

The Conflict of Filiation and Heroism in Emmy Unuja Idegu's *The Legendary Inikpi*

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Abstract

The focus of this study is on a clash between emotions of filiation and demands of heroism as portrayed in Emmy Unuja Idegu's play - *The Legendary Inikpi*. The conflict begins within the psyche of an African monarch when he is challenged by the dilemma of whether to sacrifice his beloved daughter, Princes Inikpi, to the gods or lose his kingdom. This monarch in question is Ayegba Oma Idoko - the Ata Igala - king of Igalaland. This conflict ends in the triumph of heroism, when his daughter voluntarily offers herself for the sacrifice, in order to secure her father's kingdom. This study is motivated by the interest in exploring this conflict and relating its outcome to the socio-political reality of Nigeria and Africa in general. The paper, however, argues that the study play advocates a man's readiness to lose his life for the survival of his beloved child, but such a filial commitment can be jettisoned in the face of national call for heroism during a threat of war. The objective of the study, therefore, is to critically examine the play - *The Legendary Inikpi* - expose its dramaturgical qualities, and identify its message to the society. The study draws support from the assumptions of cultural poetics theory.

Keywords: Filiation, Heroism, Cultural Poetics Theory

Introduction

The major force that foregrounds this study is the traditional Igala culture. This culture respects the kingship system, in which the Ata is the supreme Monarch who enjoys the loyalty of his subjects. Obviously this culture is still largely in force in present day Igala land, but works side by side with the murky political development of the modern Nigeria. This study is therefore based on the understanding that the play - Inikpi

not only reflects the rich tradition of ancient Igala kingdom, but also poses the question of whether this culture, its tenets and hops still constitute the objectives and trends of present day Igala land and the entire Nigerian political entity.

The terms 'filiation' and 'heroism' are commonly used in daily expressions, but they call for clarifications here. Filiation derives from the word 'filial' while heroism arises from the term 'hero'. The words

filiation and filial, within the context of this study, connote parent-child relationship. This relationship, however, varies from individual to individual, and from culture to culture. A person like Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is portrayed as a father who instead of being "a benevolent provider and protector becomes a source of fear and insecurity"; moreover, in his "ultimate aberration of the father/protector role", he kills "Ikemefuna who had established such a close bond with his entire family, and who called him "father" (Inyama 1996 218). There are other examples of filial aberration, as demonstrated in the classical Greek and Shakespearean drama.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, according to Onibonoje (1988 23) Oedipus, in a fit of temper and tribal fanaticism, ignorantly murders his own father and marries his own mother; Teiresias, in a heat of anger, denounces Oedipus as "son and husband to the woman who bore him; father-killer, and father-supplanter." In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, King Lear overestimates the value and support of children when he trusts Regan and Goneril, his two oldest daughters, to take care of him in his old age. He underestimates the value and support of children when he banishes his youngest and most-loved daughter, Cordelia (Bressler 2003 85). These artistic, filial examples illustrate the truth that serious contradictions sometimes sour and disrupt the loving, secure and deeply committed relationship of parent and child.

But these abnormal developments do not conform to the loving, caring, kind and empathetic relationship of

child and parent in many ancient and modern cultures. All over Nigeria, most parents deeply agonize, are ready for combat, when their offspring falls sick, suffer brutality or gets abducted. In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, an example is seen when Ezeulu's beloved son suddenly dies:

As soon as he (Ezeulu) saw Obika's body coming in under the low eaves he sprang to his feet and took up his matchet. 'What happened to him? Who did this? I said who? Ozumba began to explain but Ezeulu did not hear..... (228).

Ezeulu's reaction becomes a manifestation of a father's filial commitment to the protection and defence of his son if the chance had offered itself to him.

The word heroism can be understood in the light of various conceptualizations of the term. Ododo (2002 245) defines the key ingredients of heroism as sanity, decency, honour and valiant achievements. Extending this perception, Lar (2006 1) maintains that from the Greco-Roman period to contemporary times, heroism is associated with "personal charm, charisma and magnetism, as well as the nobility of character and action, and an unusual display of gallantry and valour in war-fare...."

