

Thematic Analysis of 'The Cabal' By Odafe Atogun

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Abstract

This study conducts a thematic analysis of the novel 'The Cabal' by Odafe Atogun published in 2023 to identify its prominent themes. The analysis focuses on identifying the main themes of the novel, and how they are developed throughout the story. Using a qualitative research design, the study employs thematic analysis to analyze the novel's language and content. The researcher finds out that 'The Cabal' portrays Nigeria's political landscape and societal issues in a critical and satirical manner. The prominent themes of the novel include corruption, abuse of power, social injustice, love and relationships, loyalty and betrayal. The novel also employs several motifs, such as the 'cabal' itself, and the protagonist's journey to convey its message. Through its depiction of these themes and motifs, 'The Cabal' offers socio-political commentary on contemporary Nigerian society and the challenges it faces. The study contributes to the understanding of Atogun's literary arts and provides insight into the complexities of Nigerian society and politics as portrayed in the novel.

Key Words: Political Corruption, Power dynamics, Leadership, Social issues, Symbolism

Introduction

Thematic analysis is a popular qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data. According to Braun & Clarke (2019), thematic analysis can be applied to both deductive and inductive research designs, thereby allowing researchers to identify both pre-existing and emergent themes within the data. They posit that thematic analysis also provides a transparent and systematic approach to data analysis. It allows researchers to clearly document their coding and theme development processes. Thematic Analysis provides a systematic element to data analysis. It allows the researcher to associate an analysis of the frequency of a theme with one of the whole content. This will confer accuracy and intricacy and enhance the research's whole meaning. Qualitative research requires understanding and collecting diverse aspects and data. According to Marks and Yardley (2004), thematic Analysis gives an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely. Namey et al. (2008) says:

Thematic Moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code co-occurrence, or graphically displaying code relationships (p.138).

In this study, the researcher has chosen to analyze 'The Cabal', a novel written by a Nigerian author Odafe Atogun. The writer draws inspiration from his African society to create a unique and colourful world where humankind is consumed by a common desire for change. His debut novel, 'Taduno's Song', was selected for the BBC Radio 2 Book Club. World rights for Taduno's Song was acquired by Canongate UK. It was first published in the UK in August 2016 and in the US by Pantheon Books, a division of Penguin Random House, in March 2017. It has been translated into German, Italian and Turkish, with other countries soon to come. Following his two-book deal with Canongate, Penguin Random House and Arche Verlag. He published his second novel, 'Wake Me When I'm Gone' in 2017. His third novel 'The Cabal' was published in 2023.

Atogun is known for his use of poetic language and vivid imagery in his writing, as well as his ability to weave together complex narratives that tackle pressing social issues. In his novel 'The Cabal', he depicts a world where a group of corrupt politicians and wealthy businessmen conspire to maintain their grip on power and wealth, while the majority of the populace suffers. The novel is a reflection of the state of Nigeria, where a powerful few rule at the expense of the majority, and corruption is rampant. Atogun highlights the consequences of apathy and complacency on the part of the populace. In the

novel, many people are aware of the corruption and oppression that they face, but they do nothing about it. They are either too scared or too disillusioned to take any action. This is a commentary on the real-life situation in Nigeria, where many people feel helpless and powerless in the face of government corruption and abuse of power.

The story revolves around a group of powerful and influential individuals known as 'the Cabal'. The Cabal controls virtually everything in the town, including politics, business, and even the social lives of the residents. The protagonist 'Bako Thomas' lives a solitary life, a calm centre in an increasingly unstable world. The city outside his apartment is sliding towards a dystopia as a fuel crisis holds citizens to ransom. He loses Avé, his girlfriend of two years as a result of the activities of the cabal group, and his relationship with his neighbours, The Law, Gebu and Mimi is fraught with anxiety and tension. When a tragedy forces him to go on the run, he soon finds himself being roped into the murky world of politics and corruption he thought he had left behind for good. The story follows the lives of some of the main characters, including a young woman named Ave, who becomes a victim of their manipulations. As the plot unfolds, the characters find themselves drawn deeper into the dark and corrupt world of the Cabal, leading to a shocking and unexpected conclusion. The novel offers a scathing critique of the abuse of power and corruption that are prevalent in contemporary Nigerian society, while also exploring themes of love, betrayal, and loyalty.

