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The Faces of Janus: Issues of Justice in Wumi Raji's *Another Life* and Julie Okoh's *A Haunting Past*

Abstract: The focus of this article is on the question of social justice in contemporary Nigeria as depicted in Wumi Raji's *Another Life* and Julie Okoh's *A Haunting Past*. Using analogies to the Roman god, Janus and John Rawls's assertions on the concept of justice as the basis for analysis, the article evaluates the nature of justice in Nigerian society: the operations of the legal system, the role of law enforcement agents, crime and punishment, and the application of justice in the Nigerian electoral process, as these issues are presented in the plays. Both plays rely heavily on irony to illustrate that in Nigeria, the application of law is arbitrary; and that oppression and violence are integral parts of politics and governance. The article further argues that, like Janus, the Roman god, the concept of justice in contemporary Nigerian society, and by extension, African societies, is two-faced; it can be good or ugly depending on which side an individual finds himself/herself at any point in time. The article shows that the same social institutions and persons entrusted to uphold justice are those who perpetrate forms of injustice. Ironically, in Nigeria, and as the two playwrights seem to suggest, justice and injustice are the same god, wearing different faces at different times.

Keywords: justice, injustice, law and Nigerian society

1. Introduction

Wumi Raji's *Another Life* (2013) and Julie Okoh's *A Haunting Past* (2010) raise direct questions on the concept and application of justice, the role of the state in maintaining a just society, and the application of justice in Nigerian societal governance and political processes. Raji's *Another Life* (*AL*) revolves around Bundu, a talented young journalist, who is framed for murder and falsely implicated in criminal acts. Significant about Bundu's travails is that he is a victim of agents of government who use political offices to settle personal scores. Chief Kuye, the president's Chief security officer, manipulates the courts to have Bundu hanged

because Bundu is involved with his daughter and because he hates journalists with intensity due to the fact that “his cupboard is stuffed full with skeletons” (*AL* 25). In Okoh’s *A Haunting Past* (*AHP*), high ranking government officials use the machinery of government to oppress honest, hardworking political aspirants, and install unsuitable candidates into positions of power. Mr. Beberu is an aspiring gubernatorial candidate of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Beberu is forced to step down in favour of another candidate because Great Dada, the president of the country, has chosen to make his in-law governor on the platform of the popular National Democratic Party in spite of the fact that the candidate is unknown to people and did not campaign for the position (35). So, obeying Great Dada’s inflexible instructions, the party presents a new candidate for governorship eight hours before the elections. The situations in *AL* and *AHP* point to the existence of institutional (formal) injustice in Nigerian political life; ironical scenarios in which several forms of injustice are perpetrated by the instituted custodians of justice.

Using analogies to the Roman god, Janus and John Rawls’s assertions on the concept of justice as the basis of analysis, this article examines the application of justice in the plays: the nature of crime and punishment, and the role of law enforcement agents and the machinery of institutional government offices. The article demonstrates that oppression and violence are forms of injustice prevalent in contemporary Nigerian society; that in the contemporary Nigerian society depicted in the plays, the concept of justice is arbitrary, paradoxical and ironical. It highlights Raji and Okoh’s implied suggestion that justice continues to be political and elusive because individuals in society, both the victimised and particularly those entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring justice, are compromised in different ways, making it difficult to obtain or fight for justice. Raji’s play suggests that resistance is the solution to situations of social injustice. This article draws parallels between the paradoxical nature of government — representing justice — in the plays and the nature of Janus, the Roman god with two faces, ugly and beautiful, depending on which side he turns towards you. It contrasts the implications of Janus-like attitudes in the application of justice with the implications of Rawls’ assertions on justice.

The Roman god, Janus, is said to have two faces, with one looking forward into the future and the other backward into the past. Interestingly, scholars often present these two faces as in opposition. Sometimes, one face is bearded and the other clean shaven; sometimes, one is handsome and appealing while the other is ugly and repulsive. When/where Janus turns his good face, he showers favours and when/where he presents the ugly face, he administers cruelty. Important to this essay is the recognition that Janus is fundamentally two-faced, contradictory and oppositional. This is much the same situation as in the two plays utilised in this article. The agency of government presented in *AL* and *AHP* operates in the manner of Janus.

