CHAPTER VI

MAN OF KAFIRA
Man of Kafira seriously inquires into the matters of truth, love and the art of drama though it primarily deals with the political unrest in African countries. The play also denotes the idea that the senseless murder of political opponents is a futile exercise for the simple reason that the flames of man's fighting spirit in the face of oppression cannot be extinguished; it lives on for ever (21).

Using characters who put self before society, Imbuga examines the perversion of truth, and the substitution of love with brutality in our society. Thus, Man of Kafira is a continuation of the indictment of evil in Betrayal in the City but even more an expression of the author's belief that there is hope for a better future. ¹

The play is set against the background of Boss, the ex-president of Kafira in Betrayal in the City, pacifying Jusper, Mosese and Jere, the revolutionary leaders, with government posts. By the time the play opens, Boss is in exile in Abiara where he has fled after being overthrown in the coup masterminded by Jere, the present head of Kafira. Imbuga has once again deployed the play-within-the play technique with a lot of ingenuity while maintaining the spirit of political theme.
Man of Kafira is set in four Parts, each Part having its own significance. While the first three Parts take place in Abiara, the last Part is set in Kafira, the native state of the protagonist, Boss. In Part One of the play, the main characters are introduced. It begins with a play-within-the-play in the form of a rehearsal meant for the pleasure of Boss, the ex-president of Kafira. At the same time, it is also meant to expose the nefarious and dictatorial nature of Boss and the chaotic contemporary political situation in which common people writhe in pain. As the play opens, the audience are introduced to the professional actors, Grabio and Taget, dressed as priests, while two young men, Oliver and Oscar, dressed as if for a wedding, followed by two young women in the similar type of attire. Osman, the stage director, is found elaborately expressing his views about art and its importance. As the play progresses, one understands the futility of marital affairs and vanity of human life in a world where human beings are tied in chains. Bin-Bin, Jack of all trades, tells Osman that they are wasting their time on the rehearsal of the play as Boss wants the play to be replaced with a wrestling match. The dialogue between Bin-Bin and Osman leads to the idea of truth. While Osman thinks that the truth and experience prevail, Bin-Bin says that truth is just a disease. Bin-Bin and Gafi, the president of Abiara, contrive to get rid of Boss in an honourable way because he is a symbol of evil and a burden on the state exchequer. They also plan
to make use of Regina, the third wife of Boss, as she is determined to avenge herself on Boss, who has assassinated her family members and forced her to marry him. This part of the play also highlights the mutual love, trust and respect that exist between Gafi and Amina, his wife.

In Part Two, Boss is seen exercising his oppressive authority over his three wives – Mercedes, Mizra and Regina. Boss openly suspects that his first wife, Mercedes, has an illicit bond with Gafi, the head of Abiara. He can see, yes, bond, relationship. I can see it in your eyes. (p.27). In the meantime, Bin-Bin, as preplanned, introduces Taget in the guise of Roving Eye, to Boss as the person said to be employed by Gafi to investigate the attitude of the world's population to Boss's presence in Abiara. Taget informs the insolent Boss that the world leaders say that Boss is a great man. (p.28) Some think that he is Hitler risen from the dead (p.28) and Kafirans still adore you. (p.30) Thus, with his clever flattery, Taget prepares Boss psychologically to leave Abiara for Kafira. Another character, Grabio, in the guise of the Pope's representative, meets Boss and pretending love and concern for him, prays to God for his long awaited journey back to Kafira. His prayer is so pleasant and appealing that Boss himself invites the priest to dine with him. The dialogue between Boss and Grabio acquires significance as it exposes the weak, wicked and superstitious mind of Boss. Grabio ultimately
succeeds in making Boss think strongly in terms of his future life in his country, Kafira. Boss recalls Grabio's prayer with all reverence:

Men of God come in all sorts of shades, these days. His was a most inspiring prayer. The imminent return to mother Kafira. (p.36)

In Part Three, Bin-Bin, on the advice of Gafi, finds out the fact that Regina, the last wife of Boss, has bitter hatred and enmity for Boss. In course of their discussion, it becomes clear that Regina has a fiance, Jusper, a writer and an independent thinker in Kafira. Suddenly, Lum-Lum, the ghost of the murdered Archbishop, appears and convinces Boss that he has forgiven him. He also reiterates that all is well in Kafira and his people really await his return. Boss, in his illusion, finds the footsteps of his people which, according to Lum-Lum, are a signal for him from his countrymen to return to Kafira. He advises Boss:

Follow the footsteps of your people. They will lead you away from the doubt that now plagues your mind. (p.49)

Rejoicing Boss decides to go back to his native land turning a deaf ear to his first wife Mercedes, who pleads with him strongly not to return as it will certainly put their life in jeopardy. He orders Bin-Bin to
replace the wrestling match with a *grand farewell variety show* (p.54) as he has made up his mind to return to his native land in two days.

