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### The Portrayal of the 21st Century Kenya

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The article examines the enduring relevance of three plays by Francis Imbuga—The Successor, Game of Silence, and Betrayal in the City—to Kenya's 21st-century socio-political landscape. Despite being written in the 20th century, these plays address contemporary issues such as corruption, poor governance, nepotism, cruelty against women, and disillusionment among citizens, which are still significant in Kenya today. The study uses Marxist literary theory to analyze the plays. This theoretical framework helps uncover socio-political ideologies and dynamics, including the mistreatment of peasants and workers, that fuel political revolution. Imbuga's plays are revealed to portray powerful truths about the social and political challenges in Africa. They highlight themes of betrayal, irresponsibility, greed, and disunity, critically exposing injustices faced by workers and peasants. These themes remain pertinent to current socio-political conditions in Kenya. The analysis confirms that Imbuga's works are timeless, providing critical insights into socio-political issues not only in Kenya but across Africa. Their relevance underscores the continued importance of addressing systemic corruption, oppression, and inequality.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study examines the connection between three of Francis Imbuga's notable plays—*The Successor*, *Game of Silence*, and *Betrayal in the City*—and Kenya's socio-political realities in the 21st century. Although crafted in the 20th century, these works remain deeply relevant, resonating with themes such as corruption, betrayal, nepotism, gender-based cruelty, disillusionment, and the greed and irresponsibility of political leaders. These persistent issues continue to shape Kenya's socio-political landscape today. According to Baingana (1981), Imbuga's plays convey profound truths about the social and political challenges facing Africa, offering a sharp critique of the mistreatment of the working class and rural peasants while exposing the socio-political dynamics that fuel revolutionary change.

While prior studies have acknowledged the timelessness of Imbuga's works, there has been limited exploration of their specific relevance to contemporary Kenya in light of ongoing political and social transformations. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how Imbuga's themes remain pertinent in critiquing modern governance, societal conflicts, and inequalities in Kenya. Additionally, it provides critical insights into the playwright's ability to encapsulate universal truths about human struggles within the African context. By framing this analysis within Marxist literary theory, this chapter underscores Imbuga's role in documenting and interrogating systemic injustices, emphasizing the continued significance of his work in today's socio-political discourse.

## POOR LEADERSHIP IN THE KENYAN AUTHORITIES

In the three selected plays, the concept of poor leadership has been presented as a serious issue in Kenya. Government leaders are presented as corrupt, selfish, hypocritical, greedy, power

mongers, unpatriotic and incompetent administrators who are misled by wealth. The selected plays have revealed the reality that Kenya by then had leaders who lacked intelligence and foresight in their control over state matters. The three plays have vividly presented the whole concept of poor leadership that prevailed and still prevails in Kenya as it is discussed hereunder.

*The Successor* represents Emperor Chonda as a symbol of an autonomous leader in making decisions about important state matters. For example, a flashback technique is used to show the trial session when Chief Jandi is sued for incesting Zira, the emperor uses his power to sentence the chief with banishment; thus, he is chased away without proper trial and the farewell ceremony. As the Emperor says,

"You are a banished man. I have spoken." (45)

The sentence 'I have spoken' is a symbol that portrays the Emperor's autonomous power in making important decisions for Masero. Poor leadership is also shown when Emperor Chonda understands Chief Jandi's innocence. He decides that Jandi needs to have a proper burial service since he was never involved in the crime. Again, the play symbolically presents characters like Chief Oriomra, and Chief Sasia as poor leaders who are hypocrites as they choose to conspire against the favoured successor of the king. In addition, poor leadership is sarcastically shown when the Emperor is portrayed as a leader who does not know the capabilities of his own people. Most of the people seem to trust Segasega as a wise man who had good ideas for building Masero but the Emperor used to ignore him and insult him. (45)

In *Game of Silence*, the play symbolically reveals poor leadership through Bango, Dr. Zumaka and Jimm's Killer sister who are portrayed as government agents set as torturing machines of the

lower class people (peasants and workers). The play shows that the lower class people are not completely allowed to raise their voices against the upper class. For instance, the imagery by Raja says, the poor people are always silent during the daytime, but howl like dogs at night, and, whenever they resist, they are silenced by the government. Also, the exaggeration by mourners who say that there have been so many funerals, so, God has become notorious to them (14). This situation of poor leadership is very common in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Kenya as many leaders of the Kenyan government are seen to be hypocrites, selfish and greedy for power since they usually do not care about affairs and the wellbeing of their citizens, but only care to maintain their position and status in power.

