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Protest against Military Regime in Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu*

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Abstract—This paper identifies some issues related to military regime in Nigeria and Wole Soyinka's protest against them, as dramatized in *King Baabu* (2001). Soyinka evokes his people to revolt against the antidemocratic tendencies and the manipulation of army leaders who attempt to control and contain the public through various means in order to remain in power. The paper discusses Soyinka's revolt and protest against the authoritative power which have become explicit, direct, and continuous as the only means to bring about a positive change and to curb the corruption of the military dictatorship or to make this phenomenon controllable. Protest has assisted Nigeria to turn to democracy after the death of Sani Abacha (b. 1943) in 1998, mainly because of the opposition activists and the protesting voices. Soyinka has emphasized that the end of a tyrant like *King Baabu* is miserable and disgusting, which is contrasted to the strength of the rebels, a message that Soyinka wants his audience to understand in order to establish civilian rule and democracy. The paper concludes on Soyinka's note of victory of the protesters against their tyrant, a revolutionary spirit to call people to bring back what belongs to them and drive away what threatens their peace.

Index Terms—protest, military rule, Nigeria, Wole Soyinka, *King Baabu*

I. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Politics has been a central theme in literature right from the Greek literature, through medieval age and up till modern times. It has been of great significance and occupied a central position in all forms of literary production. Writers cannot escape from the political, social and intellectual realities of their society. "A writer has no choice", Ngugi Wa Thiong'o wrote in his preface to *Writers in Politics*, "whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in society" (Thiong'o, 1981, p. xi). The writer must meet the challenge of his time and strive to tell the people the truth of the time, and reflect in his works the sense and spirit of the time that shaped his sensibility. He must give articulation to "a consciousness of his time that he shares with the group of which historical circumstances (class, period, perspective) makes him a part" (Said, 2002, pp. 42-3). As far as drama is concerned, political themes have attracted the attention of generations of dramatists. From Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* which was performed in Athens in 411 BC to Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* (1939), politics has been a major theme in many plays. Writers of the Third World are more influenced by politics because of several reasons. Therefore, when one studies a Third World writer, one must see him as a social being conditioned by the politico-economic circumstances of his times. Some critics have referred to what they call "the political dimension" in the literatures of the Third World. Fredric Jameson, for example, says that, "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (Jameson, 1986, p. 69) This is clearly found in the works of Soyinka which he used to voice his political and social views.

Protest is a kind of objection through action, words or texts to certain undesirable forces and practices that might be dominant or imposed on the public. Protest has been a common mean of opposition to inhumanities, injustices, inequality and indecent living. The purpose of protest is to reform the ills of any particular society because "it engages social issues immediate to the moment ... in order to reshape the audience's consciousness" (RUBIN-WILLS, 2005). Many protests have prevailed in many countries against tyranny, dictatorship and unjust political systems and tyrants especially in the Third world countries. Writers use their works as a platform for political protest. In addition to many Nigerian and African writers, Wole Soyinka has written a huge bulk of protest dramas such as *Madmen and Specialists* (1970), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *Opera Wonyosi* (1977), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996), and recently *King Baabu* (2001). Soyinka is a political activist and an ardent writer who has led many protest campaigns against colonial powers and the African and Nigerian military dictators. He has been against the abuse of power and corrupt political regimes which caused havoc to the Nigerian society. Through his writings, he tried to incite his people to question the prevailing issues in his country in order to unite them against their common cause. It

is true that “there is no power without potential refusal or revolt” (Death, 2010, p. 238). But to what extent can refusal and revolt be effective to produce profitable results? The answer to this question and other related issues will be elaborated below.

Many totalitarian regimes use many tricks to repress the opposing voices. Yet, those regimes do not last for long and collapse at the end as dramatized in *King Baabu*. Abacha, the recent Nigerian military dictator, whom Soyinka criticizes in the play is an example. He exercised power on his nation, tortured human right activists, exiled and sentenced active writers to death, as stated in Soyinka’s famous works:

Soyinka was able to skip the country, and he further infuriated Abacha with essay *The open Sore of a Continent: A personal narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996) and the play *The Beatification of the Area Boy* (1996), an enactment of Abacha’s bloody slum clearance operation in Lagos. He added to his anti-Abacha repertoire the play *King Baabu* (2000), also a satire on the dictator’s ignominious rule. The grotesquely inhuman General Basha Bash of Guatu seizes power in a coup and gives himself the title King Baabu (Owomoyela, 2008, pp. 167-68)