In contrast to the arbitrary nature of Janus, Rawls conceives of justice as ‘fairness,’ the ideal situation where an initial position of equality should define

the fundamental terms of all social relations (10). According to Rawls, the first principle of justice is that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others” (53). Rawls’s term, ‘extensive scheme of equal basic liberties’ may be subject to varied interpretations, but what is important is that justice in any given situation expresses equality. He maintains that the terms apply primarily “to the basic structure of society” and govern the assignment of rights and duties as well as social and economic advantages (53). He explains that basic liberties include:

Political liberty (the right to vote and hold public office) and freedom of speech and assembly; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; ... freedom from psychological oppression and physical assault and dismemberment (integrity of the person); the right to hold personal property and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure as defined by the concept of the rule of law. (53)

These descriptions of basic liberties may more simply be summarised as social justice, defined by David and Julia Jary as the principle of “social fairness” tailored toward the principles of justice, which consists of the recognition and protection of individual and social rights (345). Rawls’s assertions indicate that social justice cannot be provided in abstraction or outside the rule of law. In essence, social justice is dependent on formal justice. Rawls maintains that formal justice is:

[The] impartial and consistent administration of laws and institutions, whatever their substantive principle ... Formal justice excludes significant kinds of injustices [and]... it is of great importance that the authorities should be impartial and not influenced by personal, monetary, or other irrelevant considerations in their handling of particular cases... Formal justice in the case of legal institutions ... supports and secures legitimate expectations. One kind of injustice is the failure of judges and others in authority to adhere to the appropriate rules or interpretations thereof in deciding claims. (51)

Rawls’s assertions clearly proceed from the assumption that institutions are reasonably just in nature. Pertinently, these institutions represent the state; it therefore means that the state has an integral role in maintaining a just society.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian society depicted in *AL* and *AHP* is one in which the attainment of social justice is constrained by many factors: malfunctioning institutions, docile parliaments and compromised judiciaries. These issues are exacerbated by limited democratic practices, tame and misinformed citizens who are further constrained by financial limitations and citizens who are rendered voiceless by moral and ethical misconduct. The situation may be summarised as the absence or the breakdown of formal justice. When formal justice breaks down, formal injustice takes over and the state becomes like Janus, the two faced God — the perpetrator of both justice and injustice. As Raji and Okoh represent and interpret varied unacceptable situations, they protest the injustices prevalent in Nigerian formal institutions and governance, as well as the complicity of the citizens in the shaping of social injustice. As Chinyere Nwahunanya points out in reference to war literature:

In the process of mirroring society and criticizing its pitfalls, the war literature also serves as a compass for social re-direction. A didactic function emerges in the process... The suggested mistakes of the war initiators and administrators portrayed in these writings thus become invaluable guides to meaningful national growth and a stable and progressive society. (14)

This assertion is also true of Raji and Okoh's *AL* and *AHP*.

AL and *AHP* are relatively recent play texts which are yet to receive significant exposure and critical attention. However, there is ample evidence in Nigerian literature demonstrating that the quest for justice provides fertile ground from which Nigerian playwrights continue to harvest material for literary creativity. Evaluating Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground*, Gbemisola Adeoti, summarises the situation Yerima depicts. He notes that with the discovery of oil in 1956, the Niger Delta has had to grapple with the reality of environmental degradation, dispossession of land for living and agriculture, water pollution through oil spillage, youth restiveness and more. Adeoti maintains that even Yerima's gruesome presentations of violence does not "properly apprehend the centrality of the government's role... in the precipitation and by extension, resolution of the crises... The failure of the state in the discharge of its social responsibilities to the citizens accounts largely for the spate of violence being experienced in the area" (25). In a nutshell, Yerima's *Hard Ground* presents the consequences of the government's injustice to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Tunde Fatunde's *No Food, No Country* presents a miscarriage of justice in which the leaders of the society, in a forceful bid to confiscate land belonging to farmers, order the wanton killing of the farmers who resist this move. Ex-Brigadier Owoboriomo seeks a large expanse of land for use by a foreign company who will pay handsomely for the land they acquire. He consults with Imam Tahir, the head of Bakolori mosque, and the prince and they take the deal to the Emir. The Emir, who intends to keep to himself the money paid for the lands by Fiato-Impresito, the foreign company, orders the farmers to surrender their lands promptly. Unfortunately and unjustly, the land policy in Bakolori cites the Emir as the overall owner of all lands, who reserves the right to take or use whatever part he chooses at any point in time. Fatunde rightly states, "the kind of land policy portrayed in the play will definitely lead to people's resistance... and resistance will eventually lead to the complete liberation of our country from the wicked hands of both local and foreign enemies..." (Author's Notes, 277). Notably, leaders of the society, custodians of the law, and those in positions of authority are the ones who perpetrate injustice on the masses. Fatunde's authorial stance definitely advocates revolt as the solution to injustice, thus his oppressed characters revolt to force the advent of change.

