
ADOTSE AN ICON OF HOPE: A STUDY OF RICHARD MASAGBOR'S LABYRINTHS OF A BEAUTY

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to show Masagbor's exploration of "the vagaries of human life," (Idegwu, 2009), and how Adotse for instance, is a correspondence between the form and meaning of the virtues which are needed in human life to overcome, and win the battles of life. It is also an attempt to explore, and explain how people in power in the various realms of life create myths around their persons and office, to intimidate, and force their subject to remain cowed forever. This paper looks at the challenges the oppressed face, and shows that the possession of virtues such as courage, hope, the power to persist and remain focus or consistent are what the oppressed need to liberate themselves. Hence, the iconicity of Adotse, who personifies these virtues.

INTRODUCTION

Without revolution no new history can begin...History has already broken through the closed circle of slavery. The revolution is the break from captivity, from the condition of bigotry and oppression in which the spirit found itself before it, because it became self-conscious (p.183).

The postulation above by Moses Hess, a Pre-marxist German socialist who lived between 1812 and 1875 steers our consciousness on the issue of revolting against a social order which is inimical to the well-being of a people – "a break from captivity, from the conditions of bigotry..." (p 183). In every nook and cranny, we find people in all spheres of life in captivity, greatly messed around by those who are supposed to have cared for them by virtue of their callings either as self-imposed leaders or leaders as a result of their consistent and steady rise to power. An attempt to ponder on the high degree of servitude, and the docility of the captives shows that while they may be conscious of their being on perennial hostage, and feel very bad about their state, not more than a handful of them in every generation may boldly challenge their taskmasters. This greatly accounts for the boldness with which these Pharaohs, both the ancient and modern, parade the streets killing and maiming without anybody raising an eyebrow at least not in the public.

This is where Adotse, the icon of hope, a literary creation of Richard Masagbor (2008) in his imaginary world, an archetype of our modern Nigeria, epitomizes the audacity of Moses in his "Let my people go" revolution. Her fearlessness in the face of all odds, and her persistence in bringing to fruition, the object of her mission make her an icon of hope for the oppressed in every nook and cranny of the world. And this, Richard Masagbor graphically explores. This paper, is an attempt to showcase the iconicity of Adotse, whose enduring spirit in the face of all odds, and consistent and persistent pursuit of her vision

are divine visitations which explain to all and sundry that evil had never been an abstract phenomenon because it is happening in every nook and cranny of our society. Hence the oppressed have to stand up, challenge their oppressors, liberate themselves, and sing songs of victory forever.

THE NAUSEATING

Ngugi (1982) posit that

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialisms: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Our culture over the last hundred years has developed against the same stunting, dwarfing background. (P XIV).

Jorgen Dines Johnson (1996) in *Iconicity and Literature* gives credence to Ngugi's postulation above thus:

Literature imitates the ways in which we talk about and describes the world... one relevant way of defining literature would be as a discourse which is capable of imitating all other discourses (p 35).

The imperativeness of this axiom could be seen from Richard Masagbor's Labyrinths of a Beauty which is an exploration of the backwardness of a people, laying bare the nauseating and unprogressive nature of their culture, and showcasing how they could be courageous enough to empower themselves and change the status quo in order to liberate themselves from the shackles of all forms of oppression. The wanton destruction of lives and property, and the geometrical progression of the evils of the various cults of power are very disheartening especially in a twenty-first century world of enlightenment. Ojaide (2010) succinctly explains our plight thus:

This should not be surprising, bearing in mind the corruption that is rampant in most African states, the dictatorship, tyranny, oppression, inordinate greed, and other negative attributes that bedevil African political life. The political elites in most African societies treat the common people with total neglect of their plight. They embezzle the state funds as if personal and stash them in Swiss and other foreign banks and deprive their nations of much needed funds for development. As if that is not enough, they steal elections and behave as if they were above the laws of their lands.