In *Betrayal in the City*, the play has satirically presented leaders who lack intelligence and foresight; the situation which makes civilians overthrow the Kafira's authority. Through using a kin and skillfully created plot of the play which carries the required political change, the play symbolically presents Tumbo to exemplify the reality about leaders who lack vision in their leadership. Also, the play presents Kafira under the tyrannical dictatorship of Boss who imposes his personal will on the people. For example, Boss is ironically portrayed that, he orders the entertainment committee to prepare posters which are all written to show prosperity while in a real sense, the people of Kafira are very poor.

However, Imbuga's plays: *The Successor*, *Game of Silence* and *Betrayal in the City* are relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenyan since they have successfully revealed the existence of poor leaders in contemporary Kenya. The plays demonstrate that the Kenyan community is still led by poor high-ranked officials who are incompetent, selfish, irresponsible and corrupt. For instance, the U.S. State Department has recently imposed an entry ban on former Kenyan Attorney General Amos Wako. His alleged involvement in what the Department called "significant corruption" which Wako has

been criticized several times over the years for not enough to halt corruption during his 20-year tenure as an attorney general from 1991 to 2011 (CiFAR Research Paper, 2020).

## **CORRUPTION IN THE KENYAN SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM**

Corruption in Kenya is another serious issue depicted in Imbuga's selected plays. The plays have critically demonstrated the existence of corruption in the Kenyan socio-political system. The following accounts will vividly provide a real picture of how corruption is depicted to have been dominating the political and social life of the Kenyan community.

In *The Successor*, corruption is represented by targeting the political sphere when Chief Oriomra persuades Chief Sasia in a dialogue to set a plan which will lead to the banishment of Chief Jandi who is the Emperor's expected successor to the throne. Socially, corruption symbolically manifests itself in marriage whereby Chief Sasia asks Zira to go to the Emperor and tell him lies that she is heavy with Jandi's baby and when Jandi is banished, Chief Sasia promises to marry her. This kind of social corruption makes Zira blind as she does not realize what she is doing to Jandi.

In *Game of Silence*, political corruption is satirically seen when the political leaders offer fake scholarships to some government officials. For instance, Bango is given a fake scholarship. He spends a lot of public funds for the sake of spying on the students studying abroad especially, those who belong to the lower class like Raja. He wants to make sure that such students do not resist against the government. Socially, corruption is depicted in terms of marriage, for example, Frola is poisoned due to her mission to marry Jimmy who belongs to the upper class. When Flora dies, the doctor is bribed and reports that Flora died of a natural cause of heart attack due to marriage over excitement.

In *Betrayal in the City*, corruption is symbolically revealed by portraying Boss, the head of Kafira who keeps lots of stolen money in foreign countries. He

also uses government funds to bribe government officials so that they work in his favour. Moreover, the imagery of the name of the character Tumbo is presented as a corrupt official who misuses public funds for personal gain and is never as satisfied as the stomach itself. The play shows the way Tumbo receives money for conducting a playwriting competition, and he pays Juser Wendo a third of the provided money while he keeps the rest for himself. Also, Mulili is observed to be corrupt when he says Boss has promised to give him a large farm and cattle when he successfully stops the shaving ceremony. It was that promise which forced him to kill Doga and Nina.

Socially, *Betrayal in the City* has carefully used diction to show corrupt government officials who care about what they are being paid instead of caring for the services they are supposed to provide to their people. For example, in the entertainment committee, everyone is concerned first about the size of the potato (their allowance) and they just talk about money and tenders, not about the public services to people.

