

Orwellian Satire in Contemporary Drama: Articulating the Complexities of Governance and Resistance in Kenya in Adipo Sidang's *Parliament of Owls*

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ABSTRACT: This research paper critiques the significance of Orwellian satire in contemporary Kenyan drama, focusing specifically on Adipo Sidang's *Parliament of Owls*. Drawing parallels with George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the study explores how Sidang employs allegory to critique the socio-political landscape of post-independence Kenya. Employing Bakhtin's carnival theory, which is derived from his broader dialogic framework, this literary analysis focuses on abuse of power, misrepresentation of facts, falsification, and the institutional discrimination of the plebeian birds by the bourgeoisie, as allegorised by the owl elite. Situating the text within the tradition of African political satire, this paper argues that Sidang's play serves as a contemporary cautionary tale against neo-patrimonialism and the erosion of democratic institutions. This study concludes that Orwellian tropes do not only persist in contemporary Kenyan drama, but they are also effective in articulating the complexities of governance and resistance in modern-day Kenya.

KEYWORDS: Orwellianism, Carnival, Satire, Kenyan Drama, Governance, Resistance, Allegory, Parallelism, post-independence)

INTRODUCTION

This study is a literary analysis of Orwellian satire in Sidang's *Parliament of Owls*. The term 'Orwellianism' derives from the stylistic idiosyncrasies of Eric Arthur Blair (25 June 1903 – 21 January 1950), a British novelist, poet, essayist, journalist, and critic who wrote under the pen name George Orwell. This pen name was inspired by his favourite place, the River Orwell. Orwell's penchant for satire is evident in his six novels: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Animal Farm*, *Burmese Days*, *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying*, *Coming Up for Air*, and *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Orwell employs this literary technique to convey his ideology or his perception of society. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he uses political satire to depict the totalitarian governments of Russia and Germany. Unlike the subtle metaphors and analogies in *1984*, the animal imagery in *Animal Farm* is explicit and pronounced. In our reading, this satirically allegorical novel, which takes the form of a beast fable, is the *locus classicus* of allegorisation in modern fiction. We acknowledge that the use of animal imagery is not entirely a Eurocentric literary strategy; in fact, many oral literary works in pre-literate African communities heavily employed animal imagery as a non-confrontational means of challenging social weaknesses. Nevertheless, Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a classic example of its deployment in modern fiction. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* are typical examples of contemporary African novels, influenced by Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Orwell's novel tells the story of a group of anthropomorphic farm animals who rebel against their human farmer, hoping to create a society where the animals can be equal, free, and happy. Ultimately, the rebellion is betrayed, and under the dictatorship of a pig named Napoleon, the farm ends up in a state far worse than before. We argue that Adipo Sidang transposes Orwellianism in his play, *Parliament of Owls*, to expose and condemn social weaknesses in contemporary Kenyan society. To appreciate this play, we regard Orwellianism as a satiric genre derived from Bakhtin's dialogism, specifically the carnival theory. According to Bakhtin (1929), the 'primary carnivalistic act is the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning' and the carnival king's reign 'opens and sanctifies the inside-out world of the carnival' (p. 124). The carnival king, allegorised by the Royal Owl in Sidang's *Parliament of Owls*, 'is the antithesis of a real king; he is 'a slave or a jester'' (Stevens, 2007, p. 2).

Analysis of Adipo Sidang's *Parliament of Owls*

Adipo Sidang's *Parliament of Owls* is a contemporary Kenyan drama that depicts the political realities in Kenya and, by extension, the East African region. The title, *Parliament of Owls*, suggests the existence of an owl-dominated August House. Unlike George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Adipo Sidang's play portrays a country whose legislative issues are addressed in a birds' kingdom. The play employs the narrative and characterisation strategy in Orwell's novel to highlight the weaknesses in Kenya's political system. Some of the foibles exposed in Sidang's satiric drama include surveillance, propaganda, and manipulation of truth. Like George Orwell's

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works, *Parliament of Owls* delves deep into how those in power warp reality and maintain control of the wider society through deceit, twisted logic, and misrepresentation of facts.

Sidang' uses animal imagery to ridicule those in positions of power. They believe they are above the law; traffic laws do not apply to them. They break laws so shamelessly and arrogantly that one would wonder why they make these laws in the first place. In what is akin to what the pigs do in the Animal Kingdom, they 'break the same rules [they] make in Parliament' (*Parliament of Owls*, p.1). This means that Members of this Parliament feel special and exempt when it comes to laws in the birds' kingdom.

