

Chapter 19



Sam Ukala's *Akpakaland* as Media Representation of the Nigerian Society: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines the play, *Akpakaland*, by Professor Sam Ukala as a form of mass media representation that mirrors the socio-political landscape of Nigeria. The primary objective was to analyse how *Akpakaland* fulfills the role traditionally associated with conventional media by reflecting and critiquing societal issues. Through its narrative and character development, the play highlights themes such as corruption, injustice, and the erosion of cultural values. The article is hinged on the Agenda Setting Theory. It adopts the library method whereby relevant literature that has to do with themes of the play are critically analysed. It serves as a medium for public discourse, raising awareness about critical issues and encouraging societal introspection and reform. Ukala's play transcends entertainment, functioning as an educational and informative tool similar to mass media. This study explores the effectiveness of *Akpakaland* in conveying social commentary and its potential impact on the audience's perception and understanding of Nigerian society.

Keywords: Akpakaland, Drama, Mass media, Play, Society, Cultural values.

Introduction

Simply put, communication is the passage of information from one point to the other. Hence, Guanah (2018) opines that communication is the movement of information from Person/Medium/Point A to another Person/Medium/Point B through a dedicated channel to bring about a desired

effect or reaction. He explains further that the information may be from a single or multiple source(s); also the receiver or recipients of the information may be one person or a multitude, or a heterogeneous or a homogenous audience.

Yoshioka, Nishikiori and Bando (2021) attest that as humans started living together in a small village, rhythm, music, communication, language, and religion were born, as they gradually developed and merged mutually (Leongomez, Havlicek, & Roberts, 2021). Therefore, communication could be transmitted through different means, to wit, traditional media like drama, book, music, etc., and the conventional media like the newspaper, radio, television, magazine, etc. Nwabueze (2007) is of the opinion that books are believed to be the earliest media of mass communication, and that they have the advantage of being in permanent form and could be read by a wide range of audience at different times.

The roles of the media are numerous; they include entertainment, information, education, culture preservation, and many more. Guanah (2024) asserts that the troika of music, drama, and comedy are part and parcel of the communication process due to their ability to convey messages. This reveals the synergy that exists among various disciplines.

In fact, Bando, Yoshioka and Nishikiori (2020) opine that recent international discipline has shown the combined scientific circumstances including medicine, neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, culture, art, music, music therapy and education. Also, Guanah and Ibbi (2024) agree that the study of drama has long been intertwined with that of mass media and that the relationship between drama and mass media shape and reflect our society's communication. Hence, Atere says the writer is the eye of society:

His engagement with his art helps to determine the scope and functionality of society being represented. His periscopic stance as landscapes in his oeuvre can either create social awareness for a positive change; if he deems to toe the path of social justice and rejuvenation, or enmesh society in social squalor and ignominy, if he chooses to glory in passivity and indolence. Therefore, the pace of any society is arguably determined by the pace of its artist as a mediator. The writer creates awareness and unveils the veil of ignorance from the people (106).

This brings to the fore a critical look at *Akpakaland*, a play by Nigerian playwright Professor Sam Ukala. Known for his dedication to oral literature and traditional African storytelling techniques, Ukala brings these elements into his work to address contemporary social and political issues.

Akpakaland is a satire that explores themes of leadership, corruption, and the struggle for justice in a fictional African society. The play is set in Akpakaland, a fictional country plagued by bad governance, corruption, and social injustice. The story revolves around the struggle of the common people, led by a group of determined characters, to overthrow the corrupt leaders and bring about a better society.

The theme of the play includes corruption, injustice, and mismanagement where the play portrays societal decay that arises from these vices, and the leaders of Akpakaland as deeply corrupt and self-serving. This reflects broader concerns about political leadership in many African countries. Ukala uses his characters and plot to highlight the detrimental effects of corrupt leadership and the lack of justice, thus encouraging the audience to reflect on these issues and advocate for change.