In Part Four of the play, action reaches its climax as Boss arrives in Kafira. One hears shouts and slogans of people raised against the arrival of Boss in their native land. As Zefa and Kasim, two workers in the palace, talk for and against the arrival of Boss, Jusper gains entry into the palace and approaches Rama, the wife of Jere, the Chairman of Kafira. After a long heated exchange of words, Rama reveals to Jusper the arrival of Boss in Kafira. Jusper secretly attends the press conference arranged by Jere and declares:

> I prefer to stay here, closer, to the people where truth is still truth. (p.67)

Boss and his family are also brought before the journalists. Regina at once recognises Jusper, her lover, and crosses over to him. Boss furiously orders Regina to come to his side, which in a way helps Regina to stab him to death. The play ends as Jusper confirms the death of Boss, saying: Boss has killed Boss. (p.71)

In *Man of Kafira*, each character makes its presence felt by playing a decisive role. Regina is one character in the play who asserts her individuality on many occasions. She has been forced into exile at gun point by Boss across the borders of Kafira after getting her
separated from her fiancé, Jusper. She is compelled to become Boss's third wife. As a deceived woman, she vows to avenge the death of her parents and Mosese, her brother. In her own words they are _hunted people_ and she is a _victim of circumstances_. (p.41) Though she has no people of her own to go back to Kafira, as all were killed by Boss except Jusper, she still has something inside her that cannot be killed – her fighting spirit, _our men don't die, they live on for ever_ , (p.21) her secret war cry. She strongly resolves:

I will go down fighting before I am consumed
by the fire. (p.37)

Knowing very well the cruelty of Boss, she defies him whenever there is an opportunity. When Boss tells about his dreams in which he sees a box-full of well-wishing messages from different people, Regina says that they are messages of condolence over his death and not good wishes. Nothing can stop her from her resolve to go back to her motherland, as is evident when she declares:

I still love Kafira in spite of the dark coffin that it
has been turned into. (p.41)

This is a testimony to her patriotic fervour even in exile. According to her, everything that belongs to Boss has a mark of his guilt; it includes his wives, his friends, his wealth and all. She is a sharp
contrast to the other two wives of Boss, who meekly submit themselves at his feet. One can observe that she cannot live a frail and insignificant life. She is soft, sensitive and at the same time, hard and ferocious. All these qualities come into play in the climax scene. Bin-Bin, Jack of all trades, aptly sums up her feelings of revenge;

She is not an easy woman. I can't help feeling that she has some dark secret tucked away in some remote corner of her troubled heart. Like a tigress lying in wait. Waiting to pounce on an unsuspecting victim. (p.20)

An embodiment of love, she is overwhelmed with emotional feeling when she suddenly finds Jusper, her lover. Unmindful of her tyrannical husband's presence, she approaches Jusper with all love and concern for him, for a dream-like reunion. She cries out:

It is Jusper! Yes, it is Jusper! Jusper, Jusper.

Look at me, I am here. Jusper, it is me

Regina. (p.70)

However, immediately she rises to the occasion and avenges the death of her dear brother, Mosese, by stabbing Boss to death.

Another prominent character in the play is Boss, the ex-president of Kafira. Boss is the root cause of Regina's predicament. He was a
former ruler of Kafira, who drowned the nation into a pool of blood and a mire of poverty. Overthrown by his people, he is now in exile in Abiara. In spite of his being almost a refugee, he is very proud and unyielding. He tells Mercedes, his first wife, that he is still the president of Kafira. He boasts of his present condition in Abiara despite the fact that he is only an unwanted guest,

Absolute power even in exile. No one else but me would have thought of that one. (p.31)

Boss is so wicked that he has mindlessly killed whoever he suspects to be his enemy under the slightest pretext. He mercilessly kills Regina's parents and her brother, Mosese, believing that he was hatching a bad egg against him. (p.20) The most blatant killing is that of the archbishop, Lum-Lum, for his mere refusal to perform Boss's second marriage in his church because he was already married. Boss is so authoritative even in his dreams when he threatens the Bishop.

