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The Legendary Inikpi of Nigeria: A Play – Political Interpretation and Contemporary Implications

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Introduction

This chapter examines the political interpretation of the legendary Inikpi play and its implications for Nigerian society today. In order to develop this political interpretation of the legendary Inikpi, the chapter examines some historical and anthropological works concerning the origins of the Igala people. It is from an understanding of Igala social, economic and political structures and relations with their neighbours that the play is framed.

Anthropological Perspectives of the Igala

The name Akpoto, variously written as Okpoto, Ikpoto, Kwoto, Koto and Kato, was a name that was applied to the inhabitants of the region bounded in the north by the River Benue, in the south by Igboland, in the east by Igede and Tivland in the west by the River Niger. While the origin of this name is not clear, today it has fallen into disfavour among the Idoma and the Igala. The word Akpoto has no meaning in Idoma language, but in modern Igala, especially in Idah, it has become a derogatory name which means ‘bushman’, in reference to someone who does not speak the dialect of Igala that is spoken in Idah. Yet, while this subsidiary meaning of Akpoto developed out of particular social and political conditions in the Idah region, the word was first used to refer to the original inhabitants of Idah. If this is indeed the case, one may conclude that the ancestors of modern Igala were Akpoto, and probably spanned the lower Benue Valley down to its confluence with the Niger – especially around the Idah area.¹ Thus, Armstrong may be correct in concluding that Idoma, Igala and Yoruba

had a common proto-language before separating into three distinct tongues. This contention not only points to the possibility that the Igala and Yoruba had a common ancestor, but also suggests that Akpoto was a common name for both Idoma and Igala before these two separated to answer their present names. Erim² is of the opinion that the 'Akpoto may have been one of the Yoruba dialectical groups and the King or Attah (Ata), who imposed himself over the Akpoto, may have been of the same or another Yoruba dialectical group.' Erim therefore concludes that an early sub-stratum of modern Igala and Idoma, along with the neighbouring Igede to the east, were Akpoto.

Such a conclusion begs the question, if Akpoto refers to both Idoma and Igala, why then has the name fallen into disfavour among the two? I will offer a tentative answer. In the history of the Igala kingdom recorded by Boston, the name Igala or Igara is associated with the ruling dynasty in Idah. From the various traditions he recounts, it is indicated that the founder of the ruling dynasty in Idah came either from Yoruba land or from the ancient kingdom of Benin to impose his rule on the inhabitants of Idah and its interior. The inhabitants of that area were called Okpoto, while the ruling dynasty was called Igara or Igala. Through the process of intermarriage between these two populations, and in order to pass themselves off as members of the ruling dynasty, nearly all of the inhabitants of Idah came to identify themselves as Igala. This was how almost every inhabitant of Idah became Igala, while the people in the interior east of Idah, extending to Ankpa and the modern Idoma Division, were called Okpoto. Byng-Hall, in his *Notes on the Okpoto and Igara Tribes*,³ writes, 'The original Okpotos are nearly extinct. Nearly all Okpotos now claim some Igara blood. Igaras are the royal relations of the Attahs and owing to intermarriage with the Okpotos it is seldom that an Okpoto does not claim to be an Igara, although, without doubt, it should be the reverse'. The location of Idah town along the Niger River gave its people advantage over the people in the interior. In fact, while social, political, and economic conditions developed in Idah town, the people in the interior seemed to have remained 'backward'. Thus, the more 'civilized' people of Idah called themselves Igala, and continue to do so to the present day; and Okpoto, as the people of the interior were called, became a derisive term.

Traditions of Local Origins

In 1892, A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, published a lengthy tradition that attempts to describe the establishment of the Attah kingship. He writes that:

In the days when Idah was but a village, a woman from Ohimoje chanced to find her way thither. Whilst there she had occasion one day to visit the neighboring brought forth a boy before she could return to the village. Now, the woman was afraid to bring her child back with her, so she left it in the bush at the mercy of the

wild beasts. It happened that a female leopard, passing that way in search of food, espied the infant and, taking it up, conveyed it to her lair, where she reared it with her own cubs. The child in time grew up, and the foster-mother, having observed the way of human beings, was troubled about his nakedness. She therefore repaired to the neighborhood of Idah, and lay in wait for a passerby. After sometime there came a man from the town, and on him the leopardess threw herself, carrying off his cloth and cap to her foster-child. As the boy advanced in years, the leopardess became anxious that he should associate with human beings, and for this purpose guided him to the outskirts of Idah, where she left him. The young man entered the town, and the first thing that met his gaze was a fight between two of the inhabitants. He at once took upon himself the duties of arbiter, rebuking the one and commending the other. So astonished were the people who had during the incident crowded round him, that they immediately proclaimed him their king, and refused to permit him to leave the town. This was the first Attah, and he married wives of the people and had children bold and intrepid as leopards. But he was destined to see once again his strange foster-mother. The leopardess was to die, and came to take a last farewell of the child she had reared. The Attah recognized her, and clinging to her, begged that she would remain with him. This was however, not to be, for the aged beast, freeing herself, ran to a certain spot in the town, and throwing herself, down, expired. The Attah following on her tracks, flung himself on the corpse and died also; and the people, finding the two dead bodies, buried them together where they lay, with all the honours due to royalty. The burial spot has ever since been held sacred, and is called Azaina or the grave of the leopard, where to this day the Attahs of Idah are interred.⁴