As Nwahunanya (2003 13) submits, acts of heroism include the readiness of a person "to sacrifice himself, to lay down his life in order to achieve a sense of personal dignity, ownership and self-control." Nigeria's national heroes, who can be credited with some or more of the above attributes, owing to their contributions

to the making of the country's history are "Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Shehu Shagari" (Musa 2002 50) among others. Apart from these political leaders, gallant soldiers who died fighting during the Nigerian civil war or survived the war after demonstrating a great strength of character, bravery, and self-sacrifice were heroes. These clarifications of nomenclature are relevant to the appreciation of the events in the study play.

However, there remains to be enunciated, the theoretical framework of the study. The play is analyzed from the perspective of Cultural Poetics theory, also known as New Historicism or Cultural Materialism. In this connection, the play is examined with the following ideas, which are considered as the assumptions of the theory in which Bressler (2003, 185-189) argues that:

All texts are really social documents that reflect, but also and more importantly respond to their historical situation;" a text is shaped by the culture that uses it; there is an intricate connection between an art object and society, hence, a text embodies societal concerns, as well as historical and cultural elements; a text cannot be evaluated in isolation from its-cultural context; finally, a given literary work can serve as an agent of reformation or change in today's world.

Also in line with the theory, Amoyeze (2011, 1 - 9) adds the idea that, "a text can offer profound multiple meanings."

Synopsis of the Play

The *legendary Inikpi* dramatizes the story of how Princess Inikpi, the most beloved daughter of Ayegba Oma Idoko, the Ata Igala-Monarch of Igala land -offered herself to be buried alive as a sacrifice for the gods to salvage the Igala kingdom. In the drama, the kingdom is threatened by an imminent war from her neighbouring Benin land. Fearing defeat and destruction, an Ifa diviner is consulted by the Igala king and his council of chiefs. The diviner who pronounces the anger of the gods against the land for contravening some of their dictates, predicts the destruction of the kingdom. To avert this misfortune, the oracle demands the live burial of the monarch's beloved princess as an expiatory sacrifice.

When this demand is announced to the king and his council, the suddenness of it galvanizes the monarch into an immediate doubt, intrapersonal agitation, and instant rejection of the oracle's dictation. This royal contradiction which is spurred by filial realities is countered by the disarming spirit of heroism demonstrated by Inikpi when she offers herself voluntarily for life burial. Hence, encouraged by his daughter's heroism, the monarch succumbs to this demand, which is subsequently fulfilled. Following this consummation, the land is mysteriously salvaged.

But the play does not end with this ancient legend and its example of unflinching patriotism. It continues with a dramatized hermeneutics and exegesis of the current political and cultural undertone of the legend.

These developments are demonstrated below under textual analysis.

Textual Analysis

This analysis moves in two directions, namely, the dramatic and the theoretical. The former highlights the dramatic techniques employed by the play in successfully portraying the conflict of filiation and heroism. The latter comments on the play's ability to draw from the tenets of cultural poetics theory in relating this central conflict to historical, cultural, and socio-political issues.

In respect of dramatic techniques, the play has a clear outline of a plot and a subplot; a simple character delineation, recognizable indigenous linguistic idiom, and obvious cultural, moral and socio-political themes. The compositional technique incorporates the celebrated qualities of traditional African theatre, as well as folktale presentation formula, which enable the playwright to create a subplot, and other literary devices like dialogue, stage directions and stage movements. These features are illustrated here as the discussion of the play's action proceeds. From movement one to three of the play, the plot exposition succeeds in introducing the narrower and the wider settings. The former is indicated as the traditional palace of Ayegba Oma-Idoko, the Ata Igala. This information, among others, such as the traditional Igala greetings, cultural artefacts, chants, dances and names of major, as well as minor characters, together suggest the latter to be the ancient Igala land. The land still largely maintains historical ancestry with its current cultural area in present day Nigeria.

Further, in this dramatic exposition, the social milieu of the play is depicted as serene and well organized, under a humane monarch. The monarch is sensitive to the needs of his subjects and calls regular meetings to share ideas with them. For example, at his first meeting with his people, amidst pomp and traditional paraphernalia of royalty, the king (Ata Igala) appears and addresses them:

Ayegba

How does the Ata measure the success of his rule and the state of mind of his children if not through regular meetings with you? Your servant the king thanks you all for honouring his call (16).