Atogun's 'The Cabal' is a poignant and insightful commentary on the state of Nigeria. The novel exposes the corruption and inequality that exist in the country and calls on Nigerians to take action against these injustices. The novel explores the complex relationships between power, corruption, and greed in contemporary Nigerian society. At its core, the novel is a story about a group of powerful individuals who form a secret organization, or cabal that uses their influence to manipulate the country's political and economic systems for their own gain. The present study is deemed relevant as no other researcher has done any analysis on Odafe Atogun's 'The Cabal'. This is indeed the gap in knowledge that this work has come to fill.

Purpose of the Study

Blacker (2009) argues that a rich thematic description of the entire data would assist him and/or the readers to get a sense of "the predominant and important themes from the data (p.83). The purpose of this thematic analysis is to examine the themes, motifs, and literary devices used in Odafe Atogun's novel 'The Cabal' in order to gain a deeper understanding of the author's message and the societal issues he addresses. The analysis will focus on identifying the main themes of the novel so as to discover how they are developed throughout the story. Additionally, the analysis will explore how Atogun employs literary devices such as symbolism, foreshadowing, and irony to convey these themes and create a compelling narrative. By conducting this thematic analysis, we hope to shed light on the ways in which Atogun uses language and storytelling to comment on contemporary issues and engage readers in a thoughtful exploration of Nigerian society.

Research Questions

- i. What are the dominant themes present in Odafe Atogun's Cabal, and how do they contribute to the overall meaning of the work?
- ii. How does Atogun use symbolism in 'The Cabal', and what is the significance of the symbols for the overall meaning of the novel?

Review of Related Literature

What is Theme?

Theme is a crucial aspect of literary analysis, reflecting the underlying ideas and messages that authors seek to convey through their works. Themes can be explicit or implicit and may be universal or particular to the text or context in which it is produced. According to William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman (2013), "theme is the central and dominating idea in a literary work". Literary critic Northrop Frye (1957) defines theme as "an abstract term that refers to the unity or coherence of a literary work". In *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray (2010) write

that "theme is the general concept or message that an author wishes to communicate to the reader". According to James H. Pickering (2007), "theme is the unifying or dominant idea or meaning in a literary work".

From the definitions, theme is described as the central or dominant idea that an author seeks to communicate through his or her work. Themes can be developed through various literary devices, including character development, setting, plot, and symbolism, and may reflect broader social and cultural issues.

Theme and Other Elements of the Novel

Theme and Setting

Theme and setting are two important concepts in literary analysis that help readers understand the meaning and impact of a text. Theme refers to the underlying message or insight that a text conveys, while setting refers to the physical and cultural environment in which a story takes place. Theme can be defined as the central idea or message of a literary work. According to scholar Robert Scholes (2006), theme is "the underlying meaning or idea that a writer or artist explores in a work of literature or art" (p.332). Themes can be expressed explicitly through characters' dialogue or actions, or they can be implied through symbolism, imagery, or other literary devices. Themes can also be universal and applicable to human experience, allowing readers to connect with the story on a deeper level.

Setting, on the other hand, refers to the time, place, and social context in which a literary work takes place. According to literary theorist E.M. Forster, "The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died and then the queen died of grief is a plot" (p. 86). Setting can be used to create a particular mood or atmosphere, and can also be used to convey themes and messages to the reader. The knowledge of theme and setting is essential for analyzing and interpreting literary works, as they provide insights into the author's intended meaning and message.

Theme and Character

According to Robert Scholes (2006), theme is "the underlying meaning or idea that a writer or artist explores in a work of literature or art" (p.332). Character, on the other hand, refers to the individuals or entities that populate a literary work. Characters can be human or non-human, and can take on a variety of roles and personalities. According to literary theorist E.M. Forster, "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way" (p.60). Characters can be developed through their actions, dialogue, and interactions with others in the story, and can be used to convey themes and messages to the reader.