In 1968, J. S. Boston published a version of the same tradition, collected from one of the elders of the ruling sub-clan at Idah. In the publication, he narrates that:

The first rulers had a daughter who went daily from the capital to collect firewood in the grove that is now called Ojaina. As she was visiting this grove she met a leopard there who took the form of a young man. He made advances to her and was accepted, so the young girl was going daily to meet her husband in the bush. He killed game for her and made presents of bush cow and other animals to her parents who began to be curious about the mysterious husband and asked repeatedly to see him.

When the girl told him of this, the leopard promised to appear and fixed a time at which he would show himself to his in-laws. But when the leopard came out of the bush the girl's parents ran away in terror. So the leopard ran and hid himself again in the thick bush at Ojaina and went into the ground there. His wife later delivered a child, Abutu Eje, who was the founder of the royal clan. The Ojaina grove is the spiritual center of the royal clan and forms the last resting place of all dead Attah.⁵

Many versions of the same tradition exist and are well known in the royal palace at Idah. Traditions that claim direct descent from any of the four royal houses raise many issues pertaining to the rise of the Attah kingship, especially those that revolve around the historicity of Abutu Eje, the assessment of which depends largely on evidence derived from local sources. From our investigations, the leopard in this tradition refers to a man named Eje, a renowned hunter in the virgin forest that covered most of the area that make up Idah today. Eje had his hunting camp in this forest, and it was here that he met a woman from Ohimoje, possibly a section of Igala-Mela, who lived with him and bore him a son, Abutu. This camp now forms part of Ede, and Igala-Mela quarter at Idah. This indicates that Abutu Eje originated from Idah plains and he was also a uterine kin of the Igala-Mela.⁶

The Igala-Mela's original control of the office of the Attah seems to be further demonstrated by the fact that an important step in the installation of a new Attah, after which he rides triumphantly to the palace to sit on the throne of his ancestors, is the ceremony of the ritual rebirth during which two Igala-Mela chiefs, the Onu-Ede and Onubiogbo, act as the new incumbent's parents. After this ceremony, the two chiefs regard the Attah as their 'son'. This ceremony is a visual dramatization of the Igala-Mela's ritual power over the Attah, as was likely to have been the case from the beginning of the kingship.⁷

J. S. Boston's research also indicates that the hunter Eje was a historical figure, whose activities might have led to the gradual shift of the centre of power from the Igala-Mela chiefs to his own family. According to Boston:

The statement that there were no people in the area before the hunters arrived may be true metaphorically rather than literally. It can be taken to mean that the factor of kinship which normally plays a vital role in Igala political arrangements had to be discontinued on this occasion. The political developments that followed the hunter's arrival were not in any way the continuation of an existing set of arrangement, but formed a point of departure from which a new set of allegiances was worked out. The break with the past appears in the autonomy of the hunter's genealogy, which cannot be attached to any other pedigree, and also in the synchronization of the pedigrees of any existing families to coincide with the inception of the new clan.⁸

The Benin Connection

The members of the 1854 Niger Expedition collected traditions that describe both Benin and Yoruba origins from the Attah. According to T. J. Hutchinson:

The inhabitants (Igala) originally came from a large town named Adoh... in the direction of Benin or Yoruba celebrated for being the supposed residence of the gods. Egarrah was the name of the king who was regnant over the Apotto people

before their subjugation to the first Attah. The latter was an elephant hunter; and used to give portions of the animals killed as a tribute to Egarrah, for permission to reside in the district. But impelled perhaps by ambition or urged by some imaginary insult, and strengthened by the accession of more of the natives of Adoh, [he] attacked the Apotto people under Egarrah, drove them into a country higher up the river, and constituted himself the Attah or father of Egarrah. From him twenty Attahs have descended; and the present king has been monarch regnant for twenty years.⁹

Both W. B. Baikie and Samuel Ajayi Crowther learned in 1854 from Onupia, an Idah chief, that the country of Ado or Edo, opposite Idah, is believed by the natives to have been for the people of Ife. Crowther, inquiring about the close affinity between Igala and Yoruba words, learned from Mahamma, Abokko's messenger, how, in old times, the King of Yoruba made a journey to Rabba, when he desired the Attah to look out for a suitable locality for his future settlement. The Attah accordingly took a canoe and dropped down the river until he came to the town of Idda. There, he met the inhabitants who were called Akpoto, and their headman Igara, to whom he begged for a place to settle – a request that was granted. The Attah returned and reported his success to the King of Yoruba, who asked the Attah if he thought he would be secure and nobody could trouble him. The Attah answered that he would be secure. From that time the Attah separated and formed a district for himself. Being more influential than the Akpotos, they gave him the precedence. In the course of time, the language of the settlers gradually disappeared before that of the Akpotos. The settlers adopted the latter as a medium of communication and incorporated it into their own language.¹⁰

