

**AKUJWA IN OSUAGWU'S EGWUREGWU IGBO ABUQ: A Marxist Critique of
Organized Religion.**

By

Eze, Mabel Nkechinyere

Phone: 08063632211,

Email: cypeze62@yahoo.com

**Department of Nigerian Languages,
Lagos state University of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8306810>

Abstract

Igbo writers like many other literary artists expose what is obtainable in the society in their literary works. In Akuuwa drama, Beteran Osuagwu exposed class differential as some leaders in the society especially some church leaders exploit and cheat the people they lead and brain wash them with deceptive information to make them perpetual followers. The researcher, applied observation method in her analysis of this drama. She related what happened in the drama to what she observes in our present society. The theoretical framework for this study is the Marxism theory. This is because we see segregation based on class.

Keywords: Marxist, drama, literary, religion, deception.

Introduction

When one reads any Igbo drama texts, what first comes to mind in the analysis of that text is the theme which portrays the message the playwright wishes to convey to the audience/readers. The themes of the texts may, of course, be derived from the playwright's personal thought, experience of life and/or ideas concerning creator and creature, life and death, war, peace or other things that go on in society. These themes determine the type of emotion that will be evoked in the particular drama text and forms the contents of the texts. Uzochukwu (1987) states that theme is the main story (content) an author narrates in any piece of writing, so as to raise the expected emotion in the life of the reader(s).

A Publication of College of Languages and Communication Arts Education, Lagos State University of Education

Themes of the Igbo drama texts are very important in the sense that they are the main nucleus or central message a playwright should first of all decide before putting up his/her text. This is to enable the playwright know how best to structure the story in order to achieve the expected or desired emotion. When this basic thing is done, the playwright will not be scrambling for specific themes which may be shabbily projected at last. In Osuagwu's *Akuuwa*, we can see the theme as a critique of organized religion.

Classifying people according to social, economic and political lifestyle may be based on the striking difference observed among the people/groups. These groups include those without home and have few material possession and have little hope or no hope at all for a better life. The poor may not have much education and are struggling not to be homeless and the rich who have all the necessities of life. These ones can afford luxurious cars and nice homes. The last are those referred to as the well to do. These set of people can afford even private jets and can be described as extremely wealthy.

These groups might loosely be referred to as in American understanding as under class, lower class, middle class and the upper/aristocratic class. Those who are socio-economically and politically oppressed are the underclass and the lower class.

They experience economic, political and social deprivation. They also have limited means of improving their lots. The middle class both economically and politically oppressed but somehow privileged because they are living a life better than classes below them. Those who are politically and economically privileged are the upper class and the aristocracy. They enjoy luxurious lifestyle and good deal of financial security.

This being the case, Igbo writers through their literary works have made some contributions on the political scene of the society, observing that, the society ranges from those that lack political integration to those that are political genius who use every means to achieve their purpose. They create political awareness by making it (politics) the theme of their literary work.

On the other hand, Onukaogu and Chukwu (2009:149) says that virtually every 21st century Nigerian literary writer has something to say about Nigeria's socio-economic and political realities of the present day. In addition, Igbo writers are not left out in this regard. Literary works is usually based on things that happen in the society, so Igbo literary writers use this important feature of literary works to penetrate into some delicate and sensitive areas of human endeavor such as politics and religion as major themes of their write up.

In doing this, we see characters making use of oppressive and deceptive words and actions like the political elites of the present society.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In most cases, African, Nigerian and Igbo drama texts employ some local elements as themes of their drama texts which are also channelled through traditional and cultural practices such as marriage, festivals, rituals elements, farming, traditional medicines and all the general lifestyle of

the people. The Igbo people specifically, are among the most numerous ethnic group and nationalist in Negro Africa whose culture and society enjoyed a basic uniformity of patterns and cosmological and social ideas says Afigbo (1981:56). As a result, there is no much difference in the general lifestyle of the people except in the dialect, which is the medium through which these ideas are conveyed. The lifestyle is very unique that every aspect of it is loaded with great knowledge and wisdom which make it possible to resist any form of interference from forces within or without even in this contemporary time. These cultural practices are regarded as medium through which lifestyle of the people are transmitted and preserved from generation to generation in a ritualistic manner as Akin (2010:1) posits. According to him, people's indigenous knowledge is conveyed through stories, legends, songs, folklore, ceremonies, socio-economic acquisition which are the general practices of the people. Moreover, studies show that all the genres of literature (prose, poetry and drama) take their inspiration from these traditional practices.

