

ACTION, INACTION, AND CONSEQUENCES IN TADE ADEGBINDIN'S RAGE.

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Abstract

Literature serves some useful purposes in society. Nigerian literature serves the purpose of constituting an alternative source of information that differs from social scientific analyses for understanding society. *Rage*, a play by Tade Adegbindin, provides useful data on the menace of child abuse, social vices, crime, and homelessness, especially in Nigerian cities. The play vividly interrogates the connection between child abuse and negligence and the horrors of robbery, banditry, kidnapping and terrorism that Nigeria faces. While providing good entertainment and pleasure for readers, *Rage* offers a deep insight into how literature can shape our understanding of what constitutes good rather than evil in society. The play underscores the insecurity that has pervaded Nigerian society and provides a strong commentary on moral and social vices. *Rage* laboriously links human actions to their destiny. Therefore, the dramatist believes that by ignoring the realities of child abuse, abandonment and violence, Nigeria has inadvertently forged its own grim fate as these children of the street have grown into the menace confronting the country today. The playwright has lent his voice to this open menace and succeeds in enabling us through the pages of *Rage* to better grasp the dimensions of violence, upbringing, and social justice in cases of child abuse.

Introduction

Literature serves some useful purposes in society. Glydel Vea Aude (2021) elucidates that these functions include but are not limited to (1) sharing knowledge about the world; (2) helping with upbringing by distinguishing between good and evil; (3) facilitating communication between readers and authors and for discussion; (4) providing entertainment; (5) shaping esthetic taste by noticing beauty; (6) aiding self-development through new knowledge; (7) developing thought processes by reflecting on and discussing what is read; (8) bringing pleasure through engaging stories and verses; (9) building vocabulary; and (10) facilitating transformation by turning bad

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memories into something beautiful. Ogundokun (2021) rightly observes that “literature is an open concept and a creative art which expresses human history, experiences, imagination, observations, predictions and suggestions at a particular time in a given society”. Literature is therefore, a platform for education, inspiration, and enjoyment in various forms, whether written, oral, or visual. Nigerian literature has served the purpose of constituting an alternative source of information that differs from social scientific analyses for understanding society.

Rage, a drama piece by Tade dysbindin, provides useful data on the menace of child abuse, social vices, crime, and homelessness, especially in Nigerian cities. The play vividly interrogates the connection between child abuse and negligence and the horrors of robbery, banditry, kidnaping and terrorism that Nigeria faces. Every day in Nigeria, the media reports merciless killings anywhere or the other. Kidnappings, rape and numerous atrocities have become especially rampant in the country. It is no wonder that a philosophical playwright such as Tade dysbindin, a don at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, decided to tackle the issues in one of his dramatic cogitations. While providing good entertainment and pleasure for readers, *Rage* offers a deep insight into how literature can shape our understanding of what constitutes good rather than evil in society.

Synopsis

The play begins with a poetic narration of Ayoka’s agonizing childbirth. In the first scene, Ayoka is congratulated by Mama Abiye on the birth of her child. Here, we know that Ayoka had been staying at Abiye’s house long before her delivery. She was brought there by her friend Layeni. Ayoka’s mother, Mrs. Fala, enters to inform Layeni that Ayoka would be leaving and would not raise the child. Layeni tries dissuading them but leaves with the child. Mama Abiye attacks Layeni when she finds that Ayoka has left without paying the debts she had procured while staying at Mama Abiye’s. This fight led to Layeni’s death, and Mama Abiye was arrested. In the fourth scene, Ayoka drops her newly born baby boy onto a rubbish heap somewhere in Ibadan, calling him a terror just like Akuba, his accidental father.

At the opening of Act 2, the narrator describes how Gada, a drunk, discovers the baby in a rubbish heap and names him san. In the first scene, Gbada and his wife Sabi quarrel about whether or not Esan should be treated as their own child. Sabi pours her hatred into the boy and objects to his education. Akuba and Ayoka’s chance meeting in Benin leads to their assault. Senator Madu, an influential politician in Benin, intervenes, and Akuba is arrested for assaulting a woman. Ayoka was invited to Senator Madu’s office. He tells her his findings on her past life. She notices that he is interested in having a relationship with her. Esan decides to leave home to Lagos city with Kamali, another child he met on the street. As they make their plans, Sabi shows up in hot pursuit of Esan, whom she accused of being in possession of eight thousand naira. Esan threatens to attack her, and she crashes against concrete, and he escapes, leaving the woman unconscious. Ayoka dreams of a voice accusing her of abandoning it.

