

Alex Asigbo's *Once upon a School* as a Drama of Socio-Political Criticism and Metaphor of Social Construction of Behaviour in Nigeria

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Abstract: The paper examines Alex Asigbo's *Once upon a School* as a drama of social criticism through an interpretive analysis of embedded metaphors as forms of behaviour intrigues, twists and turns that characterize humans in quest to achieving their aspirations. The play evaluates behavioural tendencies as products of social construction of reality, which revolve around influences of nature and nurture, locale specific social realities and contexts. To discuss the behaviour of the characters in the play, the paper adopts content analysis approach regarding specific aspects of the play such as characters' choice of language, particularly humour, the characters' projected ideological inclinations, the existing didactic values, and the socio-cultural variables that propel the social construction of certain realities. Furthermore, the paper adopts Abraham Maslow's view on the humanistic perspective as the theoretical paradigm applicable to the analysis of the play's characters' conducts in specific circumstances. Lastly, the paper asserts that human behaviours are manifestations of locale specific social construction of realities and the propelling forces of an individual's nature and nurture.

Keywords: intrigues, social criticism, intentionality, humanistic perspective, nature, nurture

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on *Once upon a School*, a contemporary Nigerian play written by Alex Asigbo¹, as an allegorical portrayal of shades of

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squabbles in a fictional institution of higher education in Nigeria as well as an intense metaphorical commentary on the realities of the larger socio-political dimensions and contexts in Nigeria.

Thematically, this play revolves around the nuances of corruptions, poor leadership disposition, and issues relating to poor 'due process' culture in a fictional institution of higher education in Nigeria. Thus, in the play, the portrayals of conflicts, which metamorphosed into political manoeuvres, subsume the nuances of twists and turns in life, as well as the intricate webs of human intentionality and hidden agendas. Though presented in a light-hearted manner, *Once upon a School* remains an engaging and gripping piece of social criticism. The playwright looks at the human and humanistic angles to the delicate webs that the human actions produce.

Essentially, this paper reads *Once upon a School* as a drama of social criticism, following Cyprian Obadiogwu's claims that the playwright, as a keen observer of the happenings in the society, applies drama as a medium through which the society can assess and re-assess its realities as a means of propelling change in actions and perspectives (2002, 112). Similarly, in his critical reaction to *Once upon a School*, Ezenwa Ohaeto, notes that the primal contextual purview of drama of social criticism is "the derivation of the subject matter from all the facets of the society" (2001, vii). Ohaeto is also of the opinion that *Once upon a School* provides a platform "for the examination of moral issues, the exploration of virtues and vices, and angles of human motives and attitudes" (2001, vii). Therefore, *Once upon a School*, in line with Ohaeto's critical views, portrays the inhumanities and social anomalies that have sapped deep into the marrows of human virtue, which in many ways are inherent in every society. Lawrence Bamidele further observes that drama of social criticism can be a satirical enactment of social anomalies and wrong-doings aimed at hurting the feelings of the people in a bid to propel them to change positively (2001, 40). Here, the context of satirical enactment is classified as a form of literary humour. Looking at Asigbo's application of humour in *Once upon a School*, we perceive that, conceptually, the shades of jokes and the significations of humorous utterances are culturally as well as socially shaped; hence, they are describable as time and locale

include *Obidike: The Last Warrior*, *Fate of an Orphan*, *The Reign of Paschal Amusu*, *War of the Tin Gods*, *Once upon a School*, and *Breakdown*.

specific. The locale specific perspectives on humour are products of social construction of behaviour and worldview. Thus, the realities of humour as it relates to a particular clime are perpetually in a state of socio-culturally influenced moulding and re-moulding. To analyze the nuances of intrigues, twists, and turns that characterize the play's characters' inclinations, motivations and decisions, this paper will examine the wider contexts of "social intrigues" and the place of drama of social criticism within Nigeria's social contexts. To provide the logical conceptual background for the analysis, this paper will use the humanistic perspective and the social construction of behaviour as the preferred conceptual frames.