Specifically, looking at the drama which is the focus of this study, many playwrights do their best to portray one form of culture or the other as themes of their creative outputs. Ikwubuzo (1998:81) affirms that, a playwright can look at his/her cultural background and draw his/her inspiration from the traditional resources. Any playwright knowledgeable enough with foreign literary tradition and culture can equally adapt it as theme of his/her drama. As a means of preserving indigenous cultures and traditions, Nnabuihe (1998:109) narrates how Eshe funeral drama is an important aspect of Igbo traditional life as a theme of his write-up. To support this assertion, Bolaji and Adedina (2010:36) say that playwrights make good use of traditional forms and practices as themes to pass powerful information across to the audience/readers, which may circulate round the globe. To Africans and the Igbo particularly, it displays the people's philosophy, worldview, wisdom and knowledge, socio-economic enhancement and uplift, institutions, ceremonies and festivities. Alayna (2015:139) emphasizes the interwoven nature of African dramatic themes by saying that the roots of drama can be located in festivals and rituals, which is not lacking in almost all the traditional practices of the people. For example, one can borrow from myth and legend as we can see from the following: *Aku Fecha* by Anelechi Chukuezi, *Oku Uzu Daa Ibube* by Goddy Onyekaonwu, Igbo traditional kingship as in *Oji Isi Kote* by Walter Eneore, traditional Agriculture as in *Ezinne* by Chika Anyasido, importance of community lands and boundaries as in *Obidiya* by Enyinna Akoma, Igbo communal co-existence and peace as in *Udoka Mma* by Anaelechi Chukuezi, importance and honour of spinsterhood and marriage as in *Ugomma* by Godson Echebima and so many others.

This paper examines how the character Akụwa in Osuagwu's *Egwuregwu Igbo Abu* qualifies as a Marxist critique of organized religion. We are to see how oppressive and deceptive words and actions are displayed by the oppressive characters as demonstrated in this drama text. This, no doubt is a representative

of what is obtainable in our society especially in some religious organizations.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the Marxism theory. Marxism is derived from a philosophy of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels known as Marxian's philosophers. The Marxist literacy criticism is viable and will always attract readers, critics and researchers. The Marxist theory was not generally designed to be used as a theory of text interpretation rather, it was meant to interpret set of social, economic and political issues. They provide the platform for a system of thought that identifies inequitable economic and political relationship as a source of class conflict. Marxist theory views a literary text as the product of an ideology particularly, to a specific historical period not a product of an individual consciousness.

A text is therefore judged on the basis that any genre of literature must be understood in relation to historical and social realism of the time. They are also of the view that the socio-economic and political bases of the society determine the nature and structure of ideology, institutions and literatures that form the super structure of that society. For the Marxism, acquiring and sustaining power is the motive behind all social and political activities, then economy is the base upon which super structure of the socio-political ideology/realities are built.

In addition, part of the goal of Marxist theory is to identify the ideology, for example, it is natural for man to hold leadership position because they are privileged of where they were born. This led to classifying people according socio-economic and political lifestyle or status. The Marxist theory asks questions why certain power is denied to many others while some enjoy that. The theory is justified to be used in this study because its concern is on the treatment, security and welfare of the members of particular group. Though no literary criticism or theory goes in isolation, therefore reader-response theory can be applied to this study. This theory concerns itself with the readers' interaction with the text as central to interpretation. Interpretations by different readers are not always the same due to re-reading hence no interpretation of a text is the final.

