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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
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إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**Requiem for Absolutism: Soyinka and the Re-visioning
of Governance in the 21st Century Africa**

Gbemisola Adeoti
Obafemi Awolowo University

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Abstract

The paper examines Wole Soyinka's notion and vision of governance in contemporary Africa as articulated through his dramaturgy. Undoubtedly, Soyinka, the winner of 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, is an outstanding public intellectual and committed writer whose philosophical reflections on Africans and the African world in the postcolonial era resonate across disciplines. In his creative *oeuvre* (plays, novels, poems, essays, films and music), Soyinka addresses the imperative of African development attained through democratic, people-driven mode of governance. He contends that the ascendancy of the culture of absolutism and impunity in governance, even after independence, constitute a stumbling block on the continent's path to development and true emancipation. The reality of one party absolute rule or military coup d'état has in the main, subverted the great expectations about the ideals of liberation nurtured by African nationalists. This is an abiding concern of the playwright from play to play.

Drawing textual illustrations from *Requiem For a Futurologist*, *From Zia with Love*, *The Beatification of Area Boy* and *King Baabu*, the paper submits that Soyinka advocates for a relentless war of attrition, fought on all fronts including cultural productions like drama against despots, tyrants, autocrats and other purveyors of undemocratic rule, wherever they are found on the continent. In this regard, satire, the dominant theatrical and literary form in these texts comes in handy in the onslaught against absolutism as the first step towards the recovery of popular will by the people. To achieve good governance and development in the 21st century, therefore, he contends that the democratisation project needs to be cleansed of blemishes of authoritarianism inscribed into it in some countries as they are accountable for the socio-political and economic crises in Somalia, Uganda, Cameroun, Kenya, Nigeria, Niger Republic, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Tunisia and Egypt among others. Hence, he pursues, through the tools and techniques of satire, a diminution of despots and demolition of their castle of absolutism. This is demonstrated in the paper through its analyses of characterisation, patterns of conflict, spectacle, *mis en scene* and wit in the four plays produced at the threshold of this century. Here, attention is paid to the trope of cleansing and re-birth in the plays as iconic representations of the possibilities for re-inventing the African continent even in the face of systemic drawbacks.

Apart from providing illuminative perspectives on the dramaturgy of Soyinka, the essay underscores the import of multi-disciplinarity in any serious intellectual effort to discourse the African predicament in the unfolding century.