Moreover, the three Imbuga's selected plays seem to be relevant in portraying corruption in Kenya where there is rampant corruption in the public sectors such as the Judiciary, police, land administration, legislation, public service and civil society. For example, in *The Economist* of November, 2015, it is alleged that the Kenyan army was involved in a sugar-smuggling racket with the Islamist group Al-Shabaab, worth as much as USD 400 million a year. *The New York Times* also reported on 6 December, 2019 that, Nairobi's governor was arrested over corruption charges. Not only that but also, the inaction of the Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act of 2003 and the Bribery Act of 2016 provides proof that there is rampant corruption in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan socio-political system.

## BETRAYAL IN THE KENYAN COMMUNITY

Imbuga's selected plays have revealed betrayal as a problem which hinders development in society. In this study, political betrayal and social betrayal will be critically discussed in reflecting the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan community. Politically, Imbuga in his plays presents the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Kenya with politicians who betray themselves and their people in various aspects of life. Socially, betrayal is shown in terms of cultural aspects.

In *The Successor*, Imbuga represents political leaders in Masera who betray each other in order to gain power. For example, on the stage, the dialogue between Chief Oriomra and Chief Sasia is stylistically meant to betray Chief Jandi so that he can be banished because he is in favour of the Emperor's power succession. Also, Chief Oriomra betrays Chief Sasia by killing him because he knows that Sasia is more favoured than him for power succession. This kind of betrayal is very much practised in Kenyan politics and, the leaders themselves call it the dirty game of politics of not trusting anyone.

Socially, the play symbolically shows cultural betrayal in which the traditional system of power succession is betrayed by political leaders such as Chief Oriomra and Chief Sasia who cannot need to wait for so long (four years) term of power succession; instead, they decide to betray the traditional system by conspiring against the Emperor's favoured successor, Chief Jandi, so that they grab his position.

In *Game of Silence*, political betrayal has been shown by political leaders who have taken away citizens' freedom of expression where citizens are forced to follow government orders without questioning. This is seen in the imagery of Raja when he says that, the lower-class citizens are in deep pain but, they cannot talk back to the government. Citizens are silent during the day but howl like dogs at night. This is because whenever they raise their voices, the government raises its

heavy hand and kills them (1). Also, when Flora is poisoned; the doctor betrays his profession by giving a fake report that Flora's death is due to a natural cause of heart attack as a result of marriage over excitement. The government in Kenya has also betrayed the freedom fighters who are peasants and workers who are now being termed as criminals. In the play, it has been shown that the government leaders have completely forgotten the promises that they provided to lower-class people during the struggle for independence. In the play, it has been revealed that the majority of the lower-class people have now remained hopeless and homeless. They suffer from starvation. (2)

*Betrayal in the City* reveals the sufferings of the people of Kafira who had hopes of enjoying the fruits of independence as they would be free from oppression, humiliation and poverty, but soon after independence, the new government does the same as the former colonial master. The new government officials have totally forgotten what they promised; instead, they suppress any person who goes against the government either by killing or jailing. For instance, the play uses a flashback to portray Adika, a university student leader who organizes demonstrations against the government and is shot dead to discourage what they call chaos in the government. Doga and Nina are also killed for insisting on the shaving ceremony of their dead son, Adika. Again, Juser, Mosese and Jere are jailed for fighting for justice while Kabito is silenced for opposing Mulili. Furthermore, Mulili betrays Boss saying that he is not his cousin but only a distant cousin and he does not know him. This happens when Juser and Jere overthrow the Kafira government (73).

In addition, *Betrayal in the City* symbolically reveals betrayal against the cultural occasions, especially, the funeral ceremony and shaving ceremonies in which the government officials display disloyalty against their culture. The playwright sarcastically uses state agents like Jere and Mulili who are seen to stop the funeral and

shaving ceremony while drunk and holding a bottle of beer (8). The play mocks that the government uses stupid drunkards to stop important matters that concern culture. Moreover, betrayal against cultural occasions is seen when the government turns Adika's funeral into a political rally in which modern orders are provided wanting university students not to carry the coffin of the murdered student. Also, public crying is not allowed and people of the university are not allowed to spend more than ten minutes at the funeral.