Soyinka has been unhappy with Nigeria after independence because of its African leaders who are supposed to help their nations overcome the evils of colonialism and contribute to their present malaise (Owomoyela, 2008, p. 169). In a meeting with African leaders in Britain, Soyinka says more on this crucial issue by which he encourages his nation to fight and to be aware of:

It was clear they were more concerned with the mechanisms for stepping into the shoes of the departing colonial masters, enjoying the same privileges, inserting themselves in that axial position toward the rest of the community. I saw the most naked and brutal signs of alienation of the ruler from the ruled, from the very first crop. And I realized the enemy within was going to be far more problematic than the external, easily recognized enemy. (Jaggi, 94/95, p. 55)

The ‘recognized enemy’ of the people according to Soyinka are the military generals who have caused a halt to Nigeria in all levels and have increased the gap between the ruler and the ruled, between democracy and dictatorship. Abuses of power and corruption have become so common for many decades. Majority of military generals have not stood a trial for their tyranny, corruption or abuse of power in some African countries. If a trial takes place against any military tyrant, he is acquitted either due to lack of evidence or any other reasons. Nigeria has witnessed many human rights violations by military rulers, but no one of them is convicted or found guilty. Abacha, the last military tyrant, was supposed to stand a trial for killing innocent people, but he was declared dead of natural causes, probably of a heart attack.

Many civilian and military leaders have ruled Nigeria alternatively till the reign of Sani Abacha. This demonstrates that the Nigerian nation has attempted several times to establish a democratic state based on equality and social justice. Unlike many African countries where the military rule has continued for a long time, Nigeria has managed to turn to democracy in 1999 after several military coups. The reason could be attributed to such great writers and humanists such as Soyinka, who exerted their efforts to weaken, reduce and, if possible, eliminate the power of authoritative regimes. Soyinka protests against the evils of power and its immediate effect on different walks of life. He has been committed to promote democracy by opposing the military regime. He has always been in trouble and has been exiled for many years. It is only when Nigeria turns to democracy after the death of Sani Abacha in 1998; Soyinka is back again to his homeland. The opposition activists and the protest voices have succeeded to keep the civilian rule for at least a decade till this moment.

William Over also points out some of the human rights violations, during the reign of Abacha, when “the Ogoni Nine, including Ken Saro Wiwa, were publically hanged before the world media” (2010, p. 174). This action has been taken to hold back the activists and crush the massive demonstrations organized against the government. Seldak also shows how activists and political writers react to this unjust murder of innocent people and how the authority deals with their opposition in return:

After the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists, Wole Soyinka renews his appeals to international institutions (eg, the Commonwealth Conference) to boycott the Nigerian regime, this at the cost of his having his house near Lagos devastated by soldiers and secret police. (2001, p. 54)

People during the rule of Sani Abacha have been severely punished so that people have started to feel that the colonialists were better as pointed below by Jauhari and Seldak:

The pinnacle of this authoritarianism was observed during the military rule of Abacha (1993-1998) with the public execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and other eight non-violent human rights activist from Ogoni on trumped up charges. The colonial system of law was relatively less authoritarian. (Jauhari, 2011, p. 54)

Following a series of arson attacks on military and police installations. Wole Soyinka, along with fourteen other pro-democracy activists, is accused of terrorism and treason and put on trial before a Lagos High Court. (Seldak, 2001, p. 54)

Soyinka has been obsessed with this gruesome event that has shocked the nation. Ken Saro-Wiwa’s final questioning to his nation before he was hanged blames the nation for being the cause of this unspeakable crime: “Why are you people doing this to me? ... What sort of a nation is this? What sort of a nation is it that permits this? What sort of a nation is this, within which I take my definition” (Soyinka, 1996, p. 149)?

Soyinka in “King Baabu and the Renaissance Vision” presented at the university of Cape Town focuses on African condition in general and Nigeria in particular. He criticizes the power manifested through the reign of many military

tyrants who ruled Nigeria for many decades. Some of the leaders who have been nationals have turned to be lustful for power. Soyinka in his talk has shown his loathe for those leaders who have been the cause of deterioration in Nigeria in all spheres of life. This stance has been present through many of his works, for example, in *Madmen and Specialists* (1974), he attacks the system of 'As' which refers to the corrupt power that dominates and exploits people and blocks the way for any change. His endless strive to provoke people's aversion against their corrupt leaders can be traced in *A Play of Giants* (1984) and *The Jero Brothers* (1969) as well.