This expository stage also presents an aspect of the play's central conflict when the story portrays some of the filial attitudes of the monarch and those of his subjects. For instance, when the king proceeds in sharing his people's problems and prescribing solutions, some family issues are brought before him:

Ist Woman

(Bowing in greetings) Amideju, your highness. My long standing problem has been lack of an offspring. I have been married for four painful years, always done what other married women do, yet no month have I fallen ill to signify the early stage of being in double bodies (19).

The woman further states that her husband threatens to send her packing due to this lacuna, even though "he has eighteen children by his four

wives" (19). The king does not ignore this complaint, but realizing the agony of the woman, he recommends an instant solution that helps to arrest the tensions at the moment.

Ayegba

(Still placing his hand on her head). Do not refuse your husband's night calls and three months from now, report to me if there is no change (As he says so the woman is delighted and glad (20).

These attitudes of the king, the woman and her husband, suggest the parental caring and loving that the children are bound to enjoy if they are born to this couple that is in dire need of them. Inversely, there is a suggestion that parents anticipate the companionship, loving attention and helping hand of their offspring – when they are brought into the world. These allusions to filiation are also obvious in the case of a second woman (2nd woman) in the play who complains to the king about the deaths of five, out of her seven children. As a leader and a father, Ayegba doesn't hesitate in searching for a solution. He suggests various strategies for unveiling the mystery and putting a stop to further deaths of children, but to no avail. He invites the entire family of the second woman to a meeting to seek for solution further. One of the king's subjects acknowledges his filial trait, such as:

Makoji Ata

Agabaidu, the protector of the fatherless/helper of the needy:

your praises will be sung here and hereafter (28).

These words of praise suggest that the king considers himself a father of all, to whom he owes parental protection. The expository stage of the text winds up after the king has been depicted as a leader who, not only enjoys the loyalty of his subjects but also succeeds in arresting intra-communal rivalry.

From movement three, using folkloric techniques of storytelling performance, the play begins to unfold the various levels of struggle that move the action towards the climax and the main ideological conflict. First, Storyteller (who plays the role of the narrator) narrates the events that explain the actions in the rest of the play. In the narration, the audience is informed that the story is a heroic one, which accounts for the glorious history of the people. According to the Storyteller, "a long time ago, the Ata Igala and the Oba of Benin used to be bosom friends" (34). But this friendship got spoilt by a communication gap which created an ugly suspicion that spurred the Ata Igala to carry a war to Benin. At Benin, the Ata's warriors misbehaved to incur the anger of their gods who became bent on punishing them, while they were still at Benin. Hence the Igala warriors were driven out of Benin after their initial successes.

Still discussing with his advisers on how to reconcile with the Oba of Benin, the Ata is sent a war message by the former, who is bent on dealing "with the Ata and his people and if possible, take them as slaves" (36). In movement 4, this inter-communal

conflict with its greater threat of territorial devastation, draws the Ata Igala, his advisers, guards and messengers into another crucial meeting that involves Ohioga, the Ifa/Oracle Diviner, and Inikpi- the most beloved daughter of the Ata. Here, numerous communication techniques of the indigenous lore, such as proverbs, songs, divination, chants, ironies, among others, are employed in taking decisions on the threat of war.

Examples of all this begin to show from the moment the monarch express his inclination:

Ayegba

There is no option; the Oba's threat will be manly replied.

.... But first, we must seek the will and guidance of our ancestors (43).

The first step towards seeking the will of the ancestors is taken by inviting the Ohioga-Ifa/Oracle diviner while the discussion proceeds:

Ayegba

(He looks straight into the audience fiercely) the head of the scorpion has been touched; tell me what prevents its tail from poisonous response? (44).

Advisers

Gaabaidu, nothing can prevent the poisonous sting (44).

Supporting the royal seal, one of his advisers raises a warning against repeating the mistake that led to the Warriors' failure in Benin.

Amanata

Our fathers were no fools to have said that unless your load fell...