He critiques the way power is often misused by those in authority, leading to widespread suffering among the populace. Through this critique, Ukala aims to foster a sense of awareness and responsibility among the audience.

The play also talks about struggle for justice. The characters' fight against the corrupt regime represents the universal struggle for justice and equity. The play emphasises the importance of collective action and solidarity in the face of oppression. The narrative of *Akpakaland* is not just a critique but also a call to action. Ukala's portrayal of societal issues is paired with an underlying message of hope and the possibility of reform.

He uses the play to inspire individuals to take active roles in societal improvement, advocating for integrity, justice, and community solidarity.

Cultural identity and tradition were also addressed in the play. Ukala often integrates elements of African traditions and values in his works.

Akpakaland is no exception, as it emphasises the importance of cultural heritage and the wisdom of traditional practices. The integration of traditional African storytelling methods, include songs, dances, and proverbs, into the play. This blending of contemporary issues with traditional forms highlights the importance of cultural identity and heritage in addressing modern problems. By doing so, Ukala seeks to preserve and promote

African cultural values, encouraging society to embrace and uphold these traditions in the face of modernisation and globalisation. This brings to

mind one of the cardinal functions of the conventional media, which is the promotion and preservation of culture.

The characters of the play are made up of the 'Leaders.' They represent the corrupt political elite who exploit the resources of Akpakaland for their gain. They are often depicted as buffoonish and out of touch with the needs of the people, emphasising their incompetence. We also have the

'Common People.' This is a diverse group representing various segments of society who are united in their desire for change. Their resilience and determination underscore the play's message of hope and empowerment.

Ukala's use of satire is central to the play's impact. By exaggerating the flaws of the leaders and the absurdity of the political situation, he exposes the real-life consequences of corruption and bad governance. The incorporation of traditional storytelling elements not only enriches the narrative but also reinforces the play's cultural authenticity and connection to African oral traditions.

In contemporary Nigerian society, mass media play a fundamental role in shaping public opinion, raising awareness, and advocating for social change. However, the limitations of conventional media—such as censorship, bias, and restricted access—often hinder their effectiveness in addressing pressing societal issues. As a result, alternative forms of media, including literature and drama, have emerged as vital platforms for social commentary and critique. One such work is Professor Sam Ukala's play *Akpakaland*, which provides a profound reflection of the sociopolitical realities in Nigeria.

Despite its potential impact, the role of *Akpakaland* as a mass media representation has not been thoroughly explored. There is a need to investigate how this play, through its thematic concerns and narrative techniques, mirrors the functions of conventional media in raising awareness, critiquing societal vices, and promoting cultural values. Understanding this dynamic is essential to appreciating the broader influence of dramatic literature on public discourse and societal reform. This paper seeks to address this gap by analysing *Akpakaland* as a medium of mass communication. It aims to elucidate how the play serves as an alternative to traditional media, effectively engaging the audience in critical conversations about corruption, injustice, and cultural erosion in Nigeria.

Theoretical Anchor

The paper is anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory (AST) of the media.

This theory can be traced back to Walter Lippmann's ground-breaking work in 1922. He conducted research on how the media influence public opinion on current topics. He discovered in his research that people do not necessarily react to actual occurrences in society, but rather to the photos and images of those events published in the media, which form images in people's minds (McCombs 1-2). Regarding Lippmann's assertions regarding the media's capacity to establish agenda, Cohen states that "the press may not be successful in teaching people what to think much of the time, but it is breathtakingly successful in giving its readers what to think about" (13).

However, it was first articulated as Agenda-Setting Theory by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. It posits that mass media have a significant influence on the public's perception of what issues are important. By selecting certain topics for coverage and giving them prominence, the media shape the agenda of public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

That is why Shalini and Samundeswari (2017) assert that, Literature, including play texts, as an imitation of human action, often presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society.

This theory is highly relevant to the analysis of Professor Sam Ukala's play *Akpakaland* as a form of mass media representation in Nigeria.

