

The Gods Are Not to Blame, OR THE TOPICALITY OF A PLAY

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Introduction

Nearly thirty years after its publication, Ola Rotimi's play *The Gods Are Not to Blame*¹ still speaks to us today with the relevance of its message in present-day Africa. Although it is presented as possessing a Nigerian identity², at least if one is to abide by the great reliance on the Yoruba culture that this play conjures up, the topicality of this work cannot be gainsaid for the whole of Africa. Far from being outdated, the play interrogates our present as it provides us with some fresh insight into the appraisal of the evils dwarfing our modern-day Africa. Face to the stream of problems besetting the African continent, one can still find an avenue in this play for an accurate appraisal of the ills we are running into.

Development-wise, it is no secret that the African continent is still lagging behind. This worrying situation prompts some to shower blames on the West in accounting for the present backwardness of the African continent. Within the African context, people keep on lambasting the historical period through such facts as colonialism and the slave trade considered to be debilitating factors in the road of Africa to development.

The focus of this paper is to dismiss this barrage of criticisms and call upon men of Africa to self-introspection. Even though the foreign powers may have contributed to some of the hardships the African continent is facing, one must not be oblivious to the fact that the Africans themselves are not immune from criticisms when it comes to the present state of the continent. We intend to achieve this by focusing on the exposition of Odewale as an individual prone to action. With this characteristic in mind, the gods can no longer be charged with his undoing. Just as Odewale dismisses the responsibility of the gods in his tragedy, we offer a parallel in the relationships between the African countries and the West. In a Zima-like perspective, we will examine how the literary text reacts to historical and social issues through language.³

I- Odewale, the man of action

In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, king Odewale is a man who is prone to action in the face of the different events affecting his life. This king refuses to watch helplessly as an onlooker fate eats up his life. His stance is that man is to fight before any situation, no matter how difficult it may be.

The play teaches us that the notion of resignation is out of the question in the life of Odewale. This king is a courageous man, a hero; the Greek would say half man and half God who comes to deliver the people of Kutuje from the manacles of Ikolu invaders. His life is that of a redeemer who comes to bring solace where desolation was the only and one reality. He does not achieve his Promethean aim by crossing his hands, unmoved. The liberation of Kutuje land was achieved in the yardstick of a philosophy based on action:

¹ Ola Rotimi, *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, London, Oxford University Press, 1971

² Okpi Kalu, "Ola Rotimi : A Popular Nigerian Dramatist and Man of Theatre", *The Literary Criterion*, 1988, Vol.23, p.108

³ Pierre Zima, *Manuel de sociocritique*, Paris, Picard, 1985, p.186

I said
to them; 'not to do something
is to be crippled fast. UP, up,
all of you;
to lie down resigned to fate
is madness.
Up, up, struggle: the world is
struggle'(p.6)

The paratextual reference shows already that Odewale is a praxis-advocate, as the Marxist would put it. He is telling us that whatever happens, action is the motor of life. He is instilling into the minds of his hosts the necessity for the imperative of struggle in life. As Matigari, the eponymous hero teaches us: "Victory is born of struggle".⁴ Just as it is utterly unthinkable to imagine a man without food, so an individual, nay a community which rejects the notion of struggle is doomed to perish. Had he succumbed to the resignation of fate, this victory of Kutuje over Ikolu would have been impossible.

This necessity of action is to be seen in the face of the disaster which befalls the land of Kutuje under the helm of Odewale. Charged with inactivity, Odewale dismisses this accusation as he tells them that his own progeny are suffering from the catastrophe. This, however, does not deter him from action as he performed several sacrifices with a view to appeasing the wrath of the gods:

To what gods have we not made sacrifice, my chiefs and I? Soponna, the god of poxes?
Ela, the god of deliverance? What god? Sango, the God of thunder and rainfall, whose
showers can help wash away the evil in the soil on which we stand?
What god have we not called upon to help us? (p.11)

The diverse gods called upon to ward off the misfortune on the land uncovers the determination of the king and his entourage to wash the disease away. The exasperation contained in the above-quoted citation, which appears through the multiplicity of question marks, shows that Odewale and his entourage did take a wide range of steps in fighting against the evil claiming lives in their midst. In the face of their relentless efforts which have proved so far to no avail, Odewale and his entourage refuse to give in to despondency.

