

# **DRAMA IN AFRICA:**

**AGENCY, AESTHETICS AND IDEOLOGY**



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## **AGENCY, AESTHETICS AND IDEOLOGY**

**Adedoyin Aguru**



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## **Dedication**

To my Heavenly Father: the maker of the Universe, the most dramatic and humorous one.

To my Earthly Father: Evangelist Chief Adebowale Omotunde for opening me up to the arts.

To my Academic Fathers: Professors Wole Soyinka, Oyin Ogunba, Niyi Osundare and Wole Ogundele, Femi Osofisan, Bode Omojola for showing me the arts.

To my Earthly Mother: Chief Toluwalase Omotunde; the art.

My Intellectual Mothers: Zulu Sofola and Flora Nwapa for being daring and for personifying the art.



# Contents

|                         |   |     |
|-------------------------|---|-----|
| <i>Preface</i>          |   | 9   |
| Chapter 1               | Drama and Theatrical Dynamics in Africa   | 11  |
| Chapter 2               | African Theatrical Traditions   | 22  |
| Chapter 3               | Theatrical Traditions and Contemporary<br>Written African Drama                         | 50  |
| Chapter 4               | Playwrights and Playwriting in<br>Contemporary Written African Literature               | 57  |
| Chapter 5               | Tragic Drama in Africa  | 81  |
| Chapter 6               | Critical Movements and Ideology I   | 92  |
| Chapter 7               | Critical Movements and Ideology II  | 101 |
| Chapter 8               | Contemporary Plays: The Example of<br>Ahmed Yerima and Femi Osofisan                    | 121 |
| Chapter 9               | Dramaturgy of Identity and Regional Themes<br>in the Works of African Women Playwrights | 147 |
| Conclusion              |   | 151 |
| References              |   | 153 |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> |   | 159 |



# Preface

It is reassuring that, more than ever before, that the ethnographic qualities and values of drama and theatre are being explored. The implication being that the preservation and documentation as well as the critical engagement of the dramatic arts will continue to receive and sustain critical attention, particularly in this dispensation where many forms of African dramatic arts have faded away without adequate documentation.

This book is conceived under distinct converging lines: to meet the diverse needs of students and scholars of literature, to serve as a critical book for students of drama at tertiary levels, to contribute to the growing critical works on African dramatic literature as well as highlight the significance of the African female dramatists and the roles they play in sustaining the African dramatic legacy and agency. This study has attempted a regional cover of written drama in Africa. It has given a panoramic view of the diversity of content and form of written drama in Africa. The concluding sections suggest that a lot more potential exists in the study of specific national and regional dramatic forms, which is essential to understanding a people, their identity construct and idiosyncrasies.

Suffice to say that global efforts on transnational studies in drama across continents makes it imperative for more documentation, dramatic analogies, theoretical postulations and critical analysis of drama in Africa to be carried out, particularly because these undocumented ethnographic and archaeological materials abound.

—**Adedoyin Aguru,**  
University of Ibadan, May 2019



## CHAPTER 1

# Drama and Theatrical Dynamics in Africa

Theatre, across cultures and globally, evolved as a significant aspect of the indigenous practices of peoples. Theatre and drama originate, in other words, from this inner desire of humans to venerate and create suitable forms of worship of the terrestrial and the supernatural. This also implies that wherever those forms of worship were observed and practiced, there was theatre.

From the earliest times in Africa, almost every family, community and *nation* had its form of worship. Several of these were tied to family professions, trades and forms of living. Butchers, blacksmiths, farmers, hunters, fishermen, among other professionals, had and still have specific gods that are worshipped in relation to their professions, while there are other gods that are worshiped communally and believed to promote the overall peace, progress and prosperity. Historically in the Oyo Kingdom, the Alaafin of Oyo has specific days of the week for the worship and celebration of specific gods. Each of these gods have specific instruments, music and performance ritual carried out weekly and faithfully by their worshipers (Ajayi, 1989).