Sidang' ridicules the Kenyan regime's obsession with subjugation. The political regime has created the false impression that the government belongs to a particular group of people, and that those who support the government are likely to benefit more. Those who acquired immense wealth defend the government of the day to shield themselves from scrutiny. In Kenya, it appears that the political fate of certain groups is sealed. Whereas changes are likely to occur in the future, there is fear that 'even if it were to happen, power will remain in the hands of the night birds or the omnivores.' The owls, which have the largest eyes, will always be at the helm. 'Day birds and grain-eaters will never have a chance to run this kingdom' (Sidang', 2022, p. 2). This is the tragedy of Kenyan politics. Some groups feel so entitled to the country's political leadership that the rest do not feel they too belong:

Freedoms have limits. Rights come with responsibilities. Since when did it become irresponsible to speak the truth? You see, Osogo cannot fly beyond a certain height. Do you know why? He is naturally limited. Falcons go as high as they can because they are created to hit high levels. That is why Falcon is our weatherman. He can touch the clouds and tell us when it shall rain. But you weavers cannot. Do you get my point? A time is coming when all birds will have a sane Parliament. Maybe many generations from now. Maybe never. (Sidang', 2022, p. 2)

The dramatist ridicules the biases in Kenya's parliament. Elected leaders are so self-centred to the extent that they pass laws to suit their egotistical interests. They do not seem to care about the constituencies they represent. They thrive in puppetry and do not care what happens to the common citizen, as long as they achieve their selfish goals. They neither see nor hear evil. Targeted groups are senselessly murdered under their watch, and they remain unperturbed. 'Is it okay for the omnivores and the night birds to continue killing and murdering grain-eaters and day birds for the sake of protecting the kingdom, and the Parliament of Owls does nothing about it? All they do is pass laws that favour owls (Sidang', 2022, p. 3).

The unreasonable bills Members of Parliament propose are subjects of the playwright's satirical attack. Unrealistic as these bills are, ordinary citizens are expected to support them. Political dissent is unacceptable. The government deploys all manner of intimidation tactics to suppress political disaffection. Citizens who come out to express their displeasure are branded as criminals, maimed and, in most cases, lose their lives in the hands of law-enforcing agencies as demonstrated in the extract below:

We want to push forward supervision and roll call hours from 10 p.m. to 6 p.m. and let the exercise run until midnight. I know this is not good news. It technically means we have banned moonlight twittering. We have banned twittering with the crickets past 6 p.m., which the likes of Osogo do. We have banned flying from tree to tree in the night, and any other unauthorised movement, past 6 p.m. (*Pauses*) But, of course, the owls shall be immune to the new laws. (*Whispers*) We make and break them. Above the laws! (*Raises voice*) The message to take out there is that our kingdom is under imminent attack and the owls have found it prudent to take quick measures for the safety of all birds; grain-eaters and omnivores, day birds and night birds, alike. You have done it before; you have a sweet tongue and a powerful beak. You cannot fail us, and you know why! (Sidang', 2022, p. 7)

The government is willing to take any opportunity that presents itself to them just to ensure it extorts money from its citizens. Political puppets, who are experts at appealing to the emotions of the common citizens, are deployed to manipulate the citizens and twist public discussions around economic policies to suit the interests of the avaricious political elite. These political bootlickers are given firm instructions to ensure that people are convinced that the government actually wants what is good for them. The playwright ridicules religious leaders, such as pastors in contemporary Kenyan churches, who are recruited to do the government's dirty bidding. To persuade their congregations to support unfavourable economic policies, they deploy twisted logic in scriptural interpretations:

Now that the owls will spend longer hours supervising and taking the roll call, we expect that all birds shall contribute daily to the 'moonlight tax' to enable our great Parliament to perform their duty of protecting the kingdom. It is a necessary allowance to compensate us. If you do not like the term tax, just tell them to assume they are contributing a tithe to our gods and that the tithe shall be delivered by Falcon next time he visits the skies! Tithe? No way! Is Parliament a church or something? Well, it could as well pass for a church. If anything, we have got Pastor Owl taking care of the spiritual interests of Royal Owl. (Sidang', 2022, p. 8).

The citizens have to be hoodwinked into believing that increased tax is beneficial to them, yet these taxes are misappropriated by the same politicians who should be protecting the resources that are drawn from ordinary citizens who are working tirelessly to keep up with the demands of a regime on expenditure-spree. Revenue is collected under the false illusion of developing a utopian state. The birds, a metaphor for ordinary citizens, will be convinced that 'besides enhancing their safety, the tax will be partly used to feed [the] sick and [the] old': 'I know you are not as educated as I am, but I want to believe you have an idea of what the welfare state is about. That is what I want here (Sidang', 2022, p.10).