Act 3 begins with the narration of Esan’s welfare in the streets. He starts to steal, and soon his name is like a crack of thunder echoes through the street urchins. Meanwhile, Ayoka is married to Senator Made, a pathological womanizer. Ayoka complains to her mother, Mrs. Fala, about her husband’s infidelity. The latter advised her to be patient so she could gain more from his wealth. Later, her mother discovers in the scene that Ayoka has an affair with a man in Lagos. The next scene reveals that the Senator also has a sexual relationship with Mrs. Fala. Ayoka determines and poisons her husband.

In Act 4, the narration is about Esan’s growth into manhood and his resolve to even the score by killing as many women as the heavens allow. He performs his mission and becomes a serial killer in addition to being a robber and the head of an assassination gang; scouring for prey. In the first scene, Ayoka is in a taxi chatting with a driver named Asper. Top police officers. Tukulor, Truman, Saleh and Bakare (a police officer with a drinking

problem) discusses the menace of Esan and their plans to apprehend him. In the next scene, Esan meets Gbada, a security guard in the scene of a fresh murder. Esan gives the man money and spares his life. On their way from this incidental killing, san, Asper, and Capone reminisce about their upbringing and the evils that the women in their lives have done to them. Asper tells Esan about Ayoka, and they plan to steal and kill her. The policemen intensify their search for Esan upon receiving a statement from Mr. Gbada Also, Esan's foster father. Gbada has given the police a full dossier on Esan's story, from his discovery as a child to his escape to Lagos. Asper taps a weakness of an officer present at a police briefing. He meets Bakare at a bar and obtains information about Esan from him in exchange for drinks. He gives Esan this information and other information about Ayoka's movements in her hotel. In the next scene, Esan alone sneaks into the hotel stealthily and finds his way into Ayoka's room. Just like he does with most of his 20 victims, he tell her the story of his mother's abandonment. She recognizes his voice in her dreams, and his eyes remind her of Akuba, but he does not recognize her. She tries to escape, but he shoots her instead of stabbing her, as he does with his victims. After the operation, he comments to Asper that he is right about the operation being different. 'She is a rare prey,' he said. The police had been tracking him before the operation and had decided not to engage in an engagement with the woman as bait. The three murderers are apprehended. Capone was shot dead, and Esan and Asper were wounded and arrested. Esan says it's the "rare prey" that sold them out.

Analysis

Insecurity is a major problem facing many African nations. Nigeria has been especially notorious for terrorist bombings, kidnappings, armed robbery, serial killings, and all other spine-shivering incidents of bloodshed. *Rage*, however, attributes this mercilessness to a rage that might have been borne out of society's attitude toward an individual from infancy. Ayoka's negligence of her child represents the level of neglect most children face in Nigerian society from birth. Although most would cite economic reasons for their lack of responsibility toward their children's upbringing, these children would grow without an explanation as to why they are parentless. This irresponsibility toward a child is a slippery slope for other unpalatable experiences. The lucky ones might grow up in homes or be fostered by distant relatives or sympathetic strangers. In several ways, humans are more vulnerable as compared to children. This is why terrorist groups even in Nigeria have a reputation for recruiting children. Teenage pregnancy amid other conditions leads hopeless girls to abandon their children.