In fact, most of the forms of betrayal portrayed in the play reflect the socio-political situation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenya since the country is still witnessing the same situation; in which political leaders give a lot of promises to their voters during general elections, but soon after they are elected, they completely forget their voters, leaving them unemployed and living in harsh life conditions. Also, cultural betrayal is very common since political leaders do not care about their national culture; but just glorify modern western cultures for their own political interests. For example, they prefer wearing black suits on funeral occasions. Additionally, many funeral ceremonies in today's Kenya are turned into political rallies where political figures have been campaigning for their propaganda. In fact, African cultures have been dumped away in the country.

### THE CONFLICTING KENYAN COMMUNITY

The three of Imbuga's selected plays have portrayed the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan government which is surrounded by conflicts. The plays have shown how conflicts have become the order of the day in the Kenyan state functionaries to the extent that even the government officials have conflicts among themselves for handling power. Imbuga's plays have succeeded in revealing political figures who are ready to fight in order to protect their positions in the government. In defending their positions, they sometimes kill each other when the opposition reaches its climax. In the selected plays, these

conflicts range from intra-personal, interpersonal and social conflicts as shown in the following detailed account.

*The Successor* depicts the interpersonal conflict between Chief Oriomra and Chief Sasia against Chief Jandi in the rally for the Emperor's power succession in the Masero Kingdom. Chief Oriomra struggles to become the Emperor's successor. He plans to kill Jandi and Sasia so as to grab the Emperor's position. Also, intra-personal conflict is shown by Zira who condemns herself for framing Chief Jandi with false accusations, thus, she wishes to confess the truth. Again, Emperor Chonda suffers an intrapersonal conflict with himself by having a terrible dream of his dead father's head. Thus, he decides to visit the Diviner to interpret his strange dream.

In *Game of Silence*, the technique of interpersonal conflicts has been demonstrated between the government officials, Bango and Dr. Zumaka who work as government psychologists, but Bango calls Dr. Zumaka insane because he is very much educated and poses a threat to the government. Bango ironically admits that the Doctor was supposed to work in a lower position rank than he deserves. Dr. Zumaka has also always had an intra-personal conflict on how he would rescue himself from the frequent government crunches. (29) Again, interpersonal conflict is seen between the top-class people like Bango and Jimmy and the bottom people like Jimm's Sister and the bottom people like Flora, Raja and the mourners. The top-class people are portrayed as fighting against the bottom people in order to remain in their poverty and the upper class maintains their position. In addition, the play shows the social conflict between the government and the lower-class people because the government does not wish for the low-class people to ever share with them the freedom cake.

*Betrayal in the City* reveals the technique of interpersonal conflicts between government officials during the entertainment committee in which Mulili and Kabito have different interests for

their financial gains. Another interpersonal conflict is between Jere and Mulili who are soldiers sent to stop the shaving ceremony at Doga and Nina's home. Mulili conspires with Boss leading to Jere's arrest and imprisonment. Also, intra-personal conflict is shown by Boss who speaks to himself in the office (soliloquy), that grey hair signifies the passing of time but also it might be a symbol of wisdom. This symbolizes the way political leaders are greedy for power that they don't even wish to give chances to others to take power even if their time has passed. The interpersonal conflicts make people aware that in an ill-governed state, life is not of any value because at any time an ordinary person or a government official's life may be taken away even without a reason. In addition, there is the social conflict that the play has reported between the government and the majority of lower-class people who fought for their national independence, but they have been forgotten by the government in the division of the national cake.

Generally, conflicts between government officials are very common in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya as they are evidenced in politics. It is seen in the parliament in which the politicians have been constantly conflicting to the extent of punching each other due to that everyone wants to effect his/her propaganda as a result of varying personal interests. Though Imbuga's plays present conflicts of interest between government officials and between the lower class people and the government, the message being communicated is that government officials are in constant conflict among themselves due to their personal gains. The three selected plays have shown that conflicts emerge because some government officials are not happy with the ill government. They raise up their good ideas for improvement but, they fail since they are in the weak position of the government. This situation is vivid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenya where numerous patriotic leaders who advance for the needs of the citizens have been silenced by the government.