The next step Odewale and his entourage take in order to know the bottom of the affliction which is eating up their community is to send Aderopo to Orunmila's: "We have sent Aderopo to Ile-Ife, the land of Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain"(p.12). Odewale is resolute to trace the source of the suffering gnawing his community even if this necessitates travelling for miles to Ile-Ife, the sacred city and cradle of the Yoruba. Orunmila, the oracle divinity in Yoruba mythology known for its visionary powers is supposed to be all-knowing. Unquestionably the message Rotimi is imparting throughout the quasi dependence of his play on traditional Yoruba lore is that tradition is definitely to be reckoned with. Modernity should, in no way, be an excuse to let African traditional values fade away. With the tremendous reliance of his play on his cultural roots, Ola Rotimi can convincingly be ranked among those African writers who are the torchbearers of what Michel Naumann calls "Orpheus literature".⁵

In the face of this plague, Odewale is baffled at his people's proclivity to give in to a condemnable passivity. Instead of finding ways and means to counter the plague, they come

⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Matigari*, London, Heinemann, 1987, p.11

⁵ Michel Naumann, *Les nouvelles voies de la littérature africaine et de la libération : une littérature « voyoue »*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001

to the king expecting miracles he cannot engineer. The admonition he passes on his compatriots is rife with sense:

Now, you all have come here, sprawling, vomiting, rubbing tears on one another, begging me to do my duty, and help you. But what about you yourselves? What have you done to help yourselves? (p.12)

This assertion unveils what one might identify as the rhetoric of action.⁶ No matter how serious the plague is, the king is keen on coaxing his people into action. Odewale is of the belief that God helps those who help themselves. Within this context, to admit that the play displays an "over-riding sense of relentless fate" is both misplaced and misguided.⁷ Man should face his life throughout personal efforts and expect the backing of the Almighty thereafter. Failure to do so is to be ready to accept defeat in the face of the vicissitudes of life. Evidence to this abounds in the history of the imported religions such as Islam and Christianity.

In Islam, the persecution of the prophet by the inhabitants of Mecca will not deter him from the propagation of the Islamic faith. Although manhandled by the Mecca people he will move to the city of Medina, thereby ushering in the period known as Hegira. Likewise, Jesus Christ is believed to have gone through an unpalatable persecution in the hands of the children of Israel. This, however, does not prevent him from propagating the gospel truth.⁸

The admonition that Odewale passes on one of the citizens of Kutuje uncovers his philosophy of life. Mama Ibjeji, the eponymous lady, bearer of twins is vehemently chided by the king for her lack of initiative:

You there-Mama Ibjeji-what did you do to save your twins from dying? It is sickness that man can cure, not death. What did you do to cure their sickness?...
'The land is bad', you all cry, 'we suffer much, we die', you moan. Yet each of you lies down in his own small hut and does nothing. Now tired of doing nothing, you have all come like lobsters, carrying your large heads of complaints to my door-stet. Well, let me tell you brothers and sisters, the ruin of a land and its peoples begins in their homes.
(pp.12-13)

The oxymoron "doing nothing" reveals Odewale's bafflement at the passivity with which people watch like onlookers the unfolding of events in their lives. The king flouts the lack of action that he parallels to laziness. In the face of any predicament, the call here is on personal and relentless actions as the recipe for liberation. The message is without equivocation whatsoever: "If you need help, search for it among yourselves" (p.13).

No wonder that he himself, as a Leader, lays good examples to be emulated by the rest of society. This king is no demagogue who fills up the minds of his countrymen with empty words. Odewale is praiseworthy as his speech matches his practice:

Bring me those herbs *I* cut from the bush that night. Everybody, come and see...*I*, with *my own* two hands, and *alone* in the bush...My wife, Ojuola *herself* has boiled part of them for the household. This evening again, *I* head for the bush for more (p.15, emphasis mine)

⁶ The term rhetoric here is understood on the heels of Alain Vaillant for whom it boils down to the art of convincing by means of a coherent argumentation. Alain Vaillant, *La Poésie: initiation aux méthodes d'analyse des textes littéraires*, Paris, Nathan, 1992

⁷ Nasiru Akanji, "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique", *New West African Literature*, New York, Africana Publishing Corporation, 1979, p.25

⁸ Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*, Princeton, Islamic Teaching Center, 1985, p.108

Such a stance invites some lines of praise especially amidst African politics where the “words are faster than the deeds”⁹. By so doing, Odewale is castigating the discrepancy between what leaders preach and their actual practices. This harmony between his speech and his doing makes him vividly qualify as a Weberian-like leader.¹⁰