It is evident that there are as many performances and theatres as there are forms of worship among each African community (Ogunbiyi, 1981). Theatre and drama globally began to evolve, and the elements of ritual began to be separated from the religions and forms of worship, to birth the diversity of dramatic forms and performances that do exist now. Ogundeji (2007) lends credence to the discourse of drama and ritual by describing the transformation

process most dramatic forms have gone through as the (de)ritualisation of the ritual performances.

While acknowledging all other forms of existing studies on the origin of theatre and drama globally, I begin by exemplifying the origins of the African drama with a typical African dramatic tradition that will situate the African tradition appropriately in its ambit. Oyinade Ogunba in a banter like interview in 2006 had jocularly told me that Wole Soyinka had won a grant to document festivals, I understood that to mean the documentation of Yoruba festivals. He noted that Soyinka coming in contact with the enormous wealth of data on Yoruba festivals became inspired, he chose instead to write plays and theorise on and about the Yoruba cosmos using the data from the festivals.

Ogunba, a contemporary of Soyinka, was also the first critic of Soyinka's plays published in *The Movement of Transition: a study of the plays of Wole Soyinka* (1975). Being a theatre critic, growing up within the same age range and working within the same academic setting, he was able to reference the festivals and rituals of Africa as dominant sources and influences of Wole Soyinka's plays. The value of these ritualised performances as continental treasures are evident in the manner in which they as sources sparked indigenous dramatic forms. Most of these predates Western or any other influence that I describe as 'Un-African Influences', despite the fact that some have become syncretised with Western and foreign influences that all manifest within the African Dramatic folio.

Ogunba in his thesis, which in many ways typify and African dramatic festival, acknowledged the support he got from home and abroad in documenting, archiving and placing the ritual drama of the Ijebu people of Nigeria in a retrievable form. According to Ogunba (1967) the ritual drama of the Ijebu is operatic, dynamic and a cultural institution that accommodates and employs the indigenous forms of the Ijebu fine arts. These arts, he describes as simultaneously unique and eloquent. Ogunba, being a participant observer of Ijebu

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

extraction, aptly captured the performance and extra performance ideals of the dramatic forms while they were still thriving.

Ogunba (1967) identified twenty Ijebu festivals which he classified as: The Royal festivals, the Agemo festivals, the Ogun and Egungun Festivals and the Women Festivals. The major elements and features of these festivals share the universal features and elements of drama and they include: the setting, the stage, the *dramatis personae*, properties, sacrifice, the dance, occasional songs as well as the audience. These elements, which make up the components of the festive celebration, become constituents of the dramatic presentations of the festivals. He identifies the constituents of the ritual worship motivated by ritual action centred on the veneration and worship of gods. This belief of humans in the 'man-god relationship' is with concrete allusions to myths, history and legend which gives meaning to ritual drama (Ogunba, 1967: 34).

These communally owned dramatic constituents include forms of physical and vocal actions that very often involved the audience. Despite the fact that religion is the base and inspiration and the supernatural the essence and the basis for the enacted ceremonies, the festivals indeed thrived and owed its followership to the tremendous excitement generated by its dramatic features.

Apart from the social significance and the religious impact of the ritual observances, the methodological manner in which every aspect of the performances were carried out embodies the basic skills and dexterity which became sources and influences of the de-ritualised African drama as it evolved.

Ogunba is able to classify synonymously the characters, the costume, the properties, the stage and make up for each category of ritualised dramatic performances without missing out the significance of any.