In real situations of protests and rebellions, Soyinka suffers as he struggles against oppression, tyranny and abhorrent practices of Sani Abacha. Soyinka gets arrested and tried for an action he has been involved in (JEYIFO, 2003, p. 7). The action above refers to the famous radio station 'happening' of 1965 when a young man managed to make his way into the studios for live broadcasts at the Ibadan buildings of Nigerian Broadcasting Service to force broadcast a pre-recorded message on behalf of 'free Nigeria' (JEYIFO, 2003, pp. 6-7). Another situation which shows Soyinka's political activism is the General Strike, which led to the collapse of the first post-independence civilian regime in Nigeria and entailed a call for a popular uprising, totally endorsed by Soyinka, to institute a workers' social-democratic order to replace the government of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (JEYIFO, 2003, p. 9).

Soyinka has not been happy since the inception of the African independence due to the succession of one military leader after another. He has not noticed any progression or any remarkable transformation to democracy. Therefore, Soyinka has continued to voice his protest against military rule which controls the public with an iron fist. This tyranny, represented by King Baabu and his previous archetypes, has killed many people. Abacha has killed thinkers, writers and activists such as Ken Saro-Wiwa so that he keeps the state safe against any attempt threatening his reign. Biodun Jeyifo describes Soyinka's political activism against Abacha and the charges with treason against Soyinka and other external opposition leaders (JEYIFO, 2003, p. 9).

Since the era of African independence, as Soyinka stresses in his paper delivered at the university of Cape Town, the succession of one King Baabu after another has marked the political landscape of the continent (Soyinka, 2004, p. 13). Such kind of political regimes has proliferated in many African and Asian countries after the end of the colonial powers. The main reason behind political unrest, economic deterioration and poverty is colonialism which could be regarded as an external cause for the failure of the colonized states. But, what agonizes writers and activists such as Soyinka is the blunder of its native leaders who might be worse than their masters.

What Soyinka has kept criticizing is not only confined to Nigeria, but to many nations in different parts of the African continent. In this regard, Soyinka proves himself a universal writer who protests against tyranny of military rule. His play *King Baabu* deals with a common issue prevailing in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. During the Arab World Spring, people have started protesting against their leaders who have been army generals like Abacha, whom Soyinka portrays in his play. The same political regimes have produced the same military leaders who have ruled their nations for many decades with the same tools and means. People have attempted to overthrow the military regime and establish a state based on democracy, but their struggle has been wasted and failed to attain their desired goals. The old regime is back to power again. This is what has happened in Nigeria, as well, when Sani Abacha has succeeded to get to power thwarting people's hope for a democratic state. Thus, Soyinka protests against King Baabu and calls for resistance as long as King Baabu looms around. His words are worth quoting in this regard:

The African resistance remains a chimera as long as one King Baabu remains among us, his existence rationalized, indeed condoned and consolidated through silence – thus enshrining the cynicism of power either in the management of resources or of political alienation. (Soyinka, 2004, p. 13)

It is true that "satirists all over the world have been accused of exposing, lampooning and ridiculing the societal ills without exorcising them" (Patrick, 1997, p. 31). This is also true of Soyinka to some extent due to the rigidity of the postcolonial regime he protests against. He begins as a satirist in the early stages of his writing. But, when he has not observed any change of any kind in the right direction, the intensity of his protest has increased and has started attacking prominent dictators in his late writings. If the expected change happens, it is temporary and swiftly goes back to its old state. This is because the post-colonial countries are dominated with social and political evils and it is difficult to defeat due to the colonial legacy. Soyinka, therefore, believes that a writer has to be an active politician for a swift change in society, "the real solution to dictatorship will only be achieved when artists become politicians" (Willough, 2002, p. para 16). This means that a writer has to expect censorship, jails and accusation as a counterattack to silence the voices of protest as happened to Soyinka. Contradictory to this, Ebewo states that "satire's results, if any, come through a slow and gradual process" (Patrick, 1997, p. 33) which is true in the Nigerian context. The fruitful results have taken place after many decades of satirical writings, protests that have provoked the public against the masters of tyranny. It is around fifty years of continuous struggle to curb corruption and establish democracy in Nigeria.

The struggle against the dictators within Nigeria needs profound intellectual talents to formulate the right directions for their native nations. This struggle has to be beyond personal interests or any political promises. This is what one notices in Soyinka's career as a writer and an activist. He has never surrendered and has always been against what is called 'internal colonialism'. These words express the attitude of Soyinka in his struggle against the dictators, "Africans ... had only exchanged monkeys for baboons. What made the situation galling was that in most cases, yesterday's celebrated freedom fighter had become today's remarkable tyrant" (Williams, 1998, p. 289).

