

A Textual Analysis of Ben Binebai *Drums Of The Delta* **By**

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Abstract

This paper is a textual study of Binebai's Drums of the Delta using the content analysis methods. The paper explores the use of such dramatic devices as plot, character, language, style, techniques to evaluate the social relevance of the play. The study recommends appropriate use of such devices for effective communication of the dramatic message

Keywords; Textual, Analysis, Techniques and Drums of War

Introduction

The playwright Benedict Ebimotimi Binebai was born in 1968 at Burutu Island, Iduwini kingdom in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State. His father, Chief Tom Michael Binebai, is a retired school administrator and former DESOPADEC commissioner. He is the Olotu of Iduwini Kingdom which spreads between present day Bayelsa and Delta States. He hails from Aghoro in Ekeremor Local Government area of Bayelsa State. His mother is Paulina from the Elayelagha family of Okpokunou town in Eseinmbiri Kingdom of Delta state. Benedict Ebimotimi Binebai attended Saint Joseph Primary Schools Burutu and Ilaje Primary school, Beniboye. He also attended Buturu Grammar school Burutu and Esenaebe Teachers Training College Bomadi between 1982 and 1984 and bagged his Teachers Grade two certificate in 1985. In 1986 he enrolled for his West African School Certificate

Examination at Burutu Grammar school and bagged it. He was employed as a primary school teacher by the then Bendel State ministry of Education and became a trade unionist holding various positions ranging from the public relation's officer, secretary and chairman of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT).

Ben Binebai was admitted in the department of Theatre Arts University of Ibadan in 1944 where he read and took a Bachelor's Degree in Theatre Arts in 1999. After his youth service in 2000 at the Taraba State College of Education, Jalingo. He gained admission for masters in Theatre Arts and graduated in 2001 at the University of Ibadan. In 2011 Ben Binebai bagged his doctor of philosophy degree in the department of Theatre Arts University Ibadan with specialization in identity politics in the Drama of Niger Delta using the subaltern postcolonial theory as a guide. In 2004, he was employed an assistant lecturer at the department of Theatre Arts, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island Bayelsa State. And in 2006 he was promoted to the position of a lecturer II. In 2010 he was further promoted to the academic rank of Lecturer I. In 2013 Ben Binabai got promoted to the position of a senior lecturer.

Ben Binebai is a scholar artist. He has written, staged and published several plays. His play *Corpers Verdict* which won the Taraba State NYSC merit award was first published in 2000 before it was published in 2007 by Kraft books. Also in the list of published plays is his ANA Bayelsa award winning Drama, *Beyond Nightmare* in 2005. In 2005 Binebai won the star prize of Nigeria union of journalist award of excellence in the politics and society category. His other published play, *Drums of the Delta* was performed to the international audience of the Association of Nigeria authors (ANA) during the silver jubilee international convention of the Nigerian writers at Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Binebai has also published *Dance of the Ghost* 2009. Also in the published list is when he oil runs dry a book which captures the history and political struggle of the Niger Delta

region. In 2013 Ben Binebai also wrote a book on the subaltern postcolonial Nigeria. He has also directed plays written by him and other dramatists. He has also contributed to scholarship by writing journal articles published in both national and international journals numbering 46. Ben Binebai is a literary scholar. He teaches dramaturgy, dramatic literature, dramatic theory and criticism, contemporary African drama and traditional African festival drama. He is currently the Head of Department in Niger Delta University.

Textual Analysis of Dramatic Devices

Synopsis of *Drums of the Delta*

Drums of the Delta by Ben Binebai, is about a community facing oppression, subjugation and tyranny from the Queen of Odokoland. This Queen on her visit to the Delta usurps one of the dancers (Ebitimi) for being extra ordinarily good in the art of dancing. In admiration of his ability and the blessing he is to the Deltans, she makes him her husband despite the resistance from the people. This triggers the people to go to war in order to reclaim Ebitimi from the Queen. In their quest for liberation from the oppressive force of the queen of Odokoland. There were saboteurs whose actions led to Boro's death. Boro returns from the dead as he reunites and reignites the people's motive. Boro is captured by Atala the Queen's executioner. They are pressured to denounce their struggle only for a turn of event to see to the death of the Queen and the liberation of the Delta.

