A CRITICAL READING OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE TRIALS OF BROTHER JERO* ON ACADEMIC REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN NIGERIA'S PREPARATION FOR THE 2027 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract
The growing concern over electoral integrity, leadership accountability, civic participation, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria has intensified scholarly discussions on the role of education in promoting good governance, particularly as the nation prepares for the 2027 General Elections. This article examines the significance of academic revolution as a catalyst for democratic consciousness and sustainable governance through a critical reading of Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka's The Trials of Brother Jero (1964). The study adopts Paulo Freire's Critical Consciousness Theory and employs a qualitative methodology based on textual analysis, content analysis, and interpretative literary criticism. Data are derived from the primary text and supported with scholarly works on governance, democracy, education, and Nigerian politics. Findings reveal that Soyinka's portrayal of manipulation, false promises, abuse of authority, and public gullibility reflects enduring challenges within Nigeria's democratic process. The article argues that academic revolution, through civic education, critical thinking, media literacy, and ethical leadership training, remains indispensable for strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring informed participation in the 2027 General Elections. The study concludes that educational transformation offers a viable pathway toward electoral accountability, democratic consolidation, and good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Academic Revolution, Democratic Consciousness, Good Governance, Electoral Integrity, Wole Soyinka, Nigeria, 2027 General Elections.*

Introduction

The relationship between education and democratic governance has remained a subject of considerable scholarly interest across the world. Nations that prioritize education often experience higher levels of political participation, accountability, and institutional development. As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 General Elections, concerns regarding leadership recruitment, voter education, electoral integrity, political accountability, youth participation, and democratic consolidation continue to dominate national discourse.

Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, in his influential work Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), argues that education should enable citizens to "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire 35). Freire's position suggests that education must transcend literacy acquisition and become an instrument for social transformation and political empowerment.

Similarly, American philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey, in Democracy and Education (1916), maintains that "democracy has to be born anew every generation, and

education is its midwife" (Dewey 101). Dewey's assertion underscores the central role of education in sustaining democratic institutions and civic responsibility.

Within the Nigerian context, novelist and social critic Chinua Achebe, in The Trouble with Nigeria (1983), famously asserts that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (Achebe 1). More than four decades after this observation, leadership challenges continue to affect governance and democratic development in the country.

Likewise, Nigerian political economist Claude Ake, in Democracy and Development in Africa (1996), contends that democracy can only flourish when citizens actively participate in determining their collective destiny (Ake 58). According to Ake, development and democracy are inseparable because meaningful progress depends upon the active involvement of informed citizens.

The political atmosphere preceding the 2027 General Elections reflects increasing public concern regarding economic hardship, unemployment, corruption, insecurity, political polarization, and the spread of misinformation. These realities highlight the urgent need for what this study describes as academic revolution—a systematic transformation of educational institutions into centres of democratic consciousness, critical inquiry, ethical leadership development, and civic engagement.

This article employs Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka's satirical play The Trials of Brother Jero (1964) as a literary lens through which contemporary political realities may be examined. Although the play primarily critiques religious hypocrisy and manipulation, its themes of deception, opportunism, abuse of authority, and exploitation possess significant relevance to contemporary Nigerian politics. The study therefore investigates how academic revolution can contribute to good governance and democratic participation in Nigeria's preparation for the 2027 General Elections.

Literature Review

The relationship between education and democracy has generated considerable scholarly attention. Scholars generally agree that education plays a crucial role in promoting political participation, civic responsibility, and democratic accountability.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), argues that education should function as a liberating force capable of empowering citizens to challenge structures of domination and oppression. Freire insists that education should not merely transfer information but should develop critical consciousness among learners (Freire 72). His perspective provides a strong foundation for understanding the relationship between academic revolution and democratic governance.

Similarly, American philosopher John Dewey, in Democracy and Education (1916), views education as the foundation of democratic society. Dewey argues that democratic institutions can only survive when citizens possess the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in public affairs (Dewey 101).