Statement of Problem

There are many sources of inspiration a playwright can employ in the composition of his drama text. Some borrow from myths, legends and the entire traditional cultural life of a people. On the other hand, some consider it most necessary to go traditional in writing modern Igbo drama. Therefore, their story lines are often tied to certain religious festivals and lifestyle of the society that are economically significant; some decide to expose evils in the society. Oral drama on its part deals with people's belief system, values, norms and mores, which are passed orally from generation to generation. These stand the risk of adulteration or even fading away in transit. These beliefs, values and norms when incorporated undiluted in written drama are better preserved than they are in its oral form. The written Igbo drama also helps to spread them wider beyond the world known only to people who can preserve them orally.

Little or no attention has been paid to analyzing few plays dealing with activities in religious organizations in our society. This is, therefore, a little contribution to this aspect in this regard. The aim of this research is to expose and criticize segregation and other evils in our society especially

A Publication of College of Languages and Communication Arts Education, Lagos State University of Education

in religious organizations as represented in the drama text *Akuuwa* in Egwuregwu Igbo Abuo by Betran Osuagwu.

Purpose of the Study

This study is necessitated by the desire to investigate the extent to which some leaders especially some religious leaders mislead and deceive their followers. In African world generally and the Igbo in particular as they are reflected in this written Igbo drama. The study specifically identifies class segregation and evils as expressed in this written Igbo drama.

METHODOLOGY

The method this study employed is the literary analysis of related texts with much emphasis on *Akuuwa*, the particular text under review. The performance of the characters will be analysed as it concerns the happening in our contemporary society.

Akuuwa

The play is a religious satire which makes a critique of some deceptions some religious leaders display while leading their members. The drama captures insecurity, deprivation in the provision and allocation of some benefits gotten from the church among the church leaders and the members. These benefits include offerings and some financial donations from those the church prayed for and were blessed. As a result, there is a conflict between the church leader *Akuuwa*, now stands as the upper class and the other prophets and members as lower class. This is demonstrated by *Ekwekwe*, the protagonist who says:

Onyinye anyị na-enye n'ụlọ ụka anyị, anyị anaghị ama ihe gbasara ya. Ihe onyinye anyị na-atụkọta n'onwe anyị na nke si mba ọzọ abịa, unu maara ka ha si aga? Asị m unu kọrọ m ka ha si aga. Unu maara na ọ na-arụ ụlọ elu n'obodo ya, bụ Ndiako ugbo a? Act 3, page 18.

The text exposes stealing and deception exhibited by some church leaders against their members. This is demonstrated by the character *Akuuwa* who embezzles church fund while members are left empty handed. *Akuuwa* has divided the church into their classes, the upper class (the prophet), *ndi ozi* (workers) middle class and the members as lower class.

This reflected in his prayer in scene 1, page 10, where he states:

Nye anyị ogologo ndụ, anyị akụ na ụba..... ka e wee ghara ịkpọ anyị chiochi agụ". Onye adighi ihe o nwere ka onwee basikul; ka profeti na-agba moto, ndi ozi, moto saikul. p.10

Not only did Akụwụwa divide the church into classes but prayed that God should bless them according to their class. Although he prayed so, in the proceeds of the church, he the Profeti, takes all. In the sharing of the proceeds, the prophet takes all.

This life of 'taking it all' by the upper class represented by Akụwụwa brings about protest from the middle class, the workers and the members. This reflected in the prayer of Ekwewe in scene 3, page 17.

...onye si na anyi chue na anyi agaghị eri, ya buru okuko uto lakpuo ura. Onye ruo ya rie. Ofọ na ogu ka anyi ji o!"p.17

This also depicts the embezzlement and life of selfishness among some church leaders who believe that they are the upper class and need to have everything and benefits from the church (especially financial benefit) while other members are made to believe that they are not to put their mind on earthly wealth.

The character Ekwewe, in his attempt to win the support of the other members of the church analyzed what the life of a church leader ought to be; righteous and holy as against Akuuwa's lifestyle.

.unu maara nke oma na onye no n'udi onodu ya ugbu a kwesiri ibu onye nsọ. Onye na edebe onwe ya ocha ma n'ime mmuo ma na anu ahụ...p.18.

From the above, the leader of the middle and the lower class, Maazi Ekwewe is stating that the life of their church leader ought to be righteous but the opposite is what they are seeing. This is not leadership by example. This is what Eze (2004:209) calls poor leadership in Nigeria. The leadership of some of the churches in our society is characterized by corrupt and evil people which is a mark of insecurity in a nation/society. The church is supposed to be the last hope for the poor man but in this case, the reverse is the case.