I was above church laws, but you chose to cross my path. You killed yourself the moment you denied me the services of your church.(p.45)

Through the character of Boss, Imbuga wants to highlight the fact that jungle law exists even in civilized societies, where the weak and the meek are subjected to suffering and death by the mighty. This idea of
the playwright is undoubtedly explained by Bin-Bin while describing Boss's pitiless intentions to Osman, who is upset over the cancellation of the play in favour of a wrestling match.

He wants to use them (wrestlers) to prove a point, that in this world, only the fittest survive.

(p.15)

Osman also says that

his great grandfather was a cannibal. (p.17)

Boss's cannibalistic nature is revealed when he tries to offer Grabio a special meal of

Mashed kidneys boiled in bile soup and
delicately fried in animal fat. (p.35)

Boss is also depicted as fickle-minded and unpredictable by nature. It is this quality that makes him ask Bin-Bin to cancel the play meant to entertain him in favour of a traditional wrestling match. Again, he wants the match to be replaced with a grand farewell variety show (p.54) However, his constant change of mind about what form of entertainment he should have is

reflective of his mental instability and more significantly, it is also a reflection of an
authoritarian mind stripped of the reins of governance.

He is terribly frightened when he finds the ghost of the murdered archbishop, Lum-Lum, in his dreams. His guilt-ridden conscience is fully exposed when he wishes to be forgiven for his killing the priest. Boss, with all his mindlessness, becomes a riddle to his host, Gafi, and so he wishes to get rid of him as soon as possible. According to Gafi, Boss is a person of hidden intentions, troublemaker, mad and not at all sensible. He says disgustingly,

He won't reveal his intentions. Not even to me, his host.... It is true that we have a problem on our heads. The man is sick. He is mad and a nuisance in every way. (pp. 18-19)

Thus, Imbuga brings out his own image of a dictator in Boss. A man of hatred and cruelty, he does not express love and concern for any of his three wives. He, who resorts to rape and abduction, cannot appreciate love. That is why Osman tells Taget,

You don't understand love because you have never really been close to it. (p. 7)
He doesn't respect the feelings of his wives, however reasonable and wise they are, and always treats them as his slaves and objects of pleasure. He is so cruel that he suspects his faithful wife, Mercedes, of an illicit love affair with Gafi and threatens to kill her:

I see it in your eyes and there is no running away from it. You are a traitor and I see betrayal in your eyes. You have betrayed our bond of blood and you deserve to go. (p.27)

Thus, he exercises an iron grip over his wives denying them individuality and personal freedom.

Boss is so gullible that the Abiaran actors easily make him believe that his presence is indispensable in his native country, Kafira. A person of an unquenchable thirst for power, he is heedless to the words of his most trusting wife, Mercedes, who rightly says that this is not the time for our return to Kafira. (p.52) His cruelty and gullibility aided and abetted by the oppressive authority have blinded him to distinguish between loyal and disloyal subjects, true and false friends and real and imaginary power. His ceaseless attempt to recapture, perpetuate and legitimize his political ascendancy over the buried bones of Kafirans ends in his assassination by the very woman he has abducted, and thus
digs his own grave, as he is trapped by what Norman Miller calls his *close authoritarian system.*

Imbuga presents Gafi and Amina as an ideal couple. They are diametrically opposed to Boss and his wives. While the relationship of Boss and his wives is that of master and slave, the association of Gafi and Amina is based on mutual love, trust and respect. With true concern and love for her husband, Amina opposes him for giving shelter to Boss in Abiara. She says:

> I fear for you, my husband. I fear for us all. This man will be your downfall. (p.22)

When Amina insists on getting rid of Boss, Gafi replies,

> Be my wife not my director. (p.23)

She agrees and at the same time wants Gafi to be my husband and not my president. (p.23)

This frank conversation between the wife and husband proves that their bond is built on strong foundations of mutual love and concern, equality, individuality and freedom. Thus, Imbuga tries to breathe some fresh air into the highly polluted world where truth is considered a dreadful disease and love as a commodity that stinks of suspicion.
Imbuga in this play, dwells at length on the noble human qualities of love, truth and art. In Part One of the play, the conversation between Osman, the stage director, and Bin-Bin, the government official, highlights their opinion on these aspects. Osman strongly believes that it is truth that prevails while Bin-Bin quite negatively says;

Truth, what is truth? Just a disease, that's all. (p.18)

The playwright has introduced this mechanism of contradiction of opinions only to make Boss realize what truth is and how he has perverted it with his oppressive and corrupt practices. For Imbuga, absolute power even in exile is not truth, suppression of freedom is not truth, but justice and change are the eyes of truth. The idea of Osman about truth is succinctly proved at the end when Regina kills her husband as love and hatred cannot go together.