## OPPRESSION AND SUPPRESSION

In reflecting the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan socio-political situation, the three Imbuga's selected plays have openly revealed the reality that oppression and suppression by the Kenyan authorities of the lower class people seem to be a problem, where, the common citizens are arrested, jailed or killed even without any fair trials. The plays have been dramatically plotted in a dictatorial context in order to depict the presence of oppression and suppression in Kenya.

In *The Successor*, the idea of oppression and suppression is symbolically presented by Emperor Chonda himself who is autonomous in his decision about important kingdom matters. For example, he banishes Chief Jandi by chasing him away without the farewell ceremony, but he later realizes that Jandi is innocent (54). Also, symbolically, Chief Oriomra and Chief Sasia oppress Chief Jandi in conspiring for power succession. Again, Chief Oriomra suppresses Chief Sasia by killing him so as to avoid competition in the rally of power succession.

In *Game of Silence*, the concepts of oppression and suppression are symbolically presented through Bango, Dr. Zumaka and Jimm's Killer sister who are portrayed as government agents set to torture the majority of lower-class people, peasants and workers. *Game of Silence* has shown the imagery of the way the lower class are not completely allowed to raise their voices against the upper class. For example, Raja says that poor people are silent during the daytime, but they howl like dogs at night (1). In fact, Raja's words indicate that the lower class people are oppressed by the government by being denied their right to expression. In the play, it is expressed that whoever resists, is silenced. This is seen when the mourner says, there are so many funerals down, thus God has become notorious to them (13). Again, oppression and suppression are witnessed in the play when Flora is poisoned; the doctor gives a fake report that Flora's death is due

to a natural cause of heart attack as a result of the marriage over excitement.

Additionally, the play has shown the way the elites are oppressed by experiencing censorship by a dictatorial government so that their education and publications should not affect the government led by people of the upper class. For example, the play symbolically presents Dr. Zumaka as a person who is well-educated but, he is censored by the government. The government is sarcastically presented terming the doctor as having been over-educated, and his education makes him crazy; that is why his advice to the government is not needed any more; thus, he is demoted.

In *Betrayal in the City*, it has been shown that the government oppresses and suppresses the lower-class people in Kafira. This reality has been shown by Boss, the head of Kafira, who does not hesitate to silence anyone who opposes his orders. For example, when the university students demonstrate against the government, Adika is killed; and, during Adika's funeral, the university students are not allowed to carry the coffin of Adika; they are also not allowed to cry. Additionally, Mulili and Jere are sent by the government to stop the shaving ceremony; when Nina and Doga insist on doing the ceremony, Mulili silences them by killing them. Not only that but also, the play portrays that, critical publications are censored and suppressed by the government. For example, ironically, the government of Kafira says, Juser's manuscript cannot be published since it expresses too much truth.

The issue of oppression and suppression is still present in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya as many innocent citizens are jailed and killed without any fair trials. For example, amid Kenyan political violence in 2007, thousands of innocent civilians were arrested and tortured by being heavily beaten by the security organs especially the police and the army. Others were reported being jailed or killed without fair trials. In general, a number of poor people became refugees while their families were left homeless.

## CRUELTY AGAINST WOMEN

Francis Imbuga's plays present the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya to be cruel to women for not giving women equal value as the way men are treated in the society. Selline (2014) states that Imbuga's plays portray women who positively affect the society but the society never recognizes them instead they ill-treat them (75). In the three selected plays the issue of women's cruelty has been portrayed in various ways as it is shown in the following account.

In *The Successor*, women's cruelty has symbolically been portrayed through Zira. Zira is portrayed as a young beautiful dancer girl who is heavy with Sasia's baby. The girl is portrayed to be used by Chief Oriomra and Chief Sasia to lie against Chief Jandi in order to grab his position of becoming the next successor of the throne; but later Zira realizes her mistake and feels guilt, so she finds out the need for confessing. The girl is portrayed to be stabbed with a knife in her neck by Chief Sasia so that she does not go to the Emperor to confess her sin of conspiring against Chief Jandi who is innocent. Also, women are seen not to be allowed to take political power but only work as wives, singers and dancers in Masero. For instance, the play uses a flashback technique to show the way Emperor Chonda succeeded his father and he has to appoint his successor from another family because he has no son to succeed him.