II. PROTEST IN *KING BAABU*

King Baabu can be described as a talk for the nation of Nigeria and the African continent to protest against the evils of military rule. Soyinka's love for his nation has been with him since his early stages of his life. He is concerned with his nation as a whole. In *The Open Sore of A Continent*, Soyinka narrates how Nigeria declined to military dictatorship after independence from the colonial powers. Under such a military despot, i.e., Sani Abacha, the nation has undergone hideous crimes against humanity.

Replicating an important period of the Nigerian history, Soyinka parodies the Nigerian condition during the atrocities of Sani Abacha as reflected in *King Baabu* through the military leaders in the play like Potipoo and Basha who resemble Ernest Shonekan and Sani Abacha respectively. Shonekan was appointed as temporary president of Nigeria by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida in 1993. A reference to this dictator is the portrait that has been thrown into rubbish by the shrewd wife of Gen. Basha, Maariya. This portrait belongs to Gen. Babangida who legalized political parties and elections which were annulled by him later and allowed only two political parties to participate. Due to protests and strikes which deteriorated economic activities, Babangida stepped aside and handed the government to Ernest Shonekan. His presidency lasted only for three months because Gen. Sani Abacha led a coup putting an end to a democratic state bringing it back to control under military administration.

A. *Military Corruption and Conspiracy*

The dialogue of Potipoo with the civilians on democracy reflects Soyinka's satirist view of those dictators. It shows how these leaders have been running the country through coups and counter coups and how these leaders deal with each other. Potipoo seems to be optimistic when he takes over the power thinking that he can establish the first step for democracy. He believes that the military rule will disappear:

Potipoo: Now the Devine Ruler has seen fit to place the reins of this nation in our hands, we must move to earn the trust of the people, and of God... by the way that the word Military is missing in that title for the first time in the history of coups d'état in this nation. (Soyinka, 2002, p. 11)

Potipoo continues to speak to the civilians that the military leaders are affected by the democratic virus and that democracy has become the language of the world (Soyinka, 2002, p. 12). He promises to eradicate the wrong practices and the corruption prevailing in the Nigerian society. It seems from the context of the play, which is a parody of the Nigerian society, that Potipoo faces political and economic crises due to the corruption of the ex-presidents. He begins to fight corruption from within:

We must take the lead. I propose therefore that all officers assigned to political and administrative duties must begin with a public declaration of their assets. (*Deafening silence.*) you do understand what I mean – bank accounts local and foreign, business interests, property, stocks and shares etc. (Soyinka, 2002, pp. 12-13)

This is the leader who can lead the country in the right direction, which Soyinka dreams of. But, as the play progresses, the reverse takes place. This is what the wife of Basha confirms earlier, "fair is foul and foul is fair" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 10). This president will not live long since many looters and power-hungry people are looming around. The conspiracy against the constituted authority begins when the meeting is going on with Potipoo. The new leader as well as the civilians insist that the military institution needs an audit. They are thinking of planting vast lands to fulfil the orders 'fill the stomach campaign'. A palace coup has been already planned by Maariya through a forged intelligence report about mutiny to "derail the military transition program to democracy" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 20). It is a recurrent event in Nigeria as well as in the developing nations. Although Nigeria has tried to overthrow the military rule to turn to democracy, conspiracy has halted this transition and brings it back to the old regime.

As a part of his protest, Soyinka focuses on important issues that can make his community better if they transform and fertilize the vast lands and use it to grow crops, fruits and vegetables. His social and economic vision is manifested in Scene II where he deals with issues to economy and agriculture. He draws the attention of the audience to the human power which also could be transformed towards land and its natural resources instead of wasting money and oil revenues on army. This proves Soyinka's protest against the misuse of natural resources in Nigeria. He knows that Nigeria suffers from what economists refer to as the 'resources curse' as Uwem Affiah points out (Uwem, 2012, p. 285). Soyinka criticizes this in *King Baabu* through contrasting the corrupt officials, army generals and their close associates with the poor public who are starved to death living in straitened circumstances. The 'resources curse' is when the majority of people are living in utter poverty while the leaders enjoy and spend the enormous wealth which comes from different natural resources of the country. Controlling the country resources under the power of military leaders means subjugating and weakening the public, as *King Baabu* does. He claims to reform the economy of the country by taking advantage of the banks and the income institution.

King Baabu attempts to resolve the economic sabotage by reforming the polices of some banks. With this, Soyinka has introduced to his audience how leaders can corrupt and can immediately influence the economy. A banker offers a cheque of "fifty million dollars ... payable in hard currency" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 55), to which *King Baabu* replies, "just signature at the bottom if you don't mind. We will fill the rest later" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 55).