Yerima's *Hard Ground*, Fatunde's *No Food, No Country*, Raji's *Another Life* and Okoh's *A Haunting Past* confirm that Nigerian dramatists have continued to search for solutions to issues pertaining to justice in Nigerian society. Remarkably, depictions in the plays also illustrate that social justice continues to be elusive in Nigerian society because government and agencies entrusted to ascribe and ensure

social justice often violate the laws they make and act contrary to the tenets they are supposed to uphold. Thus, Fatunde, Yerima, Raji and Okoh confirm that the question of justice or injustice in the Nigerian societies in which they set their works emerge from the same source, like the contrasting faces of the Roman god, Janus.

2. The Faces of Janus in *Another Life*

In *AL*, Bundu, the young journalist and magazine editor, finds himself in trouble for publishing information that indicts the government. In the course of an argument about it, he gets into a physical struggle that accidentally leads to the death of his deputy editor. Consequently, he is remanded in police custody awaiting the outcome of his trial. The incident provides a good opportunity for Chief Kuye, the president's Chief security adviser, to punish the journalist for transgressions against the government and for dating his daughter, much against her father's wishes. What Chief Kuye then does is arrange to have the courts find Bundu guilty and have him hanged. Fortunately for Bundu, his guard in the police cell is a 'subversive' corporal, Bwam, who has reasons to hate the government. Bwam gives Bundu information about "behind-the-scene manoeuvres, all the scandalous stories being peddled against [Bundu] ... all the plots and details of proceedings" (22). Bundu reports later: "The night before the final judgment was given, "he [Bwam] carelessly" left my cell unlocked ... and I escaped" (22). Bundu breaks jail to save his life.

The reader is aware of the blatant abuse of power and the innate irony of the situation; Bundu needs to save his life from those entrusted to protect it. Chief Kuye uses his position to arrange the death of an innocent young man on behalf of government and to settle personal scores. Raji satirises Chief Kuye as security adviser. Tongue in cheek, Raji reveals that indeed part of Kuye's job as security adviser seems to be to mastermind the death of anyone opposing or inconveniencing the government. Eliminating opposition and opponents is clearly the government's quickest method and only response to "fix bad business." The sense of insecurity is such that government agents will also "fix" any one of their own officials who defects or whose views become inconvenient for the government. Hence, Chief Kuye also arranges to "fix" Suntai the female police officer who has become an embarrassment to the government. Suntai, is like Bwam, a police officer who has grievances against the government. She has a university degree that the government refuses to recognise because it would mean promoting her and paying her a great deal more than she earns presently. Initially, she is one of the officers assigned to handle Bundu's case, until the authorities realise that she will not be party to their arrangements and manoeuvres. Although she is competent to handle Bundu's case, Chief Kuye recognises that such people who are not loyal to the government should not be privy to government secrets or trusted to cover the government's misdeeds. For this reason, Suntai should not have been involved in "such a sensitive

assignment” (43). Thus, Suntai’s anti-government sentiments and knowledge of government secrets pose threats which the government needs to “fix”, but they realise that putting Suntai up for trial might have unanticipated consequences. Chief Kuye admits: “So we thought the way to go is to quietly fix her. It was also thought to take care of Bundu and explain both deaths as having been due to cross fire. Both of them escaped, and now we are in a terrible situation” (39).

Apart from the outrage of eliminating people at will, which violates the basic human right to life, murder is a criminal offence everywhere in the world, but ironically, the same government which assigns punishment for this offence is guilty of it. More importantly, using government machinery to “fix” government issues and personal inconvenience violates the ideals of “equal basic liberties.” That the courts can be manipulated to pronounce a death sentence — the worst kind of injustice — is evidence of deeply entrenched judicial corruption. As Rawls states, it is injustice for judges and others in authority not to adhere to appropriate rules of interpretation and deciding claims (51). Ironically, the court — the judicial arm of government — entrusted with providing social justice and redress is the same institution appropriated as the machinery for perpetrating injustice. The government in *AL* acts in ways similar to the two-faced Janus.

Raji presents the abuse of government power as institutionalised in *Another life*. He recounts how a former Minister of Defence, Ralph Orojo, used his position as minister to settle a communal feud between his Meleke ethnic community and the neighbouring Tudor. Orojo “unleashed the terror of the soldiers on the Tudor five years ago...” (52), taking lives randomly and literally destroying the entire village. Ironically and paradoxically, Chief Kuye recognises his manipulations and Orojo’s conduct as unjust, and that people affected in wanton displays of injustice react in different ways (51). Fortunately for Bundu, the officer charged to oversee his detention is a Tudor with deep seated grievances against the government. Bwam had lost his baby and mother in the Minister’s assault on his village, and his wife and father were subjected to physical violence in the same operation. Raji skillfully introduces this unforeseen complication in human existence as a contemporary ‘deus ex machina’ to save Bundu from death. He carefully motivates his readers to detest and resist the situation in which government officials exploit their positions to terrorise and even kill the very people they are paid to protect.