Two other traditions are specific in their claim that the Attah kingship originated from Benin. In 1960, J. S. Boston collected elaborate versions of the traditions claiming origins of the Attah from the Ochai Attah, one of the royal chiefs at Idah. This tradition is assumed to have some authority, since it comes from some of the information at Idah, where the inner family traditions of the royal clan were taught to the royal children. On the tradition, Boston writes that:

Long ago, there was a chief of Benin (Onu Ibini) who came to the throne when it was the rule that the first son born to the Oba should succeed him on the throne. Now, this chief and his wife quarreled, and because the wife hated her husband, when she delivered a male child she did not take it to her husband to see. Shortly afterwards one of her co-wives also delivered a male child, and immediately went with it to the chief. So the Onu took all the insignia of his title, even down to the hat that the chief wore, and had all these things placed in a neighboring town for the second child, who later on became the chief of that place. When Onu died, the followers of the two brothers heard the news and began to discuss the succession.

Those living at home said that it would fall on the senior brother, but the other part refused, on the ground that the young brother had been given the insignia of office, and still had them in his possession. In reply, the first group asked whether it was the rule that the elder of the two kinsmen should step down to let the junior one take his place. This argument led to fighting, and so much killing that the junior brother said 'if this goes on, my father's people will wipe each other out and the family will perish for the sake of a title. The best thing I can do to prevent this is to go away and leave the matter to be settled by God.' So, he went away, and was followed by the Bini who are the ancestors of the people opposite Idah, right up to Asaba (Achaba) and Kukuruku (Inglele) (Inele). Those that grew tired on the way stopped wherever they liked and were left behind. When the younger brother came at last to cross over to Idah, the people around noticed the things that he was carrying and reported to the elders at home that a stranger was coming with amazing things. The elders themselves went to look, and decided that the stranger was a man of truth, so they invited him to settle with them and became their Attah. After this, the new Attah sent his own child back to Benin with a message saying that the elder brother could be given the Oba's title as he himself was more satisfied with his new title of Attah. In return, the Oba's messengers came to Idah and reported back that they were received with great ceremony in which the Attah had followed strictly the custom of their own forefathers, breaking kola for the visitors and invoking their ancestors by name. The Oba commented, that: 'God has indeed given my brother the senior position'; and from that time onwards the seniority of the Attah over the Oba has been accepted. In the past, the Bini used to send eight slaves to Idah to be made eunuchs whenever a new Oba was appointed, and the Attah used to keep four of these eunuchs and send the other four back to the Oba.¹¹

The tradition connecting the Igala and the Attah with Benin, recorded by Hutchinson in 1854, raises some important issues regarding the origins of the Igala and the Attah kingship. First, is the claim that the Igala themselves originated from a celebrated town called 'Adoh'. Even though the name 'Adoh' might be another name for Benin, there is no tradition among the Igala that connects them, as a people, with Benin.

The second issue pertains to the migrant hunter from Adoh who started from a very modest beginning by giving gifts of meat to his landlords. But after having accumulated enough wealth and following, he revolted against the original Akpoto leader and proclaimed himself an Attah. Baikie and Crowther, in 1854, underscored that the culture that came to be associated with the Attah might have drawn its sustenance from various sources, such as Ife, Benin, Aboh, Nupe and Opanda. But their claim that Benin, Igala and Aboh sprang from Adoh is a product of their limited knowledge of the geography and peoples of the region.¹²

Sociology of the Igala People

The Igala are located at one of the natural crossroads in Nigerian geography, occupying the Niger-Benue confluence. They have exercised a considerable influence on the surrounding neighbours. Igala forms a kingdom whose ruler, the Attah, has as his capital Idah on the River Niger. Igala land begins at Adamagu a few kilometres north of Onitsha and continues up to a confluence, from where it protrudes linearly north-eastward along the Benue. It finally terminates at Amagede in Amagede at the eastern boundary, which is demarcated by the Idoma in Oyegegede and Otupl and north Nsuka – areas of Enugu Ezeke, Itah Edem, Ururu, Adavi and Ogugu of the Anambra rivers. The present area of Igala is about 13,150 square kilometres with an approximate population of 295,392 in 1944; 460,000 in 1952; 460,000 in 1962; 684,880 in 1963 and about 73,432 on taxpayer roll in 1944 and 72 million in 2006. The two great rivers that divide what became Nigeria, place the confluence as one of the national and cultural regions which brought the Igala into contact with the wide range of people in Nigeria.