Humanism, as a conceptual frame, in line with Friedrich Niethammer, is composed of human knowledge and suppositions subsumed in continually evolving worldviews propelled by critical thinking and evidence. Hence, humanistic perspective accentuates the essence, sanctity, and inalienable rights of human beings against upholding of dogma or superstition. Consequently, the emphasis on the value of humanism has been influenced by the conceptual inclinations of successive intellectual movements that identified with it (Walter 1997, 2). According to Kevin J. Pearce, "the humanistic perspective, often called the 'third force' in psychology because it was developed after behaviourism and psychoanalysis, took form in the middle of the 20th century and expanded greatly in the 1970s and 1980s" (2009, 477) and "arose in reaction to the deterministic and pessimistic view espoused by both behaviourism and psychoanalysis" (2009, 477). Pearce further explains that to comprehend a person's behaviours and motives from the humanistic perspective "you must view the person as a whole, and you must focus on the subjective experience of the individual. The focus must be on the individual, and it is assumed that a person's behaviour is connected to his or her inner feelings and self-image" (2009, 477). From the above contribution by Pearce, it is indicative that an enhanced appreciation of the characters' behaviours in *Once upon a School* will yield plausible connotations and attributions, if analyses of their conducts are evaluated from the culture specific circumstances and locale specific stimulus of the given actions and inactions.

In order to carry out a behaviour evaluation, we need to consider the factors that define a character's nature and personality. Therefore, this approach also focuses on the circumstantial and attributable factors, which variously contribute towards a character's behaviour tendencies

in a specific circumstance. Furthermore on the conceptual inclination on humanistic perspective, Pearce observes:

The humanistic perspective sees behaviour as not determined by the subconscious mind. Humanistic psychology approaches the study of human behaviour from a more phenomenological approach than either behaviourism or psychoanalysis. There are five main ideas that are often used to summarize the humanistic perspective. First, human beings cannot be reduced to components. Second, human beings must be understood in a uniquely human context. Third, human consciousness includes self-awareness and a concept of oneself in the context of other people. Fourth, human beings have and make personal choices. And fifth, human beings are intentional beings who seek meaning and value in their lives. (2009, 478)

As an analytical approach, the humanistic perspective takes the subjective experience of a focused individual as an essential area of interest. According to Abraham Maslow (1968), individuals are naturally and continually faced with certain needs that occur because of their life realities. These needs must be met in a specific hierarchical manner because the enormity and the unending nature of human needs outweigh the available resources to individuals. These needs are categorized as basic needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, achievement needs, and ultimately self-actualization (Ibid.). Thus, "humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs," and the quest to satisfy these needs largely propel and guide human behaviour and conduct (Pearce 2009, 478). As individual motivations differ, each individual must be regarded as the unique/single unit of analysis. Their results cannot be generalized as valid interpretations for other individuals nor should they simply be applied to a larger population (Maslow 1968). Still on the inclinations of thoughts and motivations of actions and inactions in line with the humanistic perspective, Carl Rogers (1995, 479) observes that "people have the tendency toward growth and a strong need to maintain and enhance life". Therefore, people are confronted with needs on a continual basis and the essence of humanistic perspective and rationalisation is about the knowledge required by each person to appropriately pursue his or her needs within available resources, permissible processes and tenable conditions, which are encapsulated within purview of social constructionism. Furthermore, this study adopts the view that constructionism is concerned with how people, individually or collectively construct as

well as make sense of their world, thus constructionism is the collective generation of meaning (Patton 2015).

