

Functionalism and Traditional Leadership Powerplay: Conceptualizing the Interface in Bakare Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan*

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Arguably, every traditional human society has a distinct culture and laid down rules expected to be adhered to without violation, to guarantee it as egalitarian society. Observably, most of these rules that are traditionally enshrined in the culture of the people are often downplayed and ignored by individualistic personalities in the society through manipulative powerplay. Leaning on the theory of Functionalism which presents a perspective that focuses on the functions of organizations, social structures and norms in the society, this paper examines the concept of leadership powerplay in *Rogbodiyan*. Based on a qualitative content analysis approach, it is observed that *Rogbodiyan* positions as a reflection of contextual realities that define the leadership structure in some African countries as it presents a situation of leadership struggle in a typical African traditional society where some of the leaders exhibit orientations of collectivism when societal concerns are discussed but their elements of individualism are revealed when the curtains are dropped. It therefore presents a position where these characters could be judged as supporting collective growth whereas their personal agenda is the opposite. It concludes that, in quest for power, the characters in *Rogbodiyan* seem to be wearing a mask that only comes off in the secret or when their aims are achieved, and they have something at stake of which the people would not want to lose but succumb to their demands.

Keywords: Culture, Functionalism, Leadership, Powerplay, Tradition.

Introduction

Playwrights have often used their creative works in documenting diverse societal issues traversing the African continent and its people. Ekeke (2025) affirms that plays have been used to x-ray the African cultural values to underscore the uniqueness of African culture and the need to preserve and promote them. In supporting the role of plays (drama) in African society, Akoh & Egwemi (2013: 58) assert that, “a dominant motif in modern African drama is the recourse by playwrights to cultural tradition as source material with which to build their theme for the edification of their audience”. One of such instances is the discourse Bakare Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan* offers.

The concept of functionalism presents a theoretical perspective that focuses on the functions of institutions, social hierarchies and norms. This perspective holds that function is

the degree to which a particular activity aids or hinders system upkeep. Within this paper the concept of functionalism is analysed in context with the notion of leadership powerplay in Bakare Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan*. Influencing others to achieve an objective and guiding an organization to become more cohesive and coherent defines the process of leadership. This description aligns with Northouse (2007) view that the process of leadership involves one person persuading a group of people to pursue a common objective. Implicitly, leaders inspire people to act by motivating them and transforming the world (Ekeke, 2025). Using their leadership attributes - values, beliefs, character, knowledge, skills, ethics, experience, and culture - a leader executes such a process. Being a leader is a complicated social process and often time relies on powerplay for individual benefit.

Powerplay could be described as an effort by an individual, group, or organization to wield power in a direct and strong manner to get or accomplish something.

From the above assertion, the essence of tradition permits the thematic preoccupation of Rasaki in *Rogbodiyan*. In reflecting existing conflict between greed for power and violation of traditional rules to secure leadership roles, Rasaki, in the words of Ekeke (2019), falls into the special class of African Playwrights who are well known in the exploration of traditionalism, based on reality to replicate the situation. *Rogbodiyan* dramatically demonstrates the underlying power that supports sustenance of traditional laid down rules, reflecting also the consequences of power abuse, though in a contested form.

The composition of *Rogbodiyan* is based on the Yoruba folkways that by implications serves as a reflection of African sacred tradition, highlighting the role of rituals, rites, gods and the ancestors. This study aims at presenting a conscious creative effort that defines the milieu of classical African tradition to the issues of leadership powerplay while also highlighting the role that established social structures play in maintaining societal norms. However, it questions the justice practice of ancestral forces that sees beyond the human pretentious efforts but still supports their ascension into leadership roles.

Functionalism Theory

Originating in the early 1900s, functionalism is linked to writers like Talcott

Parsons, Robert Merton, Herbert Spencer, and Émile Durkheim who dominated social theory in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. Though Ashley Crossman opines that Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society maintains relative stability, is credited with giving rise to functionalism.

Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that highlights the functions that institutions, hierarchies, and norms serve in society. Based on this view, function is the degree in which a particular activity aids or hinders system upkeep. According to Milton (2007), Functionalism approaches the study of human civilizations from a structural (or systems) perspective. This indicates that they view society as a structured system of interconnected elements, or ‘structures’, like institutions, that come together to form society as a whole. Émile Durkheim argues that, for society to be stable, all these components must function effectively and efficiently. Durkheim compared society to a living thing, where every organ is essential to the creature's survival. According to Durkheim (2019), even the socially aberrant individuals of society are required since sanctions for deviation uphold long-standing cultural norms and values. In other words, receiving punishment for a crime serves to reinforce our consciousness of morality. Durkheim, in 1893 penned; Because of our condemnation, a crime is a crime. When an act breaches public awareness, it does so because it violates it rather than because it is against the law. These societal components were dubbed ‘social facts’ by Durkheim. He intended for social dynamics to be considered

as genuine and to exist apart from the individual. According to Durkheim (2019), as society grew more complex, social order shifted from being mechanical to organic. This seems to have been a call for respect for structure not because of the person leading but because it is the establish route of operation.