Akpakaland brings critical societal issues such as corruption, injustice, and cultural erosion to the forefront, much like traditional media highlight specific topics. The play's narrative draws attention to these problems, making them salient in the minds of its audience, similar to how news outlets determine the agenda by prioritising certain news stories.

Just as the media influence public perception by emphasizing particular issues, *Akpakaland* impacts its audience by dramatising societal issues, thereby raising awareness and shaping how people perceive these issues.

The play serves to inform and sensitise the public about the socio-political realities of Nigeria, fulfilling a role akin to that of the press. Through its powerful storytelling and depiction of societal ills, *Akpakaland* stimulates discussion and debate among its viewers/readers, much like media reports prompt public discourse. This engagement is crucial for fostering a well informed and active citizenry capable of advocating for social change.

While traditional media might focus on political and economic news, *Akpakaland* enriches the agenda-setting landscape by incorporating cultural and social dimensions. It underscores the importance of cultural heritage and the impact of its erosion, thus broadening the spectrum of

issues considered critical in public discourse. *Akpakaland* functions as an alternative medium that sets the agenda for societal reflection and reform.

It demonstrates how dramatic literature can be instrumental in bringing significant issues to the forefront, thereby contributing to the public's understanding and engagement with these issues.

Analysis of *Akpakaland* as a Media Representation of Nigeria

Akpakaland, written by Professor Sam Ukala, serves as a poignant representation of the socio-political climate in Nigeria at the time of its writing. The play employs satire and traditional storytelling to critique corruption, poor leadership, and social injustice, mirroring the realities of Nigerian society.

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Nigeria faced significant challenges, including political instability, unprecedented corruption, and economic difficulties. These issues were exacerbated by military coups, ethnic conflicts, and the mismanagement of the country's vast resources. Ukala's *Akpakaland* reflects these societal problems through its narrative and characters, providing a critique of the state of the nation.

Ukala's portrayal of the leaders in *Akpakaland* as corrupt and self-serving mirrors the real-life political environment in Nigeria. The leaders in the play are depicted as disconnected from the needs of the people, focusing instead on personal gain. This representation is consistent with the criticism of Nigerian leaders during periods of military rule and civilian governance, where corruption and embezzlement of public funds were prevalent (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The common people's struggle against the oppressive regime in *Akpakaland* symbolises the Nigerian populace's frustration and desire for change. Throughout Nigerian history, there have been numerous protests and movements advocating for better governance and accountability. The play's narrative resonates with these real-life events, highlighting the persistent fight for justice and equity in Nigerian society (Osaghae, 1998).

Ukala's use of traditional African storytelling techniques serves as a means to preserve and celebrate Nigerian cultural heritage. By integrating songs,

dances, and proverbs, the play not only entertains but also educates the audience about the rich cultural traditions of Nigeria. This method of storytelling reinforces the importance of cultural identity in the face of modernization and globalisation (Osofisan, 2001).

Akpakaland has been widely studied and appreciated for its critical perspective on Nigerian society. Scholars have noted Ukala's effective use of folkism to address contemporary issues, making the play relevant and relatable to Nigerian audiences. The combination of humor and serious social commentary has been praised for its ability to engage and provoke thought among viewers (Ugwu & Orjinta, 2013).

As a media representation, *Akpakaland* provides a vivid and critical portrayal of Nigeria's socio-political landscape. Ukala's work captures the essence of the challenges faced by the nation, using traditional storytelling to communicate powerful messages about leadership, corruption, and the enduring spirit of the people. The play remains a significant cultural artifact, reflecting the complexities of Nigerian society and the ongoing quest for justice and good governance.

Functions of *Akpakaland* as a Medium of Communication

The media play essential roles in the society, and this includes simplifying issues for the public to have better understanding of them. For instance, newspapers break down news to help readers make sense of it by analyzing complex topics for the general public to grasp, and its permanent nature is a huge benefit to them. As a result, Igbeka and Ola claim that today's newspapers employ design features that make information readily available to readers (1). Newspapers provide the most up-to-date analysis and critique of politics, economics, health, religion, sports, psychological and emotional difficulties, music, theatre, television, the fine arts, and even comic books.