## *Adedoyin Aguoru*

| Dramatis Personae        | Masks   | Costume                 | Stage   |
|--------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|
| Royal Characters<br>Obas |   |                         |   |
| Otunbas                  |   |                         |   |
| Baales                   |   |                         |   |
| Agemo Characters         | Agemo Masks: Usually about 15 in existence at a time, once the masquerader dies, his mask is dismantled and buried along with him   | Agemo Costume           | The Agemo Stage: The Route stage, the Agbala stage                              |
| Egungun Characters       |   | Egungun Costume         | The Egungun Stage: The stage-in-the round, the route stage, and the Afin stage. |
| Ekine Characters         | Ekine Masks: five hundred such masks in the land. The masks go by various names: Agbo, Igbile, Ondo, Agira, Oni, Ajeiye, Afidagbaju | Ekine Costume           | The Ekine stage: The beach stage and the route-stage.                           |
| Ogun                     |   |                         | The Ogun Stage: The stage-in-the-round and the shrine stage.                    |
| Festival Singers         |   |                         |   |
| Women Characters (75)    |   |                         | The Women's Stage: The Agbala stage, the Agbo stage (36)                        |
|                          | Oro Masks: mask is a world in itself containing human beings, animals, reptiles and trees   | The Costume in Ebi, Oro | Royal stage: The Ipebi stage and, the Ode Nla stage.                            |
|                          | Minor Masks: Epa, Jigbo, Atete, Okooro and Egungun not of much artistic interest (108).   |                         |   |

The Ijebu ritual drama is one of the thousands of such structured dramatic and theatrical traditions in Africa. Not recognising these forms as the origins of de-ritualised drama and as the sources and influences of all forms of African drama is a disservice to the wealth of the indigenous African forms.

Having established ritual drama as the dominant source and influence of African Drama. The evolution and growth of contemporary drama in Africa has been dynamic and an agency through which identities across Africa and redefinition of the African people's eroded dignity have been carried out. This discourse

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

approaches drama in Africa by examining early accounts of indigenous theatrical traditions in Africa, contemporary dramatic and theatrical traditions in Africa, regional perspectives of African drama with focus on trends, development and output, dominant critical movements and ideology, the regional engagement of gyno-dramatists and the subsequent syncretic forms that emerged.

The prominence of West African drama and dramatists and drama criticism is not only as a result of the preponderance of the dramatists but the initial posture of the colonised states to creative writing in the language of the imperialists. The initial quest of the West African writers for independence and nationalism which negated all forms of imperialism brewed the radicalism and passion with which they wrote. The region with the highest record of the earliest creative writings in the language of the colonisers wrote to counter the imperialistic narratives on the African continent and what the West had claimed they offered in terms of civilisation.

One of the immediate rewards of African literature seeking its own taxonomy for critical valuation was the 1968 Conference on the criticism of African writing in English Language. Reward, in the sense that it did not only define the critical tenets with which African literature could now be criticised as it was in the wake of Africans coming to terms with the fact that the parameters employed in the criticism of other literatures from other climes may not be appropriate for the criticism of a steadily growing body of literature that was continental and distinctly African. It was also a continental call to creative and critical engagement to all the other regions that had not begun to write creatively with the language of the colonisers that had by default become lingua franca in their countries.

East African, David Rubadiri's presentation at the conference was on the continental spread of African literature at this period. He noted that while West African authors and their writings had received a lot of critical attention because of the volume in terms of the quantity of West African literature in circulation (both published and sold), the

variety (in terms of the genres), as well as language and style, East African literature at this time had not yet '...reached the point where the criticism and consideration have come into their own' (148).

This, he continued, was based on his observation of writers like '... Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark...' who were not only West Africans but Nigerians who had not only written creatively but were generating much critical discourse. In his words, '...we hear that James Ngugi is sometime so mistaken for being a West African novelist because African Novelists all seem to come from West Africa!' (148) The creative and critical energy generated in West Africa, he claimed, was sufficient to fuel and trigger creative writing in the East Africa.

Rubadiri's observations are vital to reconciling the beginnings of written dramatic literature across the regions of Africa. It is crucial because it throws more illumination in to the preponderance of writings by West Africans at the initial stages of development of dramatic literature in Africa. Creative writing in English in East Africa in comparison to West Africa, was a much later development owing to the type of impact the colonial experience translated to in East Africa. It was an experience that almost consumed the entire essence of the East Africans. The imperialism was not only absolute politically and linguistically, it also almost stifled indigenous attempts at expression through the newly acquired language. When the East eventually began to write he recalled that

...no one reached back, as in West Africa, towards the traditional, cultural roots and heritages and so on...  
The Owar tradition, in fact, is only now beginning to be taken seriously and to be examined with some amount of pride (Rubadiri, 1982:149).