Deconstructing Leadership

Traits, behaviours, influences, interaction patterns, role linkages, and occupation of a post have all been used to describe leadership. People use the leadership notion in both their personal and professional lives. By providing them with knowledge, assistance, and direction on how to carry out their duties in a methodical and organized way, leaders primarily aim to assist their subordinates in achieving their goals and objectives.

Leaders must instil moral and ethical values in people when they are performing their duties or working with others in order to promote goodwill and wellbeing. To adjust to changes and ensure that they benefit members of the community, leaders should be well-versed in the strategies and techniques they can use. Relatively, Tannenbaum; Weschler & Massarik (2001: 24) define leadership as “interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication procedure, in order to achieve a given target or goals”. For Stogdill (2004), leadership is the establishment and upkeep of structure in interaction and expectation. Coming from the context of change mechanism, Bass (1997) describe leadership as a conversation among group members. He

adds that leaders are change agents, people whose actions have a greater impact on others than on themselves.

Dinibutun (2020) identifies the following types of leadership styles: dictatorial or autocratic; democratic and free rein or laissez-faire leadership styles. In a dictatorial or autocratic leadership style, the leader bears complete accountability for all actions. The leader's primary source of support is the group's tacit obedience to his orders. He makes the decisions about the plans and policies. Making decisions is seen as a very significant activity. The leaders do not solicit ideas or comments from others; they make all the choices themselves. The leaders' relationships and terms with their subordinates are inadequate. They utilize punishment or threats to instil discipline and motivation in their subordinates. The followers are required to follow the leaders' decisions regardless of whether they are advantageous to them. Group members give the leader ideas and suggestions when democratic leadership is in place. The other members are given the chance to express their ideas and opinions. In a nutshell, leaders consult others before making important decisions. The leaders encourage the members to be more creative and to approach their work with enthusiasm and excitement. Members develop friendly relationships with leaders, raise morale, feel more content with their work, and become less dependent on them when they are given the chance to express their thoughts and take part in the development of plans and policies. Democratic leadership offers increased productivity and happiness.

In a laissez-faire or free-rein leadership style, the leader completely relies on the followers to decide for themselves and set their own goals. The opportunity to manage planning and task arrangement in an ineffective manner is granted to the subordinates, who then proceed. When it comes to administrative duties, the leaders have little influence. The leaders' duties are limited to informing others and offering assistance when problems or setbacks occur. Delegated leadership is another name for laissez-faire or free rein leadership. Under this leadership style, group members are given the chance to make the right choices and decisions.

Research Methodology

This study adopts qualitative content analysis approach to analyse and interpret the structural and thematic values in *Rogbodiyan*. Specifically, the analysis focuses on character roles and functions; language and dialogue; dramatic structure as well as cultural and societal functions. The analysis is anchored on the Functionalism theory which is the viewpoint on which this study is based.

Overview of *Rogbodiyan*

Rogbodiyan presents a situation of leadership struggle in a typical African traditional society. The play begins with Agogo (the king's adviser and messenger) using gong to gather the people of Ilu Koroju kingdom to be addressed by the Regent (Adebunmi). The Regent informs the villagers of her intention to rotate the kingship among lineages as customs demand. She however

presents two candidates to the kingmakers to make a choice so that the rituals for enthronement may be observed for the coronation proper.

The two candidates (Asagidigbi and Gbadegesin) as nominated by the Regent took to lobbying and other deceptive measures to gain the votes of the kingmakers (Salotin, Aloba, Abere and Eto). The struggle is for the throne of Ilu Koroju as King. The two nominated candidates get brawled in different machinations and gimmicks though Asagidigbi succeeds in gaining the favour of the kingmakers due to the huge amount of money he shared.