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Resisting government policies in a repressive state and a climate of fear is challenging. The government resorts to threats and intimidation. These tactics are deployed to ensure that policies are implemented by the very puppets they give these particular instructions. These agents are helpless, especially because the state actors hold something against them. This makes it easy for the government to control them: 'You are now living on borrowed time. I am just giving you a chance to live longer than you should. Have you now resorted to threats? Not really, Tel Tel. (*Sarcastically*) You are one of our own. Why would we do that to you?' (Sidang', 2022, pp. 10 -11).

It is believed that at times, dangerous measures have to be taken to ensure the citizens are in control. This involves killing those who come between the government and its need to work on what it wants to work on, and during these desperate times, they make fake promises, but eventually, they will do what is necessary for them. 'I will not do it. You betrayed me, remember? I lost my integrity. I cannot rise to spread propaganda anymore, especially on behalf of the wicked Parliament of Owls. You made me go around the kingdom spreading lies about Osogo. You promised you were never going to touch her. Then you went for her, and what happened? Did you get her? You killed thirty -three...' (Sidang', 2022, p. 11).

Government favours are weaponised for blackmail. Government officials employ agents to do dirty business for them. To keep these agents under control, something is held against them, sometimes family members, so they do not have a choice but to do the government's bidding. Tel Tel, for instance, protests, but remains helpless. Even when Red String shouts at her, he has practically no choice. Red Ring says, 'Otherwise, you are a traitor in the eyes of grain-eaters and day birds. You know how it goes. We will ensure your fellow day birds learn about it as we lock you up for treason. Choose wisely. Convince them. It is the Moonlight Bill, my friend! Terms and conditions apply!' (Sidang', 2022, p. 14). If he fails to persuade grain-eaters, treason charges await him. Besides, he loses his friends' support as he will always be regarded as a traitor.

Sidang' ridicules the political schemes in Kenya. He exposes how far political leaders are willing to go to protect their images and sustain themselves in power. Those in power prey on the emotional weaknesses of their subjects. Candidates selected to play the dirty political games must be able to appeal to the emotions of the masses. They regard this as their weakest point. Tel Tel is a success story in manipulation because he has mastered this art. That he is the natural pick for this role is not surprising: 'Arum Tidi, I should have listened to you. However, the good Parliament wanted to reach out to all birds, and that could have only happened through Tel Tel. Unlike the rogue Oyundi, Tel Tel appeals to the emotions of the day birds, and they tend to listen to her. She warns them of danger with her constant hammering at trees' (Sidang', 2022, p. 16).

Kenya's unrealistic tax regime is a subject of Sidang's ridicule. For the government to be able to get more money from its people, it will try to use every means possible, but the common one is always increased taxation, which dates back even before independence, when we were still under the rule of the white man. 'Or better still, let every bird that hammers at trees and makes such noise be made to pay a fee as a way of 'conserving the environment' (Sidang', 2022, p. 16).' The government is always ready to take you out of the picture as soon as it realises you are a threat to its agenda. 'Or even better, arrest Tel Tel (*Whispers*). That way, there will be no counter-propaganda as we push our secret agenda (Sidang', 2022, p. 17). In a dictatorial political environment, like Kenya's, those who stand in the way are eliminated.

The government always feels threatened by people who hold contrary opinions. It does not tolerate dissent, even its ranks, and so it always has to find a way of dealing with dissenting voices before they get out of hand, for instance, Members of Parliament who vote against government-sponsored bills are victimised: 'I heard something about some renegade owls that choose to hoot but not loot. Do not worry about those rebels. We have a plan to deal with Feathered Beak and his colleagues. They think they were clever and can dictate to Royal Owl' (Sidang', 2022, p. 20). Political expediency is the order of the day. Public participation is skewed in favour of state agents. The government is willing to be its own lawyer and judge to ensure it wins whatever the public is trying to fight it for; the accused can also be their own defendant just to ensure it achieves whatever it wants at the end of the day:

I wish to know why the Make-up Bill for female owls is not included in today's session. As I stated last time, Mr. Speaker, the wind has become our enemy, every time sweeping away our make-up and leaving us with naked faces. (*Money Bags removes the wig, steps away from the speaker's seat to speak as Money Bags, and returns to the seat as the speaker presiding over the session. This is witnessed throughout the session.*) Mr. Speaker, Socialite Owl should know that we have a great bill to pass today – the Moonlight. If you need makeup, feel free to call me. I will deliver by evening... (*Jumps back to the seat and swivels*) Thank you, Money Bags, for saving the situation. What would this house do without you? (Sidang', 2022, p. 23)

Sidang' satirises Kenya's dictatorial regime. Anyone who is opposed to the government is labelled as a troublemaker. Protest or resistance is criminalised; those who openly express their displeasure are arrested and charges are trumped up. They are regarded as saboteurs for interfering with the smooth running of the government. Dealing with them as the government deems fit temporarily contains them and open room for political excesses. The extract below paints a more detailed picture of the state of affairs in the country:

It is time, Mr. Speaker, you made harsh decisions to lock out these noisemakers from this Parliament. Whatever the Iron Lady and her fellow rebels are doing is profusely criminal! They should tell this honourable Parliament of Owls on whose

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behalf they are acting. We have worked hard as owls to make the reign of Royal Owl smooth and eternal. Because of Royal Owl, owls can now eat a bowlful of grasshoppers every night. Royal Owl is well respected by other birds, and I wonder why these ungrateful owls like Iron Lady are still allowed in this honourable House. We shall not let any of these troublemakers and rebels play around with us, Mr. Speaker! (Sidang', 2022, p. 25)

Political intolerance, it would appear, is the order of the day in the contemporary Kenyan society. Feathered Beak, together with other rebel owls, who is accused of inciting other birds, and creating commotion in the bird kingdom, which is akin to the animal kingdom in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, becomes a victim of political surveillance. Peaceful demonstration is regarded as 'troublemaking' or rebellion against government. The birds that come out to protest against the Moonlight Bill right outside Parliament are not assured of their safety. 'Moonlight Protest' (Sidang', 2022, p. 31) is, therefore, criminalised.

Whereas protests or peaceful demonstrations are enshrined in the constitution, a lawful avenue for expressing displeasure with the government of the day, government agencies adjudge illegal without referring to the provisions of the law. Holding protests is a conventional practice in many jurisdictions. It is the most common strategy used to ensure grievances are expressed, heard and responded to. Ironically, egocentric political leaders regard censorship as a progressive act: 'Err... they want to protest against the Moonlight Law and many laws our Parliament has passed before. They say this Parliament only serves the owls... We will not allow illegal demonstrations on our streets, in our air, or upon our trees! So, what is the way forward, Money Bags? The way forward is that there is no way backward!' (Sidang', 2022, p. 44). Demonstrations are considered counter-productive and destructive, whether peaceful or not. In Kenya, these demonstrations lead to loss of innocent lives, particularly when the political elite feel threatened: 'Now go and deal with those birds feigning courage...I do not want to ever again hear that birds want to march to Parliament. This is a reserved House of owls, only for the chosen few... the chosen few!' (Sidang', 2022, p. 48). Sidang' suggests that these intimidation tactics cannot fully dampen the spirit of revolutionaries:

You are misleading yourself. Can you hear the birds out there? They are coming here, to this Parliament. They are coming to take over and create an institution that believes in the rights of all birds across this kingdom; day birds and night birds, grain-eaters and omnivores. We shall abandon all laws that have been passed to favour owls. This Moonlight Law will not see the light of day. The 'Fried Frogs for the Owls' Law shall be declared null and void. The law that created Royal Trees, which legalised your tree-grabbing habit, will become illegal. We shall kick your mercenaries out of this kingdom. We shall deal with Python and Olik Tiga. Money Bags, we will make this kingdom great again! Nonsense! It is just a matter of time before we get hold of that little tail of yours! (Lunges at Oyundi in the opposite direction and slips back into sleep) You killed my people. Be ready to face the music when the flute blows right in the middle of Royal Trees! (Sidang', 2022, p. 52).

Sidang' also ridicules corruption in the contemporary Kenyan society. The government offers lucrative business deals to cronies and corrupt businessmen in the country. The tendering process is manipulated to favour unscrupulous individuals willing to pay bribes. Businessmen believe they have to bribe their way to success through these corrupt processes. Unsuspecting victims lose a lot of money in sham business deals. 'Money Bags tricked the crows and the vultures. He pretended to be impartial regarding the contest between the two flocks of birds over the security tender. The truth is that, well before the passing of the Law of Bird Protection, Money Bags had secretly awarded the tender to Olik Tiga (Sidang', 2022, p. 68).'