In *Game of Silence*, it has been used to show the anecdote of poor women like Flora who are killed by being poisoned by the government because of trying to marry a person from the upper class. The play portrays that, after Flora's death, the doctor gives out a fake report that Flora has died of a heart attack because she was over-excited with the marriage.

In addition, *Betrayal in the City* presents the same anecdote of women's cruelty through Regina, who is a relative of Mr. Tumbo. Tumbo knows the weaknesses of Boss to women, but he asks Regina to go to see him in private where Boss wants to rape

her (Regina). Regina is exaggerated to jump a ten feet window in order to avoid the Boss's rape. This cruelty to women has also been narrated when Boss locks down his wife because she laments him for the rape attempt. This reality has been revealed in the play after the wife of Boss had known about what her husband did to Regina in a flashback mode. Hence, Boss's wife suffers a home lock up in a palace cell for hours because of knowing the truth (61).

In fact, women's cruelty is very common in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya since many women in the country are considered weak and have no decisions in front of men in social and political matters. For example, there have been a number of cases reported by women who have been asked to bribe some officials with their bodies in order to be employed in public or private sectors. For this reason, different organs in Kenya are formed in order to rescue women from such harassment and gender discrimination.

## Disillusionment in the Kenyan Community

Francis Imbuga's plays present the theme of disillusionment which is also very vivid in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya. Imbuga's plays have shown that Kenyans have lost hope in the people that they entrusted with power.

In *The Successor*, Chief Jandi satirically shows that the people are disillusioned by the monarch system led by Emperor Chonda; hence, they need to change to democracy. This disillusionment is supported by Segasega, the Emperor's food taster who stipulates the need to give the people of Masero real democracy (66). This is ironically used to reflect the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya where political leaders proclaim that the country is democratic while the decisions are made in the mouth of one powerful person, and the citizens are discouraged from taking part in decision-making.

In *Game of Silence*, it is symbolically shown that the disillusioned lower class people like Raja, cripples, Beggars and mourners have lost hope against their government which silences them without caring that

they are also humans. Thus, the bottom people decide to revolt against the government in the court to show how they have lost trust in their government.

In *Betrayal in City*, through careful diction, the play portrays the way people have lost hope. Mosese says, “It was better while we waited. Now we have nothing to look forward to. We have killed our past and are busy killing the future” (28). Also, Doga and Nina show how they have lost hope in their life after their son, Adika, is shot dead during the demonstration. Their other son, Jusper, is considered as good as dead since his brother’s death. Nina says that the authority has completely blinded them. Also, Jere says, “Then, I said to myself, if they take you in, carry a Bible with you, it might restore your faith in humanity” (23). This shows that the citizens of Kafira have lost hope with the government and the only thing that will give them hope is a Bible. This is very relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenya where many Kenyans who are disillusioned by the government, take religion as their only hope.

### Disunity

Francis Imbuga’s selected plays have demonstrated the theme of disunity as the source of problems such as conflicts and social classes in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan socio-political system. Also, disunity is presented as a thing that leads to massive destruction of the cultural system of the country. And, to a large extent, disunity has caused human suffering like deaths due to the misunderstanding among stratified members of the society. In short, the three selected plays have portrayed disunity in the following ways.

In *The Successor*, disunity has symbolically been shown as the source of cultural destruction and dehumanization of people. For example, the chiefs of the Masero kingdom are portrayed to have disunity over the issue of power succession for they fight each other instead of working together to get the next successor. In the play, Emperor Chonda

causes disunity by favouring Chief Jandi. Also, the three Chiefs: Oriomra, Sasia and Jandi disunite over power succession, something that causes bloodshed. For example, Chief Oriomra and Chief Sasia disunite against Chief Jandi leading to his banishment. Also, Chief Oriomra disunites against Chief Sasia by killing him in order to grab the Emperor’s position. This fact of disunity over political power is still witnessed in the Kenyan socio-political system where politicians call it the dirty game of politics.