Akpakaland serves as a powerful medium of communication, and its impact is comparable to that of traditional media like newspapers and other forms of media, making it a significant work in both literary and socio-political contexts. Through its narrative and thematic elements, the play fulfills various functions of the media, including information dissemination, education, entertainment, cultural preservation, and advocating for social change. Through its rich narrative and cultural elements, the play serves as a powerful medium of communication,

addressing contemporary issues while preserving and celebrating Nigerian cultural heritage. Shalini and Samundeswari affirm that:

Literature reflects the society, its good values and its ills. In its corrective function, literature mirrors the ills of the society with a view to making the society realise its mistakes and make amends... It also projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. In literature, we find stories designed to portray human life and action through some characters who, by their words, action and reaction, convey certain messages for the purpose of education, information and entertainment (170).

One of the primary functions of the media is to inform the public about current events and issues. *Akpakaland* serves this function by shedding light on the socio-political realities of Nigeria. The play critiques corruption, poor leadership, and social injustice, thereby informing the audience about the pervasive issues in Nigerian society. Through its characters and plot, it provides insight into the effects of these issues on everyday life (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Osaghae, 1998).

Another crucial function of the media is education. *Akpakaland* educates its audience about Nigerian cultural heritage and traditional values.

By incorporating elements of folkism, such as proverbs, songs, and dances, Ukala teaches the audience about the rich cultural traditions of the Ika people and broader Nigerian society. This educational aspect is vital in promoting cultural awareness and preserving heritage (Osofisan, 2001).

The media also serve to entertain, and *Akpakaland* excels in this regard through its use of humor and engaging storytelling. The play's satirical portrayal of corrupt leaders and the absurdity of their actions provide comic relief while simultaneously delivering serious social commentary.

This blend of entertainment and critique ensures that the audience remains engaged and receptive to the play's messages (Ugwu & Orjinta, 2013).

Ukala's use of traditional African storytelling techniques in *Akpakaland* helps preserve and promote cultural identity. The play's reliance on folk elements not only entertains but also educates and informs audiences about their cultural roots. This function is akin to how media outlets may feature content that celebrates and preserves cultural heritage (Affiah, Amaku, & Akpan, 2022).

Like many forms of media, *Akpakaland* functions as a platform for social critique and advocacy. By highlighting the issues of corruption,

injustice, and poor leadership, the play advocates for social change and better governance. It encourages the audience to reflect on their societal values and consider their role in effecting positive change. This advocacy role is essential in fostering a more informed and active citizenry (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Accountability, Transparency, and Leadership in Nigeria

Accountability, transparency, and leadership are critical components of good governance in Nigeria, a country that has long grappled with challenges in these areas. The interplay of these elements significantly impacts Nigeria's political, economic, and social development. Leadership in Nigeria has been a subject of intense scrutiny and debate since the country's independence in 1960. The quality of leadership has often been cited as a key factor in the nation's struggles with corruption, economic instability, and social unrest. Nigerian leaders, both at the federal and state levels, have faced criticism for prioritizing personal interests over national development, leading to a pervasive culture of impunity and mismanagement of public resources (Ogbeidi, 2012).

Transparency in Nigerian governance has been a persistent challenge. The lack of openness in government operations has created an environment conducive to corruption and mismanagement. Despite efforts to improve transparency, such as the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011, access to government information remains limited. This opacity extends to areas such as budget allocations, contract awarding processes, and policy formulation, making it difficult for citizens and civil society organisations to effectively monitor government activities (Aina, 2014).

Accountability mechanisms in Nigeria have often been weak or ineffective.

While institutions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were established to combat corruption and promote accountability, their effectiveness has been hampered by political interference and limited resources. The judiciary, which should serve as a check on executive power, has sometimes been compromised, further weakening the system of checks and balances (Enweremadu, 2012).