Theme and Plot

Themes can also be universal and applicable to human experience, allowing readers to connect with the story on a deeper level. Plot, on the other hand, refers to the sequence of events that make up a story. Freytag opines that "plot is the arrangement of incidents that evoke a particular response from the reader or viewer" (p. 6). It can be broken down into a series of components, including exposition (the introduction of characters and setting), rising action (the buildup of conflict and tension), climax (the point of highest emotional intensity), falling action (the resolution of the conflict), and denouement.

Theme and Point of View

Theme can be defined as the central idea or message of a literary work. According to Terry Eagleton (2013), theme refers to "the unifying or dominant idea which gives coherence and meaning to a literary work" (p.189). Themes can be expressed explicitly through characters' dialogue or actions, or they can be implied through symbolism, imagery, or other literary devices.

Point of view, on the other hand, refers to the perspective from which a story is told. It encompasses the narrator's attitudes, beliefs, and values, as well as the limitations and biases of their perception. According to literary theorist Wayne Booth (1983), point of view is "the perspective from which the story is presented to the reader" (p. 158). Point of view can be first-person (in which the narrator is a character within the story), third-person limited (in which the narrator focuses on the thoughts and

feelings of one character), or third-person omniscient (in which the narrator has access to the thoughts and feelings of multiple characters).

According to M. H. Abrams (1991) point of view signifies the way a story gets told to the mode or perspective established by an author employing which the reader is presented with the characters' actions setting and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction (p.142).

Theme and Conflict

Theme can be defined as the central idea or message of a literary work. According to literature scholar M. H. Abrams, theme refers to "the central meaning or dominant idea in a literary work". Themes can be expressed explicitly through characters' dialogue or actions, or they can be implied through symbolism, imagery, or other literary devices. Themes can also be universal and applicable to human experience, allowing readers to connect with the story on a deeper level.

Conflict, on the other hand, refers to the tension or struggle between opposing forces in a literary work. Northrop Frye (1957) states that "conflict is the basic stuff of literary form" and "the imaginative shaping of the experience of strife" (p. 130). Conflict can take many forms, including internal conflict within a character, interpersonal conflict between characters, or conflict between a character and their environment or society. Conflict is often a driving force in a story, propelling the plot forward and creating tension and suspense.

Theme and Style

Theme and style are two important elements of literature that can greatly influence the meaning and impact of a text. Theme refers to the underlying message or insight that a text conveys, while style refers to the distinctive way in which an author uses language to express their ideas. Writers can use their style of writing to reveal what they want to say or their central idea or theme. Kirszner and Mandell (2011) suggest that "style is how a writer selects and arranges words to what he or she wants to say (p. 247). Theme and style can work together to create a powerful and evocative literary work. By using language in a distinctive and purposeful way to explore important themes, authors can create a memorable and impactful reading experience.

Eyatu & Zeleke outlined ways of identifying themes in a novel. According to them, themes can be identified by asking the following questions when reading the story:

Does the title signify something special about the story, and does it point to the truth, it reveals about life? When a reader finishes the story, he or she should think about the title, to see if it can add new meaning to the story (of course not all titles do this). Does the main character change in the course of the story? Does the main character realize something he or she hadn't known before? Are any important statements about life or people made in the story, either by the narrator or by the character in the story? Does the statement apply to the whole story, not to the part of it? (p. 20)

By focusing on the above mentioned methods a reader can easily decipher the meaning or theme of the story.

Research Methodology

The researcher adopts a systematic and rigorous process of examining the text to identify key themes and ideas, which would contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel and its message. The researcher goes through the text line by line, identifying relevant content, and assigning it to the appropriate category or subcategory. The data would be analyzed through identification of patterns and trends in the text. The findings are interpreted, and conclusions drawn based on the research objectives.