In *Game of Silence*, the play juxtaposes the top class and the bottom class by disunity which is seen as the only thing that separates the citizens from their government. Disunity is portrayed to be the source of classes between the top class and the lower class and between the educated and the uneducated. The play portrays the way the top class does not wish to work with the lower class by any means. For example, Flora, from the bottom class, is killed for wanting to marry Jimmy from the top class. Also, Raja is prosecuted for revolting against the government. This situation is very relevant to the contemporary Kenya where the government is always considered as an enterprise owned by the top class who do not wish to share its wealth with the people from the bottom class.

In *Betrayal in the City*, disunity is symbolically portrayed as the source of classes: between the top class and the lower class, between the educated and the uneducated; and between the traditionalists and the modernists. The play portrays the way the top class members like Boss, Tumbo and Mulili are not interested in solving problems facing the lower class people like the demonstrating university students, Doga and Nina. For example, the government is seen fighting against the students who demonstrated against it (2). Also, disunity is seen between the traditionalists and the modernists when the government sends its agents: Mulili and Jere to stop the shaving ceremony at Adika’s funeral while Adika’s parents, Doga and Nina, want to maintain their traditional roots for having the shaving

ceremony. The two government agents also decided on whether the shaving ceremony be conducted or not. Again, disunity is seen among the government officials during the entertainment committee where Mulili and Kabito fight over the milk tender instead of focusing on the important matters of the state.

In fact, the three Imbuga's plays: *The Successor*, *Game of Silence* and *Betrayal in the City* have successfully portrayed disunity as the source of problems like conflicts between government officials themselves and between the government and citizens. This situation seems to be a hindrance to fast development in the country. For example, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed political instabilities in the country due to disunity among Kenyans amid the 2007 general elections. The event caused lots of losses of properties and people's lives.

### Power Succession

Francis Imbuga's selected plays portray the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan power succession system. The power succession system has been presented differently in *The Successor*, *Game of Silence* and *Betrayal in the City*, though all three plays propose that the power succession system is unfair to Kenyan citizens.

In *The Successor*, the hereditary system of leadership has been portrayed in which the Emperor passes his power to the next one by choosing one member of his family especially, his elder son. It is revealed that such a system was considered to be democratic as Segasega claims that democracy was born in Masero (53). This system ironically presents the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan socio-political situation where the ruling politicians claim to be in democracy while power succession is still hereditary in nature, based on only one clan, the Kenyatta clan.

*Game of Silence* portrays power succession in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan socio-political system using classes. It has been shown that, in the Kenyan society, the top class is always eligible for power succession while the lower class people are not

eligible and when they try to penetrate government positions they are suppressed by the government's repressive organs such as law and mental hospitals and sometimes they are silenced to death. This situation is also relevant to Kenya since independence where peasants and workers are not being given chances to hold top political positions.

Additionally, *Betrayal in the City* portrays how power succession is practised in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenya through a nepotistic practice, where the play portrays Boss, the head of Kafira state, who makes his illiterate cousin, Mulili, to be a senior government adviser. This means that, at any time he could even be the next successor of Boss in Kafira state. In fact, the play satirically mocks the way the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan government gives positions to relatives or fellow clan members in favour instead of considering people by their inborn capabilities.

In general, Imbuga's plays have artistically shown the power succession system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Kenya as totally unfair to the citizens because the citizens are blinded and think that they practice democracy while it is a hereditary system of one person choosing who to put into power and who to exclude. Thus, the play puts forth the concept of democracy as not being the decision of one person but all the people.

### CONCLUSION

Francis Imbuga's plays—*The Successor*, *Game of Silence*, and *Betrayal in the City*—continue to hold remarkable relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Kenyan socio-political landscape. Despite being written decades ago, their themes of corruption, poor governance, betrayal, and social inequality remain strikingly familiar in contemporary Kenya. Through a Marxist literary lens, these plays reveal the systemic injustices faced by peasants and workers while exposing the socio-political dynamics that drive revolution. Thus, Imbuga's works serve as both a mirror and a warning, reflecting the persistent struggles of African societies and urging critical discourse on governance, responsibility, and justice.

Their continued significance underscores the necessity of addressing deep-rooted corruption, oppression, and inequality, not only in Kenya but across the continent. By illuminating timeless socio-political realities, these plays reaffirm the power of literature in shaping consciousness, inspiring resistance, and advocating for transformative change.

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