The boundary of the Igala land was not static. Throughout its history, for example, the western boundary was further inland into the areas of Etsako and Islam in the past, which explains the existence of the river bank. Of obvious significance to the Igala people and land is the location of the settlement at the confluence of the Niger-Benue. The people with whom this study is concerned are: the Igala, the Idoma, the Alogo, the Tiv, Afo, the Igbirra TAO, the Irra Nya, the Igede, the Nupe, the Northeast Yoruba, and the Igbos. According to Alogoa, the history and geography of Nigeria is more often the collection of the history on the level of individual people and political and ethnic units. There is a need for a national historical perspective enhancing the economic, cultural, political and other interaction between people. It is, of course, necessary to begin with the history of individual groups and the serious need to lay greater emphasis on the intergroup relations, so as to compare development within the various groups. In spite of the openness of the borders, however, there is a certain compactness about the Nigerian geographical environment, which encourages greater movement and interaction among people within it, rather than those outside.¹³

It was not until the eighteenth century that the people of the Niger-Benue confluence came into a controversial realm of identity history. With regard to the problem of separating the political facets of the tradition from their historical aspect, sources suggest that the function of myths in the Igala context is mainly political. It is further argued that in the early period of the Igala, history was primarily concerned with this interaction. The time span is conventionally defined by associating each major change with one reign or one generation, but this attribution of time is purely conventional, and stands in for the passage of a much longer period. The political principles with which these early myths are

concerned are the principles of descent, and they form an antithesis which corresponds to a basic division in the Igala political system. There is, on the one hand, the kind of power, legislature and sovereignty, vested in the royal group, and, on the other hand, the eventual control of the royal group vested in the non-royal clans throughout Igala.¹⁴

In terms of the political system, the Igala form a kingdom whose ruler, the Attah, sat in the capital of Idah on the River Niger. The Attah ruled over a loosely federated kingdom in which major provinces were organized and behaved like petty kingdoms. The provincial chiefs were relatively autonomous in their provincial capital, and were subject to the kings in only sovereign matters such as homicide and succession to their own offices. Interaction among the provinces acquainted and blended various cultures. As the blend of civilization redefined culture, traditions and people, independent identities emerged across lineage and kingship.¹⁵

The Nupe today speak a number of related dialects, constituting what is today's Bida division of Niger province, which consists of different political sections. The Nupe call themselves Nupecizi. A small section of the Nupe are also scattered through Nigeria, especially in villages and towns around Niger. The largest of this group is Bassa Nge in the northwest of the Igala in Kaba province.

Tradition and Origin of Nupe

The Nupe kingdom was, according to its own traditions, founded by the cultural hero Tsoede or Edegii, born according to the genealogies of the Nupe in the early fifteenth century when the Nupe were grouped in small chieftainship subjects to the Attah of Igala at Idah. The son of the Attah fell in love with a woman and gave birth to a child called Tsoede, who soon after became the Nupe chief. From that line, Nupe was formed. The Nupes claim that their founding ancestors came from Idah, and derived the legitimacy of their office from the Attah.

The Igbira

The Igbira people occupy the area east of the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers in northern Nigeria. Thus, the Igbira are found in the Kontun Karrifi division of Kabba province in the Muerans district of the Nassarawa division in Benue province, and in part of the Bida and Abuja divisions in the Niger province. More recently a few Igbira have settled in southern Kurkunul, Benin province, and among the Yoruba.

All the Igbira claim to have been colonized by the Igala of Idah. The Igbira, Panda and Igu trace the Igbira origin to Ohimi, the son of the early Attah (chief) of Idah, who crossed the Benue in about 1750. One legend states that Ohimi was slain by the then Attah of Idah for establishing independence. Various legends recount struggles over succession between the sons of Ohimi, and between the

daughter and grandsons of Ohimi, which led to separate establishments of the states of Koton Karrifi and Panda. According to the Panda legend, Ohimmaagedi, the son or Grandson of Ohimi, established a chiefdom at Panda adopting the Igbira language from the loyal inhabitants. He was given the royal staff of office (Okute) by the Attah of Idah, and subsequent Panda chiefs sent gifts to Attah when assuming office.¹⁶

The Igbos

Sociological analysis of the peopling of Igala-Igbo relations is inadequate with regard to the influence and origin of the Nri family which constitutes about 80 per cent of today's Igbo. Apart from the Benin influence there was an Igala influence from the northwest direction of the Igbo area, the origin of the Idah that was traced to the fifteenth century. By the seventeenth century, it had become a greater influence within the north-western part of Igbo area. The contact between the Igala and Igbo went beyond the Igala Kingdom. The Nri culture embraced some portions of the Igala land up to Idah. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Igala influence appears to have become more dominant. One of the traditions contains a series of Igala military action centred on Ojo, Ogboni.¹⁷