B. *Lust for Power & Tyranny vs. Democracy*

The third Scene of the play is dramatic and provoking because it exposes Maariya's determination and shrewdness to persuade her husband to act according to the forged intelligence report to crush the claimed mutiny. She plays the role of Lady Macbeth who plans how her husband should act. Her husband hesitates because of his loyalty to Gen. Potipoo.

An important issue which appears in this scene is Soyinka's satirical view of the military generals who don't care for their family as they do for promotions and military ranks. Although no one seems to sympathize with Maariya for her evil desires and the dirty games she is pushing her husband to, Soyinka reveals the cruel nature of the army man when they think about demotion or military disgrace. Basha tells her that he will reveal the plot to Gen. Potipoo before he discovers it.

Basha: I tell him you send me the note to get me to cause rebellion and unrest and I strangle you myself. I carry your dead body to cabinet meeting in my strong arms with tears dripping down my face and drenching my ribbons and medals and I say to Potipoo, look, I love my wife but I love my commander-in-Chief more. (Soyinka, 2002, p. 22)

Soyinka explores how military generals act to ensure their security when they topple the rule. After Basha's wife ignites his desire with these words, "when the Council resumes its meetings, guess who'll be presiding" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 23), Basha gets worried about the next step after deposing Gen. Potipoo since he has many loyalists. If Basha succeeds, he has to silence the opposing voices as Macbeth did exactly with the loyalists of King Duncan. Soyinka also makes a reference to the crimes that Sani Abacha has committed during and before he takes over the rule. His wife states that he has led many coups and has killed around nine people under the orders of others. She explicitly justifies the killing of Potipoo since it is for the sake of her husband, Basha, the future King.

Protest and sarcasm against military leaders are conveyed through Maariya. Through her, Soyinka criticizes the military regime. She reveals one of the tricks practiced by military leaders against each other in the name of democracy. Basha and his wife mobilize the masses to protest for army audit and in this case Potipoo cannot stand against the voice of the masses as Maariya states, "When the labour sneezes, watch even the army catch cold" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 27). Since masses can easily change and reverse the common affairs of a nation, Maariya exploits them to support her husband. She knows their needs; therefore, she distributes envelopes containing money to influential leaders to arrange for a coup against the former president. Gen. Basha arranges the preparations for the coup and announces that Gen. Potipoo has placed him in charge of all troops to put down the insurrection. Till this moment no one knows what is the fate of Potipoo except that he is forced away to safety. Basha is preparing to broadcast "the news of an attempted mutiny [which] is dangerous for our programme of transition to democracy" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 34). The speech, the technicians and the station are ready. He reassures the nation that he is fighting the dangers against democracy because he knows that the nation is looking for a real transition to democracy. Basha and his close associates control the scene through forcing their brothers-in-arms to accept what they propose. They use Gen. Potipoo, who is under home detention, to pass forced decrees and promotions which support their situation:

... those who disagree with authority are mutineers and only one answer to mutineer. ... It get signature of General Potipoo himself at bottom, so everything is, as saying goes, very legitimate. We promise that there will be no more coups in the nation, and there is no coup, only a change of command. (Soyinka, 2002, p. 34)

Soyinka has been a relentless protester against military rule. He has joined street demonstrations demanding democratic rule and social justice. He knows the fake promises and tricks of military rulers who get to power. They turn their promises to mirage and they become more tyrannical than before. He wants them to understand that leaders such as Abacha makes a revolution by claiming to fight the fake insurrection plotted by his wife in order to establish a Kingdom based on dictatorship, as Georg Orwell points out, "We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship" (Orwell, 1954, p. 217).

People have suffered from the dictatorship of the military rulers and revolted against this regime to turn it to democracy. Baabu promised them to be a democratic leader at the end of Act I. Soyinka in Act II again satirizes Army leaders. General Basha, who transforms his name to King Baabu, establishes an open court to resolve the complaints of the people and to minimize the distance between the ruler and the ruled, as he states in the beginning of Scene I. This kind of mockery is exposed to the audience in the subsequent scenes of the drama. Will King Baabu establish justice to his people or will he be worse than earlier leaders? Or is he going to make the people pay for their attempted revolution?