Plot and Plot Structure of *Drums of the Delta*

Plot according to Aristotle is the soul of drama. Plot is the sequential arrangement of events in a story. Plot is the skeletal framework upon which drama is built, passing through the beginning, the middle and the end laying emphasis on the law of causality. *Drums of the Delta* through the arrangement of event, is of complex plot and episodic plot in nature.

The play is not in scenes, rather in situations, and the plot point of attack begins relatively early through the use of a narrator, and the actions are not necessarily in the cause and effect chain of development.

The exposition is embedded in the narration of Sam as he explains the situation of the Delta, the place of setting the dramatic action, and characters in the play. Actions in the play begin with Sam (the narrator) in a mood of festivity along with the people of Delta. This is cut short by the introduction of Atala and the warriors of Odokoland, Owei, Oko, Joshua, Ogbanta, Maro, thus exposing characters, situation and setting of the play.

Complication in the play arises as the Queen of Odokoland takes Ebitimi as her husband. The people of Delta present a display of their culture to the entertainment of the Queen only for her to pick interest in one of the dancers (Ebitimi). After the departure of Ebitimi, the Deltans begin to experience turmoil and hunger.

This breeds conflict as Isaac Boro reveals his intention against the Queen, and agitates the people of Delta to join his quest for liberation of the Delta, the Queen on the other hand prepares to alter this revolution.

The action culminates in the arrest of Major Isaac Boro and other Deltans with him by Atala as ordered by the Queen of Odokoland. They receive threats from Atala, in an attempt to make them renounce their revolutionary struggle. Tension further intensifies with the arrival of Deltans in the Queen's palace requesting for the release of their own, which are in the Queen's prison. The Queen feels threatened and asks Atala to shoot Major Isaac Boro.

The struggle results in the death of the Queen and the Deltans reclaiming Ebitimi, as they celebrate liberation. The play end at the village

square with the youths including men and women dances, with various songs of victory.

Style/Language and Technique of *Drums of the Delta*

Style has to do with a pattern of writing a playwright uses to express his/her play. It therefore means that the style of writing can vary, depending on the syntax, tone, mood, and diction, and word choice of the playwright. In the play, *Drums of the Delta*, Ben Binebai employs a complex proverbial and naturalistic style. It is complex because it is not written in the everyday ordinary language rather in verse. Also it best expresses the aura of the Niger Delta in terms of the mood of the play, mother tongue interference in proverbs and the use of Pidgin English. It is also seen that Ben Binebai did not write in acts or scenes rather in situations. For example, incarcerations, drums of war, Boro's place.

Use of Language

Language is a system of words used to express thoughts and feelings. The playwright's language is always represented on the body of his work. According to Brockett and Ball:

Language is the playwright's primary means of expression, when a play is performed other expressive means (music, sound effects, and spectacles) maybe added; but to convey intentions to others, the dramatist depends almost entirely on dialogue and stage direction. The language (diction) is the playwright's primary tool (44).

The play's language expresses the supposed language in the locale of interest, as it is also poetic, proverbial and figurative. In line with this, these excerpts buttress thus:

Atala: Oh, bloody prisoners in this bloody prison talking bloodily of bloody destructions. You are

prisoners, know that you can't vanish from here; you not even faithful as Simon Peter or any of the apostles of Jesus Christ. You must die I will kill you! I will kill you all.

Joshua:...the warriors are all over the land like locust and voodoo bees with weapon of destruction. People are roasted alive, visages and voices are crying under the mud. The tragic drum beats thunderously across the land.(18)

Maro: E be like say make I die leave this earth. Wish kain life we get?(19).

Use of Technique

This is concerned with the playwright's artistic pattern of expressing his/her ideological standpoint, and how he/she exposes events of the play for the consumption of its reader.