According to the tradition, the legendary figure, Onu Ogboni, who also features in the traditions of many other people like the Idoma and the Urhobo, made slave raids over the Niger to the delta and sold them to Ijo middlemen. Igala influence led to broad cultural borrowing by the Igbo, especially the vocabulary, title and other social institutions like masquerades and facial mark. The Nsukka and Nri area of the north Igbo, for instance, appropriate the Igala word Atama for their priest, Igbo put on Igala cultures which are greatly rooted in their people Nri system of Ozo and Eze. The contact between the two in this period was so close that it became a tradition for the Igbo elites, when taking title, to go to Idah as part of their initiation ceremonies.¹⁸ The emergence of the Attah dynasty constituted a major turning point in the history of the Niger-Benue confluence area. It involved unprecedented economic, social, political and cultural changes, which produced the Igala Kingdom; and there are many traditions that seek to explain this phenomenon.¹⁹

Benin Connections

The members of the 1854 Niger Expedition collected traditions that claim both Benin and Yoruba origins from Attah. According to T. J. Hutchinson:

The inhabitants originally came from a large celebrated town named Adoh in the direction of Benin or Yoruba celebrated for being the supposed residence of the gods. Egarrah was the name of the king who was regnant over the Apotto people (the aborigines of this country) before their subjugation to the first Attah. The

latter was an elephant hunter; and used to give portions of the animals killed as a tribute to Egarrah, for permission to reside in the district. But impelled perhaps by ambition or urged by some imaginary insult, and strengthened by the accession of more of the natives of Adoh, he attacked the Apoito people under Egarrah, drove them into a country higher up the river, and constituted himself the Attah or 'father' of Egarrah. From him twenty Attahs have descended; and the present king has been monarch regnant for twenty years. So the legend runs at Idah (ibid).

The Legendary Inikpi Intervention

The play *The Legendary Inikpi* can be placed within the context of Igala people and their traditions. Sometime in the sixteenth century, Inikpi offered herself as a sacrifice, to be buried alive, in order to save the entire Igala Kingdom from destruction in a war that was poised to annihilate her people. *The Legendary Inikpi* is about the history and a tradition of Igala people, dramatized by Dr. Emmy Unuja Idegu. Inikpi offered herself for sacrifice as divined by the oracle to ascertain victory for the Igala people. The Igala-Bini war is said to have taken place in the early sixteenth century.²⁰

Inikpi's story has for a long time been a controversial issue, when it comes to the war for which Inikpi was sacrificed. Some early works of anthropologists, historians and of late, playwrights represent either directly or by implication that Princess Inikpi was sacrificed during the Igala-Jukun war. They also contend that Ayegba Oma-Idoko was the Attah Igala by then. But these may after all be historically inaccurate. The play, *The Legendary Inikpi*, is a result of extensive research conducted into the core of the matter, and of which the Attah Igala, His Royal Majesty Mallam Aliyu Obaje, the Amanata (Senior Royal Counsellor, Late Achimugu Obaje), the Ohioga Attah (Chief Ifa, diviner to the Attah institution Abaro Akwu) and the At'ebo (Chief Priest to the Attah institution, Late Ichifu Idu) were principal informants.²¹

It was documented by the playwright, Dr. Emmy U. Idegu. Putting the Attah Igala to task during his interview with him, he confessed the misconception surrounding the conflict of the particular war in which Inikpi died, that it was not during the Igala-Jukun war and that those who documented it as such never confirmed their stories. According to him, Inikpi was not sacrificed in the Igala-Jukun war, but another woman was. It was Omodoko, Idoko's daughter, by the River Inachalo's bank with the Jukun army en route to Idah. Ayegba Oma-Idoko was not the Attah Igala when the Igala people were at war with Jukun or Wukaris in present-day Taraba State, it was Idoko, his own father. Inikpi died by burial in the Igala-Bini war and by the banks of the River Niger, where her statue still stands today along the only route of the Bini forces to Idah. By then, her father, Ayegba Oma-Idoko, was the Attah Igala.

In *The Legendary Inikpi*, the playwright set out to explain the popular struggle in Nigeria within the context of the Nigerians' class relations and neo-colonial dependency. He further buttresses the fact that all act, all have a class base, and all are working towards advancing the interests of the class they represent. The revolutionary folk music of Fela can be compared to the revolutionary action of Attah Igala in the sacrifice of his daughter, the beloved princess, in order to liberate the kingdom; it is situated within the class polarities of Nigeria, which, the author explains, has been nurtured by years of imperialist domination. Inikpi's liberation is also characteristic of the historical development of this creative work, and the play was subjected to detailed analysis by critics, not only regarding its social vices but also its didactic work, in representing an historical force struggling to realize a future society. Through the author's creative praxis, *The Legendary Inikpi*, as a romantic celebration manifests among other dynamics male chauvinism, ethnic prejudices, and a metaphysical presentation of African religion. But behind all this is the use of socialism as demonstrated by the action and activities of Attah Igala and Inikpi. Criticism of the former qualities serves to limit the revolutionary thrust, an active and more significantly patriotic identification with the oppressed. This limiting capacity should not be underestimated as part of the overall attempt to incarcerate the oppositional culture, and the oppressed that bear it. Idegu calls on all patriotic forces to intensify the class struggle in all theatres, as only an organized and militant oppressed can free themselves, and free true creativity in Nigeria.²²