Raji also depicts the use of propaganda and deceit as major forms of the government’s injustice against her citizens. The government deliberately spreads false information about Bundu to prejudice the people against him. It alleges that Bundu has killed two other people in his brief period of incarceration as he waits for the court verdict. They frame Bundu for the death of a female police officer who is alive. The government arranges for all the newspapers to carry the story of the lady detective, Suntai, supposedly shot dead by Bundu. In reality, Suntai is not dead, but in hiding from her police colleagues who want her dead. The police shot an innocent young woman who they had mistaken for Suntai. Government sponsored

propaganda ascribes all kinds of feats to Bundu: that he had the power to disappear, cast a spell on policemen, kill with his bare hands and more. The government deliberately creates the image of a hard core, supernatural criminal that society needs to be rid of in order to make it easy to sentence him to death and make the verdict acceptable to the people.

Another area of the play's irony is its treatment of journalists, who are supposed to make the truth known and act as the eye of the people, but who become willing tools deployed by the government to perpetrate acts of oppression. Bundu's colleagues do not even attempt to investigate the allegations against him, implying that they have either been bought over by government agents or are in one way or another compromised, making it impossible for them to question the government or raise a protest for fear of reprisal. Being compromised also means that they can be instructed to supply the populace with information falsified to put a good face on the government's illegal activities and they are obliged to comply. They become tools of formalised injustice. In addition, a colleague, the deputy editor, acting out of envy, lies about Bundu to make him appear guilty. A society of highly placed liars and schemers cannot be expected to apply the principles of justice in the administration of social systems.

Implicated in the scenarios Raji depicts is the fundamental irony in Rawls's idea that the attainment of social justice is dependent on the effective application of formal justice. Raji's play indicates that laws and prescriptions exist in abundance, but are most often cosmetic. For example, the law assumes one to be innocent until the courts prove him/her guilty of a crime, but before the court verdict Chief Kuye decides: "...the truth is that Bundu is guilty of murder and is going to be brought to justice for it" (42). Interestingly, Chief Kuye's wife is the voice of reason.

MRS KUYE: If the matter is that straight forward, why then has it been difficult for people to believe it... Why wasn't Bundu arraigned openly, tried openly? A transparent trial would have cleared all the doubts, where evidences are adduced and tendered openly, witnesses called and the accused allowed to defend himself. There is some secrecy about this matter, and this, may be, is what has caused the complications... What exactly did you mean when you asked the police to *take care* of her? She is a trained police officer: why shouldn't she be involved in a case she's perfectly competent to handle? An innocent woman, visiting her people was shot dead? How come the story in the press said it was Suntai that has been shot... ? (42-43)

Mrs Kuye obviously has an intellectual mind and an inquisitive spirit, attributes which enable her to identify anomalies, ask questions, and makes it impossible for others to deceive her. Unfortunately, Chief Kuye, in a bid to keep the government's "bad business" hidden, remains convinced without evidence that Bundu is "that ugly creature, that criminal" (45). Raji prompts his audience to wonder how many others in the same context have been framed, falsely imprisoned and killed for crimes they did not commit, or even know about, at the instance of some high ranking person or agent of government.

Another irony is that in the past, Chief Kuye had tried without success to offer Bundu bribes to withhold the truth from the public. He admits: “Bundu tormented everybody throughout his period of editorship of that newspaper. And there is nothing we didn’t do to get him to come down from his high horse. We sent people to him, made him offers...” (51). Clearly, Bundu’s real problem is that he is not amenable to manipulation from high offices and he is resistant to bribes. In addition, he, “an implacable opponent of the government” (50), is dating the daughter of the government’s top official, a double situation of enmity. This effrontery on Bundu’s part is, in Chief’s view, worse than any criminal offence, so Chief, who is accustomed to fixing “bad business” and thereafter putting up a good public façade, will “fix” this problem too. However, Bundu is difficult to fix. Even as a fugitive in hiding, he retains a fiercely stubborn spirit which cannot be broken by adversity. He vows:

I won’t surrender. Never. Like Macbeth, I’ve been tied to a stake. I cannot run. I can’t fly either. But like a bear, I fight on... [With] Anything. Stones, sticks, bottles, sand — anything. They come and I swing into action. They shoot me and I die. But nobody will capture me alive... I will fight till death... (23)

Raji implies that Bundu’s militant resistance is the only way to deal with or prevent social injustice. Fortunately, Chief Kuye does not always succeed in getting things “fixed.” All his attempts to “fix” Bundu fail. He also tries unsuccessfully to “fix” a marriage between his daughter and a medical doctor from another prominent family.