Invariably the critical discourse on writers like Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and John Pepper Clark who were all West African and Nigerian triggered the Eastern writers into a different kind of literary

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

action.

...we suddenly got into this feverish excitement of trying to explore our literary interests into new fields of expression... I think they suddenly realized that they (East Africans) had been sitting on important literary material and that the inspiration which was there, could now easily be used to express something bigger and something larger than what had traditionally been encouraged...(1982:150).

The story of Ngugi showing up at Achebe's door with scripts of his creative writing have also been told by James Curry (2008) and he in essence became one of the leading dramatists and novelists in East Africa.

Having established the positive and enormous influence West African and Nigerian writers and literary critics were to East Africa he went on to conclude:

I think within the next decade this trend in East African writing is going to produce something exciting as has developed in West Africa. Whether this influence will now be seen in South Africa is something one will have to wait for (Rubadiri, 1982:156).

The African Writers Series with Chinua Achebe as leading editor and human magnet attracting writers across the continent, published several plays across the regions of Africa. The African Writers Series which is indeed the greatest agency of African literary revolution subsequently published four notable collections of short plays:

*Short East African Plays* edited by David Cook and David Rubadiri, *Ten One-Act Plays* edited by Cosmo Pieterse, *Short African Plays* edited by Cosmo Pieterse and *Five African Plays* edited by Cosmo Pieterse. Wole Soyinka would, several decades later win the Nobel Prize for drama placing Nigerian and African drama and literature, in unmistakable terms, with the best of world drama and literature.

North African drama had its initial limitations in the North African religious posture to dramatic arts and stage performances. Writers like Tewfik Al-Hakim's and Naguib Mahfouz who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature changed the narrative of North Africa completely. South Africa in Athol Fugard had the dramatist that championed the anti-apartheid cause.

This book, is a panoramic view of drama in Africa from these diverse perspectives. The history, the ideology and the creativity of Africa in drama and theatre is rolled in to one folio. The entire African dramatic folio is an agency of Africanisms: ethnographically, historically, in repositioning and recreating the African identity. It presents the manner in which African aesthetics are conceived and deployed and also distinctly explores the African ideology. In spite of diverse limitations the effort yields. The texts and playwrights examined have been selected across the continent of Africa. They have been discussed in a manner that reflects the thematic concerns in contemporaneity, and within a framework that allows for historical, comparative, theoretical and ideological inquiries.

Chapter two for instance gives an overview of the African Theatrical Traditions. It traces the history of drama in Africa from ancient times, up to its evolution into a profession that began to command scholarly attention in contemporary times. A clear distinction is made between drama and theatrical performance thereby giving an historical overview of indigenous dramatic performances that pre-dated and influenced the current written forms. Tracing the evolution to the more contemporary theatrical forms in Africa from three perspectives described as phases and each phase defined by the geographical differentiation of the African sub-regions. Each section appraised how each of these sub regions fared in The First, Second and the Third Phase.

Chapter Three interrogates theatrical traditions and contemporary written drama. It identifies forms such as culture plays, rational drama and neo-rational drama. It also gives a clear

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

explication of each classification as well as that of the dramatic elements inherent in them. While cultural plays focus on African culture using satire and humour to achieve their portrayal of African cultures and European values, national drama adopts a more contemporary poise and it is written drama based on nationalist crusade. Rational drama simultaneously portrays culture and nationalist objective while neo rational drama focuses on issues affecting African nations using African folklores and songs in passing across its themes.

Chapter four explores the significance of playwrights and playwriting in contemporary written African dramatic literature. It encapsulates the socio-political realities prevalent in African nations in post-independence era through the works of prominent playwrights whose plays have drawn thematic preoccupation and motifs from issues relating to African tradition, culture, identity, bad leadership among others. These dramatists, whose works belong to the best of African and world literature, effectively engage satire to enrich the aesthetics of the plays and also thematically engage issues on political disillusionment, cultural and social alienation, dehumanisation and identity crises in contemporary African societies.