This study adopts an interpretive epistemological approach, whereby the research intention is to examine, understand, and analyze the individual-specific and subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007). In our attempt to examine the play's portrayal of human experience, particularly the shades and nuances of behaviour, in relation to a constructionist ontological perspective, which aligns with the position that "social phenomena and their means are being continually accomplished by social actors and are in a constant state of revision" (Bryman 2008, 19). The ontological position also enables us to enhance our appreciation of the kind of assumptions a conceptual purview makes about the world. Consequently, the focused purview is about how individuals consider the nature of reality and how people understand human reality. However, Berger and Luckmann (1966) contend that humans are in a world of multiple realities, which evolve through social interactions. A constructionist ontological position also sees behaviour and their attributions as a means of appreciating the varied multiple realities (Tuffin & Howard 2001). Those realities can be made plausible through interpretive analyses of people's perceptual inclinations and ideological bents. On the explanation of social contexts as products of locale specific social construction of behaviour Victoria Dickerson and Jeffrey Zimmerman contend that a social constructionist perspective "locates meaning in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social and community context" (1996, 80). Similarly, Alexandra Galbin observes that "social constructionism regards individuals as integral with cultural, political and historical evolution, in specific times and places, and so resituates psychological processes cross culturally, in social and temporal contexts" (2014, 85). Furthermore, Galbin notes that "apart from the inherited and developmental aspects of humanity, social constructionism hypothesizes that all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed in our interactions with others through time" (2014, 85). Galbin's contribution echoes Kenneth Gergen observation, which espouses that social construction paradigm, revolves around "eschewing the individualist tradition, and giving value to relationship over isolation, ultimately requires an alternative to the traditional conception of the self - in effect, creative theoretical work" (1997, 122). Furthering, Gergen explains:

In this vein, theorists such as John Shotter (1994a, 1994b), Edward Sampson (1994), and Hermans and Kempen (1993) have begun to develop a deeply socialized conception of self. Drawing importantly from earlier writings of Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1981), individual functioning is held to be inseparable from relationship. The vast share of human action grows out of interchange, and is directed into further interchange. (1997, 122)

Clearly, what we learn from the perspectives of the mentioned scholarly contributions is that ‘social construction of reality’ is thus comprehended as a concept providing a better understanding of how locale specific interactions, circumstances, experiences and history of a people form the variables that determine their worldview and perspectives about human aspects such as behaviours.

INTRIGUES, TWISTS AND TURNS IN *ONCE UPON A SCHOOL*

Through the play *Once upon a School*, Asigbo shares his view on how locale-specific social philosophy and ideology combine to create twists and turns in human experiences. By applying salient nuances of status and socio-economic gain struggles, Asigbo interrogates the prevalent squabbles inherent within and around the academic institutions of higher education in Nigeria. His characters are modelled after the academic staff and students coming from different ethnic groups in Nigeria. He also illustrates the nature of the instigating factors that usually generate the squabbles between lecturers and students and amongst lecturers, locating some of the factors in the claims and counter-claims of victimization and blackmail, which may be mere exaggerations or indeed actual reality. Noteworthy, *Once upon a School* though locates and predominate the actions within a fictional Ivory Tower; the metaphor of the play’s projected conflicts represents some typical realities and societal-body make-up of Nigeria’s polity. The paper thus discusses *Once upon a School* as a metaphorical commentary aimed at stimulating interpretive discussions on human interactions in academic institutions, the larger social construct, and how the play might in turn instigate a re-orientation and change of attitude of Nigerians.

The play opens with Chuks, an academically low achieving student, who declares: “what you are going to see tonight are rather incidents both within my life and around it” (Asigbo 2001, 1). In the opening

scene, Chuks comically introduces the play's casts and highlights the individual character's physical and psycho-social attributes.

The playwright applies Chuks' introductory comments to put emphasis on "Nigeria-centric" idiosyncrasies on dimensions and realities of human-nature typologies and stereotypes. Asigbo uses Chuks's introduction to make witty allegorical innuendoes to buffet and lampoon or to eulogize each character's behavioural tendencies and supposed psycho-physical inadequacies as a means of projecting the entrenched dimensions of human biases subsisting in Nigeria.

The playwright portrays the characters as individual metaphors subsuming ideologies of Nigerian people's notions of likes and dislikes in dimensions, qualities and propensities of people. For example, Chuks alludes to the various shades of hypocrisy prevalent in Nigeria, which are steadily becoming the standard: "I hate it when people become too assuming; I hate it when people fail to acknowledge the fact that they are humans, therefore fallible" (Asigbo 2001, 2). Chuks also wonders why some individuals, such as Professor, should appear more divine than others: "but what right has that pot bellied old fool of a Professor got to carry on as if he were a demigod" (Ibid.). Here Asigbo points out the inimical realities of selfishness, over-ambition and autocracy, which apparently are allowed to thrive because of the weak structures and institutions of government. These lapses operate to a large extent as the variables that encourage African leaders to feel that relinquishing power at simple instances of disgust or public provocations or expression of dissatisfaction is a form of weakness. Consequently, because of this kind of behaviour there are adjectives such as 'president for life', which defines the sit-tight syndrome regardless of unambiguous widespread disaffection by the ruled.