The government has no concrete social plan for displaced children, and "streets" is the beckoning alternative. The street can be an umbrella or colloquial term for the slums, ghettos, and poverty-laden jungles in cities where crime is the order of the day. This nomenclature is apt as appropriate because people without housing spend most of their days on the streets of urban cities, amidst plenty of noise. Adegbindin presents a psycho-drama that enunciates a lack of parental upbringing as the core reason for a young man's assimilation into the "streets". The bag-snatchers, the phone-grabbers and the pocket-pickers are all familiar characters in the Lagos atmosphere. This steady pool of drifting humans was probably born by the negligent acts of Ayoka or parents who could not stay to raise them due to unavoidable circumstances. The justice system intended to curtail crime only uses force despite a considerable amount of corruption and compromise. Studying the psychological profile of crime perpetrators is out of the question for Nigerian security personnel. There is no encouraged inquiry into the factors that create a criminal to nip the menace at the bud. Rather, their demonstration of force compounds the problem and leads to more gruesome bloodshed. *Rage*, as a crime drama, offers a causative approach to unraveling a crime mystery.

In *Rage*, poetic narration is used to open every act as opposed to the realistic day-to-day language used in the scenes. The plays' structure is episodic. The entire play spans several years. It begins with Esan's birth and his

capture by the police as a young man. The play's setting also covers several cities and states in Nigeria; from Ibadan to Lagos and Benin. The characters were created to move the plot forward and also to create depth in the story. Tade Adegbindin explored many themes in *Rage*, including child abuse and neglect, motherhood, fosterage, violence, and revenge. The first abuser in this drama is Asoka, the mother of san. Child abuse is when someone, whether through action or inaction, causes injury, death, emotional harm, or carries the risk of serious harm to a child. "When a child is abused, their feelings are often the first thing they suffer." Feelings of insecurity, uncared, and isolation are more likely to develop in a youngster..." (Ajisafe et al, 2023:20). When a mother abandons her child on a refuse heap despite the agony of pregnancy, labor pains, and childbirth, there appears to be an immense and active level of hatred between the mother and the child. But this is not the case every time there is such abandonment. There are many accounts of those who abandoned their children with a deep sense of sorrow arising from their inability to raise such children. There are some who drop their children on the doorstep of comfortable families in the hope that such children will receive proper care, and these have happened across cultures and periods.

But in *Rage*, when Gbada stumbles upon the child, he cannot help but feel 'some loathing and resentment for the sinful who abandoned the sinless infant'. His naming of the child 'Esan' is suggestive of the terror that is to come from this macabre act. Unicef's data reports that 6 out of 10 Nigerian children experience some form of violence (UNICEF Report 2014). Even if the constitution stipulates punishment, until recently the matter of child abuse was treated fairly domestically with little or no government intervention. Esan moved to another level of abuse in Gbada's household, at the hands of Sabi, another abusive woman. In this instance, the play suggests that she protects her own daughter but detests Esan and sees him as a burden on her family's resources, including Gbada's affection. However, entitled to her opinion, she manifests her hatred toward Esan violently; physically and verbally. She hits him when she can, and his retaliation in the scene where she is last seen causes her death. In her discussion with Gada, she mentioned that Esan had been hawking goods since he was five. Not until recently, in Lagos and a few other cities, is using a child for domestic labor, such as hawking, a crime. Still, several hawkers and good peddlers in Nigeria are children.

The link and import of motherhood to society is clearly attested to in Ayoka's lack of motherhood. Mrs. Fala's maternal power is also revealed as a factor behind Ayoka's cold decisions. When a child is born, it is expected to be under the tutelage of his/her parents until he/she is then introduced into society at large. It has been established that children's responses to punishment and approval help form their superego (Cherry, 2023). Therefore, parenting should be a bigger obligation not only to one's family but also to society at large. Mrs. Fala's parental leadership of Ayoka is the genesis of the whole problem. Ayoka can move on without guilt, leaving Esan at the mercy of the street. This theme resonates with the current conditions in Nigeria, where violence, brigandage, and ruthless murder are unleashed on the country by apparently abandoned children who have been brainwashed and totally drugged out. A research report on violent crime in Nigeria (Ojo & Ojewale, 2018) highlighted this point in *Rage* about violence and brigandage traceable to abandoned children who have been brainwashed. However, one cannot totally agree with the playwright on this point because many bandits and kidnapers that have been arrested and paraded were never abandoned as children. Also, many Boko Haram terrorists were religiously indoctrinated. This shows more of societal and religious failure than child abandonment.