Chapter five examines tragic drama as a dominant and symbolic form across two African regions. J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* are engaged as early models African tragic plays. Their settings, dramatis personae, thematic thrusts, universal themes such as infertility, impotence, vengeance, suicide and murder are examined. The plays juxtapose several elements of African tragedy which include; man's fate as influenced by a man's choice, mystical beliefs in supernatural interventions, a cathartic representation of the suffering a man inflicts on others or himself. Both plays which are largely influenced by African worldview, continue to influence African worldview.

Chapter six is an engagement of the portrait of nationalism as a major ideology in African drama. The nationalist ideology of two foremost dramatists is the thematic focus of the chapter. Wole Soyinka and Ngugi Wa'Thiongo centre on themes such as corruption, deceit (which has always been a major tool in the hands of the colonizers), identity crisis, political instability, the presence divinities among humans and the import of their interventions, futility as against hope and the interrelationship of art and politics amongst others. By reiterating the advocacy of nationalist playwrights and their concern about the anomalies in the society, the chapter highlights the position of these playwrights on the disillusionment the continent continues to experience noting and condemning the diverse ways and manner in which a fraction of the social strata connive with the external forces working against the good of the continent.

Across continents and in Africa the history of feminism have manifested across contexts of movement, ideology and creativity. The earliest female writings in Africa were not different as the women needed to portray things from the feminine perspectives as well as idiosyncrasies. The dramatic effusions of Zulu Sofola, Efua T. Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo are engaged in Chapter seven as the earliest African written drama by female playwrights. Feminist ideologies in respect to the experiences of women in patriarchal societies, the posture of the menfolk as well as parents about mate selection and marriage, the notions about infertility, love and commitment as well as harmful practices against women like leviration or wife inheritance make up the thematic preoccupation of these dramatic effusions.

Chapter 8 focuses on style: deconstruction and unorthodoxy of the more contemporary plays of Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima. The chapter centres on the unique features of each of the writers bring to the continental form. Both writers portray African culture in really modern contexts trouble shooting the ancient notions and

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

perspectives of the belief systems. Their willingness to experiment with forms and characterisation brings that uniqueness in distinct modes and generic forms to their works and in comparison to other writers. Yerima's successful experimentation with dark comedy and Osofisan's deconstruction of the notions about deities, demi-gods and worship of the gods altogether brings unprecedented dimensions of reasoning in African drama.

Chapter nine draws attention to the gaps that continue to exist in studies of African playwrights and African playwriting with emphasis on the African female dramatics and drama that are located across the regions of Africa. It is a call for further inquiry on aspects of African female writings that have not been considered, and a nudging towards extensive research on the dramaturgy of identity which would bring to fore the regional themes portrayed by these African women playwrights. This chapter also references major works done by some women playwrights that reflect Africaness; they focus on different plots surrounding African women myths developed over the years and other indigenous identification of women in African culture. Proposals for archiving and accessing several of the unpublished or unrecognised African women playwright's effusions, ideologies and identity construct are given to bridge the yawning gap between African female writers' work and their male counterparts.

The functional and aesthetic function of art meet in the drama of Africa. Its agency and ideology fuse seamlessly with its aesthetics.

## Chapter 2

# African Theatrical Traditions

Drama, alongside poetry, is arguably one of the oldest forms of literature which centres on action. From ancient times, it began its manifestation through performances and other theatrical engagements in human societies until it evolved into a profession and began to attract critical studies with respect to its forms, nature and aesthetics. Most of these performances are characterised by elements such as action, impersonation, mime, dialogue, costume and portraits of character types. In Western literary scholarship, drama is traced to ancient classical Greco-Roman civilization. It is etymologically from the Greek word *dran*, which means imitation. The genre is said to have origins in the worship of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and fertility, in Athens, the capital city of Greece, in an annual festival. It started as a one-man engagement with Thespis as the first actor. This explains why scholars and students of performing and dramatic arts are often regarded as Thespians. Since then, there have been works by Greco-Roman dramatists like Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Plautus, and this continues to the contemporary times across the world with the works of different playwrights, dramatists and theatre practitioners.