Asigbo's portrayal of Prof's and Wariboko's behaviours as Heads of Department of their academic units at different times is a metaphor of the subsisting anomaly in governance realities in Nigeria, introducing a retrogressive feudal psychological disposition and thus creating a platform for an inordinate self aggrandizement at the detriment of the masses. This inimical mindset is exemplified by Prof's blatant and defiant comment as he fends off the gathering opposition: "Come, come my friend. You don't expect me to relinquish the leadership just because a bunch of prodigiously simple and intransigently recalcitrant students came to your office making puerile utterances against my person" (Asigbo 2001, 12). Prof labels his fellow colleagues as power hungry, yet he does not mind being the

Head of Department for so many years and does not even consider to step down and allow others to fulfil their aspirations of becoming the Head of Department. Prof's behaviour can be attributed to the corrupt nature of government structures and institutions in his local community.

Behavioural tendencies by Prof may be described as typical Nigerian realities, which, according to Maslow, can be classified as behaviours driven by safety needs. In this instance, we consider such behaviour as propelled by safety needs because most of the individuals who behave in like manner are typically insecure and afraid of societal retribution, hence they choose to continue with the tendency to remain in office perpetually. This occurs because the poor Nigerian welfare system encourages fear of becoming irrelevant after holding office; some individuals thus attempt to remain in office as long as possible in order to amass more material wealth and do not allow others to advance according to their merits.

Another Nigerian common perspective present in the play is that some Nigerians promote mediocrity through 'god-fatherism', thereby negating the progressive benefits of meritocracy. 'God-fatherism' and sit-tight syndromes in Nigeria are mainly attributable to dysfunctional governance and social welfare structures. Another force at play here is the social construction of behaviour that is heavily conditioned by the prevailing realities of nurture, particularly environment and indoctrination. No doubt, nature contributes to the social construction of behaviour, however, the effectual force of environment and indoctrination, which we refer to as nurture, effectively conditions the propensities of human nature. In many ways, Asigbo portrays Prof as a man of questionable character, thus turning him into a metaphor of inordinate ambition, selfishness, despotism, and retrogressive behaviour.

Asigbo further shows that the hunger for power and social position could expose highly positioned individuals to rebellion, political gang-up, and eventual disgrace. In the play, this is brought into being when Prof is eventually forced to resign due to the student protest, engineered by a senior academic Wariboko and executed by Chuks, both of whom harbour bitterness towards Prof. To achieve their aim, Chuks employs very ignoble crooked tactics such as character assassination, blackmail, and intimidation to arm twist Prof into awarding him undeserved high grades in the courses he taught. Eventually, Wariboko takes over the position of the Head Department

from Prof and turns out to be even less accommodating than Prof. Consequently, his fellow colleagues who helped him to become the Head of Department begin again to feel alienated, cheated, and discarded. Asigbo thus here exposes the inimical realities of self-centeredness and puts the responsibility for Prof's behaviour on the dysfunctional social structures and government institutions:

You heard hm. Vitriolic of a professor you might call it. Ruffled me a bit - I'm still ruffled mind you. And since then I've been trying to think of a way out. What do you do to the alpha and omega of a course? I've asked myself that question a hundred times but I can't seem to find the answer. I have tried to send him gifts but that got him mad as he now promises to ensure that I fail other courses. He says he does not like seeing my face. Anyway, I'm an optimist, something will turn up. I must think. (Asigbo 2001, 16 –17)

Chuks' behaviour can be said to be also driven by what Maslow refers to as safety needs. Through attribution, we can suggest that the refusal of Prof to accept Chuks' gift, places both of them at cross-purpose. Failing exams endangers Chuks's future endeavours; consequently, he feels insecure, which prompted him to do what it takes to secure his future. The other angle to this is that he made this resolution because he rationalized and came up with what he assumed as a workable process. In reasoning so, Chuks reflects on two things: first, that some students attempt to compromise the academics just as many people in Nigeria attempt to compromise public servants to achieve their parochial advantage; second, that there is the culture of inducement in Nigeria even though the inimical consequences of such behaviour portends the overall health of the polity. Nevertheless, he attempts to carry out his plans because they are rational to him at that point in time. Consequently, Chuks' actions are influenced by the social construction of behaviour, emanating from his social learning, observation, assimilation, and rationalization.