The work is teaching Nigerians, especially students who are now his target audience and the leaders of tomorrow, revealing the effusion of a bungling ruling class and their successive regimes through the power of historical imagination regarding the reason why Inikpi was sacrificed. The contemporary lessons are not difficult to draw out. Inikpi lamented the objective, but submitted her life for the people; rulers of Nigeria proclaim their patriotism, but upon their assumption of office, they promptly betray the people. The structures left by colonial rule have denied the people the right to condemn these rulers, though they have plunged the nation into political instability. Idegu traces the history of patriotic action as promoting the concern of the people of Nigeria in opposition to the unpatriotic actions of their rulers and imperialists against the people of Africa. These 'patriotic' activities unleash the lawlessness, arson, kidnapping and assault on agents of law enforcement, and with unrelenting efforts mirror the looting of the national wealth by the elites to the detriment of the productive section of the nation – the workers, the peasants – revealing the gap between the rich and the poor, the utter neglect of the rural society, the pursuit of education policy as a privilege rather than *sine qua non* for the preparation of the youth as tomorrow's leaders.²³

Understanding Politics through Theatre

Theatre practices of various Nigerian societies help us to understand various communities elsewhere. It is not peculiar to Nigeria or indeed to Africa; it is a worldwide phenomenon. Our knowledge of the Greek society – its people and its civilization – comes from accounts of its theatrical practices. In classical Greece, the theatre reflected the societal structures of the day. Athens was the theatrical capital of Greece with Greek theatre evolving from the head of Zeus and climaxing in the great tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

The Greek theatre presented three kinds of play: tragedies which dealt with heroic legends and often used gods for convenient endings; satires which burlesqued such legends and indulged in bowing mimicry set off by a chorus of satire; and comedies which dealt in a broadly farcical way with current life. Understanding Nigeria should take us to her traditional societies and a deep look into the numerous festivals and ritual performances. The festivals and rituals, as the greatest artistic institutions, have a strong religious base. Most of the festivals are attached to supernatural beings or deified ancestors, and in them certain incomprehensible phenomena are explained, e.g., the seasonal rainfall, hamattan, etc. Ritual is used to explain their occurrence and to negotiate their regulation. The origins of religions are particularly important to our understanding of the nature of Africans and the kind of life they live. As Bakary Traore writes, 'Every religion produces drama and every cult voluntary and simultaneously takes dramatic development to begin in religion and ends in esthetics'.

The categorization of indigenous performance is, however, not our main aim here. The most important thing is the accompanying functions of these festivals and how the performances help us understand societies better. The cultural peculiarities of different ethnic groups and specific festival themselves come to the fore as different myths are performed with peculiar performing styles. The arts of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting, dancing, storytelling, miming and several others are brought into play. The above elements are deployed depending on the nature of the festival performance, and serve as sources of renewal, a growth in the community's spiritual and material development. Even the stories of the gods and legends are returned to the human level and, oftentimes invoke the presence of the gods. The priest serves as an intermediary, thus revealing people's belief system.²⁴

Our understanding of the Igala society today will be greatly enhanced by the study of their origin and performance system. Traditional forms of Igala drama offer deep insights into its society. The relevance of drama, which can serve as a framework for African art, lies in its ability to provide useful insight into the people's essence. The recurrent experience of disintegration is significant for

distancing the will among people whose mores, culture, and metaphysics are based on apparent resignation and acceptance – but which are actually experienced in depth, as a statement of man’s penetrating insight into the final resolution of things and the constant evidence of harmony. Even the language of this drama is often dense and poetic. In religious rites, language reverts to its pristine existence, swallowing the sterile limits of particularization and the embryo of thought where myth is a daily companion.

Mythic drama in Igala culture, as expounded by Idegu, is in all essence captivating, suffering and redemptive. No one should try to look for the value of conflict or revolutionary spirit in the present classical Western sense for, in most cases, the conflict is on the metaphysical plane.²⁵

The Contemporary Dimension of *The Legendary Inikpi* in Nigeria

Her Royalty, Inikpi Princess – Blue Blood running in her vein, the most beloved of all the Attah children. The demand from the oracle is that she is most needed. The best of gods needed, despite hesitation, but she is willing to give herself, to die for the land to be saved; selfless sacrifice. Our leaders and followers must see to the issue of self-sacrifices so that their enemies will not consume the whole Igala people. The rulers should be able to sacrifice their time, money, or whatever forms. The writer notes that:

As father and daughter remained moody, the expression of his love for her was too great and sincere she was deeply moved, listen (Pause) INIKPI heard at least the reason for the continuous call, the message too heavy, piteous and heartbreaking to be announced by a loving father, was broken. She dearly sympathized with father, yet, what did she do? Did she commit suicide instead of waiting for the slow death of her life burial prescribed nobody this oracle or did she run away from the land never to return? Listen to what the beloved child of Ayegba Omaldoko said: “oh-Baba, my lord, your highness, the king of iron house, the one and only father our ancestors gave me (Ayegba and the adviser listen eagerly) precious gift from the gods to whom I am most Beloved (Pause). I have seen your response to the request from our ancestors. Let nothing prevent the victory of our people. Whatever must be given out to bring prestige and honour to you and to your land should not be delayed. Give no second thought to the verdict of the oracles. For he who does not bend to the gods will be bent. Your fatherly love and concern have been seen (Pause). I have decided that our ancestors prevail so that your life and those of your people will be saved from the pending destruction. Baba, it is very painful, very hard to bear, but more pains and disaster will befall the land if the call of the oracle is treated with contempt. Be glad and honored that your daughter though beloved,

carries the problems of the land. Let me die if my death will give life to my people. Oh baba, you can still have another daughter to love, but let me go first (Pause, then softly) I am ready to die for the land". (the Advisers one after the other all give a heavy sigh of relief and raise their heads. Gently he takes her up with him. He endures for a while, his face looking unhopeful. But holding her in his arms, he gathers courage to speak; flute is now in low tone) (Idegu: 61).

Attah, Ayegba Omaidoko

The Attah was the monarch of Igala kingdom. Within the Igala traditional set up, the Attah is second to the gods, in that whatever the Attah says is not questionable. However, Attah is subject to the gods of the land. His charisma and influence as a leader is in having a cut with his people, making consultation and offering solutions to their problems. Second to the gods, he can confer and discuss with his people, on the level of humanity that he shares with them. He shows how a contemporary leader who holds the mandate of the people should often consult with the people he is representing, even if he is unable to solve their problems, he can still listen to them and share his feelings with them.

The Oracle

Attah, however, is representing the gods and the oracle has demanded that the most beloved one of his father be offered as sacrifice, though with hesitation, seeing whether an alternative from god can be made. The oracle could in the contemporary period signify the voice of the people, expressing their needs and wants that ought not to be compromised. The leader should listen to the demands of the people, no matter the cost, pains, and inconveniences, so far as the generality of the people will benefit from it. Leaders should make decisions based on this principle.

The Royalty

Royal adviser, the Amata Ochai Attah, Makojo Attah, Ohiomogho. Their role is to advise the Attah, who takes consultation from the advisers in order to avoid being a tyrant or dictator. No unilateral decision is ever made, even though he has the capacity to be a tyrant. A contemporary interpretation is that an adviser represents legislative arms of the government and leaders need consent consultations with the National Assembly in order to sustain nascent democracy in Nigeria.

The People

In the play, the people refer to the villagers, the crowds that table their problems before Attah and raise issues that affect them. When the oracle demands the beloved daughter of Attah, the people share his pains, feeling the loss as the Attah also feels. Today, the leaders and voters still need to maintain a cordial relationship in order to create an atmosphere of peace.

Daughter

In the play, the daughter is the granddaughter of the storyteller. She calls for a retelling of the tale. But at the end of the play she refuses to accept the willingness of Inikpi for self-sacrifice, because the sacrifice has not produced the fruits for which she submitted herself.

Daughter II

(Loudly) No, no, I don't see, I can't understand, I refuse to be deceived; don't lure me into seeing the justification in that act, the act which you now honour (Everywhere is still and tense with uncertainties).

Daughter II

You listen to me now. All who are together here? Listen to me (to the Story Teller and elder on stage with him) you said Inikpi died to give Igala people life.

Daughter III

Where is that life? (Silence) Tell me, where is the life she died to give her people, when the same people she died to save continued to kill themselves without good cause or regard. Where is life when some feed and get choked to death for taking in more than their bellies can hold even as they watch their nearest neighbours die of starvation in this very land. The land led by the doyens of human bloodsuckers. Shameless exploiters.

Daughter IV

Hear my case, old man, and all who are gathered here. The princess died so that the land will be united, is that not so?

Daughter V

Tell me how united is that same land she was said to have died for? Before her death, we were one united, formidable entity under a respected responsible overall head, what do we have today? Many heads, oh too many heads for one weak and fragile body.

Daughter V

She died to unite the land, and every day the land disintegrates into a million and one fragments with varying leaders and many voices. Where lies the so-called peace you people killed her to restore? Murderers, cold-blooded murderers that you are. Tell me, is there peace today? Do you have peace in your houses? Don't we kill ourselves, struggling to be kings, political leaders, chiefs and whatever?

Daughter VI

Oh, blind and ignorant generation, what tradition cure yourselves, purge your souls and bodies of this mental slavery at the misguided dictate of a misused tradition.