Insecurity is observed in some churches in Nigeria and this is depicted in this drama 'Akụwụwa' where the church leader Akụwụwa is accused of having a hand in the death of some of the church members who challenged him. Nnodi, in scene 3, page 20 says:

Unu ajukwala ihe kpatara onwu mberede Dimkpa na onwu ike Ahumibe bu onye kwuputara na o riri agari nke mere e ji chuo ya n'oru; Dimkpa n'akuku nke ya wakwunyere ya ogu n'ulo ya ihi na o na - achọ inara ya nwunye ya. Unu echefuchaa ndi a, kedu maka nke mekwaranu unyanwu; naani na Akumefula bira ya ugwo ha wee barita mba, duo aka n'onu kpatara isi ya ji laa n'ime ya. Nwoke mmadu wee noro be ya nojia mkporu amu. Ya bu na unu amaghi na o bu ekpere ka o ji kpegbusie ndi a? p.20

Nnodi explains the evil character of their religious leader, Akụwụwa. This also represents the character of some religious leaders who use religion to perpetrate evil in the church and in the society. This is cheating through organized religion. This is conflict because the upper class wants

to own everything while the middle class and the lower class feel cheated and struggle to get what belongs to them.

Class Struggle

The play depicts class struggle as typical example of what happens in the society today. Take for example what happened in the recent 'Endsars' struggle in Nigeria which was a struggle between the government and the masses.

The play 'Akụwụwa' is a struggle between Akụwụwa the church leader and the other members of the church. To make insecurity in the church a thing of the past, members want a society where everyone will have equal right in all socio-economic and political privileges.

As the lower class is fighting to get equal right with the upper class, the upper class is using every means to maintain their position without rival. Anakoro (2019) states, "as many scholars like Berelson and Steiner (1964), Rummel (1976) have identified nature of human societies.

Marxism basing its argument on the ownership of property assumes that certain old fashioned class structure were supposed to be overthrown with force (revolution) instead of being replaced through patient modification. p.197

According to Anakoro (2019: 197), recent scholars also agree that various kinds of conflict - social, political, economic, cultural and many others are embedded in this struggle within the society.

In the play Ekwewe, members of the church now made up of the middle class and the lower class held a meeting against the upper class, the prophet, Akụwụwa to fight for the right of the majority. They planned to destroy the Akụwụwa's personal shrine where they believed is the source of the power which he used to oppress them. The character, Arinze in the meeting states: "Uche m n'okwu a bụ ịtụ elo ụzọ anyị ga-esi tikpoo ihu arụsị ya ahụ okwu m agwụla." p.21.

Ụkọha said that he is in support of the destruction of the shrine as suggested by Arinze. At last, they agreed to destroy the shrine where the power of Akụwụwa lies. Not only do they want to destroy the shrine but also to break away from the church location and create theirs where they will form their ideal church.

According to Anakoro (2019:168) social conflict is a struggle waged by group of people for a common cause. He identified two main characteristics of social conflicts. First, according to him, unlike market type conflicts which are carried out within a voluntary exchange framework, social conflicts involves coercive power and domination. Secondly, social conflicts are assumed by people struggling for 'common interest' and not only for private individual interests.

While Akụwụwa is fighting for his selfish benefit, Ekwewe and his group are fighting for the good of the majority of the church members. They decided to embark on revolution.

Nnodi said, *N'uche m, e chere m na o ka mma ka anyi kewapu onwe anyi n'ulo uka ya* p. 21. Members of the church having endured the oppression of the leader so long agreed to destroy the existing order and break away.

The upper class will do everything possible to retain their position while the lower class will continue to struggle to upgrade themselves. *Akuuwa* the prophet and the church leader resulted to physical fighting with his members who got tired of the old order and revolted by destroying the secret shrine from where it is believed, *Akuuwa* received his power.