Analysis and Findings

The cabal is used to symbolize the political group in Nigeria who control the economic resources, thereby leaving the poor masses to thrive in abject poverty with a few left with the option to work for them or suffer the consequences. This creates a power dynamic where the cabal members have control over the lives of the lower class, and the lower class is dependent on the cabal for survival. The novel explores several themes that are relevant to contemporary Nigerian society and the human experience as a whole. Here are some of the main themes of the novel:

Power and Corruption: One of the central themes of ‘The Cabal’ is the corrupting influence of power. The novel portrays a society where power and corruption are deeply intertwined. The powerful few use their influence to maintain control over the masses, and corruption is rampant at all levels of society. Consider the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1

For days, the unions picketed government offices with raised placards, chanting, chanting their demands. They wanted better living conditions, better hospitals, better roads, more job opportunities, better schools, improved security, more accountability from the fat politicians in power and an end to corruption and impunity. Why, they wanted to know, would an oil-producing nation not have fuel for local consumption, relying instead on imports for the very thing they had in abundance? What kind of animal sense is that? One placard read in bold letters (p.14-15).

This excerpt describes a situation where unions are protesting and picketing government offices to demand improvements in various areas of life such as living conditions, healthcare, transportation, employment opportunities, education, security, and accountability from politicians. They also want an end to corruption and impunity. The excerpt also highlights the irony of an oil-producing nation importing fuel instead of using its own resources, which the protestors find unreasonable. The use of the phrase "animal sense" in reference to this situation suggests that the protestors believe this behavior is irrational and lacks basic logic.

Above all, the passage presents a picture of the Nigerian society where the citizens are dissatisfied with the government's performance and are taking action to demand change and accountability. However, the use of placards and chants suggests a peaceful and organized form of protest.

Excerpt 2

He (Bako) recollected the day he told his father that he was moving out of the house. ...He informed him that he never wanted to be a politician, that he was moving out of the house to chart his own path. His father begged him not to leave, saying that he would inherit all that he had built, that he would come to see that politics is the true essence of life, the surest way to attain power and wealth. Look at me, his father said to him, my parents were so poor that poor people called us poor. But look where I am now, politics changed my life, and I have become one of the richest and most powerful men in this country (p. 45).

In the context above, the relationship between politics and wealth in Nigerian society is highlighted. Bako's father sees politics as the surest way to attain power and wealth, and he uses his own success as an example to convince Bako to pursue a career in politics. This reflects a common perception in Nigerian politics, where the pursuit of political power is often seen as a path to personal enrichment/aggrandizement and wealth accumulation. Many politicians in Nigeria are known for their extravagant lifestyles and unexplained wealth, leading to widespread corruption and a lack of accountability. Bako's decision to reject his father's advice and pursue his own path may be seen as a rejection of this corrupt political culture. It suggests that he is more interested in living a life of integrity and authenticity than in pursuing wealth and power at any cost.

At the same time, the fact that Bako's father is able to use his wealth and power to influence his son's decisions also highlights the unequal distribution of power and opportunity in Nigerian society. The fact that politics is seen as the primary means of upward mobility suggests that access to political power is limited to a select few, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and corruption.

Excerpt 3

His father's fanatical love of politics was clear to all. Because it was what helped him to conquer poverty, he believed that he could rise to the pinnacle and become a god in the establishment, one that would be worshipped the length and breadth of the country. That for him was more important than anything else, and he direly wished that Bako would sustain his legacy (p. 46).

The above excerpt explicates some of the key issues facing Nigerian politics, including corruption, inequality, and the complex relationship between politics and wealth. It sheds light on the mindset of

Nigerian politicians, particularly those who believe that politics is the key to personal success and wealth. Bako's father's love of politics is described as 'fanatical', highlighting the intense passion and dedication that many politicians in Nigeria have for their careers. The fact that Bako's father believes that he can become a 'god' in the political establishment suggests a deep sense of entitlement and a desire for power and influence. This reflects a common perception among Nigerian politicians, who often view themselves as above the law and immune to accountability.