Soyinka introduces King Baabu in the second Act to ridicule the leaders who cannot do away with their old habits and their lust for power. They cannot be accountable to their people because they feel that it is accountability which reduces their power. That is why King Baabu has broken his promise to be a civilian ruler and begins to exercise his power instead. He uses various remedies to continue in his throne for a long time. He makes the conflicts more visible to the people so that they can believe him easily. He creates fake mutinies and unrest in some parts of the country in order to justify his mission against his foes. This appears as a threat against social peace and harmony. With these steps, Baabu attempts to be an authorized power to resolve the conflicts that appear "more essential than mere clashes of interest or mere institutional blockages" (Death, 2010, p. 248). He continues through his reign to create unrest and violence so that he keeps people busy with their own problems. This is a common practice of tyrannical leaders throughout history. Like many rulers such as Mohammad bin Tughlaq (1290-1351), a Muslim ruler of Indian and Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (985-1021), a Fatimi ruler of Egypt, King Baabu uses similar remedies to protect himself

against the threats of the public, as described by Soyinka, “What are the remedies most readily applied by King Baabu whenever he feels threatened? We are all familiar with them. He resorts to religion, ethnic, or racial incitement, mouthing a rhetorical commitment to the goals of social transformation” (Soyinka, 2004, p. 13).

Soyinka blames the leaders who once have been liberation fighters and National leaders, but later have become aspirant to the crown of King Baabu (Soyinka, 2004, p. 12). Soyinka is certain that it is the sense of irresponsibility and hunt for power of the Nigerian leaders which are behind the miserable situation of his nation. He considers the elected leader of a nation to be the principal custodian of its laws (Soyinka, 2004, p. 13). But, what happens when a leader “evokes racial animosities simply in order to incite his followers to take the law into their hands over any issue” (Soyinka, 2004, p. 13)? Baabu has taken the law into his hand thinking that he can control the rest of the nation. He makes laws which do not apply to him. He claims to have an open court, yet it is he who passes judgments based on his whims and personal interests. This leads to hostile actions against him due to the endless suffering of the people as expressed in the dialogue of the people who feel guilty of being on his side in the past:

Rent: Our people are groaning.

Dope: The heavens are weeping.

Rent: The earth is wailing.

Dope: The very stones are bleeding.

Rent: Our ancestors have spoken. Their anger is in the thunder.

Dope: Their lamentations are rains of fire.

Rent: Our shrines are desecrated.

Dope: Our women violated (*They exchange glances.*) Indeed, why hide it? (Soyinka, 2002, pp. 88-89)

C. *Language of the Protesters vs. Language of the Tyrant*

Through the words of the crowds in Scene V, Soyinka reflects the attitude and apprehensions of the commoners toward the army generals. Maariya is clever and knows that people won't accept Generals, therefore, she tells her husband to change his military dress as a welcome note to democracy. She wants him to fool the people and show his readiness for a transition for democracy. But, these people have had enough of the army generals and are ready to continue their protest. The words of the crowd truthfully expresses Soyinka's detest and hatred for such military regime as the crowd shout before Gen. Basha appears:

Crowd: Enough of Army rascals.

Down with Rajinda

Down with Potipoo

Away with Basha Bash

Down with the Army

Long live Democracy (Soyinka, 2002, p. 41)

The language of the masses above reflects their protest against the army but their attitude begin to decline in front of the tactics and the language of Basha, his officials and his agents. Tutor who has a PhD in popular psychology attempts to persuade them to listen to Gen. Basha who is introduced to them as “the champion of the oppressed” (Soyinka, 2002, p. 41). He dances in front of the public without his military uniform to make them feel that he is open and democratic so that they accept him as their new leader and not a coup maker. He speaks to them that he is the voice of “the new democracy ... and regent of the new democratic order” (Soyinka, 2002, pp. 43-44). But the masses are not satisfied with Gen. Basha's plan to take over the rule because of his military background. They suspect his intention to be to a civilian leader, “the Army again on the threshold of power. You are bringing in the military through the backdoor. ... It is another military wolf in sheep's clothing” (Soyinka, 2002, p. 42). Although the crowd feel that it is a trick of the military in a new robe of democracy, they succumb and King Baabu continues to rule.

Towards the end of Scene V, the language of control defeats the language of protest. Instead of shouting ‘enough with army rascals’, protesters proclaim “Long live Pa Baabu. Long live Baabu the Bountiful” (Soyinka, 2002, p. 48). It appears that the crowd has succeeded in changing the ‘physical appearance’ of General Basha who affirms that he is an ordinary person like them and as poor as a church mouse. He also changes his name to Baabu which means nothing to please the crowd to trick them that he is ready for a positive change. He can accept any kind of humiliation at this stage for the sake of power, but he will make them pay for this later, as he states.

He who has the language of control and the tactics of manipulation often wins the battle as Basha does many times. Basha has won the crowd not because of his language but because of his tricks and forged banknotes. Soyinka warns his audience of the distorted language of leaders which will lead to a corrupt power and then a collapse of the society. Leaders such as Basha, as Soyinka stresses at the end of Scene V, twist and change the tone of their language in order to mislead and distort the public so that they will not be able to understand the real intention behind their words:

Basha: Basha bash is dead!