Ben Binebai employs different artistic techniques in *Drums of the Delta* such as: foreshadowing, flashback, symbolism, narration and songs.

Flashback

Flashback is a literary device that is used to reveal past events, and synchronize it with present events. According to literaryterms.net:

Flashback moves the audience from the present moment to a scene in the past. Oftentimes, flashbacks are abrupt interjections that serve to further explain a story or character with background information and memories... flashback is important in that it adds complication and depth to a narrative that is otherwise straightforward and chronological... flashback can thicken plots, create dynamic and complex characters,

reveal information otherwise left unspoken, or surprise the audience with shocking secrets...

The play practically unravels its events through the use of flashback. Thus Ben Binebai uses the flashback technique to streamline dramatic actions in practically the entire play.

Foreshadow

This is also known as the planting effect where the playwright exposes or puts in the mind of his reader an idea of what is to happen before hand. The playwright establishes this technique through Sam the narrator as he foretells the liberation of the Delta – “But the day is coming for the song of joy to rule our land” (47).

Symbolism

The use of symbols, significant images or personages is also another predominant technique in *Drums of the Delta*. First and foremost the title of the play/text symbolizes the agitation of the Niger Delta for liberation/freedom. Ebitimi represents crude oil and the Queen of Odokoland represents the exploiters and oppressors of the people of Niger Delta.

Secondly, characters in the play are used to represent the different major cultural groups in Nigeria. Hence, Chief Dudu represents the Yorubas, Chief Okoye represents the Igbos, and Chief Ahmed represents the Hausas. Finally the playwright uses Major Isaac Boro to represent the Elites who left the country in the acquisition of knowledge and return to Nigeria and help free the country from colonial rule.

Narrative

Another technique in the play is the narrative technique, where the playwright uses Sam to unravel events and actions of the play. The play is

seen to be in non-linear narrative. This is a narrative technique where the narration does not follow the direct causality pattern of events, thus narrating most of the story in flashback.

Use of Setting

The setting of the play has to do with the time and locale where the action takes place. The play is set in Nigeria, Niger Delta region to be precise. The events mainly occur in the palace of the Queen of Odokoland and in the forest.

Use of Character and Characterization of *Drums of the Delta*

Characters are human personages, animation or ideas the playwright uses to convey the events of the play through dialogue and action. Characters are vehicles used to bring the story to life. They aid in the expression of the mood, thought, and motive of the playwright.

Characterization is the personality of a character, detailed from the course of action. According to the Aristotelian concept of characterization, a character is known by what he says, does, his thought, appearance, and what other characters say about the character. *Drums of the Delta* presents numerous characters, thus emphasis will be placed on major characters.

Isaac Boro: He is a man in his late thirties, the protagonist of the play. He is an archetype character. He inspires the people and awakens them to consciousness on the need to fight for their right, freedom from oppression, and the return of Ebitimi. He is a courageous, intelligent, smart, and principled character with focus. This is seen in the play as he first determines to go against the Queen in order to restore peace and progress to the Delta, irrespective of comments from loved ones and relatives opposing his mission. On encountering the Queen, he refuses to denounce the revolution even at the expense of his life. This brings victory and success to his mission and that of the Deltans, as the Queen is shot and

incapacitated, thus enabling them to free Ebitimi and restore peace and progress in the Delta.

Queen of Odokoland: The Queen is the antagonist of the play. Her character represents a selfish, rigid, and an individual that abuses power. She visits the Delta, as they deem it fit to entertain their quest, only for the Queen's unyielding appetite for oppression to come to play as she demands for Ebitimi's hand in marriage irrespective of the people's opinion, thus taking their pride and source of progress. Ebitimi is taken to her land where the splendour of Ebitimi flourishes, making her land rich at the expense of the peace and progress of the Delta. An agitation to recover Ebitimi is constantly hindered, as she commands her soldiers to kill anybody that goes against her in any form. But this did not stop the Deltans as her incapacitation frees Ebitimi and restore peace and progress to the Deltans.