Asigbo also emphasizes the centrality and inclusiveness of attribution and signification as integral and consistent factors in making meaning with and about actions and phenomena in life. This view is undoubtedly evident in Chuks' comment:

When a man like Prof suddenly changes tactics in a problem of this nature, know that something is wrong somewhere. I must confess I expected his resignation. You know, people like him who are always acting like demigods – they can't bear it when things get out of their

control. But his attitude today, it's as if he were enjoying a private joke on me. I must get to the bottom of this. (Asigbo 2001, 38)

From the above comment it is plausible to suggest that Chuks deduces that Prof's behaviour in relation to the prevailing circumstances signifies to him that it may be premature to roll out the drums. Chuks thus expects Prof to appear wounded and dejected because he lost his office, yet Prof calls into question this assumption as he appears to be in high spirits. Therefore, we can suggest that Chuks' reading of Prof's mannerisms and disposition is in line with Maslow's humanistic perspective who suggests that for one to understand any person's motives and behaviours, he or she needs to focus on the locale specific, culture specific, and circumstance related signification of actions and inactions of the person at a particular point in time. The point here is that the character's mannerisms, actions, and inactions are in many ways connected to their inner feelings and such manifestations can be classified or defined variously.

In Chuks' case, what prompted him to blackmail his lecturer is selfish persuasion, hence he is not an embodiment of virtues that could be emulated (Ohaeto 2001, viii). Chuks is presented as a rebel, a non-conformist upstart who wants others to reason like him, as a dubious and dishonest personality who seeks to achieve his desires regardless of the detrimental effects on the victims of his actions. These tendencies are manifested in his remorseless lies to his girlfriend, to his professors or any person, if need be. Chuks' profession of love to Angela is, for example, a mere crooked falsehood. Once again he is depicted as a devious personality who pretends to be ignorant of his girlfriend's flings even though he is aware that Angela has several male lovers. Despite this knowledge, Chuks stays with Angela because he intends to continue to exploit her as well as use her in his dark plays. Asigbo's portrayal of Chuks as a twisted opportunist who accepts to conspire with any person for a common goal of destroying a perceived common enemy, regardless of the immoral nature of such behaviour, continues throughout the play. Thus, the playwright presents the human interactions as a form of a survivalist game, which is subsumed in multi-dimensional intrigues, twists, and turns.

Angela symbolizes a habitual consciousness of deceit exhibited by some individuals in Nigeria who are hopelessly pretentious and hypocritical. This is portrayed in the following comment by Chuks: "you notice she's not too young. I've known her for four years now in

those four years; she has celebrated her 22nd birthday four times” (Asigbo 2001, 3). Angela validates her own penchant for falsehood by adhering to the tenets of not placing all her eggs in a single basket. Angela's behaviour is caused by the fear of massive heartbreak if she and Chuks should break-up abruptly. This is again an example of social construction of behaviour, which falls within Maslow's safety needs. Through the behaviours and dispositions of Angela and Chuks, Asigbo indicates the shades of hypocrisy that has become the standard. This also projects the reality of human mindset being capable of both evil and good deeds. These realities in the behaviours of these two fake lovers are quite symbolic and as such show how vulnerable and susceptible people can be. The nuances of those emotional sensibilities are depicted in the following dialogue:

ANGELA: What exactly do you want to do? I hope there won't be any trouble?

CHUKS: There won't... come on, trust me...if you love me.

ANGELA: I love you but I don't want to get into trouble.

CHUKS: You won't... come please?

ANGELA: Alright, just tell me what to do and it's as good as done.