In the same vein, thinkers like Plato and Aristotle also began theorising and critically examining drama as a genre. This practice persists to the present day among scholars and researchers in various departments, institutes, centres and circles of linguistic, literary and cultural studies. Drama in Africa, which is the concern of this work,

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

encapsulates dramatic and theatrical practices identified with Africa, which has its roots in *orality*, rituals, cultural festivals and ceremonies on the continent and some of which are still observed in contemporary times. It is therefore safe to authentically describe African drama and theatre as the performative arm of African culture. Like other continental dramatic forms, drama in Africa represents the significant essence of Africans, African culture, civilization, experience, belief system, worldview and ideology.

### **Drama and Theatre**

Drama is a form that can be elusive in specifics in terms of definitions and explications. Bentley (1964) argues that 'drama is human.' His opinion is drawn on his views and beliefs that to see drama in something is to, on one hand, perceive the elements of conflict and, on the other hand, to respond emotionally to these elements. He further posits that if drama is a *thing one sees*, there has to be *the one to see*, which makes it human. By a thing one sees, he means characters, while the one to see refers to the audience.

Dasylyva (2004:2) describes dramatic literature as drama in literary expression. This idea also facilitates the understanding and appreciation of drama. Therefore, one can describe dramatic or drama texts or plays as they are also described as performance in literary expression.

We would constantly need to be reminded of the profuse and enormous pleasures as well as the oddment and the seemingly perpetual eccentricities the world of drama continues to offer the people of the world in a most worthwhile manner. Universally, the diversity and perspectives to drama is endless and the overflowing abundance of familiar and unfamiliar plays that have been written over thousands of year attests to this fact. In Africa, the list of plays and playwrights is endless, confirming that which is obvious on the relevance, viability, and continued significance of the form to literary and critical scholarship.

The text is often separated from the performance in several institutions where drama is taught. A historical overview of drama and dramatic forms in most parts of the world reveals that performance predated and influenced the written form that drama now takes. Drama and theatre critics ought to keep this as a fundamental ideology in studying national, intercontinental or world dramas.

Drama derives its source from and finds relevance in diverse aspects of human life. According to Hughes (2009:20), theatre does not and cannot exist in isolation: history, theatre, and literature are a part of the social and artistic infrastructure of the world in which we live. She observes that this is of great significance and that within contexts where literature and theatre are written for purposes of pure entertainment and not with the intent to educate, both still make up a significant part of what she describes as 'social and artistic infrastructure... in the making and recording of history' (20). The indigenous theatres in most continents and individual nations of the world (Africa inclusive) are the sources and influences of their theatrical and dramatic traditions.

### **Modern African Drama**

Modern African drama can be described as the collective of dramatic and theatrical works, critical discourses and theatrical agencies in Africa. Sources and influences of African drama include material from indigenous theatres as well as contacts and encounters with European and other foreign theatrical and dramatic material during the colonial and post-colonial periods. African literature as a whole reflects the experiences of Africans, often portraying a nostalgic pre-colonial era to the imperialist ruled colonial era and a post-colonial era marked with diverse contradictions and propositions. These experiences usually form the basis of the themes and settings of African literary works and in this case, African drama.

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Africa is officially recognised as a continent with fifty-four countries classified into five regions: Northern Africa, Western Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa. The concern of this section is the evident developments and trends in modern African drama across these regions. The focus on playwrights, forms and ideologies that have defined modern African drama is to repurpose, in this context, the critical thoughts on their significance to drama in Africa.