The play-within-the play raises doubts about the idea of love that has no place where there is slavery and oppression. This only reflects the hatred of Boss for his wives, who live the life of the slaves of their own husband. Gafi and Amina, who stand for mutual love, are protected from the possible ill-effects of Boss. Grabio laments over lack of love in the world:
man's shadow has turned against man
returning hate with greater hate. (p.5)

He feels that love should give way to life opposing erection of walls of hatred among people. Thus Imbuga highlights the idea that brutality and hatred should not have a place anywhere, but love for peaceful co-existence.

Imbuga as a committed writer, has great faith in the value of art. He expresses his views through the words of Osman. Artists, according to Osman, have a significant role to play in society; their main responsibility is to portray truth as it is. Thus, Osman is not in the least worried by the fact that Boss may be offended by the play meant to expose his atrocities in the name of entertainment. He feels:

It is our responsibility as free thinking artists to
be sincere in our portrayal of what we consider
to be truth. (p.10)

He tells Grabio forcefully:

Remember, he who sits on truth sits on his pride. (p.10)

His contention is that as sincere artists, they should not flee from presentation of truth. Maybe, as Grabio says the time is not yet ripe for truth. He thinks that their responsibility first and foremost should be to
themselves. When they try to point out truth to others, they are misusing their art. But, as Osman points out, there are some questions - *How do they preserve the dignity of their art? Can it be done by turning their backs to truth?* (p.10) It is Osman's firm conviction that turning back to truth has been responsible for all troubles in Kafira. The artists of that country played the blind for too long. Osman asserts that they cannot preserve the dignity and value of human life by numbing their artistic sensibility,

Osman wants to present the truth in the form of the play, in spite of the fact that its content will be unpleasant for Boss. The indirect note here is that an artist has to pursue his profession not only to fill the bellies of himself and his family, but also to speak out and spread truth. Any artist who is insensitive to truth will be doing disservice to his country. This way, Osman believes that through his drama, he can penetrate into Boss's subconscious mind and, thereby Boss will be psychologically affected and perhaps reformed. Thus, Imbuga makes the art of drama socially functional. This is how, it can be said that Imbuga is a socially conscious writer. As Chukwudi T. Maduka says,

*The African writer cannot afford the luxury of withdrawing into the cocoon of creativity in the name of art for art's sake*
The same idea of the function of the artist is explained in clear terms by Wole Soyinka. He appreciates that

*by extending the horizons of perception of his society, the writer is already contributing enormously to the well being of the community*.

One significant aspect of *Man of Kafira* is its theme of patriotism. The playwright convincingly presents the patriotic feelings of the people of Abiara. Bin-Bin, an officer in the government, Gafi, the head of the state, and his wife, Amina, strongly feel that the presence of Boss is a threat to their nation both politically and economically. So they try various methods to send him out of the country to ensure the safety and security of their nation. The rehearsal of the play in Part One, is meant to make Boss understand his unwanted presence in Abiara. The patriotic feelings of Gafi are well presented when he tells his wife that he cannot sacrifice the interest of his nation for the sake of Regina whom Amina wants to protect.

*I shall not betray a whole nation’s future just to please one woman. (p.23)*

Like the people of Abiara, the Kafirans are also full of patriotic feelings. Jere, Jusper and Regina are worth to be discussed. These
characters are real lovers of their country and their people because they have relieved Kafira of the tyrannical rule of Boss in the coup which they have carried out in spite of great threat to their lives. Jusper, a young writer, vehemently opposes the arrival of the cruel and wicked Boss on his soil. He does not hesitate to rebel against Jere, the chairman of Kafira, in order to prevent Boss from entering the country. He decries;

Stop him someone, stop him before he returns us to the dark days. Oh, I see blood, I see blood in every Kafiran homestead. I see blood. (p.70)

Regina, Jusper’s beloved and the third wife of Boss, in spite of her wretched life with Boss, continues to survive only to see his end so as to lead the Kafirans into a bright future. Regina’s patriotic feelings are uppermost when she says;

And I love my country, yes, I still love Kafira in spite of the dark coffin that it has been turned into. (p.41)

Her remarks showing love and concern for Kafiran’s freedom fighters and for the on going disturbed political and social reality, are fraught with patriotic fervour indicating her real intentions to get Kafira rid of Boss for a happy and peaceful future.
The innocent have become criminals in their own land, while the criminals sit at table and laugh dry laughter over delicacies that they do not deserve. (p.41)

Thus both Jusper and Regina, the victims of suppressive polity, have put up a concerted struggle forgetting their personal interests and concerns to topple the oppressive regime to lead their society in to the future. But Fanon points out the struggle has to be made against those who made the revolution for their patriotism to be more meaningful. Obviously it is Jere who betrayed the revolution in Kafira after the coup. However, Imbuga seems to have spared Jere giving an indirect warning to him that erring dictators will meet the same fate.