The government gives favours and unmerited rewards to opinion leaders to tilt numbers towards unpopular government policies. The target of Sidang's criticism, using Ouno's (2017) arguments, are political leaders who use 'positions of leadership for material gain, [which] is the bane of leadership in Africa; [the political] elite do not derive economic power from [owning] the means of production, [rather they] are petty and parasitic' (p. 1015). Parliamentarians do not pass laws because they believe in them; they do so to secure favours. They are always promised something at the end of the day. Government-sponsored bills sail through easily because Members of Parliament are beneficiaries of corrupt deals. No matter how retrogressive a bill or a policy is, they are approved at the end of the day:

Money Bags, I hear your concerns. This is the time to put your name in the good books of history as Parliament that passed, in record time, a very progressive bill, sponsored by Royal Trees. Right? (Pauses) There is no other option. Owls must therefore vote in favour of this bill. Royal Owl will be waiting to hoot congratulatory messages to us. A meal of fried rats and frogs (*Whispers*) and maybe a piece of the cunning bird shall be waiting at the royal table. (Sidang', 2022, p. 31)

Using state resources, the is able control the majority of political leaders in the August house. Nothing can stop it from implementing new laws as long as these political puppets are required to vote. It enjoys tyranny of numbers in Parliament. The minority of leaders who are opposed to government policies do not stand chance to mount a serious political challenge. A government with the majority of the House members on its side is unstoppable. The extract of the speaker's pronouncement presented below demonstrates the insignificance of the minority's resistance:

Okay, may Feathered Beak, together with his group of rebel owls, any other owls, and as many as are of a contrary opinion, say nay...(Does not wait for response) The ayes have it! (*Rebel owls hoot in protest again.*) No, Mr Speaker, we reject this comedy! We shall not allow this! (*He is joined by Feathered Beak in the clamour. Iron Lady enters the stage and joins in*

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the clamour.) Mr. Speaker, this bill is... (*Interrupts*) A point of correction, Straight Eyed. It is now a law; the Moonlight Law. (*Ignores*) This bill, Mr. Speaker, is going to undermine the rights of birds that twitter in the moonlight and omnivores that hunt in the night. This bill is going to introduce an illegal tax at a time when birds are faced with imminent hunger. This bill is a way of getting funds to gag rebel owls and other birds and bury the truth to never see the light of day. (Sidang', 2022, p. 32).

In a repressive state, sometimes silence becomes a survival mechanism. Those who voice their political frustrations endanger their lives. Speaking ill of the government of the day is unacceptable: 'I gathered, last night, that Arum Tidi had a damning dossier on a serious scandal which implicates Money Bags and Royal Trees. Money Bags had now warned all birds against speculating about the death of Arum Tidi' (Sidang', 2022, p. 63). When things get out of hand, the government uses its machinery to muzzle dissenting voices. To create a climate of fear, members of the opposition are murdered. The government believes that killing and other forms of political intimidation are the surest ways to suppress opposition to administrative weaknesses:

I do not like the idea of signing a pact with Oyundi. We would rather... (*Interjects*) Do what? We would rather finish her before morning comes. Are you out of your mind? That will trigger an unimaginable protest among day birds and some night birds. It may even get out of hand. Remember, she has a massive following among both male and female birds. Then sign the pact and make her disappear after a week or so. That is a good idea, sweetheart. Organise that with One-Eyed (Sidang', 2022, p. 99). 'We can hire goons to chant anti-Oyundi slogans during the ceremony, cause chaos, and make sure she gets hurt in the process. We can then have Nightingale rush her to Royal Trees for medical care, and we can take her down before she gets to Royal Trees. (Sidang', 2022, p. 100)

Sidang's *Parliament of Owls* criticises government for its open disregard for the sanctity of human life. The government uses and dump people 'at the right time.' For example, government agents plan to 'quietly cut links with [Arum Tidi] and then use the Moonlight Law to gag him and finally send him to the gallows' once they 'confirm he has been able to control the birds.' Ludicrous as it may seem, even those who make the loudest noise in support of government are not safe: 'There is no other use for hornbills; they only make noises.' One becomes an easy target, especially when state agents feel that they 'already know too much,' and 'desperate times call for desperate measures' (Sidang', 2022, p. 36). This is the political tragedy that befalls Arum Tidi:

If he jokes around, we will take him to the Water Stone Point at the river, to viciously attack his own reflection like a clown. (*Socialite Owl laughs uncontrollably and excuses herself, goes off the stage.*) That is what we must do: deal with Arum Tidi once he accomplishes our mission. We will not pay him even a single cent, and he must stay away from Royal Trees. (Sidang', 2022, p. 38)

When the Moonlight Bill passes into law, Arum Tidi passes away. Ironically, the laws of the birds' kingdom are amended to dedicate a hero's day in memory of Arum Tidi. 'Arum Tidi shall be a hero to be celebrated every Heroes' Day. Arum Tidi, EBH- Elder of the Beautiful Horn. Next time, do not take my word for granted (*Laughs hysterically*)' (Sidang', 2022, p. 72). After the death of Tidi, a heightened climate of fear persists and 'most birds [become reluctant] to speak about sensitive issues. ... no one wants to loudly point fingers' (Sidang', 2022, p. 106). In the Royal Owl's kingdom, 'truth imprisons; it does not set one free' (Sidang', 2022, p. 116). A similar fate befalls Money Bags, the king's blue-eyed bird. He is relieved of his duties, stripped of all the royal titles and state commendations he 'ever received from my throne,' and arrested (Sidang', 2022, p. 120). He accuses the Royal Owl of sacrificing his allies, killing them for his selfish interests when it is too late. His claim that 'it is time to free [the birds]' kingdom from the cruel and oppressive rule of owls' (Sidang', 2022, p. 124) is as insincere as it is too little, too late. By way of 'mock crowning,' Sidang', like Soyinka's *Chronicles*, using the words of Wasike, Oketch and Ouno (2024), 'critiques the abuse of power and authority by those in positions of leadership ... challenges the legitimacy of the ruling elite and exposes their hypocrisy, demonstrating [how] their actions undermine the well-being of [the plebeian birds]' (p. 10).

The playwright casts aspersions on the credibility of professionals and government institutions. Critical positions are held by people who are not only unqualified, but also unfit to hold public offices. On account of incompetence and integrity questions, they are easy to manipulate. Propagandists, who are government payroll, spread unfounded rumours and allegations to tarnish the reputation of political dissenters. The government is willing to do anything, including plotting the killing of individuals that they perceive as threats to their leadership.

The only danger we face is the madness that infected your minds. Look at what is happening now. We are aware that Money Bags controls our courts and that the vultures were the least qualified birds to hold such critical positions. We are aware, Mr. Speaker, that Money Bags, through his puppets, hired the services of Arum Tidi to spread cheap lies and propaganda and confuse night birds and omnivores with innuendo, and further portray owls that stand for truth as corrupt. Mr. Speaker, we know that Tel Tel was also instructed earlier in the night to spread lies to the entire gathering of day birds and grain-eaters. Mr. Speaker, we are aware of some plans to kill some birds, including myself, because of the stand we have taken to ensure there is good governance in this kingdom. Mr. Speaker, I am reliably informed that this new law is a secret ploy by Money Bags to loot funds from the coffers of birds and channel them to his private investments in unknown trees in

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deep forests. By passing this law, you have inaugurated theft and robbery with violence, because that is actually what will happen. (Sidang', 2022, p. 34)

The government uses propaganda to control political narratives. Conspiracy theories are woven by the owls to divert public attention from real political issues. Political leaders believe that they are god-chosen, intelligent rulers, who can 'create ideas, then create impressions, then make these impressions look real, even though they are not real'; however, 'the fact that they are not real makes them real because [royal owls] make the ordinary owls believe they are surrounded by enemies from outside the kingdom.' It is this make-believe atmosphere that sustains inept rulership in contemporary African societies: 'Fiction always makes sense to those birds that have experienced reality; a little bird once said (Sidang', 2022, p. 56).'

CONCLUSION

Orwellian satire persists in contemporary Kenyan drama, particularly in Adipo Sidang's *Parliament of Owls*. Drawing parallels with George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of the playwright's deployment of zoomorphism, attributing traits, characteristics, forms and behaviour of birds to humans, to critique the socio-political landscape of post-independence Kenya. This literary analysis highlights themes of power subversion, manipulation of truth, and the systemic marginalisation of the ordinary birds, the rank and file of the contemporary Kenyan society, by the dictatorial and avaricious owl elite. Situating the text within the tradition of African political satire, this paper demonstrates that Sidang's play serves as a contemporary cautionary tale against neo-patrimonialism and the erosion of democratic institutions. Ultimately, the study accentuates the enduring relevance of Orwellian tropes in articulating the complexities of governance and resistance in modern-day Kenya.

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