Gbada and Sabi raised Esan. Sabi, the wife, never hid her hatred for Esan from her husband. In the scene where she argues with her husband against Esan going to school, she considers the money a waste because he is not their biological child. This story is also quite typical of what some foster parents and step-parents hear in many parts of the country. Even though good foster parents have had a positive impact on their foster children through

education, entrepreneurship, and creating loving environments for them, many people only take in young children to use as “domestic slaves, serfs and maids” (Leadership Editorial, 2023). Many who foster children lack altruism and compassion. The consequences are dire because children raised with violence and hatred will soon become a social menace. The Yoruba adage that says ‘four eyes begot a child, and two hundred would raise it’ (Oluyemisi, 2017) has deep philosophical implications. This means that, just like many other African cultures, the Yoruba society values childrearing as a communal responsibility. However, there is also a Yoruba adage that underpins the importance of mother to a child. “Whoever can back the child like its mother should come forward” This means that no one can raise a child like their mother even though many will contribute to the upbringing of the child. These two philosophical limits are values that concern Ayoka's actions and most importantly, Sabi and Gada. Gbada stumbles over a baby abandoned on a pile of dirt. Out of human compassion, decides to pick him up and take him home, not the nearest police station or a foster home. He decides to raise the boy and brings him home to his wife and daughter. Gbada undermined the legal imperatives of fostering. He should have taken the child to the police for proper treatment. By being compassionate, he eventually contributes to the trajectory of Esan's negative life. And there are many who will do this wrong out of misplaced compassion. In the scene, Sabi, his wife, she tells him “You are always to tell him his true position in this house.” Gbada claims that his true position in the house was that of his own son and that he had sworn a covenant to God to raise his son as his own. Sabi, however, would do anything in her power to remind the boy of his past. This attitude is quite popular in African literature and society about wicked stepmothers who would do harm to their stepmothers or foster children. This area is also an aspect that requires government intervention. The social welfare service in the country should make sure every case of fosterage is registered and delicately monitored by the government, and I think that the playwright ought to have made a case for this course of action rather than the simplistic but criminal fosterage embarked upon by Gada.

The name given to the child found on the rubbish heap by Gbada captures the karmic philosophy of the play: san. The name of the baby given to him by Gbada in a drunken state literally means ‘revenge’ in Yoruba. According to Yorubaname.com, “Esan, (a noun) is the spiritual concept of cause and effect, karma. It is broader than "revenge". It is getting paid back as a reward and/or consequence of an individual/group action(s)” (2023). What was going on surely came around for Asoka. It was the same son she had abandoned on the rubbish heap that killed her. This is also an area of play that begs the question of ‘what consequences has a name got to do with all these?’ It is really an unjustifiable argument that a name can carry such a reverse tragedy of edipal magnitude. Esan goes on to murder several women, including Asoka, his mother, for the hatred he has planted in him since childhood and the violence of his upbringing in Gbada's homestead and under the bridges of Lagos. However, in reality, many people have surmounted different negative Karma and baggage of upbringing to chart about more positive paths for themselves in life. Also noteworthy is the relationship between the characters and their natural environment. The plot of the play reinforces the notion that it is the same hate that society gives to an individual that leads to the rage with which vicious crimes are committed (Slavutzky, 2023:113). However, this is not always the case in reality, as some have become better citizens despite their societal disadvantages. The playwright could have created other characters with the same background who turn out differently to underscore this point.

The playwright has created characters from the streets and high society in Nigeria. The play's plot is a mesh of social problems and how the action of one can affect others. Therefore, in this regard, we are all responsible for our society, and our actions must reflect that responsibility. In Adegbindin's *Rage*, action has consequence. Even just as the consequences of others have made san, Asper, and Capone become who they are, their homicidal actions have also had consequences. They are apprehended by law just after Esan kills his mother. Esan says it's

the ‘rare prey’ referring unknowingly to his mother. The three characters also have a matricidal hatred that drives them to kill several women in a prolonged period of rage. This rage drives the imagery of violence within the play. And this is also where the issue of gender comes into question. There seems to be a predilection for men in the scene were san. Asper and Capone discuss their mothers. The women in their lives have made them bitter; hence, they turn their bitterness to other women. This gives the play a patriarchal undertone even though many male characters in the play are victims of the actions and inaction of the society.