AL is predicated on irony. Chief Kuye lists the security challenges of the country: “Armed militants in the Niger Delta killing innocent citizens, vandalizing pipelines, kidnapping oil workers, politicians, prominent people; a fundamentalist sect continues to terrorise people in the North, demanding a religious state; ethnic conflicts in the middle belt...” (50). What is remarkable about these crimes is that government accuses others of them, and metes out punishment for the same crimes they are guilty of perpetrating. Yet people rely on the government to get redress when they are afflicted with some of these offences. Criminal offences have prescribed punishments in laws made by government, but who will punish the government when it acts as the criminal? Paradoxically, the government is both the law maker and the criminal, a Janus with two faces.

Raji’s depictions consistently find the state/government guilty of injustice to her citizens. The subversive female police officer, Suntai, does not get justice at work. She holds a degree, but the government refuses to recognise the value of her education and continues to pay her less than she deserves. Unfortunately, Suntai is not the only one aggrieved with the government’s misdeeds and the social situation. Chief Kuye effectively summarises the general disaffection with the government:

It’s so, so, complicated. Like Bwam, countless people nurse deep pains, bear serious grudges against the system. ...the farmer in the Niger delta whose crops were destroyed by oil spills

[environmental degradation], the man whose family was wiped out when the church in which they worshipped was bombed [insecurity], the Karu whose house was razed when the dominant Marara invaded his village, the university lecturer [whose] appointment was terminated because of the role he played in an industrial action... I can go on and on... You just can't exhaust the list of grievances. They are multifarious — political, social, religious, professional, ethnic... Almost everybody you meet has one reason or the other to be embittered [against the government]. Fresh graduates complain of lack of jobs... (52–53)

Kuye's statement indicates that the government, characterised as the two-faced Janus, turns the evil side of its face to her citizens most of the time.

Raji obviously keeps a watchful eye on issues of justice in Nigeria. His purpose in *AL* is clearly to awaken a consciousness and incite a spirit of resistance to injustice, which is more useful in contemporary society than Aristotle's supine catharsis. Raji's fight against injustice is vehement, demanding redress for a number of issues: the practice of false accusations, violence, intimidation, dishonest propaganda, misuse of government power and machinery, a compromised judiciary, corruption, doctored media news and class consciousness. His authorial tone reminds us of Marshall in Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun*, who insists: "Let all prisons fall!" (77). *AL* prods all the social vices which imprison the appropriate application of justice to collapse.

3. Politics and Governance in *A Haunting Past*

Okoh's play represents a variant, more or less, of the situation depicted in Raji's text. In *AHP*, Great Dada uses the power of his office as president to force Mr. Beberu to withdraw from the gubernatorial race just eight hours before the primaries, only to install his in-law as governor. It is no concern of Great Dada that Mr. Beberu has expended tremendous physical, mental, and financial resources on the campaigns, and that the man and his team have, for months, gone round every nook and cranny of the state familiarising themselves with the people, canvassing for their votes and struggling generally to win their support. The masses enthusiastically support and adopt Mr. Beberu, to the extent that they even make donations to the party. Then without notice or any understandable reason, Dada drops the bombshell ordering Beberu to step down. The inflexibility of this order confirms the absolute power the president wields. Great Dada does not care that he has mercilessly trampled on a man's right to participate freely in electoral politics, thereby inflicting injustice on him, and violating Mr. Beberu's right to vote and to hold public office. What is more, Great Dada does not care if, as is the case, the imposition of a stranger on the party and the masses is not agreeable to them. The people's displeasure with Dada's imposition of a stranger is evident in their reaction:

CHIEF: ... They have killed us.

MANAGER: Mercilessly.

PRO: The whole state is in grief. The streets are dry, market square empty, barber's shops vacated. Drinking parlours are firmly closed...Everywhere is silent as a graveyard. (10)

Ignoring the fact that Mr. Beberu is the most popular of all the candidates, and that the people are going to feel devastated, Great Dada disregards and discards the wishes of his citizens. This act amounts to a merciless dashing of the hopes and aspirations of the people, and is as painful as the physical death of a beloved person. The situation is such that formal justice can be described as being non-existent. The masses are therefore subjected to arbitrary treatment and, more often than not, downright injustice. Like in *AL*, the government and agencies of the state act simultaneously in two contradictory capacities, meting out both justice and injustice at their whims.