Ojaide's explanation above shows that evil is not abstract but something that breathes down the neck of our people in every nook and cranny of our society Soyinka (2005) cites

a psychiatrist in north Belfast saying that in this kind of culture "children grow up believing there is no such thing as respect for human dignity" (p 90) The unsavoury nature of everything around us draws committed artists to write to change their world for good. Albert Camus (2000) re-echoes this feeling thus:

I cannot keep from being drawn towards everyday life, towards those, whoever they may be, who are humiliated and debased. They need hope, and if all keep silent or if they are given a choice between two kinds of humiliation, they will be forever deprived of hope and we with them (pp 190-191).

And to be in tune with this clarion call, Masagbor posits the unpalatable state of our society, where the citizenry are daily deceived in the name of religion or culture, thus:

The Chief Priest had been beaten to unconsciousness. He had a big confusion on the head. Erua and his remnant comrades ran helter skelter but to no avail. The exit was closed and the only man who had the key was dead.

Erua, gallant Erua, fought back like a wounded lion but the game of numbers was not on their side. They were hopelessly overpowered and herded together. They were marched on to the captor's house. Here they were in a strange world, a world they thought was ethereal, for so they were taught to believe. Also it was an illusion, adult make-belief. It was a world like theirs, the people were flesh and blood like them. At the very least of consideration, they had engaged them in a fight. On sober reflection, Erua observed that they would now be labeled as men from beyond. What beyond? This was the mystery of their existence....(p.20)

This is Masagbor's way of frowning at the degree of deception of the priestly class and all other leaders in the various realms of governance who mystify their positions, and employ deception to perpetually make the people subservient. The Priesthood class so mystified, enslaves the people's thought process in order to perpetually keep them in chains. Masagbor, graphically explains the enslavement, and its effect on the citizenry thus:

"Our father", she replied, "I know you still remember the events of the recent past and the role of Adotse in them all. Some long lost people came back while the dead were confirmed dead and the necessary rites of passage were done for them. The whole thing has just jotted us out of the life of mass illusion to the light of modern day reality. This seems to have offended an important class of our community.

"Yes. I am aware of that," he replied. (p. 84).

This is indeed, our predicament as a people. What kind of nourishment had we been fed? This remains the question I have been asking myself. I speak now, most sincerely, not of

the stomach, but of the mind, the container which when polluted destroys more and faster than a thousand dynamites. Masagbor explains that the people had lived "a life of mass illusion to the light of modern day reality", (p. 84) The people are daily fed with lies simply because a small session of the society – the Priest class, the ruling political elites want to perpetually remain in power. Hence.

The first act of ingratitude committed against her was the kidnap by agents of the Priests. They bound her hands and feet and meant to kill her. Only divine intervention and the old age grade saved her. The last straw that broke the camel's back is the bogus divination ordering her death to purge and heal the society of a pestilence". (pp. 84-85).

Mosogbor wondered why the lid had remained. "I thought the lid had been blown off that deceitful games of theirs," observed Acha, the quiet one among them. "It's not a laughing matter. So many people have died because of nefarious custom. Now see what it has caused us today" (p. 68). The story had remained the same, even worst things are happening. The Priest class in the sanctuary of democracy, and all other forms of governance and leaderships in Nigeria pollute the land as Masagbor tries to posit in Labyrinths of a Beauty. (See Dan Agbose: 2009 and Dare Baborisa 2010). Each dawn presents a stubborn refusal to learn and change, and an improvements on the deadliness of their means of terrorizing the people. Masagbor, dramatizes this, thus

The Priests who had been disgraced after their attempted kidnap of Adotse never relented in their opposition. They still indulged in nocturnal schemings. Many of them constituted the Eboh clan. They felt humiliated by Adotse and would leave no stone unturned just to be even with her even if it meant going against their work ethics by falsifying the oracles. Some of them met one morning and came out with some strange divination that ascribed the source of evil in the community to Adotse. It was said that for things to be normal again, she had to be sacrificed. They led a group to forcefully get her but the same age grade that had rescued her the first time still came to her rescue. (p. 79).