Nigerian political economist Claude Ake, in Democracy and Development in Africa (1996), argues that democracy cannot succeed without active citizen participation and political awareness (Ake 58). Ake emphasizes that democratic governance requires citizens who are capable of holding leaders accountable and contributing to national development.

Political scientist Larry Jay Diamond, in Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation (1999), similarly contends that democratic consolidation depends upon informed citizens, effective institutions, and civic education (Diamond 76). Diamond's position reinforces the argument that democratic stability cannot be achieved without political enlightenment.

Likewise, political theorist Robert Alan Dahl, in On Democracy (1998), argues that democracy functions effectively only when citizens possess adequate information and the capacity to make informed political decisions (Dahl 187). According to Dahl, political knowledge remains an essential requirement for democratic participation.

Within the Nigerian context, Okwudiba Nnoli, in Introduction to Politics (2003), emphasizes the importance of political education in promoting responsible citizenship and national integration (Nnoli 114). Similarly, Richard Joseph, in Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria (1987), identifies the tendency of political office holders to treat public resources as personal entitlements, thereby weakening democratic institutions (Joseph 34).

Literary scholars have extensively examined Wole Soyinka's dramatic works for their critique of corruption, abuse of power, and social hypocrisy. However, limited attention has been devoted to the relevance of The Trials of Brother Jero to contemporary electoral politics and democratic participation. This article contributes to existing scholarship by connecting Soyinka's dramatic representation of manipulation and authority to Nigeria's socio-political realities and preparations for the 2027 General Elections.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Critical Consciousness Theory as propounded by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire in his seminal work Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). Critical Consciousness Theory emphasizes the capacity of individuals to develop awareness of social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against oppressive structures within society.

Freire argues that education should not merely transmit information from teachers to learners. Rather, it should empower individuals to become active participants in social transformation. According to Freire, "washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (Freire 122). This statement underscores the responsibility of citizens to engage critically with societal realities rather than remain passive observers.

Critical consciousness involves three interrelated processes: awareness, reflection, and action. Through awareness, individuals recognize the structures that influence their lives. Reflection enables them to critically evaluate these structures, while action empowers them to participate in transforming society.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because democratic governance depends upon informed and politically conscious citizens. In the context of Nigeria's preparation for the 2027 General Elections, Critical Consciousness Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how education can strengthen democratic participation, electoral accountability, and responsible citizenship.

The theory also illuminates the experiences of characters in The Trials of Brother Jero. While some characters remain victims of manipulation because of their lack of critical awareness, others demonstrate resistance by questioning authority and demanding accountability. The contrast between these characters reflects the broader struggle between ignorance and enlightenment within democratic societies.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design because of its suitability for literary and socio-political analysis. The research relies on textual analysis, content analysis, and interpretative literary criticism.

The primary source of data is Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka's The Trials of Brother Jero (1964). Secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, electoral reports, scholarly publications, and relevant literature on governance, democracy, education, and political participation.

Textual analysis is employed to identify themes such as manipulation, deception, exploitation, leadership failure, opportunism, and public gullibility within the play. Content analysis is used to examine the implications of these themes for democratic governance and electoral participation in Nigeria.

The findings are interpreted through the lens of Critical Consciousness Theory in order to demonstrate how academic revolution can contribute to democratic transformation and electoral accountability in Nigeria's preparation for the 2027 General Elections.

Synopsis of *The Trials of Brother Jero*

Nigerian playwright, essayist, and Nobel Laureate Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka first published The Trials of Brother Jero in 1964. The play is a satirical comedy set along a beach in Lagos where several self-proclaimed prophets establish places of worship and compete for followers.

The central character, Brother Jeroboam, commonly known as Brother Jero, presents himself as a charismatic prophet endowed with spiritual authority. However, beneath his religious appearance lies a manipulative individual who exploits the hopes, fears, and aspirations of others for personal gain.