Ohiomogbolo

(Completing the wise saying for him). You will not know how best to pack it (45).

When the diviner arrives, he settles down with his instruments and begins to make pronouncements following his incantations and pleas to the ancestral forces.

Ohioga

.... Our ancestors are not pleased with us at all Our ancestors are very sad over the disobedience in Benin and the lost battle that has paved way for the coming war. Gaabaidu a war it is indeed (49).

The atmosphere becomes tensed. The king, his advisers and the diviner plead. But the ancestor's dictate cannot be stopped, and the diviner finds no option than to expose the divine secret.

Ohioga

Gaabaidu (bowing), Gaabaidu, our forefathers want nothing but the sacrifice by the burial of your most beloved daughter Princess Inikpi and by the river Niger bank, the only passage of the Benin Enemy forces to Ida (53).

This announcement throws the king into a short reverie occasioned by shock. Between this period of psychological distancing and return to

reality, the monarch cries out his immediate rejection of this divination.

Ayegba

No. No. o-o-, it can never be
(shaking his head sorrowfully)
no (pause) it will not come true
(53-54).

Even when the king is assured that the sacrifice “will mark the end of enemy invasions in Igala land” as promised by the oracle and complete victory would be gained against Bini enemies, while “everlasting peace will come to the land” (55), the king stands firm in rejecting the divination. He offers to perish along with all his earthly belongings rather than lose his daughter. Because the situation demands a deep strength of the mind and a heroic disposition, the king is thrown into an intra-personal battle, in which heroism and filiation are called to question. He is confronted by a complex question as leader of the entire kingdom, must he, heroically approve the live burial of his only beloved, and save the land, or insist on perishing, even with his kingdom, to preserve the life of his daughter?

The existing dilemma underlines the conflict which rages as the king twice sends for Inikpi – the beloved daughter in question – without deciding to tell her exactly why he has sent for her. However, answering his inner voice as he holds Inikpi with deep affection, he loudly cries out: Innii-In-inikpi (very loudly) No! It will not happen (59). Seeing that her daughter curiously wants to know what is happening, he asks her to leave, pending when she is again needed.

Shortly after, mysteriously, Inikpi appears to sense that what is going on in the land, places some demand on her. Appreciating the turmoil her father is passing through because of this, she decides “to do what she thinks best as her father calls her again” (59). The king has not yet changed his filial stand when her daughter appears. In an atmosphere of “tension, suspense and high anxiety”, as the king holds Inikpi firmly, he intimates her with the reasons for his repeated calls. Her immediate heroic response instantly opposes her father’s inclination to filiation. In this interpersonal difference between father and daughter, heroism triumphs as Inikpi responds:

Inikpi

Oh.... baba, my lord, your highness. The king of lions, the one and only father our ancestors gave me ... I have decided that the wishes of our ancestors prevail so that your life and those of your people will be saved from the pending destruction Let me die if my death will give life to my people ... I am ready to die for my land (61).

Although Inikpi’s choice here is in part, moved by love for her father (which is yet filial), patriotism moves her more and positions her heroism above filiation. Hence, when the king is moved by his daughter’s courage to withdraw his rejection of the oracle’s decision, heroism wins the overall victory.

This climatic moment is sustained by the rituals surrounding Inikpi’s life burial, which is supervised by the

chief priest called At'ebo. Following the life burial, the immediate objective of the sacrifice is realized, since Igala land is ultimately salvaged. According to the Storyteller:

When the Oba's warriors were on their way to Ida, crossing the river Niger, the whole town was in flames. The war never got to Ida any more till today (68).

At this point in the play, when the resolution of the main conflict appears imminent, the play continues with a sub-plot which demonstrates its theoretical affinity with the demands of cultural poetics theory. These demands are already discussed here. In the subplot, therefore, the relevance of the entire play, with its major conflicts, to the socio-political, historical and cultural conditions of contemporary Igala land and the entire Nigerian nation is examined. This kicks off through critical questions raised by DAUGHTER who watched the play from its beginning and decides to interrogate its essence. She begins to ask questions which possibly represent the playwright's new historicist evaluation of his work.

