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A Review of Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Gbuji*

About the Author

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo is Rundle born lecturer (Academic Rabbi). He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Rivers State University, Nkpolu/Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt. A former lecturer at University of Port Harcourt, Department of Theatre and Film Studies. He is also a part-time lecturer with Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies. He is a practicing Christian. He has held many posts and chaired committees both as an ASUU unionist and an academic staff of university.

As a playwright, he has over fifty unpublished plays. Some drafts of his plays include *Suffering in Paradise*, *"A Tale of Nine Months"*, *"The Last Resort"*, *Apogee*, *"Shan Inna"*, *"Shame in His Glory"*, *"Jane in Crisis"*, *"The Bouncer from Igodomigodo"*, *"Kaposi in Sacoma"*, *"The State's Cake"*, *"Untimely Death"*, *"The Last Don"*, *"Ele Gbaka"*, *"Rinya Chiokike"*, etc. *Gbuji* was produced on the occasion of ASUU NEC held in UNIPORT in June 2018. Some of his plays have equally been produced for the UNIPORT audience. *"Shan Inna"* (A stage play on poliomyelitis) was read via zoom to commemorate the World Polio Day, 2020. One of his articles was classified as one of the 700 articles of the year by <http://nousssommesfans.com/2019/01/06/articlesmemoires-et-theses-de-lannee-2018-la-liste/f> [access: 10 August 2023] a *studies et culture populaire* in Paris, France. He is married to Mrs Precious Uchechi Azunwo, who also is a lecturer. Their union is blessed with a son, Jehu Chimezumena.

Storyline

The play *Gbuji* is an exciting drama preoccupied with the conflicts surrounding ASUU, university students, parents, stakeholders and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). In the wake of the plot, ASUU declared a total, indefinite and comprehensive strike and to hearing of the students, especially those who are already at the verge of graduating, conflict invigorates. These disgruntled students take no time to go face to face with the ASUU representatives (ASUU Chairman, Professor Festus and Professor Andrew). The incidental meeting ignites a clash of words between the students and the ASUU. While the students continue to launch accusations and blame at ASUU over incessant strikes, the ASUU reps present would not stop playing defensively. Such an intensive display of sentiments forces the ASUU Chairperson to reveal certain details about the history/development of ASUU, her aims and achievements since her inception. Despite this effort, the dissatisfied students remain in doubt about the claims melted by the ASUU reps, thus pressing more charges against them.

Their argument lingered and ended inconclusively as the disagreeing parties agreed to resolve their differences via the President's moderation. The President of the country is around the school vicinity with his entourage for a commissioning programme, ASUU reps, students, parents and stakeholders grab the opportunity and made their way to the venue. And although, they are lightly welcomed, the President grants them the opportunity to air their worries and in no time, each group made their points. In conclusion, the President reprimands each group for their faults and resolves the conflict by inaugurating a financial programme, adopting a member from each group as part of the committee while he heads the committee. The financial programme is aimed at addressing the issues degrading university education in the country and in the end, everybody seems fairly treated and happy.

Plot Analysis

Gbuji is crafted dramatically following Gustav Freytag's plot model. The plot, therefore, has a beginning, a middle and an end, with each of the parts sequentially representing an exposition, a climax and a resolution. The plot is also a climactic plot. This claim is exacted with the following reasons;

- The play's plot runs in a very limited time frame (in this case, within 24 hours).
- Only a few characters carry the story. Thus, even though, there are plenty of extras and crowd scenarios, the mobility of the plot is on the shoulders of only a few characters (less than ten in number).
- The locale is very limited too (in this case, the locale is as restricted as only the university community).

Granted the foregoing details, the plot is also a homely one because it obeys strictly the three unities of; time, place and action.