Daughter VII

Look my people, for how long shall we remain absolute dummies. For how long shall we be fooled by trading which seeks to protect every being that dislikes the people? Open your eyes wide and see. Take a second look at the traditional institution you admire. Is it the same as that under which Inikpi offered her life for their people? Oh, the fruits, nurtured by her blood are now unambiguous open prerogatives of the privileged. Tell me then why you should still be here to here-worship the very mosquito that sucks your blood dry.

Daughter VIII

Use your sense, poison your bowl for the mosquito. You are of age. Meaningful tradition died with the heroine you honoured.

Daughter IX

No, on the contrary, nothing is wrong with us, but many things are sensibly wrong with the system. The inhuman and the mercilessly exploitative step that you stand here to glorify.

Daughter X

I say it again loud and clear, nothing is wrong with us for we are a winning a positive generation.

Daughter XI

Ask yourselves these questions as you go. Does today's tradition protect the land and people? Is the tradition of our time as selfless as it was in Inikpi's days, use your sense oh people? The time to decide is now or be forever fools and slaves. (She jumps from the stage down raising her drenched fists in the air). I am liberated, I am free, I am whole.

Daughter XII

No, no I refuse to agree. It was a hopeless death. She shouldn't have died; she shouldn't have died at all. I say she shouldn't have died. Oh ye people, liberate yourselves, we have endured for so long a time. We refuse to be exploited by traditions any longer. We abhor being mystified. Liberate yourselves people and that is how the records can be kept straight. Rise, arise my people. Rise up and walk or be forever self-crippled. Liberate yourself. Liberate your senses, free your minds from incurable bondage. I am liberated, I a-m F-r-e-e-e-e-e. I belong to today's generation. I am of this age. I belong to this generation we are a winning people, a positive generation (to audience) Beyond the Igala land, you all have several Inikpis in your land and in your country. People who continue to betray the trust for which the Inikpis in your immediate society and country gave their lives. Go home and think. Think carefully and dispassionately. Let us

collectively discover our shortcomings, adjust and collectively move our societies and country forward. Now is time we can do it for we are winning people.

In a contemporary interpretation, the daughter stands in for the voice of reason, very critical, very analytical and progressively minded. The daughter is standing for the led, who want to see the fruit of their following given to them in return for their mandates. Democracy should be able to produce water, electricity, good roads, health services and education. The daughter makes reference to the past history, but she is giving contemporary interpretation and relevance to the past. Finally, we have the voice that appears in the play.

Voice

My people, my people, the Igala people, I am INIKPI Oma Ufedo Baba talking. Listen to the voice of the one who died to give you life. I am not happy my soul is troubled. Is this the same land I died to redeem? Are you the same people for whose sake I suffered to death? Over' here where I talk from, we are grieved, why is there division in the land I died to unite? Why do you kill one another? When I died to give you life? Tell me why these unnecessary envy, jealousy and hatred between my people, for whose peace I suffered untold pains. The tradition during which I gave my life for people was a positive one. A selfless one, a loving, saving one. What do you have today oh yea leaders of the people. Uphold traditions that preach love, unity and togetherness so that my soul shall have its deserved rest. You have been warned. Those of you, who desecrate the land, go home and keep records straight. Readjust your selfish priorities at the expense of my people. Else it will remain thus; if I had known it will be like this, I would never have died. Go home I say again and put records straight. Then and only then shall I remain contented and wholly satisfied you have be-e-n-w-a-a-r-r-n-n-n-e-e-e-d-d-d-d- (a strong noisy sound of heavy sign ends her speech; everywhere quiet) (Idegu,p.72).

Here, the playwright is using Inikpi's voice to assess the essence of her selfless sacrifice. The playwright makes comments about today, saying that the labour of our heroic past, the labour of our nationalist people who gave their lives for the nations of the world to exist will not be in vain – if current leaders do not shy away from their responsibility to the people and to the nations.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter illustrates that there is something about power that corrupts the human soul. Unchecked power soon finds victims whom it suppresses, humiliates, and even annihilates. The weaker the victim, the more ferocious is the attack on him or her. Where power does not find external victims, it turns on the weak within.

Lamentably voiced on several occasions in the dialogue between daughters I to XII and the voice in the concluding part of the play when the Igala people were faced with serious pending war from the Bini people, Inikpi offered herself as sacrifice to save her father's land from destruction by the invading enemy forces, in order to secure peace and total freedom for her people. The author demonstrates the contradiction inherent in a society where the ruling class has looted the natural wealth to the detriment of the population; where killings and assassinations are carried out in order to quiet the antagonists. He concludes by symbolically challenging the youth, whom he has called the leaders of tomorrow, to get prepared for self-sacrifice, fortitude, bravery, and to put away the irresponsible desire to be free if they are to prevail in reasserting the indomitable spirit of man/woman. It is in their sacrifice, courage and determination that the future and progress of their society resides.

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