



GUIDE TO BETRAYAL IN THE CITY BY FRANCIS IMBUGA: Comprehensive Analysis of the Play

EDWIN SIMIYU

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The play paints a picture of independent Africa which is under oppressive leadership. It starts by showing the contradictions between African culture and inherited cultural systems in Africa as well as the dilemma and failure of post-colonial African leadership.

Francis draws a clear distinction between leaders and the lead (masses) and in so doing, he highlights the gaping fault lines within our societies that are still evident even today.

The play opens by showing the life of Nina and Doga who mourn for their lost child, who was killed on an organized demonstration, which was focused on African dictatorship and corruption.

Francis Imbuga builds up the Plot by adding more characters that represent different situations and in different circumstances. For example we meet Mulili an illiterate soldier who was turned into high ranking government official.

Francis Imbuga unlike other writers survives the harsh regimes due to a number of things. One, by employing use of distancing technique that gives the play a multidimensional appeal and also ensures the playwright's security as he does not point out a finger to any regime: he talks about Kafira but not Africa when really he is meaning Africa. Two, by virtue of the names used the authorities are not touched i.e. names of Boss, Tumbo, Mosese lacks any ethnicity, Mulili refers to an alarmist crocodile tears. These names are used to alienate the characters from the ethnocentric realities outside the context of play and help us to ask ourselves moral questions or issues.

In nutshell, the play addresses the post-colonial failures listed below:

- Innocent murder of citizens in Kafira.
- Suppression of intellectual and artistic freedom, Mosese (a lecturer) is to bury one of his dead student and he is told that nobody should weep, no making of speeches but he decided not to follow that and which lands him in jail, Juser is told to put everything in black and white about development when he writes the play.
- Suppression of student rights: they are not given chance to demonstrate on what they want.
- Infighting amongst government officials and their scramble for material wealth, the entertainment committee is full of fights it even starts late because Mulili came late due to him following the milk tender to the university that was snatched away from him.
- There is presidential patronage i.e. the president oversees everything.
- Mulili is an agent of destruction. He kills anybody who stands in his way. Kafira destroys its own people like Doga and Nina.
- Everything is reduced to property ownership and competition. It is a system that is self destructive for personal advantage.

One of the most emotional and psychological appealing statements are those of Mosese: "it was better we waited. Now we have nothing to look forward to. We have killed our past and are busy killing our future..." What ails Kafira is the specter of political realism. This is a socio-political Darwinism in which those in leadership believe they were born to live and lead over others.

THE SETTING

The text sets in the city in the fictional country called Kafira ruled by Boss, who is surrounded by sycophants like Mulili and the sharing-the-pie government officials: Tumbo, Kabito, and Nicodemo.

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