Oko: This character is one of the youth leaders at the forefront of the agitation, but in course of time and event he changes, thus making him a dynamic character. Oko joins the agitation for the liberation of the Delta, because the Delta is wallowing in poverty and degradation. He switches to the opposing side as their resource diminishes to the point he felt they might have to quit their quest and join the Queen in order to satisfy their bellies. Despite the advice from others he abandons the quest and forms an alliance with the Queen in exchange for his personal satisfaction. His action leads to the capture of Isaac Boro and other Deltans with him.

Use of Genre in *Drums of the Delta*

Ben Binabei's *Drums of the Delta* is a melodrama. According to dictionary.com, melodrama is a dramatic form that does not observe the laws of cause and effect, and that exaggerates emotion and emphasizes plot or action at the expense of characterization". *Drums of the Delta* did not follow the law of causality, in the sense that the play is written "In medias res". The play also made use of the narrative technique which reduces

characterization, songs in between actions intensity emotions as they are rightly utilized to emphasize actions. Therefore *Drums of the Delta* is justified under the subgenre of drama known as melodrama.

Thematic Pre-Occupation of *Drums of the Delta*

The theme of a play is basically the overriding message embedded in the play. Theme can be deciphered from the title of the play, and reading in between lines of the play's content, *Drums of the Delta* by Ben Binebai has its thematic pre-occupation in subjects of oppression and liberation. Hence the thematic pre-occupation is the equality and fair treatment: A necessity for societal growth.

The people of Delta in the play face extreme marginalization from the Queen and her cohorts of Odokoland. They restrain them from enjoying the booty of nature which they are blessed with, rather it nourishes the Queen, and develop Odokoland, while Delta wallow in poverty and penury, and environmental degradation. This triggers the people to agitate for liberation from their oppressors. Lives were lost as the society experiences unrest instability and degeneration from destruction of infrastructures and human lives. Consequently, the people of Delta seek stability in the society as they demand fair treatment to their fundamental human right. Hence if they are treated as equals the society will blossom in the splendour of unity, thus its growth is inevitable.

Conclusion

Power is something enjoyed by the ruling class, but they are blind as to the malady and psychological mayhem that befalls the larger population (the lower class). Ben Binebai's *Drums of the Delta* addresses such issues of oppression, subjugation, tyranny, and authoritarianism as the result of uncontrolled power, thereby causing a major hindrance to societal growth. The struggle in such situation brings about disunity in fraternization, inter/intra ethnic conflict, consequently resulting to the degradation of

societal welfare. Hence the play's relevance to the society centres on the essence of equity in the control of productions, for the purpose of societal growth.

Right from the inception of the world, the human society has always been divided into two classes. The 'haves and the 'have not'. Karl Marx explains that it all started with the primitive society when there was a communal ownership of properties. But when men started to own properties individually, class struggled emerged. This contradictions begins to arise between the classes, for instance, Marx asserts that the society has had different evolution; from the primitive society to the society involving masters and slaves, which he calls the 'slave society', the 'feudal society' where it was the lords (land owners) and the serfs, and the capitalist society' (Bourgeoisies and Proliferate). The Bourgeoisies are the owners of the means of production, this set of persons continually exploits the proliferates who are usually the labourers.

In Nigeria these different era of society existed and still exist, for class stratification and abuse of resources from the ruling class is still present. It is a thing that was also institutionalized by the British leaders who colonized Nigeria. Nigeria gained her independence only to still replicate this act, and as it is seen in *Drums of the Delta*, the masses are not all bending as different revolutionary groups are emerging against the ruling class such as: Niger Delta Avengers, Egbesu Red lions, and the Biafran Nation. Karl Marx states that when proliferates becomes conscious of their situation, there will be a serious revolt against the Bourgeoisies, that the proliferate will then overthrow the government of the Bourgeoisies and instate a suitable government for themselves.

Therefore, the factor of capitalism in the country, which comes along with its adverse effect on societal growth, is to be expunged or division will embrace the society for good. Hence the governmental body and every

individual should come together, put a standing order to the betterment of every sector, thus reinstating social stability.

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