Masagbor, above graphically presents the intrigues the crusaders for a just society face daily. The oppressor's class – the Ebon clan, is everywhere in Nigeria. They are those, who kidnap, kill and maim everyday. Anyone they feel is a threat to their nefarious activities, they assassinate with ease. The current wave of assassination of political office holders and members of the press, around the country attest to it. The fact that there are people like Adotse in our society, though relatively few, gives us a sense of hope, that things might be well one day. This is why Adotse epitomizes freedom. She is an icon of courage, a very scarce commodity in our kind of world.

Masagbor also moves further to add that

a trouble marking group had been sent to Erua by the priestly class. The objective was to ferment trouble between Adotse and Erua over their son Adotse's family had

claimed ownership because he was born out of formal wedlock. Erua had been incited into refusal – a thing he had earlier on considered a rather trivial issue. He was now beginning to grumble (p74) (see pp 75-76).

This is an archetype of what is happening in Nigeria. The Niger Delta region is bedeviled by the existence of various militant group believed to be greatly funded by those in power for various selfish reasons. There is a deliberate attempt by those at the Cult of Power to maintain the status quo even when very ignoble. This is why Nigeria today could be tossed up and down by the ruling cabal on the issue of the presidents health, that for 68 days, the nation can not say this is the state of the presidents health. The Nigerian Priestly Class – the ruling cabal is equivalent to Masagbor's 'ignoble priestly class' in Labyrinths of a Beauty. It took the Federal Executive Council in Late Yara Adua's regime a long time to be jolted out of the life of mass illusion for even the cabal were deluded to have believed that their game would last forever. This explains why nothing works in Nigeria. What on earth could make the then Federal Executive Council allow Nigerians experience such shameful drama in a 21st century World of enlightenment if not for mad selfishness. They are not different from the priestly class who after the exposure of their ignoble acts, went kidnapping Adotse instead of hiding their heads in shame for deceiving and fooling a nation for decades. Masagbor seems to put the actions of the FEC thus:- "They on their part had vowed to keep the fight on but unknown to them they were kicking against the goad. They were still dwelling on the myth that had been flawed and exposed. They were fighting against change and against truth". (p.76).

This is because they have so mystified everything in order to create fears in the mind of the people. Masagbor (2008) puts it this way:

The chief priest had been beaten to unconsciousness,... Eru and his remnant comrades ran helter skelter but to no avail. The exit was closed and the only man who has the key was dead.

... They were hopelessly overpowered and herded together. They were marched to the captor's house. Here they were in a strange world, a world they thought was ethereal for so they were taught to believe. Also it was on illusion, adult make belief. It was a world like theirs, the people were flesh and blood like them. (p20).

However, mists do stay forever on a windscreen. So, it was with the intrigues posed by the Priest class in their attempts to deceive the people forever.

THE AUDACITY OF ADOTSE

Ngugi (1980) did say that "it is when people are involved in the active work of destroying an inhibitive social structure and building a new one that they begin to see themselves." (PII) It is at this stage, that they begin to set in motion the machinery for the liberation of their body, soul and spirit. And until this is done, one may be existing, not living. Adotse, the heroine as an icon epitomizes the courage to change that which is anti-progressive. She was all that the community needed to be able to begin the rounds of confrontations

that would usher in the desired changes which the people have been deprived of, for ages: Masagbor puts it succinctly thus:

"Enough gentlemen," said their leader. "Let us be of one accord here that we shall not part with the white fox. If a class of people decides to live in anachronism, the enlightened ones must not allow themselves to be dragged into their Folly" (P68).