Plot Narration

Opening sharply with a protest, the dramatic exposition begins. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is having a congress somewhere in the University community with a prime motive of staging a total, indefinite and comprehensive strike. Meanwhile in reaction, some disgruntled students of Nigerian University have had it at the throat of their neck over the incessant strike actions carried out by ASUU. Therefore, they sought a revolutionary action and the nearest resort was a protest match. This emergency rally engages the students in their numbers, led by the student union government (SUG) president, as they sing their solidarity song, matching fearlessly to face the leaders of ASUU. In no time, the students find themselves face to face with the ASUU chairman and two rudimentary ASUU stakeholders: Professor Festus and Professor Andrew.

Following a very weak and unfriendly welcoming and receiving of each other, the students and the ASUU representative begin to dialogue. This lengthy discussion puts the sharp-articulated ASUU president and his two subordinates in a defensive position against the high-pressing students who are prepared to unleash their discontent against the industrial body. The students are of the plain opinion that ASUU is in the habit of embarking on strikes in an incessant frequency and that most of these strikes are poorly motivated and are for the selfish interest of her members. In reaction, ASUU, through her leading speaker (ASUU President) makes a frantic effort to defend the union by educating the disenchanting students. This attempt makes three basic points, the first highlights the information on the establishment of ASUU and her objectives, and the second informs that ASUU constantly go on strikes because of the Federal Government of Nigeria's (FGN) constant refusal to honour agreements it freely entered with

the union and finally, the achievements of ASUU which are relevant to the development of university education in Nigeria and not restricted to ASUU members alone.

However, despite the systematic attempt to put ASUU in a transparent landscape, the already harmed students still find reasons to fault ASUU and her members. This scenario is, however resolved with the informing by ASUU President that the President of the country is around the university vicinity for a project commissioning. The latter also makes a useful suggestion that they should all go to the President's location and tender their complaints to him. At the acceptance of this suggestion, both students and the ASUU representatives present march towards the President's location singing the solidarity song all along.

Upon their arrival at the commissioning ground, the restless students and the struggling ASUU reps are followed by an unhappy crowd of parents and stakeholders who are also seeking answers to the question of ASUU strikes. Approaching the forestage, the President's entourage (NUC Secretary, Minister for Education, Labour and Productivity and Minister of Finance) feeling shocked and embarrassed at the manner these uninvited groups of people show up at the commissioning ceremony, find the motivation to authoritatively chase them away with the presence of some armed police men. Intercepted by the interested President, they are instead put to a halt. The President, therefore ensures that all the groups are let in as he listens to them. After identifying the different groups, the discussion begins with the fore-speech of the ASUU president who expresses in details some of the worries of ASUU. In support, Professor Festus and Professor Andrew also invested some points. Accusingly, parents and stakeholders lash at ASUU for always striking, stating the direct impacts of ASUU strikes on them. And in support, the SUG president, speaking on behalf of the students also indicts ASUU further, stating the likelihood how ASUU strikes frustrates and devastates their university program.

The President's entourage (NUC President, Minister for Finance, and Minister for Education et al.) also paints ASUU black with the fore-claim that her members are lazy, academically unproductive, selfish and corrupt. The strong position of these government officials engineers a quarrel between ASUU and them. Despite the heated dialogue, the calm President, who has been listening quietly since the discussion, now takes a resolute position which is, in the end, favourable to all available stakeholders. He cautioned everyone for their mistakes and inaugurated a financial policy for developing university education with the hope that strikes will one day

cease to exist. The plot is, at this instance, resolved as everyone present rises and sings the solidarity song together.

Thematic Thrust

Theme refers to the central idea or message a work of art sustains. A work can have more than one theme (hence, subthemes). In any case, however, themes are reoccurring motifs spotlighted in a work.