The situation is a tragedy characterised by the Aristotelian concept of magnitude/verisimilitude, going beyond the personal aspirations of one man to a communal affliction. As is indicated in *Another Life*, social justice is difficult in the absence of formal justice. The president of the country, constitutionally entrusted with the well-being of the people, is the same person who violates constitutional procedures of conducting elections. Dada's actions confirm the larger than life stature of presidential power in the country. Okoh characterises Great Dada as a megalomaniac insulated from the needs of the people in his care by his own power. The government and its agencies are the equivalent of gods, bestowing favours and punishment arbitrarily — a two-faced Janus.

Raji and Okoh expose social injustice(s) in condemnatory tones, but a major difference between the playwrights emerges in the reactions of their protagonists and characters to injustice. Okoh's protagonist and characters react by withdrawing silently. Manager states: "Anger, rumbling in their stomach, the people nurse their wounded spirit behind closed doors" (10). The Finance Officer (FO) observes: "Since then, the boss has been sick. He doesn't want to see anybody. He doesn't want to talk to anybody"(44). Mr. Beberu takes to his bed, made physically ill from trauma. These reactions indicate the psychological turmoil that individuals and the society undergo as a result of this injustice. Their reaction is internalised and passive, similar to the Aristotelian cathartic effect of great tragedies. Okoh's attitude to gory injustice is condemnatory, but does not offer decisive or well defined solutions to the problem. In contrast, Raji's *AL* reminds one of Peter Brook's description of the rough theatre: "Lightheartedness and gaiety feed it, but so does the same energy that produces rebellion and opposition... [It embodies] the energy of anger, sometimes the energy of hate, the creative energy [that] could go straight to war" (79). Thus Raji characterises his protagonist with militant energy to resist oppression and injustice very fiercely. A clear message from Raji's play is the need to challenge injustice actively and confront the sources of injustice head on.

Great Dada and his government orchestrate all manners of injustice against the citizens and also act criminally. For instance, the order that Beberu should step

down is accompanied by a serious threat. Godfather, who delivers the ‘step down’ order from Great Dada, reminds Beberu of the dire consequences of not complying with Great Dada’s orders.

GODFATHER: What are you going to do, Son? Step down quietly or go to jail, dragging all of us along with you, in mud?... Face reality as you see it.” (40)

Blackmail is a criminal act and Mr. Beberu is blackmailed by the party acting on Great Dada’s instruction. The agencies of government are aware that Beberu had some corrupt dealings while he was in office, but they keep quiet, biding their time. They do not arrest or prosecute him for fraud; instead, they bring up the issue and consequences at this crucial time, thereby blackmailing him into submitting to their demands. If he disobeys Dada’s instruction to step down, he will go to jail. Yet, a government is expected to punish those who commit blackmail.

Mr. Beberu is not only forced to step down, he is blackmailed into accepting the new candidate and publicly declaring support for him. In addition, Great Dada asks Mr. Beberu to support and accompany his rival publicly. Thus Beberu, with a forced smile hovering on his face (43), and Robnus ride round the stadium in an open vehicle, waving to the crowd in a parody of comradeship, suggesting that Beberu has willingly stepped down in recognition of a better candidate. But, Beberu and his wife understand that defying Great Dada could cost him his life. Mrs. Beberu expresses fear for her husband’s life as she recalls Great Dada’s statement:

He said: “winning this election is a do-or-die affair!” So, I am afraid. If you fail to help, he will not let you go scot-free. Remember what happened to Aloba Egi, to Zanza of Megara and a host of others. They were all eliminated for stepping on Great Dada’s big toe. So, we must not aggravate him or give him any reason to doubt our loyalty. But like the tortoise, we shall look for a way to protect our lives without attracting his attention. (58)

Similar to government actions in *AL*, Great Dada acts as a despot who eliminates his citizens for non-compliance with any of his whims. The government in both plays can be described as contemporary replicas of Kongi in Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest*. Okoh illustrates that the same government who ascribes and executes punishment for murder commits it wantonly and without repercussions.