CHUKS: That's my girl! Come, I'll tell you as we go along. [*You saw that? Attack they say is the best form of defence. It's not my fault that she's hopelessly in love with me mind you. Oh come on, don't be jealous. You must admit that I am a rather intriguing character and women you all know are strangely attracted to characters like me*]. (Asigbo 2001, 26)

The dialogue thus indicates that human behaviours are largely influenced by numerous variables and one of such variables is the possible consequences of actions and inactions. In this instance, Angela becomes the bait and the sacrificial lamb to tame the overzealous Prof.

In addition to Angela, Asigbo introduces other characters whose behavioural tendencies are the products of social construction of reality, revolving around locale specific social realities and contexts and the forces of an individual's nature and nurture. One of them is Oforji who is presented as a lacklustre intellectual and a good man, hence “a proper bookman but much too pedantic and eccentric” (Asigbo 2001, 4). In a tone that could be interpreted as that driven by jealousy or bigotry or even both, Chuks observes: “notice how he bears himself like a sage” (Ibid.). Chuks' comments reveal the dialectics of

jealousy and pettiness, another category of emotions that have the propensity to drive an individual towards dark behaviour.

There is also Segun who is described as “a true Nigerian” – “slippery like a fish” and an opportunist who “romances with the left and . . . with the right” (Asigbo 2001, 4). Segun effectively bootlicks his way into Wariboko’s favour, which as a result propels Wariboko to tilt towards acceding to his meekly tabled requests. Segun understands that a number of political leaders in Nigeria succumb to praise-singing and bootlicking sycophants. The playwright indicates the above supposition in the following dialogue.

SEGUN: My head! My only head! (*Wariboko beams from ear to ear*).

The only head I know. (*Prostrates*)

WARIBOKO: Mr. Segun. Get up, eh, get up. You see, I’ve told you before, I’m here for you.

SEGUN: My only head! My able head!

WARIBOKO: Ha! Ha, ha, Mr. Segun, with me you have no problems.

OK, how can I help you?

SEGUN: My head! Eh Sir, it’s about this study leave. (Asigbo 2001, 42)

The conversation shows that Segun gets his needs sorted through relentless pampering of Wariboko’s ego. Segun wants to get his study leave approved and he is aware that leaders in the mould of Wariboko soften and compromise when their ego is properly fed. Even though Wariboko makes it clear to Segun that he is not qualified, he nevertheless signs the letter of study leave request for him. Wariboko grants Segun’s request because Segun has steadfastly exhibited that he will always support his policies, bad or good, as long as Wariboko remains in power. The symbiotic relationship between Wariboko and Segun thus indicates that the electorates or political constituents in any form or design in Nigeria usually locate, adopt, elect, appoint, and validate individuals for leadership positions mostly because of self-centred interests.

In the character of Ikenga, Asigbo further focuses on the human biases people exhibit towards one another: “Notice how he wobbles like a noctambulist. I think life has been unfair to him. You won’t believe it but he has a PhD. Anyway, it’s his fault. He is completely destitute of political and social dynamism. As you can see, he still lives in the past, 18th century to be precise” (Asigbo 2001, 4). The quote portrays the existing social perception held by a significant number of Nigerians who reject uniqueness and show no respect for individual

choice of appearance and ideology. By pretending to embrace modernist-liberal outlook to life, they actually remain shackled by hypocrisy and gravely short-sighted. In the following conversation between Wariboko (the current H.O.D.) and Ikenga, one of the lecturers that played significant role in his emergence, the playwright portrays the dimensions to twists and turns that usually emanates as a result of crooked politics and slimy behaviour. Similarly, Ikenga expects Wariboko to be pliant and malleable to his requests as they colluded to dethrone Prof, but Wariboko has turned out differently. In response to Ikenga's request to be promoted Wariboko retorts:

WARIBOKO: I told you we're looking into it. Eh? Calm down. Look, we're looking into it and I'm telling you that in the nearest possible future, you will be promoted.

IKENGA: Look Wariboko, I'm not a small boy. Stop playing with me. We fought this battle together but now, you're alienating us.