N'otu ntabi anya, n'oke iwe, o buru Ukhoha tuo n'ala togidesie ya ike n'olu. Ibe malite besiwe akwa ike. Sera akwudebe di ya n'akuku

The play goes further to depict how some church leaders would want to hold their post even by dubious means. This is demonstrated by *Akuuwa* who insists:

...ihe di m mkpa bu ka unu kwere na unu huru Ekwewe na ndi otu ya ebe ha na aku m ihe, Amaara m na onye oru nwere ugwo oru... p.34

Akuuwa requested that Irechi and Amadi should come and bear false witness in his favour but Irechi replies:

Heiii! Onye amuma! O buzikwa gi na-ekwu otu a! a u u u! Uwa a emebichala. Isi okwu gi bu ka inye anyi ngari ka anyi wee gbaara gi ama ugha? Tufia Chineke ekwela. Enyi m nwoke! Iri ngari megidere nkuzi ndi uka anyi... p.35.

This action represents the teaching of “follow my teaching not my behaviour” that many church leaders practice.

The case of *Akuuwa* and other church members were dragged to court and *Akuuwa* was found guilty. The ‘majistreti’ passing his sentence states:

...tupu ichugide ha wee tuo ogu. I dara iwu, nnukwu iwu. Nkita anaghi arachapu onwe ya nsi n'isi n'ihia ya ikpe mara gi, *Akuuwa*, I ga-akwu nha, iri naira anoma o bu I gaa mkporo onwa abuo...p.45

In conclusion, *Akuuwa* is a critic of some false Christian religious leaders who cheat, rob the members and anyone that comes their way. *Akuuwa*, the protagonist is an example of such a religious leader as displayed in the play *Akuuwa*. *Akuuwa*, as we have seen placed himself higher than other members of the church, used religion to deceive, exploit and suppress them. The members on their own were not complacent, they endured to some extent, fought for their freedom, and got it. It is real fulfilment of Rummel (1978) as quoted by Anakoro (2019)

Marxism basing its argument on the ownership of property assumes that certain old fashioned class structure were supposed to be overthrown with force instead of being replaced through patient modification p.160

Here, Ekwewe and the other members of the church became tired of the old order enjoyed only by the leader of the church Akụwua revolted violently and got their freedom.

References

- Afigbo, A (1981) Ropes of Sand. Nsukka: University Press Ltd.
- Afolayan, B.F (2015) “Festival Estetics: Continuities and Discontinuities in Selected Plays of Wole Soyinka” in Overcomer – Philosopher. A Festschrift in Honor of Asonye, Uba – Mgbemena. Nnabuihe and Onyekpe (ed), Lagos: West African Books Limited.
- Akin, A (2010) ‘Indigenous Knowledge for African Development Prospect and Challenges’ in African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge, Vol.1 No.1
- Anakoro, C (2018) “Marxist literary studies as a panacea for unemployment and insecurity in international journal of language education, communication and development publication of Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education and instituted d’enseignement superieur sonou d’Afrique Porto-Novo , Republique du Benin.
- Bolaji, E. T and Adedina, N.O (2010) Aroko among the Yoruba: Its Communicative Value in Drama in African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge, Vol.1No.1
- Eze, N (2004) Political Jobbers and the leadership questions in Emeka Nwabueze’s parliament of Vultures in Nsukka Journal of the Humanities, Faculty of Arts University of Nigeria. No 14.
- Berelson, B and Seiner, G (1964) Human Behaviour: An Inventory of Sceintific Findings. New York: Harcourt Brace and world.
- Iwu – Ikwubuzo, R.O (1998) Classical iInfluences in Igbo Literatures: The Example of Ogbalu’s Dimkpa Taa Aku and Oyekaonwu’s Nwata Rie Awo” in Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies Vol. 2 No.1.
- Nnabuihe C.B (1998) ‘Eshe Funeral Drama: Form and Significant’ in Ihafa: A journal of African Studies Vol.2 No.1.Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies, University of Lagos.
- Osuagwu, B (1985) ‘Akuuwa’ in Egwuregwu Igbo Abuo Akuuwa na Uka a Akpara Akpa. Owerri. Macmillan, Nigeria.
- Uzochukwu (1987) Aka Nka na Nnyocha Agumagu Igbo, Lagos Sam Orient Publishers.