The play is replete with situations showing that the president and the agencies of government dispense more injustice than justice. The playwright exposes the manner in which the president manipulates the citizens in the manner of a man playing chess with human lives. His altercation with the third gubernatorial candidate is illustrative. Great Dada encouraged the man to run for governorship on the party platform. Confident that he had the backing of Great Dada, the man pasted his posters everywhere and expended a lot of money, but a few weeks before the primaries, Dada publicly withdrew his support, forcing the man to realise that Dada had, all along, only been paying him lip service (18). Beberu’s chief campaign strategist laughs as he comments on Great Dada’s character: “Not even a chameleon can rival him in fickleness” and the Manager has not heard of anyone

as erratic as Dada is (18). In addition to withdrawing his backing, he sets up FEDECO, the country's electoral body, to issue the man a fake party card, and then turn round to accuse him of using a fake registration card, all in order to disqualify him. FEDECO, entrusted with the job of conducting free and fair elections, is manipulated to dispense injustice. The operation of FEDECO, like the courts, is expected to be neutral and non-partisan, but, on the president's instructions, it connives with the party to issue a fake party card and then go on to declare the card fake. Ironically, FEDECO frames a candidate for fraud and would not have hesitated to prosecute and find him guilty if he had not backed out of the elections, indicating that corruption has taken root in all arms of government. This electoral incident is analogous to the one in *AL* when the police mistakenly kill an innocent woman, deliberately misidentify her, and then turn around to accuse Bundu of being the killer. In the plays, justice and injustice arise from the same source — the government, which acts like the two-faced Janus.

In addition, Okoh's drama invites her audience to evaluate the influence of individuals and organisations affiliated to holders of political office, particularly the position of the First Lady of the state or the country. Okoh deploys the play within a play to satirise the office of the First Lady. The PRO and MANAGER re-enact Mrs Beberu's interview with a pressman before Dada's unexpected intervention thwarts their political plan.

PRO: Excuse me, Madam!

MANAGER: Is that how you address the First Lady of the state?

PRO: Oh, pardon me, Her Excellency.

MANAGER: What can I do for you?

PRO: What are your plans for the women of this state, when your husband becomes the State Governor?

MANAGER: First of all, we shall order wrapper materials with the portrait of His Excellency printed on them. Then we shall distribute them to all our supporters.

PRO: Is that your priority?

MANAGER: Is that not good enough? I mean anytime they put on the material, everybody around will remember who the State Governor is. That means my husband, of course. This is our time...

(They request to take her picture and she agrees)...

You better let the picture be good so that the people can easily recognize their First Lady. Understand! (22)

Clearly, Mrs. Beberu is not interested in the service that the position entails or even in the needs of other women. She is only interested in being popular and easily recognisable to the public. The playwright implies a parallel between Mrs. Beberu's shallowness and the lack of vision of aspiring politicians who are only interested in the glory and glamour of public office. The audience is urged to wonder if her husband really seeks to serve the state or just to acquire power that will enable him to turn into the state equivalent of Great Dada.

Ironically, Okoh, a well-known champion of the cause of women in her plays, characterises Mrs. Beberu with this frivolous attitude, while Raji ascribes reason and integrity to Mrs. Kuye; she relentlessly questions issues and stories that do not make logical sense and she tries to prod Chief Kuye's into appropriate conduct. She keeps asking: "But what exactly is the truth of... Mayekogbon's death and Bundu's involvement?... I have a right to ask questions, to know clearly what the issues are" (42–43). Also, she is not afraid to give her opinion on issues even when her opinions are not agreeable to Chief Kuye. In spite of all his explanations, Mrs. Kuye is firm when she tells her husband:

Yet, I cannot but feel that the steps that you have continued to take since then have only served to lead us into greater scandal... What I suspect though is that the deep wound you nurse [against Bundu] has made you to embark on a course of vengeance, and this now is to the extent that what purely should have been a family crisis is now being loaded unto the national page... I think you should have left Bundu alone. (46–47)

Bundu's girlfriend, Ramou, is also a decisive character. Like her mother, Mrs. Kuye, Ramou is characterised with an intellectual, independent and questioning mind. She defies her parent's efforts to marry her off to the illustrious son of another wealthy family. She realises that marriage to a rich surgeon would guarantee a comfortable life, but, Ramou resolutely takes sides with Bundu, opting for what she believes in. Notably, she is also able to oppose Bundu when she believes he is acting inappropriately, hence she admonishes him for spitting in the deputy editor's face: "That was wrong Bundu, it was primitive (20). Raji places Mrs. Kuye, Ramou and the female police officer who cannot be intimidated in positions in which the reader must respect them. Okoh is not as charitable to her female characters. Mrs. Beberu is frivolous and the second female character in *AHP* is an inconsequential waitress whose presence in the play contributes nothing significant.