The intersection of leadership, transparency, and accountability in Nigeria is particularly evident in the management of the country's vast oil resources. The oil sector, which accounts for a significant portion of

Nigeria's revenue, has been plagued by a lack of transparency and accountability. This has resulted in the loss of billions of dollars in potential revenue and contributed to environmental degradation in oil-producing regions, fueling social unrest and economic disparity (Ologunla, Kareem & Raheem, 2014).

However, there have been some positive developments in recent years. Civil society organisations and citizen activism, often facilitated by social media and digital platforms, have played an increasingly important role in demanding accountability and transparency from government officials. Initiatives such as BudgIT, which uses technology to simplify budget and public data, have helped increase citizen engagement with governance issues (Budgit, 2022).

International pressure and initiatives like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) have also pushed for greater transparency in Nigeria's resource management. These efforts have led to some improvements in financial reporting and disclosure practices, although challenges remain in fully implementing these standards (Ihugba, 2012).

Empirical Review

Akpakaland by Professor Sam Ukala has been the subject of numerous reviews and academic analyses. These studies explore the play's thematic depth, stylistic approach, and cultural significance. This discussion synthesises various perspectives and scholarly evaluations of the play. On the use of folkism, Ugwu and Orjinta (2013) discuss Ukala's theory of folkism, emphasising its potential to ensure the relevance of Nigerian literary theatre. They highlight how *Akpakaland* employs traditional storytelling techniques to critique contemporary social issues. The integration of songs, dances, and proverbs enhances the play's cultural authenticity and engages audiences in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking (Ugwu & Orjinta, 2013).

Affiah, Amaku and Akpan (2022) explore the centrality of narrative storytelling in Ukala's ideological framework. They analyse how *Akpakaland* utilises indigenous storytelling methods, such as improvisation and audience involvement, to convey its themes. This approach not only enriches the aesthetic experience but also reinforces the play's sociopolitical messages (Affiah, Amaku, & Akpan, 2022).

Ukala's critique of corruption and leadership in *Akpakaland* is widely acknowledged. Scholars have noted how the play reflects real-life political scenarios in Nigeria, with the leaders depicted as corrupt and disconnected from the people's needs. This portrayal serves as a mirror to the political environment in Nigeria, particularly during periods of military rule and political instability (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Osaghae, 1998).

Osofisan (2001) praises Ukala's efforts to preserve and celebrate Nigerian cultural heritage through his plays. *Akpakaland*, with its rich incorporation of folk elements, serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of traditional African storytelling in modern literary forms. This blending of the old and the new provides a unique lens through which contemporary issues can be examined (Osofisan, 2001).

Emphasising on the educational and social impact of *Akpakaland*, Samphina Academy (n.d.) indicates that reviews often highlight the educational value of *Akpakaland*. The play not only entertains but also educates audiences about the cultural and historical contexts of Nigeria.

By addressing themes such as corruption, justice, and cultural identity, the play prompts viewers to reflect on their societal values and the importance of preserving cultural traditions (Samphina Academy, n.d.).

The reviews and analyses of *Akpakaland* by Professor Sam Ukala underscore the play's significance in Nigerian literary theatre. Through its use of folkism, narrative storytelling, and thematic depth, *Akpakaland* offers a compelling critique of socio-political issues while celebrating cultural heritage. The play remains a vital piece in understanding the complexities of Nigerian society and the power of traditional storytelling. It is observed that in all the foregoing reviews, none discussed the media and communication angle hence this present study was poised to fill that gap.

Conclusion

No doubt, books, theatre (drama), dance, songs, and other forms of traditional (Oral) media perform most of the functions the conventional media like newspapers, television, and magazines. *Akpakaland* is a powerful and thought-provoking play that uses humour and traditional storytelling to critique contemporary social and political issues just as the media do. Through its vivid characters and compelling narrative, it calls for a more just and equitable society while celebrating the resilience and cultural heritage of the African people. Professor Sam Ukala's work

remains a significant contribution to African literature and theatre, offering both entertainment and profound social commentary.

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