The mention of poverty and the belief that politics can help one conquer it also speaks to the pervasive poverty and inequality that exists in Nigeria. For many Nigerians, politics is seen as a way to escape poverty and achieve upward mobility, which contributes to the intense competition and corruption in the political arena. Furthermore, the fact that Bako's father wishes for his son to sustain his legacy suggests a desire for dynastic power and a continuation of the status quo. This highlights the lack of diversity and the concentration of power in the hands of a few families and political elites in Nigeria. The excerpts therefore highlight the complex and often troubling mindset of Nigerian politicians, who see politics as a means to personal gain rather than as a way to serve the needs of their constituents. It highlights the need for greater transparency, accountability, and diversity in Nigerian politics to ensure that the interests of all Nigerians are represented and protected.

Social Injustice: The novel equally highlights the wide gap between the rich and the poor, and how the poor are often marginalized and denied basic rights and opportunities. The excerpts below typify that:

Excerpt 4

One afternoon, upon returning home after another fruitless search for petrol, Bako broke into a cold sweat and his whole body began to tremble. He climbed into bed, his teeth clattering. Soon, the sheets were soaked. He looked up helplessly at the static ceiling fan above him. By the time AY visited him, his condition had deteriorated (p. 15).

The use of the word "helplessly" to describe Bako's expression suggests a sense of powerlessness in the face of the situation. It x-rays the ugly situation the poor masses have found themselves. The helplessness of the Nigerian nation is portrayed:

Excerpt 5

He became really frustrated when the battery of his phone went flat that night. His power bank having suffered the same fate. A generator was running in the compound and for a moment Bako thought of going to charge his phone in a neighbour's apartment, but he decided against it (p. 19).

The frustration expressed by Bako over the unavailability of electricity for charging his phone is a small example of a larger problem in the novel, which is the scarcity of basic resources such as petrol and electricity. The situation highlights the difficulties faced by individuals in a society where access to essential resources is limited or controlled by a select few. The intensity of the helplessness of the people is expressed further:

Excerpt 6

Kerosene lamps, fire from the stoves of the food vendors, rechargeable lamps, candlelight, and bulbs powered by small generators lit the long stretch of road. With the queues getting longer and rowdier by the hour, businesses continued to take up every available roadside space (p. 31).

The above text shows how lack of electricity and other basic resources can have a significant impact on people's daily lives, causing frustration and inconvenience, and adding to the sense of helplessness and powerlessness experienced by characters in the novel. In the light of this helplessness, there is still no hope for the populace as those in power, irrespective of their age bracket have refused to go on retirement; deceit has become the norm as seen below:

On the late morning news, the anchor said that the timely and judicious intervention of the president had brought the strike by the Association of Petroleum Workers and Marketers to an end. She warned though that the queues that had formed could even take several days, even weeks to clear television broadcast to the nation, the eighty year

old president claimed that the fuel scarcity was orchestrated by political ‘enemies’ desperate to derail his re-election bid (p.71).

The excerpt highlights the social injustice of a government that fails to take responsibility for its own mistakes and instead blames others for problems that it has caused. It also highlights the ways in which the media can be used to manipulate public opinion and shape narratives to benefit those in power. Furthermore, the fuel scarcity and long lines at gas stations disproportionately affect the poor and working-class citizens who may not have the means to purchase fuel at inflated prices or wait in long lines. This perpetuates social and economic inequality and reinforces the existing power dynamic where those in power are able to protect their own interests at the expense of the most vulnerable members of society.

The novel highlights the ways in which social injustice can be perpetuated by those in power who prioritize their own interests over the needs of the people they are meant to serve. It emphasizes the quest of Nigerian politicians to retain power/leadership irrespective of their age or frailty. This issue has been a major concern in Nigeria.

Excerpt 7

Gebu had no regular job, and he often bragged about the wealth and connection to powerful politicians, but the old Mercedes Benz, a beat up Land Cruiser and four mobile phones were all he had to show for it. As an aspiring politician, he believed that these possessions were crucial to improving his fortunes (p. 21).

In the above context, Gebu is described as an aspiring politician, who boasts about his wealth and connections to powerful politicians but has few material possessions to show for it. The mention of his old Mercedes Benz and beat-up Land Cruiser, along with his four mobile phones, suggests that he is living beyond his means. The fact that Gebu believes that these possessions are crucial to improving his fortunes reveals his superficiality and lack of understanding of the political process. It suggests that he is more interested in projecting an image of wealth and power than in actually making a positive impact on his community or achieving real political change.