WARIBOKO: My friend, don't tell me that! Everything here has a procedure and I ... (Asigbo 2001, 41)

After Wariboko's refusal, Ikenga begins to plot with the rest of the alienated staff to dethrone Wariboko immediately. The play ends with the assumption/idea/message that the electorates and political constituents should improve in their consciousness building towards due process, fairness, and equity. The playwright indicates the futility and vainness of the vicious cycle of 'pull-him-down' and install another person syndrome and idiosyncrasy, solely for the purpose of installing one who will just do their self-centred bidding in negation of the common interest of the Nigeria masses.

CONCLUSION

Asigbo's play presents a society held-down painfully by many afflictions, such as conflicts of self, of purpose and of essence, which are the manifestations of social construction of behaviour. It is an attempt to portray select social realities as a means of interrogating and assessing anomalies, problems, retrogressions, disharmonies and hostilities that tend to create inter-personal squabbles and disenchantments in Nigeria's institutions of higher education and, by extension, in Nigerian society and polity. To do this, Asigbo focuses on the relationships among the staff and between students and the staff to show how different interests in many ways influence actions and intents by people in an academic environment. Through *Once upon a*

School, Asigbo laments on the social and academic intrigues inherent within an academic institution, the larger social construct in order to provide insights on how Nigerians can enhance their understanding of the existing anomalies in governance and behaviour patterns. The play shows that not only do people become tyrants in government offices and oppress their subordinates because of the weak structures and institutions of governance at various levels but also that the lack of adequate and functional social compass has created a society without progressive bearing, inflated with an artful blend of imagery of gloom and decadence. It also shows that hopelessness helps to detonate massive explosions of anger and anguish directed at a society overtaken by sundry ills and that individuals threatened and pushed to the wall by bad behaviours of others may attempt to slide towards illegalities.

The play eventually offers a scenario indicating that better social structures are needed to promote fairness and equity. Technically, through Chuks' utterances the playwright portrays the propensity of likes and dislikes as enormous force that propels human relations in the short and long run. Logically, the playwright indicates through Chuks' words that there is no individual without an anomaly either physically or behaviourally, even though some people apparently are adjudged to carry more anomalies than others. The play may be asking the question: do individual carry anomalies by choice or otherwise? The playwright enactment can be deduced as metaphors of the reality of human emotions. In line with this study's perspective, human emotions are creations that are continually re-invented and remodelled. The notion here is that when emotions are created they begin to blossom, get embedded and entrenched, thus forming part of the definitive variables of the individual person. Hence, we can deduce from the conflicts in the play that commensurate progress will follow when structures and institutions of governance are strengthened to develop the individual's mind and mental abilities through a good social environment for better social construction of behaviour.

Furthermore, *Once upon a School* demonstrates that human behaviour is a product of phenomenal complexities and variables that are perpetually undergoing continual differential re-aggregation, which negates consistent flawless prediction. Again, an interpretive reading of *Once upon a School* indicates the nuances of social learning paradigm as a relevant conceptual trajectory in assessing the portrayal of the characters' behavioural tendencies.

This theoretical view subsumes the idea that social learning increases knowledge of the individual and the quality and quantity of knowledge an individual accumulates and remembers, provides such individual with the realities of rationality. Therefore, an individual's behaviours are among other things the products of choices which the individual deems tenable and rational to him or her in the given circumstance. Thus, the position we espouse here suggests that individuals substantially glean information from the series of continual observations and receptions, which as the situation requires, he or she applies accordingly. Buttressing on the concept of social learning paradigm, Albert Bandura (1974, 859) explains that human "psychological functioning is best understood in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between behaviour and its controlling conditions". It is these varieties of controlling conditions that this paper believes are in most cases locale and culture specific. Consequently, these conceptual frames inform the cardinal point of view and the central focus, through which this study analyzes the variables supposedly responsible for the characters' behaviours in the focused play. This position is in many ways in concordance with the conceptual frame of humanistic perspective. This theoretical position again subsumes the conceptual on the relationship between stimulus and intentionality, which can be rationalized within the conceptual frame of social construction of behaviour. The thinking here is that these conceptual frameworks will aid us towards the broadening of this paper's thematic purview, which is to assess the relationship of the actions and inactions of the play's characters to some variables such as the innate human quest to enjoy pleasure, achieve higher status, get revenge and enhance self preservation.

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