Against laid down traditional rules, Asagidigbi becomes the king-elect even as they Diviner advises otherwise. Asagidigbi first official assignment as a King involved him going into a 7-day seclusion rite in the palace, in preparation for the annual Oge Festival. Asagidigbi, being used to a free lifestyle where he could do as he pleases, went against the guidelines for the seclusion including outings, getting drunk and forcing himself on Arugba Oge (the virgin sacrificial bearer). When Agogo tried to restrain him, he killed Agogo, claiming he has overstepped his boundary. On the day of the Oge festival, as Arugba carried the sacrifice into the Ogboju shrine to appease the gods, the response is thunder strike and lightning with rain of deformities on the people of Ilu Koroju. Consequently, the King (Kabiyesi) Asigidigbi goes blind while his aide develops hunch back. On getting the Diviner (Fadele) for a possible solution from the gods, it is revealed that only a drink of water from River Awogbaarun can

cleanse the people and heal the land, thus, someone must be sent immediately to Ite-Esumare after the land of the dead where the River Awogbaarun flows. Fadele adds that the oracle wants the king to go fetch the water for the people for without the crown on the head of he that goes to fetch the water, inhabitants of the land of the Dead will not allow him to cross their land. King Asigidigbi argues against him making the trip citing his blindness as a hindrance; however, Adegbanl offered a suggestion, volunteering to make the trip but with the King's attire and importantly the king's crown since the power that subdues Ara Orun (the leader of the Dead) is inside the crown. The people embrace the idea with excitement and Adegbanl declares that he is doing it for the love of his fatherland. Adegbanl succeeds in his venture, though the spirits knew his real intention and also identified that he is not the king. Upon his return to Ilu Koroju, he outrightly told Asigidibdi that he will not return the King attires and crown as he deserves to be the king, being that he made the trip to save the people and the land. At the same point, Fadele (the Diviner) reveals to the people of Koroju how the king violated the traditional culture of the land by defiling virgin Arugba Oje before the Oge Festival. Interestingly, Asigidibdi had people who supported him and felt he should still be allowed to rule. But with Adegbanl handing out the healing water to the people and threatening that if he is not allowed to rule, he will break the pot of water and others will remain with their ailment, the greater support went to Adegbanl who became recognized as

the King while Adegbanl ordered that Asagidigbi and the kingmakers be taken away.

Conceptualizing Leadership in *Rogbodiyan*

It is not hyperbolic to submit that *Rogbodiyan* positions as a reflection of contextual realities that define the leadership structure in some African countries. Relatable instances are the records in some African countries where a single leader occupies the throne for decades and in some cases when there are clamours for change, the leadership is rotated around a particular family. Regent Adebunmi occupied the position of King in Ilu Koroju for seven years having taken over from her father. In a somewhat twist of occurrences, her son (Adegbanl) becomes the King after her, despite her promise of ensuring she is the last in her lineage to occupy the throne. The conversation:

Regent: It has not been easy ruling this land since Adeakin, my father, left us to join his ancestors. That was seven years ago when I became the regent. You all know how we tried since then to choose a new king, but this has not been possible. Let me quickly tell you again that I know my lineage has ruled this land longer than any other lineage and I want my own reign to be the last of my lineage. (Rasaki, 2004: 10)

The reaction that followed her declaration signal that her promise is a repeated act that has not seen recorded action. This could be read from Salotin's speech:

Your Royal Highness, we hear you and judging from the reaction here, we are happy with what you have said. But Oyibo people say, 'once bitten, twice shy'. With all due respect, Your Highness, why may we believe you this time? In spite of several promises,

your lineage has ruled this land for the last twenty-three years..." (Rasaki, 2004: 11)

Quite questionable also is her act of presenting two candidates from which a king is to be selected. An act that goes contrary to the community's style of choosing their king. A woman raised objection to the act as she says:

Yes. I insist on being heard! I must speak my mind. How can anybody wake up one morning and impose two candidates on us just like that? Aren't there established procedure for this sort of thing? Are we people without tradition? Wonderful things are happening in this land.
Regent: I refuse to take your words in anger. As far as this issue is concerned, I have spoken, and so it shall be. The crown un-worn is a crown smeared with dung. The staff unheld is a staff buried in the mud. The power unused is a power unworthy of being owned. I want to bring the people's government back to this land and I have decreed the procedure to follow and all who want peace for this land should abide by it. (Rasaki, 2004: 12)

Above delivery by the Regent positions her as an autocratic leader who takes it upon herself to decide for the people and insist that her declarations must stand. While it could be argued that culture is subject to change, Ekpe (2018) posits that every culture has an innate tendency toward both accepting and opposing change. While certain dynamic processes promote unchanging stability, others promote the acceptance of novel concepts and objects. The absence of conservative forces opposing change would probably lead to social and psychological anarchy. It could then be deduced that 'Woman' represents a conversative force resisting change while also recognizing that sustained change could be

introduced in a more palatable form, buying the acceptance of the people.