Loyalty and Betrayal: Another theme of the novel is loyalty and betrayal. The novel explores the theme of betrayal in different forms, including betrayal of trust, betrayal of friendship, and betrayal of family. The characters' motivations for betrayal are often linked to their pursuit of power or self-interest.

Excerpt 8

Bako heard the familiar voice away to his right. His heart skipped a beat and running, he saw him chatting to a young woman. His heart began to race, as if it was about to burst through the chest. Even though he had tried to keep an open mind since ‘The man’ disclosed to him that one of his neighbours was the killer, he had suspected that it could be him. Now, seeing him standing there in the midst of countless politicians and listening to his voice, he came to understand why he had allowed himself to be used to snuff out the life of an innocent woman (p.164).

The excerpt reveals portrayal of loyalty (to the politicians) and disloyalty (to a dear neighbour). Bako felt betrayed by his neighbour who is the killer of his girlfriend (a woman he wanted to marry). Bako felt bad on the realization that politicians have used Gebu to carry out their heinous crime. Bako's heart races with the realization of this betrayal, as he had trusted his neighbour. This excerpt highlights how loyalty can be used to manipulate and betray someone. It also shows how the pursuit of power and influence can lead people to do terrible things to maintain their position, even if it means betraying those closest to them.

Excerpt 9

... What would happen to them if his father died? Would the one who betrayed his father go after them? He felt a twinge of fear. He promised himself that he would reach out to them at the appropriate time. Surely, the animosity of those must be behind them now (p.143).

The protagonist is reflecting on the possibility of his father's death and the implications this could have for him and his family. He wonders if the person who betrayed his father would come after them,

indicating that he is aware of the potential danger and consequences of disloyalty. The protagonist's fear and concern for his family suggest that he values loyalty and familial bonds. He promises himself that he will reach out to his family at the appropriate time, indicating a sense of responsibility towards them. The mention of 'animosity' suggests that there may be past conflicts or betrayals that have strained relationships between family members. However, the protagonist expresses hope that these issues are now behind them, indicating a desire for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Furthermore, this excerpt emphasizes the importance of loyalty and the consequences of betrayal, while also highlighting the potential for healing and reconciliation. It suggests that even in the face of conflict and betrayal, it is possible to maintain familial bonds and work towards rebuilding trust and relationships.

Community and Connection: Atogun emphasizes the importance of community and connection in 'The Cabal'. The novel shows how the actions of one individual can have far-reaching consequences on the entire community. It also highlights the ways in which people rely on each other for support and survival.

Excerpt 10

Your father is not just a member of the cabal; he is the cabal.... He could not really fully understand the implications of those words. As a matter of fact, he did not want to. To understand would allow him to be drawn into his father's world. Something he had sworn never to allow.

The above excerpt highlights the tension between the protagonist, Bako, and his father, who is a member of the cabal, a secret and powerful political group. Bako's father's position in the cabal suggests a lack of community and connection with the wider society, as the cabal's activities are often secretive and focused on personal gain rather than the welfare of the people. Bako's reluctance to understand the implications of his father's involvement in the cabal suggests a desire to maintain a connection to the wider community and a rejection of the insular and self-serving world of the cabal. Again, Bako's rejection of his father's world highlights the importance of community and connection in Nigerian society, where a strong sense of community is often vital for survival in the face of poverty, corruption, and political instability.

However, the excerpt also suggests the difficulty in maintaining a sense of community and connection in the face of the cabal's pervasive influence. Bako's father's position in the cabal makes it difficult for Bako to remain connected to the wider society without becoming drawn into his father's world. It highlights the complex relationship between community and connection in Nigerian society and suggests the importance of maintaining a sense of community and connection in the face of corruption and political influence, while also highlighting the difficulty in doing so in the face of powerful and secretive groups like the cabal.