The king wants to remain a simple mortal despite the social prestige attached to his position. He does refuse to be seen as a living god among simple mortals. Just as any human being, he is entitled to display some weaknesses and inefficiencies in the heat of the crisis paralysing his kingdom. For him, the remedy lies in a collective fight as he is no Moses: “Because I, Odewale, son of Ogundele, I am only a person, human: like you, and you, and...you” (p.13). Odewale wants to be seen by his fellow countrymen as an ordinary man who cannot as such work out miracles. His leadership is that of a man who refuses to succumb to the arrogant temptation of divination. The outcome of a community is less dependent on the efforts of a few individuals, however talented and gifted they are. Salvation rather rests with the capacity for each citizen to contribute to the bliss of one and all.

Verbal instructions are also forms of actions-taking that an authority gives to set things in motion. Odewale sees to the welfare of his fellows by giving instructions to his bodyguards for the salvation of souls in pain. The mad woman with the baby is the symbol of the afflictions of the community. Odewale gives her all his support throughout what he asks out of the bodyguard:

Quickly take that woman to the home of Alaba
the curer of sick heads. Whatever he charges
for the cure of her head, tell Alaba that I shall pay (p.16)

Through the use of the imperative form, Odewale is entrusting a mission to one of his guards. Far from the narcissistic philosophy, the duty of a worthy leader is to attend to the needy. In African societies wherein leadership is believed to be a stepping-stone towards personal contentment, Odewale is a distinguished exception who is caring. Leadership is shallow if it fails to assuage the suffering of a community in trauma.

King Odewale is also a resourceful man who does not shun the task, no matter how difficult it may be. Having vowed to identify the murderer of king Adetusa, Odewale does not back down in the face of the different hardships he runs into. His determination remains unshaken before the odds leading to his goal: “If we fail to catch the murderer in the town, we shall move on to the villages around us. If we find no murderer there either, we will go to the farms.”(p.50) The philosophy of Odewale brings him to leave no stone unturned in his search for the murderer of his predecessor in the kingdom of Kutuje. Like Sisyphus, Odewale seems ready to continue unabated the same task again and again provided he brings the murderer of Adetusa to book. No matter what the situation, man should refrain from abdicating, he is to create his safe haven by fighting tirelessly. Such a practical philosophy washes out the gods’ responsibility in Odewale’s undoing.

II-Do not blame the gods

The Gods Are Not to Blame can without doubt be read as the tragedy of king Odewale. This sorrowful development can be analysed taking into consideration the weaknesses of this character. Our assumption is that king Odewale should have averted the traumatic experience

⁹Ayi Kwei Armah, « African Socialism : Utopian or Scientific ? », *Présence Africaine*, n°64, 4è trimestre 1967, p.28

¹⁰ For Max Weber, a leader is supposed, among other qualities, to live by examples. This is discussed in Max Weber, *Le savant et la politique*, Paris, 10/18, 1982

he went through if he had not displayed a spectrum of misdemeanours, which in the end, bring about his downfall. The notion of fate should not be seen as an excuse to justify any wrongdoings. His statement which dismisses the responsibility of the gods does prove the fact. In an existentialist-like move, Odewale is telling us that man is the prime responsible for his actions. Odewale is telling us that our defects and shortcomings are first and foremost ours.

One element which defines Odewale is his firing temper. This seems to be a trait he bears since his early childhood. The Ifa priest, a bridge between human beings and divinities, under the spell of his metaphysical knowledge, traces back the source of Odewale's tragic flaw. Baba Fakunle pinpoints this malady that king Odewale bears: "Your hot temper like a disease from birth is the curse that has brought you trouble" (p.29). No wonder his former friend, Alaka, rightfully recalls his nickname "Scorpion." Like a gorilla, Odewale bounces on whatever he does without the necessary quietness and restraint.

Odewale himself is aware of this when he contrasts his own behaviour with that of his wife Ojuola by imploring the gods to give him some of her "patience". By castigating his own temperament, Odewale at the same time showers praises for his mother turned his wife:

Gods! What a woman! ... Give me some of her patience. I pray you. Some... some of her cool heart...let her cool spirit enter my body, and cool the hot, hotness in my blood-the hot blood of a gorilla! (p.39)

Through his appeal to the deities to help him get rid of his hot temper, Odewale seems to gauge the negative sentiments in him. He is the perfect antithesis of Ojuola when it comes to coolness of heart. While Odewale is rush, Ojuola is patient, while the former is sharp, the latter is the embodiment of coolness. This trait of his character will bring Odewale to slaughter, albeit without his knowing, Adetusa when the latter abused his tribe on the farm at Ede.