One of Jero's most devoted followers is Chume, a humble messenger who constantly seeks spiritual guidance regarding his troubled marriage. Chume's unwavering trust in Jero makes him vulnerable to exploitation.

Another major character is Amope, Chume's outspoken wife. Unlike her husband, Amope is assertive, courageous, and unwilling to submit blindly to authority. She frequently challenges injustice and refuses to tolerate exploitation.

The play also features a Member of Parliament who consults Jero regarding his political ambitions. The politician hopes to receive prophetic assurance concerning his future career. Jero exploits these ambitions by promising success and divine favour.

Through irony, humour, satire, and dramatic tension, Soyinka exposes the dangers of blind obedience, manipulation, false promises, and abuse of authority. These themes provide important insights into contemporary political realities and democratic governance.

Nigeria's Socio-Political Environment and Preparation for the 2027 General Elections

Nigeria's democratic journey since the return to civilian rule in 1999 has been characterized by both progress and challenges. Although democratic institutions have become more established, concerns regarding corruption, electoral malpractice, insecurity, unemployment, political violence, and weak accountability mechanisms continue to affect governance.

Political scientist Samuel Phillips Huntington, in Political Order in Changing Societies (1968), argues that political instability often emerges when institutions fail to keep pace with social change (Huntington 7). This observation remains relevant within Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape.

Similarly, political scientist Larry Jay Diamond, in Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation (1999), contends that democratic stability depends upon credible elections, strong institutions, and informed citizens (Diamond 76). These factors remain central to discussions surrounding the 2027 General Elections.

The growth of social media has further transformed political communication. While digital platforms provide opportunities for civic engagement, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation, propaganda, and political manipulation.

Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, in Communication Power (2009), argues that political power increasingly depends upon control over information and communication networks (Castells 231). Consequently, media literacy has become an essential component of democratic participation.

As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 elections, citizens face important decisions regarding leadership, governance, and national development. The quality of electoral outcomes will depend significantly on the extent to which voters possess critical awareness and political literacy. The election therefore represents more than a contest for political office. It is also a test of democratic maturity and civic responsibility.

Academic Revolution and Democratic Transformation

Academic revolution refers to the transformation of educational institutions into centres of critical inquiry, democratic engagement, ethical leadership development, and social responsibility.

Rather than restricting education to classroom instruction and certification, academic revolution seeks to produce citizens who can think independently, evaluate information critically, and participate actively in governance.

Tanzanian statesman Julius Kambarage Nyerere, in Education for Self-Reliance (1968), argues that education should contribute directly to societal transformation and citizen empowerment (Nyerere 45). Nyerere's position aligns closely with the objectives of academic revolution. Likewise, South African statesman Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, in Long Walk to Freedom (1994), famously states that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Mandela 67). Mandela's observation highlights the transformative potential of education in promoting social and political change.

In Nigeria's preparation for the 2027 General Elections, academic revolution requires the strengthening of civic education, voter enlightenment, media literacy, leadership training, and democratic participation. Educational institutions must become active participants in democratic development by encouraging critical thinking, public debate, and civic responsibility. Citizens who possess these qualities are less likely to become victims of political manipulation, vote-buying, ethnic propaganda, or misinformation.

Furthermore, academic revolution can help address voter apathy by encouraging greater participation among young people, who constitute a significant proportion of Nigeria's electorate. Through education, citizens can develop the knowledge and confidence necessary to engage meaningfully in democratic processes. The relationship between academic revolution and democratic transformation therefore lies in the ability of education to empower citizens, strengthen institutions, and promote accountable governance

Textual Analysis of The Trials of Brother Jero

Manipulation and Political Deception

One of the dominant themes in The Trials of Brother Jero is manipulation. Throughout the play, Brother Jero derives power from his ability to control the perceptions, emotions, and actions of his followers. Soyinka presents him as an individual who understands human weaknesses and exploits them for personal benefit.