Excerpt 11

Working with 'The man' he has come to place so much trust in me, and I know everything about his affairs. In fact, I know everything he knows. Your father was most certainly poisoned by someone within his organization, not an outsider. If he were to die today, what do you think would happen to you? Have you asked yourself that question? Do you think his killer would let you and your siblings live? No, he will not. He will not rest until he eliminates everyone who could possibly be a threat to him (p. 142).

The excerpt portrays the theme of 'community and connection' in the novel 'The Cabal'. It highlights the idea that within a community or organization, people must be able to trust each other and work together towards a common goal. The character speaking in the passage emphasizes the importance of this trust, as he reveals that he knows everything about 'The man' and his affairs, which suggests a close connection between them. However, the passage also highlights the potential dangers of being too closely connected to a community or organization. The character warns that if Bako's father were to die, his killer would likely target everyone who could be a potential threat to him, including Bako and his siblings. This shows that being too closely connected to an organization can also make one vulnerable to harm or betrayal. The excerpt emphasizes the delicate balance between trust and danger

that can exist within a community or organization, and the importance of being aware of both the benefits and risks of such connections.

Tradition and Modernity: in addition, the novel explores the tension between tradition and modernity. The Cabal represents the corrupting influence of modernity and the erosion of traditional values.

Excerpt 12

A wild commotion ensued as several men in red rushed into the field with long knives. As the first man sliced the doctor across the body, Bako realized what was to happen. Screaming, he sprang to his feet and jumped from the podium onto the field, rushing towards the doctor to try to save him. But Lobito and his men were behind him, holding him, stopping him from going to the aid of the doctor being butchered on the field (p. 154).

The excerpt highlights the clash between tradition and modernity in Nigerian society. The "men in red" with long knives represent a political group who are carrying out a violent act which they regard as their tradition. Bako's attempt to save the doctor shows his alignment with modernity and education. However, his efforts are hindered by Lobito and his men, who represent the political forces that seek to preserve the culture and customs of their cult.

The struggle between tradition and modernity is a common theme in Nigerian literature, reflecting the ongoing tension between the country's diverse cultural practices and the push towards modernization and development. The violent act also raises questions about the place of barbarism in modern societies.

Excerpt 13

No! Bako screamed, struggling to break free. But he was utterly powerless. Tears streaming down his face, he watched as Dr. Taju's blood sprinkled his assailants, soaking them in a ritual of unholy barbarism. ...Lobito whispered fiercely into his ear. 'You can't save him. Let it go Bako. No one can save him. ...Cries of terror rent the air as the crowd dispersed in every direction. Dr. Taju was unable to put up any resistance. Lying on his back, arms spread, in the shape of a cross, he submitted himself to his punishment, to his fate (p. 154).

The scene explicated above underscores the importance of recognizing the complexity of the Nigerian society. The excerpt portrays a clash between tradition and modernity. The use of knives to carry out a punishment in front of a crowd suggests the continuation of traditional practices in the society. The manner in which Dr. Taju was killed exemplifies the present-Day Nigeria that is burdened with the activities of people who maim/kill their fellow human beings without any consideration to preserve lives. On the other hand, Bako's reaction of horror and disbelief at the barbaric act and his attempts to save the victim indicate a rejection of such practices in modern times. The use of the phrase "ritual of unholy barbarism" suggests a condemnation of the act as something that goes against modern values and norms. Lobito's whispered words, 'Let it go Bako. No one can save him', show a resignation to the reality of the situation and imply that the act is beyond redemption. The cries of terror and the dispersal of the crowd also suggest that the act is seen as something that is unacceptable in modern society. The victim's submission to his fate suggests a defeat of modernity in the face of entrenched heinous traditional practices.

Love and relationships: 'The Cabal' portrays different types of love and relationships, including romantic love. The characters' relationships are however, complicated by issues of power, social status, and betrayal. Some of these features are explicated below:

Excerpt 14

Ave was special. He had felt it from that first day at her twenty-second birthday party two years ago. The moment she smiled at him, he had felt at ease, a calmness in his soul. Something he had not experienced since his mother died. Their relationship grew. They talked about their plans for the future.They had even discussed marriage a few times, but his infidelity... his love of women, was a big issue (p.7).