Thus, the powerful presentation of the patriotic feelings of the characters makes the political theme gripping and appealing.

Imbuga has used certain techniques in the play to make it powerfully artistic. One technique he has employed in the play is the play-within-the play which becomes an integral part of the main play. In fact, the main play begins with the rehearsal of a scripted skit, which the audience recognize as a rehearsal, only when director Osman intervenes with the rehearsal by shouting authoritatively cut. It is through this technique, the playwright has tried to delineate the actual situation prevailing in Kafira. This short play exposes the evil-minded
nature of Boss, his highhandedness and cruelty towards his wives, his ominous presence in Abiara and the feelings of people who groan under the heavy weight of his autocratic rule. The play is intended indirectly to make Boss realise his violent actions on earth. In the words of Osman:

This play has been specially written for a specific audience (p.9).

In other words, it is to probe deep into the innermost feelings of people like Boss.

This technique also serves as a platform to explore the artist's relationship to his art and to society. Through juxtapositions, parallels and counter points, the play investigates the function of theatre. The playlet introduces its director Osman, as the privileged embodiment of truth or in the words of Richard Schechner, as the owner of meaning of the performable text. It not only provides the playwright with machinery to educate and involve the audience but also to enhance the symmetrical construction of the play. Thus the technique of play-within-the play in the form of a rehearsal of the scripted play at the beginning of Man of Kafira is vital to the structural design of the play. It introduces the dichotomies between life and death, between home and exile and between art and reality.
Through certain powerful symbols and images, the playwright wants to achieve his purpose of attacking

the sub-conscious mind, that part of our brain

that refuges to be cheated. (p.8)

The images and symbols used in the play reveal the nature of his characters. The animal imagery is used only to show how people like Boss behave like wild animals. Boss is compared with animals such as *hyena* and *mangoose* which are for blood. The *hyena*, an invective which Jusper uses to allude to Boss, is an apt image to describe the Kafiran dictator for

> apart from being an animal of odious habits,
> the *hyena* was a traditional beast of hypocrisy,
> supposed to entice men to destruction by its power of imitating the human voice⁹.

*Evil creatures with breasts for eyes* (p.11) symbolize Boss as very much a lady's man (p.13). Golden bed arranged for Boss indicates his costly and luxurious life at the cost of Abiarans. The food items of Boss, *liver, tongue, lungs, kidneys and spleen* throw light on the cannibalistic nature of Boss.

The playwright also uses colour symbolism to highlight the blood thirsty nature of Boss. It is evident when Boss says:
The colour red has always been my favorite colour, you see. I couldn’t let that colour down. (p.38)

Guns and skins suggest Boss as a hunter, who hunts people like animals and kills them. Thus, the symbols are appropriately employed to expose the wicked personality of Boss.

Imbuga’s language in the play at times is quite poetic. One is reminded of Tagore’s Gitanjali when one comes across the words of Oscar, the professional actor in the play:

It is the dream of every man,
The urge of every soul,
That the sky be bright
Where they tread.
So show us the way,
Lead us there, with dignity. (p.2)

These lines are reminiscent of Tagore’s words which refer to the 35th lyric in Gitanjali in which political and spiritual overtones are heard.

..... Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-
widening thought and action –
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake. 9

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The language used for the song of the golden bed meant for affecting Boss psychologically to hasten his return to his native land, is direct in its appeal, simple in its appearance and fraught with poetic imagination.

*When the mind is troubled*

*Beds of feathers bring no rest*

*When the heart is in haste*

*Beds of gold are no place for rest*

*So why live with all this waste*

*Why endure a mind so troubled?* (p.46)

Thus, *Man of Kafira* is a well-knit play of the ideas of Francis Imbuga mirroring the political and social conditions of the continent of Africa as a whole and Kenya in particular. The aspects of *quest for power* and *oppression* are abundantly elucidated in his other powerful play *Aminata* in which Jumba, the Headman of Membe tries to enforce his tribal authority on his people.
REFERENCES

1. Sunday Nation, 1984 (The blurb of Man of Kafira)