For instance, when the Storyteller winds up the main plot, saying: "my people that is the end of our heroic story and the lessons thereafter to be learned are obvious" (69). DAUGHTER walks up to him, looks at the characters on stage and then the audience. She asks:

Daughter

What is happening here Tell me, what the hell is going on here? Can't anyone answer me (Directly to the storyteller).

Now you old man, tell me, what are you up to? (69).

In other words, she implicitly interrogates the socio-political, cultural and historical rationale for staging the legend of Inikpi and articulating the conflict between filiation and heroism. Through the responses to Daughter's searching question, which she follows up with other interrogations, she is informed that the play is meant to celebrate tradition, glorify the gods and ancestors, and pay loyalty to tradition (70). The STORYTELLER further clarifies that the play "surrounds the selfless sacrifice of princess Inikpi" (71), who was buried alive in order to sustain the whole land; she died to give life "to us all" and for the land to remain united. These references to historical and cultural objectives do not fully address the socio-political question.

But DAUGHTER'S reaction to the above responses ironically represents the play's socio-political question and its call for reformation of contemporary society. For instance:

Daughter

You listen to me now... You said Inikpi died to give Igala people life Where is the life she died to give her people when the same people she died to save continue to kill themselves without good cause or regard? Where is the life, when some feed and get choked to death for taking in more than their beliefs can hold even as they watch their nearest neighbours die of starvation in this very land? The land led by

the doyens of human blood-suckers (Shameless exploiters 74-75).

Still not convinced by DAUGHTER'S line of argument, Story Teller continues in his attempt to justify the show and its glorification of tradition and heroism. But DAUGHTER continues to argue; pointing out that the same land for which Inikpi demonstrated a rare heroism was even more united before her self-sacrifice than after, especially today. She also asks:

Daughter

.... Where lies the so-called peace you people killed her to restore? Murderers, cold-blooded murderers.... Don't we kill ourselves struggling to be kings, political leaders, chiefs and whatever? (76).

On one hand, DAUGHTER is able to convince the Storyteller and others that Inikpi's death shouldn't have happened, given the present disunity and ugly politics in the land. On the other hand, she implies that such heroism, when it happens, should be justified through the propagation of its objectives. And to achieve this, DAUGHTER gives her final injunction which helps to drive home the socio-political message of the study play:

Daughter

Go home and think. Think carefully and dispassionately. Let us collectively discover our shortcomings, readjust and collectively again move our societies and country forward.

Now is the time. We can do it; for we are a winning people, a positive generation ... (80).

To lend credence to DAUGHTER'S message of hope, an imagined voice of Inikpi, which also symbolizes the voice of Igala and Nigeria's past heroes, is heard as the final moral and conclusion of the play.

Voice

My people, my people, the Igala people. I am Inikpi Oma Ufedo Baba calling. 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 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 ... if I had known it will be like this, I would never have died ... (81).

By implication, Inikpi wouldn't regret her act of heroism if there were positive changes and total reformation in the land, where peace, unity, justice and progress should reign supreme. Inikpi's call here also implies that, "there is evidence in Nigerian history to show that there are more factors making for Nigerian unity than those making for disunity (Anyanwu 23 - 41). Hence, Nigerians should embrace the factors that make for unity.

Conclusion

The play has been appraised as a skilful dramaturgy due to its successful use of narrative, dramatic dialogue, simple characterization and

folk-linguistic techniques. Its dramaturgical strength is also vindicated by its artistic use of a subplot to clarify the significance of the major plot. Displaying the conflict of filiation and heroism, by telling the story of the legendary Inikpi, the play subjects the major plot to examination through the sub-plot, in order to expose its message to the contemporary Igala and Nigerian societies. Through this study, it is discovered that the heroism and patriotism which are upheld in the play have, in modern society, been underplayed due to the negation of their objectives. But, overall, the play succeeds strongly in calling for a change from this negative attitude to a more positive embrace with the gains of heroism and patriotism. The playwright has, therefore, displayed artistry in dramatically making history alive in his play. Moreover, he has demonstrated his skill as a social critic and a writer who is committed to the exigencies of his time.

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