The theme of love and relationship is evident in the novel 'The Cabal'. The protagonist, Bako, is deeply in love with Ave and believes she is special. He felt a sense of calmness in his soul since the day she smiled at him, which was a feeling he had not experienced since his mother passed away. This shows

how Ave's presence in his life has brought a sense of comfort and peace to him. Bako and Ave have a growing relationship and discuss their plans for the future, including marriage. It must be stressed that Bako's infidelity and love for women creates a problem in their relationship. This conflict highlights the theme of love and relationships in the context of fidelity and trust. Bako's inability to remain faithful to Ave threatens their future together.

Excerpt 15

Which of his neighbours could have killed Ave? Was his impetuous affair with Mimi connected to Ave's death? Is Mimi working for his father's enemies? Or could it be Idi? He had seen something sinister in his eyes (p.69).

This excerpt therefore depicts the complexity of love and relationships. It shows how love can bring comfort and peace to one's life. It also shows how infidelity can destroy someone's future. Love and relationships can also be challenging and require trust and fidelity to be sustained.

Gender and patriarchy: The novel explores the theme of gender and patriarchy, particularly through the experiences of female characters. The male-dominated society places significant restrictions on women's lives and opportunities, and the female characters face numerous obstacles as they navigate their roles in society.

Excerpt 16

And then his mother became ill. Because his father was on the campaign trail, he was left to look after her alone. She went in and out of hospital, but his father did not visit her at the hospital even once. Bako never forgave him for never paying attention to his mother. She died at home one afternoon with Bako at her bedside. And anguish like he had never imagined consumed him (p. 35-36)

The excerpt above portrays how women are relegated to the background. It explicates the ill treatment meted to Bako's mother. By virtue of her gender, she was merely treated as an ordinary object who could be discarded at any time. Bako felt bad that his mother could be treated like that. Even at the burial, 'his father was business as usual, introducing him (Bako) to his colleagues, telling them that he (Bako) would become a senator like him one day (p.36).' Consider the excerpt below:

Excerpt 17

Dad, it's my mother's funeral not a fundraiser! In response, his father pulled him aside and said, look, son, you must learn to be dispassionate about death. You must if you are to become a great politician like me one day. Always remember, it is only in death that life becomes complete (p.36).

The above is Bako's reaction to his father's callous behavior towards his mother. Bako's father's attitude towards his wife to a large extent portrays the level at which women are being relegated to the background. In the Nigerian society, a woman who loses her husband restricts her movements and mourns her husband accordingly, but this is not so for the male folk. The novelist equally buttresses the point that a woman's life is sometimes, not valued; women have always been at the receiving end. This view could also be drawn from the callous and gruesome manner in which Ave was murdered as explicated in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 18

He felt anger rising inside him, to think that his girlfriend was murdered because of this man lying lifeless yet invincible on a hospital bed. Why kill an innocent woman to attempt to destroy a man that was indestructible? ...he knew that he would never rest until Ave's killer had been brought to justice (p. 136).

Conclusion

The novel 'The Cabal' is a rich and complex exploration of the social realities of contemporary Nigeria. It touches on themes such as loyalty and betrayal, social injustice, love and relationships and it explores predominantly the theme of power and corruption, and the limitations that exist on these in Nigerian society. The characters in the novel are often constrained by social and economic factors that limit their ability to make choices and determine their own destinies as typified in the life of Bako. The novel asks important questions about the extent to which individuals can exercise their freedom and agency in the face of such limitations. Summarily, it portrays a society where power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who use their influence to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. The novel

basically depicts how political corruption thrives in such a society, and the devastating effects it has on those who live in its shadow. 'The Cabal' therefore, is an unsparing look at political power, the choices that it drives human beings to make, and the limits of individual resistance to it. Atogun's austere, pared-back prose lifts the veil of platitudes that often covers the wielding of power, confronts the degradation that it causes. In conclusion, the novel offers a searing critique of many of the issues that are prevalent in Nigerian society, highlighting the need for change and reform. The novel underscores the importance of addressing these issues in order to build a more equitable and just society.

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