The concept of leadership in *Rogbodiyan* is presented as an intentional use of influence to guide, plan, and cultivate relationships and activities within a group or organization but more interesting is the situational twists where in unexpected times personal agenda are played against the interest of the people. This is seen also in the spirits of the Dead as they are swayed by personal gains. It could also be said of Adebunmi who does nothing when her son ended up being king after her, despite her promise to the people. Aloba (the head of the kingmakers) who is revered as upright, a democratic leader with the interest of the people somewhat proves to be the opposite when eyes are not watching. He opted that Ifa be consulted on the selection of the new king and then bend to the suggestion about going for majority vote though with an interesting twist to drive home his plan. He speaks objectively of the two candidates when he says:

We all knew when the two children were born, and we all know them like we know the colours of our palms. Apart from wealth, what again is the good thing Asagidigbi and his lineage possess? They have wealth, but is that enough? What about morality? We all heard stories of his great grandfathers who ruled this land before we were born, and we all as children witnessed the reign of his own father. His father plunged this town into disaster and the wounds have not healed. Now look at Asagidigbi himself, he is even more reckless than his fathers. The child still weaves the cotton spun by the mother. Abere, let us not look at wealth. This town needs people of high intelligence and moral uprightness and that is what Gbadegesin is. (Rasaki, 2004: 21)

He declares his vote for Gbadegesin and when Gbadegesin appears to offer bribe to the king makers he expressed shock and resorted to inviting the Diviner (Fadele). After Fadele's revelation that none of the two candidates may rule the land as "they are old wine in new skins" (Rasaki, 2004: 24). Aloba offered to take the information to the Regent, just then Asagidigbi enters with his thugs and bags of money. All the king makers, except Aloba, accept the bribe money. Asagidigbi threatened to kill Aloba, causing fear in the other king makers who sneak out with their bags of money and at this moment it is revealed how corrupt Aloba is and his plans to ensure Asagidigbi becomes king revealed:

Aloba: Have they gone?

Asagidigbi: Yes. Gone with their ... (they both laugh again)

Aloba: I got your message. Your men brought the money to my house. (A bit seriously) Yeah... I am worried about the diviner. We are ordinary mortals. But nobody can buy the diviner.

Asagidigbi: Nobody can buy the diviner, eh? Every man, divine or not, has his price. Every man can be 'settled'. (Another round of laughter by Aloba and Asagidigbi. Then Aloba prostrates.)

Aloba: ka a biyesi oo (Rasaki, 2004: 27-8)

Eto (a king maker) is presented as a laissez-faire leader, with some sprinkles of sycophancy; one who goes with however the flow is. He swings his support to whoever has the floor and does so with pride. Upon confrontation by Abere, he proudly declares his selfish agenda:

Abere: Eto, you bat of a creature. You are neither an animal nor a bird, neither here nor there.

Eto: Yes, that is how I get what I want, by belonging to all the camps. The only politics I play now is the politics of my stomach and probably that of my immediate family..." (Rasaki, 2004: 20)

Interestingly, Rasaki employ sarcasm in relating result of the election that produced Asagidigbi as king elect. Through the character of the narrator, he writes: "That was the selection of the king, my people and you all saw how fair, peaceful and free it was. The entire town is now in a festive mood as the new king is about to be coronated" (Rasaki, 2004: 28). The leader of the Dead (Ara Orun) also represents a corrupt leader; this is revealed through his conversation with Adegbani:

Ara Orun: Who are you? Where are you coming from and where are you going?

Adegbani: I am Adegbani the king of Ilu Koroju. I am coming from Ilu Koroju, and I am heading for Ite Esumare to fetch the healing water for my people who lie in anguish back home.

Ara Orun: (laughs hilariously) ha ha ha a. You lie young man. We know you. Speak the truth, no liar crosses the land of the Dead.

Adegbani: You know everything. You have seen everything but please let me cross your land so that my people may be healed. If you allow me cross and the deed is done, 'I will always offer you sacrifices' (my emphasis).

Ara Orun: You bear this task not because of your people but because of yourself. But by helping your selfish self you may as well be helping your people. 'Do not forget what you have promised us'(my emphasis). We will allow you pass for your bravery, confidence and readiness to give unto the Dead what is theirs. (Rasaki, 2004: 51)

Relatively, some leadership theories imply that because of some observable difference between some persons and other

group members—who are referred to as followers or subordinates—one or more of them can be identified as leaders at particular times. This is discoverable in *Rogbodiyan*, specifically in the character of Adegban with the suggestion he brought about getting the healing water. However, there is clear contrast between what he exhibited before embarking on the trip and his act when he returned. This seems to align with Ekpe & Wekpe (2023) assertion that theatre has been positioned to reaffirm effective communication messages, relatively, Bassey (2025) and Ekeke (2024) add that plays have shown to be useful instruments for examining and interacting with human concerns.