It demands much from the industry of a man to make this kinds of statements, and to stand on it even at gunpoint. It calls for sacrifice. The self must give way for the collective will of the progressives. Masagbor clothes Adotse in the following words "Adotse came with life, she dispelled the darkness of ignorance, she gave womanhood a pride to live for" (p. 94). Here, Masagbor, showcases the virtues of Adotse to his readers. She symbolizes light, knowledge, hope, courage and the beauty of womanhood. She is a virtuous woman. She is the motivator; the people need to move in the right direction. She is a fountain of life. The education of the people towards engaging in a social change is a very hard task. It takes one who has great audacity, the audacity of courage and hope to do this Through Adotse's empowerment, the people were able to change their world. "Take it easy" she said, "we don't need to come to blows, our position is that Adotse has opened the gate to life and truth. We all subscribe to it. We shall fight with what we have. For beating up our fellow women, wait for our next move" (p. 81)

Information is a necessary tool for change. It helps in the education of the individual. It is a means of empowering the individual as well as member of a society towards knowing whom they are, what they ought to be, and how to be whom they want to be. Dayal (2008) states that education as: "a continuous process consists of all experiences which affect the individual from birth to death.....One thing seems to be certain, education plays an important role in moulding the character and personality of an individual", (p.161). Adotse, the teacher, gave her people the bits of education they never had, and needed to stand against all forms of evils. This is why:

"Iyaka and Izenabu moved from house to house counselling or rather inciting housewives. They would stop at the gate and call for woman of the house. It was Izeebu who did the speaking.

"My fellow women," she said, " We refused cooking in order to make our point and ;they beat us and almost killed one of us. This is our next step, and tool. Fellow women, you must keep your legs closed together for a week. Do not succumb to any cajolement or sweet-tongued promises or even gifts," (p 81).

The women were able to call for change. They stood their ground, the Adotse's type. They closed their kitchens and their legs against their husbands to press their demand for an ideal society, a society that is free from oppression.

"My fellow women, the oppressed members of society," She began " I am glad, in fact very glad, that we have made our point and very strongly too. They will know that it takes a woman

to not only build a steady home but also a stable society - this, Adotse's contributions has clearly shown". (page 83).

The call for justice has been an ageless venture. There have been a lot of "Adotse", before Adotse, and many more will spring up until the world is devoid of all forms of oppressions. Evil reigns in our society because nobody wants to do the thinking. Nobody wants to do the acting. Nobody wants to take the lead to call for a change even when the situation has become very deplorable, and absolutely dangerous to the well being of the society. Either for fear or for selfish reasons men run away from doing that which is and remains for the general good of humanity. It takes one with the heart of a lion, and the passion for justice to take the lead, putting one's life on the line simply just to set men free. Though such humans are rare, they are found in every generation. The Martin Luther King Jnr. the Gani, the Ken Saro Wiwa, the Awolowo's, the Tunde Bakare's of latter Rain Assemblies, the Oshomole's and the Ige's among others. Masagbor, in his graphic descriptions of Adotse's iconicity chosed his words very carefully to canonize Adotse thus: "Adotse came with life, she dispelled the darkness of ignorance, she gave womanhood a pride to live for. Lets us remember....." (p 94).

Adotse is the light in a very dark world. Her unprecedented courage was all that the ignorant docile and domiciled villagers need to change their world. The educator, the mobilizer, and that whom they need to be on the lead, to pull or drag them along to revolt against their ageless tormentors. Hence "that evening, Iyaka and her assistance leader came to Adotse. They reminded her that even though they led the other women in town in their silent struggle against their men folk, she, Adotse, was their de facto leader. Her return had cut a niche for her in the annals of her people (p 87). This goes to prove that Adotse, the heroine, is an icon. The scenario is iconic in that kind of society. The resistance to change, and the consistency of the persistence call for change pages 84 and 91 are iconic in themselves. This tallies with Jorgen Dines Johnson feelings as he cites Pierce as saying than an icon exhibits some relevant properties of the object, the index is influenced, by and points to the object, and the symbol makes representation general and stable and allows us to make and reflect on propositions and judgements. (p 36).