At the beginning of the play, Brother Jero confidently introduces himself by declaring, "I am a prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination" (Soyinka 7). This statement immediately establishes his authority and self-confidence. However, as the drama progresses, Soyinka reveals that Jero's authority is founded on deception rather than genuine spirituality.

Jero carefully cultivates an image of holiness in order to gain the trust of his followers. He promises solutions to their problems, offers prophetic assurances, and presents himself as an intermediary between the people and divine power. Yet these promises are primarily designed to maintain his influence.

The character of Brother Jero closely resembles political leaders who rely on persuasive rhetoric, propaganda, and unrealistic promises to secure public support. During election

campaigns, politicians frequently portray themselves as saviours capable of solving all societal problems. Like Jero, they exploit public expectations and aspirations.

Nigerian novelist and social critic Chinua Achebe, in The Trouble with Nigeria (1983), asserts that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (Achebe 1). Brother Jero symbolizes this leadership failure through his deliberate exploitation of vulnerable individuals for personal advancement.

The relevance of this theme to Nigeria's preparation for the 2027 General Elections is evident. Citizens are often confronted with campaign promises that lack realistic implementation strategies. Academic revolution becomes necessary because an educated electorate is better positioned to evaluate political claims critically and hold leaders accountable.

Chume and the Vulnerable Electorate

The character of Chume represents the ordinary citizen who lacks critical awareness and therefore becomes susceptible to manipulation. Chume is hardworking, loyal, and sincere. However, his inability to question authority makes him vulnerable.

Throughout the play, Chume places absolute confidence in Brother Jero's guidance. Whenever he encounters challenges in his marriage, he seeks spiritual solutions from Jero rather than critically assessing his circumstances. His dependence on Jero reflects the behaviour of electorates who rely entirely on political leaders without evaluating their competence or credibility.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), criticizes what he calls the "banking concept" of education in which learners passively receive information without questioning its validity (Freire 72). Chume's character illustrates the consequences of such passivity.

By accepting Jero's instructions without scrutiny, Chume effectively surrenders his independence. This situation mirrors political environments in which citizens support leaders based on emotional appeals, ethnic loyalties, religious affiliations, or financial inducements rather than informed judgment. The lesson for Nigeria's 2027 elections is clear. Citizens must move beyond passive political participation and develop the critical skills necessary to evaluate candidates, policies, and governance records. Academic revolution seeks to cultivate precisely this form of democratic consciousness.

Amope and Civic Resistance

In contrast to Chume, Amope represents civic resistance, critical awareness, and democratic assertiveness. She is one of the few characters in the play who refuses to be intimidated by authority figures. Amope openly challenges injustice and insists on accountability. She is unwilling to accept exploitation and consistently demands fairness in her interactions with others. Her courage and determination distinguish her from many of the other characters.

Within the framework of Critical Consciousness Theory, Amope embodies the ideals advocated by Paulo Freire. She does not accept authority blindly; instead, she interrogates it. Her

actions demonstrate that democratic participation requires courage, vigilance, and active engagement.

In contemporary Nigeria, Amope symbolizes citizens who demand transparency, accountability, and good governance. Such individuals play a crucial role in strengthening democratic institutions because they refuse to remain silent in the face of injustice.

The increasing involvement of civil society organizations, youth movements, women groups, and democratic advocacy organizations reflects the type of civic resistance represented by Amope. These groups contribute significantly to electoral monitoring, voter education, and democratic accountability. Consequently, academic revolution must encourage the development of citizens who possess Amope's qualities of courage, critical thinking, and civic responsibility.