AHP also make a statement on human nature and the nature of public politics in Nigeria. From Mr. Beberu's conversation with Uncle, we learn that Great Dada was of very humble beginnings. Uncle remembers:

Do you know that there was a time when he was in abject poverty? His former friends and colleagues came together to bail him out. When he was going into politics, we gathered the money to pay for his registration card. We gave him money to campaign. Then, he was very meek and humble like a lamb. We thought, with his past, hard experience leading to his exile, he was the ideal man to give birth to the democracy that is much needed in this country. Who knew he would turn out to be a tyrant? (65)

Uncle and Beberu agree that they all gave Great Dada too much power and now he has become powerful and fearful, using his power to intimidate and oppress everyone within his reach. Mr. Beberu cites Shakespeare, who once said that it is in the nature of man to climb up the ladder of success and then attempt to destroy the ladder with which he climbed to the top (65). This suggests that human nature is unpredictable, particularly in positions of power. As Okoh demonstrates in the

play, in Nigerian society, public politics and governance represents for most of its practitioners only the fastest way to acquire power and amass wealth.

AHP also addresses the danger of ethnic politics. Great Dada's in-law comes home to contest in his home state although he does not and has never lived with them. The reason is stated clearly:

You know very well that in this country, a child cannot claim his place of residence as his hometown, even if he was born and raised in that place. A child belongs to wherever his ancestors originated from, whether that child has ever stepped feet on that land or not. So, to seek political position, employment in government institutions, scholarship, or other things requiring formal identification, the individual must always go back to his ancestral hometown. It doesn't matter whether the people know him or not, he belongs to them, and they belong to him. (15)

This means that an individual who was born, raised, and has lived in a place for 30 to 50 years remains essentially a stranger as long as his ancestral roots cannot be traced to the place. The politics of ethnic divisions often produce situations of double displacement because individuals are rejected in their places of abode at essential times such as in competitive political or employment situations. Often and ironically, he is also regarded as a stranger in his ancestral place because he is not resident there and is, therefore, not abreast of the current social situation. This is the case when Great Dada imposes his in-law on the party, a double situation of displacement. The situation in Okoh's play exposes the serious and negative effects of ethnic politics. However, Okoh does not advance a solution, although the exposure of this anomaly leads to audience awareness, a consciousness of the problem, which is the first platform from which change can arise. The role of the state in promoting a just society also comes to the fore here. Great Dada's policies, political actions, and mediations promote ethnic divisions and injustice which may be favourable to a select few, but unjust to the majority. The ethnic situation depicted in *AHP* makes social justice elusive in the society, and confirms that indeed justice and injustice are domiciled in the same source.

Raji's *AL* and Okoh's *AHP* have a number of things in common. Both plays present government administrations in which the application of justice is crippled by corruption: the courts of justice and the electoral processes are falsified and manipulated by government(s), individuals are framed for crimes they did not commit, and governments wantonly eliminate those perceived as enemies. Paradoxically, governments who make laws and prescribe punishment are the criminals who violate the laws they make. Significantly, the plays highlight the indictment and complicity of individuals in the erosion of social justice and acceptance of injustice. *AHP* indicates that Mr. Beberu actually has intentions of serving the state well, and would prefer to resist the order to step down for Robnus, but, unfortunately, he cannot because he is guilty of fraud and is therefore vulnerable to blackmail. He is haunted by his past misdeeds. Journalists in *AL* have been heavily bribed so they are obliged to falsify and cover government misdeeds. Bundu can fight back because he is not compromised. This implies that one can only seek justice when

he/she has not been compromised, a reminder of the cliché that one must come to equity with clean hands.

4. Conclusion

Another Life and *A Haunting Past* present variants of situations which demonstrate that the state/government plays a central role in the shaping of social justice and injustice. The use of law enforcement agents to perpetrate varied forms of oppression; using the machinery of government offices to manipulate political processes, orchestrate murder and other criminal offences, as the plays depict, confirm that justice and injustice in contemporary Nigerian society is analogous to Janus - the Roman god with two contrasting faces. Raji and Okoh's depictions acknowledge that there are laws in abundance and social structures put in place, ostensibly to ensure the appropriate application of justice and distribution of amenities, but often times and ironically, these same structures are the avenues through which injustice is perpetrated. The plays demonstrate that social justice cannot be taken for granted, and is not inalienable as human right decrees claim. While the two plays conscientise the public and serve as a compass for redirection, Raji is emphatic that resistance, revolt, and activism in situations of injustice will provide solutions. He is clearly in agreement with Uwem Affiah who states that, "nowhere in the world have the forces of oppression [and injustice] been known to willingly set the oppressed free at any point in history. Protest, revolt and uprising seems to be the only means of effecting change and establishing a society where justice [and] fair play ... will prevail" (284).

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