Ngura, Haydan (1976) cites an advert thus:

PRESS ON.

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not, unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education alone will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.(P 109).

That was what Adotse and company did. They knew that good things do not come very easily. They were not only patient, they were consistent with their persistent struggle for their freedom and the freedom of their people. At the end we find them successful in their quest, for they did not give in to the intrigues the oppressors had against them. Hear the songs of victory as posited by Agidigbo, the ancient wisdom, Masagbor's Icon of truth, the spokesman of the community in Labyrinths of a Beauty at the end of the battle.

"You are free, my daughters," he replied. "Do not forget I am the custodian of our ancestral values. I can decree and unbond or repeal. So, feel free"

"Yes, our father" she said, "we had unqualified success"

"Now," he said, turning to me, "did you hear her?"

"Yes, we did" answered a spokesman, "I personally condemned the priestly class for their assault on Adotse and all that they had schemed. I do not blame them though because the events of the recent past have blown the lid off their collective enslavement of all us"

"Including our generation?" The elder asked.

"Yes, our father", he replied, "We are moving forward. This has robbed them of some means of livelihood. Only a few of them are hardworking enough to eke out a decent living. So, their source of easy and regular livelihood has been jeopardized by the good achievement of our daughter, Adotse. That is the crux of the matter. Our father, we need your intervention. (p.85).

Indeed the price of freedom is great. Few in every generation find the journey of freeing others interesting, hence we salute Adotse and her kind. Masagbor sums up society's ingratitude to our social crusaders in the following words.

'Our father, may you live long to transform our society to a better place. The first act of ingratitude committed against her was the kidnap by agents of the priests. They bound her hands and feet and meant to kill her. Only divine intervention and the old age grade saved her. The last straw that broke the camels back is the bogus divination ordering her death to purge and heal ;the society of pestilence'.

The old man was so shocked that he was literally shaking. He kept exclaiming, 'my God! Our ancestors!'" (p 84-85).

The old man was shocked beyond measure. He could not hide his feelings. He was not ashamed to say that "the events of the recent past have blown the lid of their collective enslavement of all us". (p85). This is because all over the world, while about 98% of the people follow the culture in vogue, only about 2% shape it. This situation is very bad. Hagher (2002) citing Nyerere, states that "the present condition of men must be unacceptable to all who think of an individual as a unique creation of God". (p150). This is true. This is why Adotse is a symbol of the audacity to say no.

CONCLUSION

Masagbor's *Labyrinths of a Beauty* is in deed an exploration of the vagaries of life. The author explores the deceptive nature of man stating that those in the cult of power deliberately build myths around their persons and office in order to perpetually enslave

the body and soul of fellow men. This is what happened in *Labyrinths*. The people were enslaved until, Adotse, the icon of redemption or freedom, came and gave their lives a meaning. In Semiotic and functional cognitive linguistics, iconicity is seen as the analogy or similarity between a form of a sign and its meaning. Viewed from this perspective, therefore, Adotse, Masagbor's principal character in *Labyrinths* is an icon of hope, courage, being consistent and consistent and purity. She is the "correspondence between the form and meaning of these virtues," <http://www.Webster.com>.

In conclusion, therefore, I wish to state that though this paper centres on Adotse, the who is an icon, heroine, the whole scenario is iconic in that kind of society. The myth, the resistance to change, the consistent and persistent call for, and pursuit for change are iconic in themselves. Indeed, Masagbor's *Labyrinths of a Beauty* is an attempt to conscientise and sensitise the people to be masters of their destiny, rather than allow "imbeciles" to keep them in perennial servitude in the name of governance, religion or cult of power. It is a call to arms, the arms of wits to change that which is dangerous to our collective well being. Adotse, and the entire scenario are iconic.

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