Granted the foregoing, the central idea in Azunwo's *Gbuji* is the 'Rot and decay of university education in Nigeria'. And although the play is bodily preoccupied with the dealings of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the basic idea floating in the background of the entire drama is the expression of the failed university system in Nigeria. To credit this point, the first thing to consider is the question of, "why ASUU always go on strikes?" In quick response, it suffices to make a necessary reminder that the Nigerian university system is generally ranked poor, with facilities in shambolic condition, whereas understaffing, underfunding and corruption stand behind the bane. As such, everybody is, in one way or another, affected. Thus, staff, students, management, parents and the general public are all badly touched because of the failing state of the educational sector.

Citing the world university ranking, it is on record that no Nigerian university today can boast of a place amongst the first five thousand universities globally. As a matter of fact, wealthy Nigerians who understand the place of education and are zealous about academic pursuit, make a fast step to fly their children abroad to be serviced academically in classy institutions. This is a support line to the affirmation that tertiary education in Nigeria is in its worst state. The realisation of this very fact is exactly what ASUU is interested in, thus the formation of the union since 1978.

Premised on the foregoing backdrop, the first idea established here is that, ASUU is formed as a result of the botched university education in Nigeria. Hence, the initial position that the thematic essence of the play under scrutiny is the 'Rot and decay of university education'. ASUU is reacting to this reality not particularly because teaching staff members are understaffed, underpaid, poorly equipped and/or poorly treated but because university education is falling and everybody is feeling the impact, including the larger society. ASUU is, therefore an organised setup existing functionally as a revolutionary body fighting to revive tertiary education in Nigeria.

In a related interest, it is on course to state that the students are usually desperate about graduating from the university, still, at the back of their minds, they hope that they studied in better institutions where there are better laboratories-well equipped, proper classrooms with suiting fittings, and advance approaches to teaching. The students express this very idea in the play on a number of occasions. A handy example comes from the words of the SUG president when he asked the ASUU Chairman, “which of the items listed here affects the student directly?” This question implies that the SUG President might be egocentric; hence, as the ASUU Chairman presents issues pertaining to the union, the SUG President wonders how what he is saying affects the students. This directly implies that the students also have their own peculiar worries affecting them. These worries all contribute to the falling state of university education in Nigeria. In the same vein, the complaints and worries of the parents and stakeholders all boils down to the failing state of university education in Nigeria. Therefore, in a final note, all the conflicts in the drama is ironically staged against the rot and decay of university education in Nigeria. In the first instance, if things were every day about Nigerian university education, there would not be a need for ASUU and her constant agitations (industrial actions). Students, on the other hand, would not have had any need to protest against ASUU and the Federal Government would not have been constantly troubled about issues of this sort.

Societal Relevance

In the first instance, every literary work is materially driven from the society and so in return, is mandated to give back positively to the society. Hence, apart from the fact that Gbuji is an entertaining piece of art, it informs, educates and edifies its audience. Specifically, the topic treated in the work is ideally topical and relevant to this dispensation. Education is, as a matter of fact the bedrock of development in any nation. That is exactly why when an onlooker goes through the world map today, checking through to find grade A or grade B nations, he/she will discover that such high-ranked countries have a superb and standardised educational system. Hence, there is a symbiotic relationship between a standard educational setup and a developed society.

This very idea appears to be the principal message Azunwo aims at informing the audience with Gbuji. This very relevant interest is support-

ed with the fact that the play also attempts to create a balanced equation about ASUU. It has already been established that ASUU has been most times misinterpreted, misconceived and misjudged by a lot of people, especially because of her incessant strikes. This piece is, therefore relevant because one of its prime motives is to clarify those erroneous packages propagated about ASUU. More so, the play is relevant and in fact, a crucial innovation owing to the fact that it attempts to administer resolution to a social crisis. Hence, the recommendation that adequate funding will go a long way in addressing the challenges facing university education in Nigeria. Meanwhile, as regards the disharmony between ASUU, FGN and university students, the play offers an interventionist strategy to arrest the conflict. Finally, all these attempts are envisioned to advance social peace and development.

AZUNWO, E. E. (2022) *Gbuji*. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers International Ltd.