It is essential to state that the term 'modern' often placed before 'Africa drama' denotes forms of African drama that are more contemporary and have evolved from various forms of theatrical and dramatic performances in African history. These are forms of theatre that are still evolving. Drama in Africa continues to evolve in various stages and develops continually. Several scholars have written on the evolution of Modern African drama from the traditional forms of drama and theatre that existed in the pre-colonial era. This book takes on the evolution of contemporary drama in African from three perspectives which other scholars have described as phases or stages.

Drama is undoubtedly one of the oldest genres of literature. Here the context of the historically constructed Western scholarships that have it that its origin is traceable to as far back as ancient Greco-Roman civilisation is examined with the understanding that it is a universal phenomenon and that the orthography available for its documentation does not in any way make it predate other such developments across cultures globally. This Greek example is particularly connected to the worship of Dionysus in Athens, the capital city of Greece. Identified with this Western provenance is the first actor, Thespis and playwrights and dramatists like Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Plautus as well as critical thinkers and philosophers like Plato and Aristotle who started debates and critical inquiries on the aesthetics of drama and literature in general. African drama, being a subset of art forms and performances identified with Africa and Africans have inspired critical responses from critics and

scholars that this dramatic genre began with the pre-colonial African society that essentially and primarily transferred its knowledges via orality and the unblemished traditional values and forms held in high esteem, part of which survived the colonial periods, the foreign influences and the postcolonial period were transferred and partly preserved through oral forms that were taught intergenerationally.

### **Drama as Ritual: The First Phase**

African drama, like drama from other continents, grew out of two basic human needs, primarily veneration and entertainment. It, however, served these and other needs in time and in space. Significantly time and space influence how drama eventually functions to serve human needs. Its ability to serve this function, therefore, involves its identity as drama, in this context that is African and which can also be examined in terms of a temporal pattern, hence the traceable evolution of modern African drama. As earlier stated, this evolution has its origin in pre-colonial African society, grew through the period of colonialism and continues till today in contemporary Africa. It has been critically viewed to comprise three phases or stage; the first, second and third phases. These phases pans out in Different African nations in ways that are unique to the dominant cultures and traditions of its peoples.

The elements of the first phase of modern African drama marked by what can be described as pure traditional drama, theatricality and performances because it had neither been influenced by colonialism or Western modernisation. Ogunbiyi (1981) describes the dramatic experience of traditional African drama as an expression of the relations or state of connectedness between man, society and nature. This period was identified with ritualised performances because most of them were tied to traditional or cultural festivals, religious engagements, rites of passage, and spirituality, among others. This stage of African drama is often described as representing a form of drama characterised by orality largely because of the folkloric

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

tradition it emerged from, and derived its elements from, a tradition that engaged dominant features found in performances in pre-colonial Africa. By orality, reference is made to the use of verbal expressions (it was a period when no form of orthography had been developed in most parts of Africa). The dramatic experience in this period was often original and spontaneous. Notably, the works produced therein were anonymous or communal properties. In essence, there was no claim to ownership by a single person.

### **West African Drama and the First Phase**

Questions have been raised about the existence of the popular theatre tradition before Africa was colonised. Taking developments in Nigerian drama as a template, one finds Ogunbiyi's clarification germane to other national dramatic forms (1981:11). He makes a distinction between the Nigerian popular traditional theatre in Nigeria and the European tradition that was to become a dominant influence in Africa as a result of colonialism. Popular theatrical forms which includes the burlesque and musical comedies in the Western style are identifiable as sources which also served as influences from the European tradition. This is also true of the other African countries.

The prominence of Nigerian in the discourse of drama in West Africa cannot be overstated as highlighted in the introduction of this work and largely because of the strategic literary position Nigeria occupies on the continent and its dramatists' position in dramatic history globally. Suffice to note that Wole Soyinka is the first black African to win the coveted Nobel Prize in Drama. The motivation for the award was how he uses "a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones" to fashion "the drama of existence" (<http://nobelprize.com>). This gives credence to the rich literary canon the Nigerian context boasts.