Odewale's temper is to be seen as a legacy of what he receives from the divinities. When Alaka avows that he did not teach him hot temper, he himself avows: "No, no, Sango, the thunder lion, taught me that one" (p.44). Here is unveiled the contradictory nature of the king. In Yoruba mythology, Sango is a deity whose attributions are associated with thunder. But one must be quick to admit that thunders which announce heavy falls are also followed or accompanied by heavy losses which cause untold destructions. This contradiction is also apparent in the behaviour of Odewale who, as a hot tempered- man, lambastes Akilapa, his bodyguard owing to this trait.

The contradiction which brings a touch of humour to the play appears when Odewale critically mocks one of his bodyguard on account of his rush manner. Bemused by the suddenness with which Akilapa bursts in, Odewale cannot but brand him in no equivocal terms:

Everything: gira, gira, gira...power, power, force, force...action, action! No thoughts, no patience, no coolness of blood. Yet you go about shouting you are better than women, superior to women... Get out, braggant, go marry a woman and learn coolness of mind from her. (p.40)

To say that the aforementioned passage is humorous to all intents and purposes would not be an overstatement. Odewale the epitome of hot-temper charges Akilapa with the same ill. This is a good illustration of the theory of the robber robbed. Odewale should be taught to remove the blink in his own eyes before passing criticisms on Akilapa's. The contradiction of Odewale, his social position notwithstanding, simply distinguishes him as a human being with his grandeur but above all with his lapses. Rotimi is bringing to our attention the futility of

near-divinisation of all the rulers in Africa, who on account of their social position, are put to the status of divine beings. Man is to remain a simple mortal even though he socially ranks high in the societal pyramid.

One point which invites scrutiny is Odewale's feeling over his tribe. To say that this king is imbued with tribal sentiments would unquestionably be self-evident. This ruler can bear whatever insults provided they did not tamper with his ethnic belonging, which for him is the apex of humiliation. As he put it: "He spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I thought was my own tribe. The man laughed, and laughing he called me a "man from the bush tribe of Ijekun"(p.71). Attacking Odewale's tribe is a *casus belli* which must be atoned for through a punishment. This episode cannot go unnoticed when we examine the social class of Odewale. Within the social stratum, he is far from being a nobody as he is a king. Even socially important individuals cannot withstand the attack of their ethnic belonging. Tribal conflicts are indeed a major recipe for chaos in African societies wherein communities are utterly destroyed on account of ethnic clashes. The nightmarish situation of the Rwandans during the last decade of the previous century stands as a valid testimony to this statement.

The punishment inflicted by Odewale to avenge his abused tribe is not a laughable matter as he terminates the life of Adetusa, his offender. In his move to avoid the fallout deriving from this murder, he leaves his farm of Ede to Kutuje where he will alleviate the suffering of the people. As a reward, the Kutuje people will make him king and grant him with the wife of the former king, Ojuola, his mother to marry: "It was my run from the blood I spilled to calm the hurt of my tribe, that brought me to this land to do more horrors" (p.71). The sexual, nay marital relationship between mother and son stems from the latter's presence in Kutuje. Such an abomination could have been avoided only if Odewale had cooled down his temper and spared the life of Adetusa, the man he unknowingly beheaded to avenge his scorned and underestimated tribe.

In examining the character of Odewale, one is somewhat compelled to emphasize his impressive stubbornness. Having been enlightened by the phrase "the butterfly thinks himself a bird" (p.59), he is drawn to the oracle so as to know his real coming from. Even though the oracle admits that it will be mere foolishness to attempt any fleeing move, he ends up by providing Odewale with a piece of advice: "Stay where you are. Stay where you are...stay where you are..." (p.60) The three-time repetition of the piece of advice, reminiscent of the Holy Trinity in the Christian faith, on behalf of the oracle uncovers the sanctification of the statement. However, Odewale will say none of it as he will move from his original place, thereby flouting the cautionary words of the oracle. That's why Nasiru Akanji's statement is difficult to condone: "Odewale suffers because the gods will it so".¹¹ The will of the gods however sad or unpalatable does not exonerate our individual responsibility. Moreover, the gods always offer an opportunity in order to hamper the coming into being of a bad development in what is known as a propitiatory sacrifice. Had the people of Kutuje performed the initial sacrifice to the gods, this parricide coupled with an incestuous relationship between mother and son would not have taken place. Had Odewale heeded the piece of advice coming from the priest asking him to stay where he was, this unfortunate development would have been averted. Odewale's tragedy is the outcome of his stubbornness which prompts him to listen to no one but himself.