...

Basha: Speaking to you is the voice of the new democracy.

...

Basha: Who am I? Me, I think I beginning not to know myself. I common man like grass roots. Like humble grass, I village, but good goatherd, know how to look after goats. But also good Army record. Get nothing of my own to boast of. Look. (*Proceeds to turn out his pockets.*) See for yourself. Empty. Nothing. Baabu. (Soyinka, 2002, pp. 43-44)

To obstruct this kind of distortion which may creep into the public as happened with the protesters, audience has to remain solid and unified against any attempt to break their solidarity or to distort their minds. Soyinka, therefore, drives his audience to think that if the crowd remains strong and consistent in the face of Basha, they won't suffer another reign of tyranny.

D. *Dehumanizing Effect of Power and the End of the Dictator*

In the manner of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Soyinka portrays King Baabu as Macbeth who feels insecure due to his tyrannical rule and the killings of innocent people. King Baabu speaks to the people about "much dissenting and opposition and complaining and demonstration and so forth spite of democracy" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 58). Baabu's insecurity appears when he listens attentively to the words of the spiritual advisors, Oriental and Marabout, who are similar in their role to the witches in *Macbeth*. They warn him, "you must beware woman ... Avoid female impurities ... you need to make pilgrimage to the shrine of Kali" (Soyinka, 2002, pp. 58-59).

These predictions of the spiritual advisors prepare and encourage King Baabu to be firm and resolute to deal a knock to the opposition. The predictions also pose a warning to him because they are difficult for him to fulfil. If he wants to succeed in his mission and his rule to continue, he must "sit on the skin of a freshly sacrificed spotless white he-goat for forty days and forty nights. A new one will be scarified each day and Baabu must consume its testicles" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 60). He also must give up human kindness as Macbeth did in order to kill the king. Marabout keeps on putting more difficult prescriptions for Baabu to follow if he wants his dynasty to last forever without a break, "Send out you foragers far to a field to find forty hunchbacks and forty albinos. The albinos will be buried alive, with padlocks through their lips. That guarantees that no voices shall be raised in protest at anything you do" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 62).

According to Marabout, the hunchbacks contain elixir of power. He suggests to King Baabu to chain them to wall and starve them till they become bones and skin. After that they will reduce the core to ashes and then Baabu can use a spoonful of the powder in his stew every day. This powder will give him the power to rule and the power to bend others to his will. This is the result of the dehumanizing effects of power which Soyinka opposes in many of his writings and in his campaigns after the Nigerian independence. Baabu, a developed copy of General Basha in Act I who promised people to be democratic, promotes himself to a king who thinks of conquering the whole continent. Power of these leaders cannot be reduced or contained easily by the public as Soyinka depicts through the character of King Baabu.

Dr Bero in *Madmen and Specialists* (1974) derives his power from bending nature to his will and from dehumanizing others. He feeds on the flesh of human beings and eats their human guts and testicles and tricks others to eat them as well. He gets rid of the last human tie ,i.e., his father. Similarly, King Baabu in Act II is derailed of his humanity and enjoys the suffering of his fellow human beings as he watches the amputations of the prisoners with ecstasy, "Get more fun hearing groans of pleasure" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 101). Soyinka describes the scene while Baabu watches, "The amputations continue, rhythmically, ritualistically. As a basket fills up, it is replaced" (Soyinka, 2002, p. 101). Baabu has also been using children, women, hostages and priests as human shields in his battle against his opposition to deter his enemies from achieving the targets. These dehumanizing activities have given King Baabu a chance to win the battle several times. It is a dirty game that can be played against the opposition.

Soyinka describes the rule of Abacha as the worst period in the Nigerian history. He is not happy with it and warns the people, "When Abacha took over from the interim government in November 1993, I warned that he would prove more ruthless than any dictator we have endured the nation till now" (Soyinka, 1996, p. 15). In the second Act of King Baabu, Soyinka portrays the crisis and the degeneration of human values on the part of Baabu. He has become more savage than before. Using the language of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*,

Double double toil and trouble
fire burn and cauldron bubble
by the prickling of the thumb

Something wicked comes this way (Soyinka, 2002, p. 66),

Soyinka foreshadows the events during the rule of King Baabu. As seen above, he has been cruel and revengeful which will bring his downfall, the end of every dictator. Soyinka uses similar atmosphere to that of Macbeth's when he is surrounded by the rebels tightening the hold around him. Baabu is in the same dilemma as a result of his unnatural deeds; his dynasty is falling apart and it will not last forever, which refutes the predictions of his spiritual advisors.