Rage underscores the insecurity that has persisted in Nigerian society. Several reasons have been ascribed to the surge in kidnap, murder, and ritual killings, and one of these is the incapability of law enforcement agencies to contain crime (Okwuwada, 2023). The system of justice is intended to curb and regulate human excess. Balancing the scale of justice is a sensitive matter that must be given utmost importance in a society where freedom and human rights. However, the justice system in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Tukulor, Truman, Saleh, and Bakare are policemen in the case of Esan and his homicidal cohort. Their lack of understanding of the case delayed the capture of the three psychopathic killers. Not until the police met Gbada, who gave them a profile of san, their leader. Policing in Nigeria would need to use more psychoanalytical techniques, DNA profiling, and other modern technological methods of arresting criminals to curb and regulate crime in our country.

Finally, the play provides a strong commentary on moral and social vices. The fornication between Akuba and Asoka is the genesis of the play’s plot. Their illicit sexual encounter while they were meant to be studying led to a shameful pregnancy for Ayoka and her mother. The character of Senator Madu also represents this theme. He is a chronic fornicator. He takes it a step further by having incestuous relations with his mother-in-law. Ayoka poisons him when she determines about it. The play moralizes by ensuring that anyone who indulges in illicit sex is punished. In this capacity, the play fulfills the moral obligation of drama, that is, to teach. The theme of infidelity is examined in the play and linked directly to other vices arising from the reaction to infidelity. Asoka, Mrs. Fala, and Senator Madu’s infidelity form the basis of almost all evils in the play. This is parallel to the Yoruba belief that infidelity is a harbinger of death.

Conclusion

Rage laboriously links human action to their destiny, as if a character like Esan has been predetermined to turn the way he has done. Even the name, Esan in the play foreshadows the punishment that will come from his hand to Ayoka for her decisions. Therefore, the play has an empirical stance with destiny. In this dramatic world, the characters create their fate through their actions and reactions to predetermined conditions. Therefore, it can be averred that by ignoring the realities of child abuse, abandonment and violence, Nigeria has inadvertently forged its own grim fate as these children of the street have grown into the menace confronting the country today. Many have found careers in banditry, religious extremism, oil bunkering and illegal oil refining, kidnaping, armed robbery, armed militancy, motor-park touting, etc. And this may just be the beginning. More than 18 million children are out of school in Nigeria (UNICEF Report, 2022). According to the report, the impact of this include: “Violations of children’s right to education and increased risk of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and recruitment to extremist groups. Missed opportunities for learning and skills development. Lack of access to meaningful employment, perpetuation of intergenerational poverty and inequality.” More families are dropping into extreme poverty daily, and the nation seems oblivious of this fact: the nation has slid to the poverty capital of the world with “71 million people living in extreme poverty today (World Poverty Clock, 2023) and a total of 133 million people classified as “multi-dimensionally poor according to National Bureau of Statistics data” (Ubanagu, 2023). Many are impoverished by the various hurriedly devised and executed government policies. Therefore, the number of abandoned and abused children can only increase. But destinies can be changed for a

man to forge his destiny by his own hand for good or bad. Moreover, many great men and women in history have triumphed against crushing poverty, gender disparity, racial discrimination, war of occupation, violence against women and children, etc. It is also important to note that “No matter how hard an individual tries to control his or her character and personality, no matter how much someone wants to transform him or herself, there are always outside forces that influence who someone is and will become, beyond their own plans and desires” (LaFantasie, 2023). And after God, the government shapes the trajectory of a citizen’s life. Therefore, any serious government that is interested in the well-being and future of the country will reverse the trend of violence against children and take a serious position on the rehabilitation, training, and empowerment of these abused and out of school children. The playwright has lent his voice to this open menace and succeeds in enabling us through the pages of *Rage* to better grasp the dimensions of violence, upbringing, and social justice in cases of child abuse. The play in its conclusion rightly paints a grim future in which things may seem bad enough now, but there will be dire consequences in the future for today’s continued inaction on the abuse and neglect of and violence against children.

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