Odewale's downfall would be, in all regards, meaningless if we do not draw lessons from his tragedy. As he himself enjoins us to "learn from his fall" (p.71), we deem it of interest to muse upon his sorrowful plight and draw some lessons in assessing the predicament the African continent is ever going through. This venture calls upon us to unveil the allegorical reading one may derive from *The Gods Are Not to Blame*.

¹¹ Nasiru Akanji, , op.cit. p.25

III- Do not blame the West

The Gods Are Not to Blame can convincingly be viewed as a literary work loaded with a political message shedding some light on the situation of the African continent. The horrendous scenes of young Africans doing, at the perils of their lives, whatever they can to set foot in western countries in thousandth brings us to reflect on the timeliness of Rotimi's play. Rotimi himself provides a valuable clue when he asserts:

The Gods Are Not to Blame does not refer to the mythological gods or mystic deities of the African pantheon. Rather it alludes to national, political powers such as America, Russia, France, England, etc... countries that dictate the pace of world politics. The title implies that these "gods" shouldn't be blamed or held responsible for our own national failings.¹²

In the face of the continuing plagues holding up the development of Africa, the tendency among some Africans, the best minds include, is to lay a sweeping blame on the western powers. The argument is ascribed to the unpalatable experience the African continent went through in the form of the slave trade and the "darkness of colonialism"¹³. Some distinguished and acclaimed minds of the African continent went even too far by clamouring a spectrum of compensations as if to atone for the misdeeds of these social maladies Africans underwent.¹⁴

However, Rotimi's play is pregnant with meaning in so far as it provides us with enough food for thought since it teaches that the blame is in us and among us. Let us not delude ourselves and squander our time searching for scapegoats to account for the evils bedeviling our continent.

A scrutiny of the political elite will for sure suffice to assess the failure of leadership which is at the root cause of our backwardness almost half a century after the African independence. To say this is not to lay unwarranted claims on our political elites. It is a matter of common occurrence and public knowledge that misappropriations of public funds are pervasive in Africa. This all too rampant situation has prompted Eustace Palmer¹⁵ to admit that in Africa politics is the way to self-aggrandisement. Contrary to the Aristotelian philosophy which holds that Politics rests with the betterment of the lot of the community, amidst our local politicians, it is nothing but the shortest short cut to amass ill-gotten wealth for them and their cronies. Should we here blame the West for the misdeeds of our governing elite? Let us not blame the West for our backwardness; rather we should revisit the management of our different countries. To continue blaming the West for our woes is to admit our incapacity to rule on our own the different countries making up the African continent.

The responsibility of the African rulers is well identified by the Ghanaian writer when he clearly raises the point in a query which is more than ever timely: "How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders?"¹⁶ This question is nothing but a serious indictment on the failure that indigenous leadership has meant to the continent. This disastrous management is entirely the making of our leaders who are busy developing their selfish interests at the expense of the well-being of the totality. That Africans youth are doing their utmost to give up their land of

¹² Bernth Lindfors(ed.),*Dem-Say: Interview with Eight Nigerian Writers*, Texas, African and Afro-American Studies and Research Center, 1974, p.61

¹³ Elisabeth Isichei, *History of West Africa since 1800*, London, Macmillan Publishers, 1985, p.123

¹⁴ Wole Soyinka, "Reparations, Truth and Reconciliation", *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999. In this paper, Soyinka is calling on the West to compensate the misdeeds of such historical facts as colonialism and slave trade through some form of reparations.

¹⁵ Eustace Palmer, « Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* », *African Literature Today*, n°10, London, Heinemann, 1970

¹⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, London, Heinemann, 1968, p.80

birth to safe havens in Europe and America is to be seen as the glaring tokens of this half-baked leadership. You do not look for shelter in your neighbour's room when your own is safer.