Functionalism, Leadership and Power Play in *Rogbodiyan*

The functionalist view of society emphasizes how all of its components must be interconnected; society is more than the sum of its parts. Individual behaviour is not the same as collective behaviour, therefore studying collective behaviour is distinct from studying individual behaviour. As exemplify in *Rogbodiyan*, some of the leaders exhibit orientations of collectivism when societal concerns are discussed but their elements of individualism are revealed when the curtains are dropped. It therefore presents a position where their characters could be judged as supporting collective growth whereas their personal agenda is the opposite.

According to Durkheim, a society's 'collective conscience' is made up of its common values, attitudes, and beliefs. It then presents that the collective conscience of

leaders such as Adebunmi, Asagidigbi, Aloba, Eto and Ara Orun are questionable. Functionalism demands that leaders perform a variety of tasks in addition to guiding and mentoring members of the community toward the accomplishment of group objectives and fostering a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. When the leaders get along well with the subjects and build strong bonds, there is room for comfortable conversations; personal and societal challenges can be discussed and solutions sought. If Regent Adebunmi was a listening leader, there is a possibility that the troubles that befall the people of Ilu Koroju would have been averted. Also, Asagidigbi would have avoided a tragic end if he got along well with Agogo (the king's adviser, who had served three kings before Asagidigbi). The entire community of Ilu Koroju would have been saved from the challenges if the kingmakers had followed the advice of Ifa declared through the diviner (Fadele).

The leadership tussle in *Rogbodiyan* is dominated by manipulative powerplay. Analysis of the play text reveals how the characters employ deceptive mechanisms to exert influence and gain acceptance. First is Regent Adebunmi who autocratically declared a strange method for selecting a king and defied any objection. We also have the two candidates – Asdagidigbi and Gbadegesin who individually employed available gimmicks to be the favoured one. Also involved in the tussle game are the kingmakers (Aloba, Salotin, Eto and Abere) with the most involved (Aloba) being even more discreet while summoning others to be of best conduct and

carry out assigned duty with due diligent. Additionally, there is Adegban who skimmed his way to become king even after his family had occupied the throne for twenty-three years. He even employed blackmail to position his family as the ‘saviour’ of the land. He declared:

Enough of all this nonsense. You and I know that you cannot do without the Adeakin lineage. When power is given to you, what do you do with it? You squabble amongst yourself and mess up. You cheat and lie and play games. And we, of the Adeakin family, have to come and clean after you. Shut up. Where will you be without us? (Rasaki, 2004: 57)

Interestingly, this is coming from someone whom the mother (as Regent) singlehandedly dictated an unrecognizable format to produce the next king. She imposed two candidates on the people, asking them to choose one of them without right of replacing any of the candidates or refusing them both. The characters in *Rogbodiyan* in quest of power seem to be wearing masks that only come off in the secret or when their aims are achieved, and they have something at stake of which the people are on the disadvantaged side.

Conclusion

According to an old analogy, human society is a huge organism made up of several components that work together to sustain the system, much like the human system has organs that keep the body healthy. Implicitly, these components define different society and through their functionality, the structure of the society is determined. *Rogbodiyan* presents a society with structure, one that has responsibilities spelt out. In some twist of

purpose, the persons put in place to help maintain the structure have different agenda of pursuit. Recognizing that these are parts that sum up to make the society work, it could be submitted that both their positive and negative pursuits help define the society. For through differing acts and non-compliance, new structures emerge. It then becomes a game of the most powerful. This study establishes an interface between functionalism and traditional leadership powerplay in the context of an African society. It therefore glaring that in the scheme of powerplay, some persons consider functionalism as their gains in delivering assigned responsibilities, thus manipulation and misrepresentation become the order of the day with the populace left to choices that still contribute to subjective powerplay in the leadership battle.

Contributions of the Study

Functionalism essentially provides a framework that enables us to analyse a play by taking into cognizance how each component—characters, dialogue, structure, themes, etc.—works in concert to serve particular purposes within the play's overall goal. Recognizably, there are published academic works on Functionalism and Powerplay but to be seen is one that discusses how the concepts interface in Bakare Rasaki's *Rogbodiyan*. Implicitly, this study serves as a new frontier in understanding *Rogbodiyan* both from a structural and thematic perspective. Additionally, it opens the window for more diverse deconstruction of the play text in question.

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