The Member of Parliament and Political Opportunism

Another significant dimension of Soyinka's satire is his portrayal of political ambition through the character of the Member of Parliament. The politician consults Brother Jero in search of prophetic validation for his aspirations. Rather than focusing on public service, he is primarily concerned with personal advancement and prestige. Jero exploits these ambitions by offering assurances of future success. Through this relationship, Soyinka exposes the dangers of political opportunism. Both Jero and the politician pursue self-interest while neglecting broader societal concerns. Their interaction reflects the tendency of some political actors to prioritize personal gain over public welfare.

Political scientist Richard Joseph, in Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria (1987), argues that political office is often treated as a source of personal entitlement rather than public service (Joseph 34). The behaviour of the Member of Parliament reflects this phenomenon. As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 elections, the play reminds citizens of the importance of scrutinizing the motivations of political candidates. Leadership should be evaluated based on competence, integrity, and commitment to public service rather than personal ambition.

Brother Jero as a Symbol of Elite Manipulation

Beyond his role as a religious figure, Brother Jero functions as a symbol of elite manipulation within society. He understands the psychology of his followers and uses that knowledge to maintain power. His success depends largely on the ignorance of those around him. By controlling information and shaping perceptions, he creates a system in which followers willingly submit to his authority. Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, in Communication Power (2009), argues that political influence increasingly depends on the ability to control information and shape public opinion (Castells 231). Jero's behaviour exemplifies this principle.

The contemporary relevance of this theme is particularly significant in an era characterized by digital communication and social media. Political actors can influence public opinion through strategic messaging, misinformation, and propaganda. Academic revolution therefore requires media literacy programmes capable of helping citizens distinguish between factual information and manipulation.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis reveals a strong relationship between education, democratic consciousness, and good governance. One major finding is that manipulation flourishes where critical awareness is absent. Brother Jero succeeds because many of his followers lack the capacity to question authority.

This finding supports Paulo Freire's argument that education should empower citizens to challenge oppressive structures rather than submit passively to them (Freire 35).

A second finding concerns leadership accountability. Brother Jero operates without meaningful scrutiny because his followers fail to demand accountability. Similarly, democratic institutions become vulnerable when citizens do not monitor leadership performance.

A third finding relates to civic resistance. Through the character of Amope, Soyinka demonstrates that informed and courageous citizens can challenge exploitation and demand justice. This lesson is particularly relevant to electoral participation and democratic governance.

The study also finds that academic revolution represents a viable strategy for addressing voter apathy, political manipulation, misinformation, and governance challenges. By promoting civic education, critical thinking, and ethical leadership, educational institutions can contribute significantly to democratic development.

Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between academic revolution, democratic consciousness, and good governance in Nigeria's preparation for the 2027 General Elections through a critical reading of Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka's The Trials of Brother Jero. The analysis demonstrates that Soyinka's portrayal of manipulation, deception, opportunism, and abuse of authority remains highly relevant to contemporary Nigerian politics. Brother Jero symbolizes leaders who exploit public ignorance, while characters such as Chume and Amope represent contrasting responses to authority.

The study establishes that democratic consolidation requires more than periodic elections. It requires informed citizens who possess the capacity to evaluate political claims, demand accountability, and participate actively in governance.

Academic revolution therefore emerges as a strategic instrument for strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing electoral credibility, and promoting sustainable good governance. As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 General Elections, educational transformation remains essential for cultivating the democratic consciousness necessary for national development.

Recommendations

1. Government should strengthen civic education programmes at all educational levels.
2. Universities should incorporate democratic participation and political literacy into their curricula.
3. Electoral bodies should collaborate with educational institutions on voter enlightenment campaigns.

4. Media literacy programmes should be expanded to combat misinformation and propaganda.
5. Leadership training initiatives should emphasize ethics, accountability, and public service.
6. Youth participation in democratic processes should be encouraged through structured civic engagement programmes.
7. Civil society organizations should intensify public awareness campaigns ahead of the 2027 elections.
8. Citizens should be encouraged to evaluate political candidates based on competence, integrity, and performance rather than ethnic or religious affiliations.

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