One cannot be blind to the fact that these plagues such as colonialism and the slave trade did play a part in underdeveloping Africa¹⁷. However, it is mere folly to keep on referring to these problems to account for the problems the African continent is going through. To follow on the heels of Chinua Achebe, it is very crucial in the assessment of a phenomenon to distinguish between the immediate and the remote causes. Achebe's character Ikem Osodi teaches us this when he calls our attention to this fact in a masterly manner. To use his proverb, "it is like going out to arrest the village blacksmith every time a man hacks his fellow to death".¹⁸ What makes sense rather is that when a machete kills somebody in a village, you find the responsible for the act instead of finding the person who made the machete. It is not mentally sane to keep on referring to the evils committed in the past and be silent over the malpractices of the modern-day ruling elite. We should not overlook the fact that those who are ruling since independence, "the earthworms" as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o¹⁹ would put it, have a tremendous hand in the ordeal of the continent.

An avenue which needs canvassing is the spate of conflicts which are devastating the African continent. One cannot but be saddened to notice that this continent has cynically been turned into a battle ground wherein conflicts and wars are the order of the day. Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Côte d'Ivoire, to name but a few, are glaring signs of the turmoil affecting our mother land Africa. When developed countries are busy beefing up their potential, the sons of Africa are rather dwarfing down the continent through mindless wars and their ensuing ravages.

Some might argue that these conflicts, to dilate on the Ivorian crisis, have some foreign ramifications. We do not here want to go for unnecessary polemics, what we believe is that western countries would not have succeeded, if proven that they have a hand in our crisis, had Ivorians not laid themselves open to it. To paraphrase Odewale, westward powers would have failed if we had not let them use us. This African saying invites quoting here: "A house divided against itself cannot stand". The malaise prevailing in our midst prior to the outbreak of the conflict is to be held responsible if one is to assess with a minimum of integrity the origin of the crisis.

The recent toxic waste scandal²⁰ appearing in the country also deserves our attention in that this is a thought-provoking issue. In the face of the seriousness of this nauseating affair, some Ivorian highbrows lambaste the West for turning Africa into a cesspool as they dump their waste on the continent.²¹ This scandal, however acute it may be, is invested with a serious meaning within the framework of this paper.

Such a horrendous development could not have happened had some Ivorians not subscribed to the lethal agreement. This is all the more undeniable as some African countries such as Liberia, Nigeria and Guinea have emphatically turned down the criminal cargo. We have not heeded the piece of advice provided to us by Odewale which runs as follow: "The ruin of a land and its peoples begins in their homes."(p.13) Odewale is urging us to look in our midst to pinpoint the plagues that are dwarfing our society. What is being hinted at here is the demise of moral values on the part of administrative and political authorities before money. Our collective ordeal is consequent on the sadness of harbouring within the

¹⁷ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania Publishing House, 1976

¹⁸ Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*, London, Heinemann, 1987, p.159

¹⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, London, Heinemann, 1977, p.344

²⁰ This tragedy took place in August 2006

²¹ In a recent interview on the British Broadcasting Corporation, one of them, the well-known Ivorian writer, Bernard B. Dadié, castigates the West for its disrespect towards Africans

community devil-like men we call leaders. The origin of the permissiveness which characterizes the totality is not unknown. We have known for ages that money perverts human qualities into their opposite.²² This standpoint still holds true when some leaders among us, prompted by their hideous cupidity, annihilate life and supersede it with death.

Conclusion

The artist plays a critical function in that throughout his works he is aiming at the betterment of his society. Ola's Rotimi *The Gods Are Not to Blame* beyond its literal meaning is no exception. Under its literal significance, this play has political undertones which help us shed light on the situation of present-day Africa. In the face of the continuing difficulties besetting the continent, people are quick to find scapegoats to account for the trouble of the continent. In writing this paper, our concern is to propound another approach. Without underestimating the burden of the past in the form of the slave trade and colonialism, we still hold that the evils dwarfing our continent are among us. They take the form of misappropriation of public funds, mismanagement, unnecessary wars and conflicts, to name but a few, all these evils and social plagues, if avoided can help us make headway and thereby contribute to the development of Africa. To continue laying the blame on the West for whatever woes we are facing is to take an indecent short cut. To keep on blaming others, especially the West for our ordeal is simply to refuse to awake to the fact, to remain a child and refuse to grow up and critically face the wildness of conduct of our present-day rulers. The salvation of the African continent lies in the wise management of the immense resources the continent can boast of. Only thus can the continent make leaps forward and move towards brightening horizons.

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²² Karl Marx quoted by Jean Rousset, *Les chemins actuels de la critique*, Paris, Union Générale d'Éditions, 1968, p.49

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