Soyinka emphasizes that the end of a tyrant who has been ruling his country with an iron grip is miserable and disgusting. Baabu falls down after a shot rings, and as a result, he gets covered with mud and twigs. Nobody seems to be with him in the field as the stage directions explain (Soyinka, 2002, p. 71), which is similar to the state of Macbeth towards the end of his rule. The fall of the king and the fall of his royal crown are symbolic as they convey the core of Soyinka's protest against military rule and its various facets that have come to its end. Baabu's long speech after his fall reflects the psychological condition and his hallucination for the impending loss of power remembering his 'suffering ancestors' of the past.

The weakness of King Baabu is contrasted with the strength of the rebels in Scene V. King Baabu seems also confused and exhausted due to the continuous uprising of the people in many places and finds it difficult to control

them. The public leaders appear more organized and determined to uproot the military dictatorship as Rout states, “The people are ready. The workers are on the move. The petroleum workers will blow up the pipes and provide a wall of fire to consume Baabu’s forces. You shall witness a popular uprising that will go down history” (Soyinka, 2002, p. 86).

Rout continues:

I have mobilized the proletariat for the final onslaught on the monster. This alliance between the suffering masses, workers, and peasants and the progressive intellectuals will lead to a definitive installation of the proletariat and the end of militarist interventionism. (Soyinka, 2004, p. 87)

The wrath of the suffering masses has produced its result on the tyrant. The last appearance of King Baabu shows that he is powerless and not even able to pull himself together. He appears half naked dragging his feet and rounding his eyes. His tongue hangs while he clutches his throat. While Tikim tries to help him sit on the chair, the robe slips revealing him naked. This is the end that Soyinka puts for a tyrant like King Baabu, a message that he intends to spread for his nation and dictators. Soyinka portrays the King naked which is a symbol for humiliation, shame, and punishment. It is also a symbol for victory for the public that the King is stripped out of his power by the power of the people.

Shortly after his naked appearance, King Baabu dies mysteriously. It is perhaps, as Tikim says, he is overdosed. A similar end to that of Sani Abacha’s who has been declared dead in his presidential villa. It was not clear whether he died because of a heart attack or poison. Whatever the cause is, the people desire his end in order to stop their turmoil under such a military dictatorship. The celebration of the people and the shots heard after the death show the overwhelming ecstasy of the people on the death of ‘the devil incarnate’ (Soyinka, 2002, p. 86). Although the people’s struggle to overthrow this tyrant is fruitful, a divine power is required to intervene so that a nation can start a new era of social justice, equality and decent living. No doubt that Soyinka has done his best to fight dictatorship in Nigeria and played a major role in the returning of democracy with the support of the rebels and the protesters who have also a major contribution in this regard.

III. CONCLUSION

Although this play has been written after the death of Sani Abacha, Soyinka aims at warning people of such military leaders who appear to be prodemocracy in the beginning but they continue to be dictators if they are given a chance to rule. He encourages the public to rise against them and not to be fooled by their tricks and their distorting language. As seen through the play, protesters have suffered a lot, but have not lost hope despite the wicked tricks of the tyrant. Soyinka ends his play with a note of victory, a message which Soyinka wants to convey to his audience. Through this end, he emphasizes that continuous struggle and protest must be crowned with the victory of the oppressed over the oppressor.

Soyinka has adopted various means such as protest, activism and political campaigns to force the desired change in his society. As conscientious writer, he cannot ignore the appalling conditions of his nation which he attempts to unify through his political writings. His belief that a protest is an effective mean for survival has fruitful results as seen at the end of King Baabu’s rule. His revolt and protest against the authoritative power have become explicit, direct, and continuous as the only means to bring about a positive change and to curb the corruption of the military dictatorship or to make this phenomenon manageable.

Soyinka’s protest writings have proved to be effective and vital which can be noticed in Nigeria in recent years following the fall of the military dynasty. Military rule continued for several decades till the end of the twentieth century, but ultimately people have won the battle to bring Nigeria to democracy. Elections and democracy have been a great success in this regard which the public have been struggling for.

Soyinka’s *King Baabu* can be considered a historical document which clearly manifests a turning point of Nigeria’s democracy and civil rule. As parodied in the play, violence was at its peak during the reign of Sani Abacha (King Baabu), who has been known as the worst human rights violator. This artistic representation of political life in Nigeria sheds light on the tyrannical rule of the dictator and how the people react towards it. The victory of the masses who got frustrated in some stages of their struggle crowns the play. With this pessimistic note, Soyinka gives hope for his audience that protest and struggle against dictators always succeed at the end even if it is long or slow. The will of the public wins at the end.

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