiary and primary institutions in the country. If this is done, it will strengthen the discourses around democratic participation amongst citizens and the masses will become more informed about democratic processes and the narratives that surround the discourse in Nigeria.

It is also the desire of these writers that plays such as this is translated into different languages in the country so as to have a wider out reach. Not just the translation of such plays but they should also be converted into films and made available everywhere in all nooks and crannies of the country. In this way, those who cannot read can also have the opportunity to watch them in form of movies and this will help in no small measure in sensitizing the people and at the same time raising their consciousness.

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