Popular traditional theatre in Nigeria includes the *Annang* drama of the Ibibio, Yoruba *Alarinjo* theatre, The Tiv *Kwagh-hir* and Bornu

puppet shows and the Hausa comical art of *Yankamanci*. Most of these theatrical forms, just as it takes place in most theatres of the world, emerged from ritual performances that became 'deritualised' (Ogundeji, 2003:7).

Following the long drawn out arguments of critical scholars of African drama like Ossie Enekwe and M.J.C. Echeruo, some types of drama in Nigeria and in Africa will always be ritualized or de-ritualized. Scholars like Kalu Uka argue that traditional drama is not drama but simply aspects or elements of drama. J.P Clark opines that the earliest forms of Nigerian drama is discoverable in the indigenous Yoruba religious and magical ceremonies and festivals, in the *mmo* masquerade performances of the Igbo, as well as the *owu* and *oru* water masquerade of the Ijaw. He considers these ritualistic performances as drama typical of the Nigerian national repertory still widely unacknowledged today (Clark, 1981:58). In the same vein, Rotimi (1981) asserts that African ritual display involves 'Ritual display that reveal in their styles of presentation, in their purpose, and value, evidences of limitation, enlightenment and or entertainment...' (77).

The hydra-headed opinions on drama in Africa still hinge on the ritual origin found in almost all world theatrical traditions. Adedeji (1981), in his study of Yoruba traditional theatre, conceives of it as emerging from three stages; the ritual, the festival and the dance. Traditional forms of performances earlier stated translated into more developed forms of dramatic enactment and theatricality. J.P Clark's seminal essay on aspects of Nigerian drama separates traditional drama in two aspects: the religious form and the secular forms. He cites the annual performance of Obatala and Oshagiyan at Oshogbo and Ejigbo as examples of the sacred forms of traditional drama. Clark discusses religious forms of dramas, mythical and ancestral plays from one perspective, and the masquerade plays and drama from different cults and age group from another. His analysis of the secular form of traditional drama is a division into five types: magic or

tricks plays, pastoral or puppet plays, civic drama, dance or song dramas and narrative or epic dramas. However, he concludes that elements that make performances pleasurable and entertaining cannot be separated from the ecstasy and devotion that transpires during religious worship (Clark, 1981:58-61).

Though Ogunbiyi (1981) describes Clark's classification of drama as outdated and constrictive, one finds that it provides an operational structure and platform for studies in African drama. Ogunbiyi classifies the forms of traditional drama as dramatic ritual, the popular tradition and Yoruba travelling theatre. He in another vein, classifies traditional festivals and ritual ceremonies under the sub-section of dramatic ritual. Here, the indigenous dramatic performances evidently thrive along with the performances of mask cults which are ritualistic. The popular traditional theatre he describes as art that is preferred by the indigenous people within an Urban culture that is growing like the Yoruba *Alarinjo* or the Bornu Puppet shows.

### **North African Drama and the First Phase**

The North African stage is as dynamic as the West African. The Egyptian theatre is largely symbolic of the Northern African theatres. Zaki (2004) takes on an explicative analysis of the development of the Egyptian theatre. It has been observed that the foundation of the unique style that characterises the Egyptian theatre appeared in Egyptian theatre over five thousand years ago (2004:13). This period of traditional theatre in Egypt is referred to by Zaki as the Pharaonic period, which represents thirty dynasties of Pharaonic rulers. This period is also divided into the 'old kingdom, the middle kingdom and the new kingdom' (2004:13). The Pharaonic period was characterised by the strong persuasions of belief in the rebirth and regeneration of man, culminating in the beginning of special ceremonies specifically connected to rites of passage. The ruling dynasties also passed judgement and established traditions during the Pharaonic period

(2004:13).

At this time, religious and ceremonial observances dominated special ceremonies and also informed the existence of a priestly caste, who were persons assumed to be intermediaries between the Pharaohs and the gods. The privileged position occupied by this class gave them access to wealth since they were primarily workers in the temple, and the temple was a sort of domain for them.

An example of grand ceremonial drama first appeared in written form on the Shabako stone, which is a copy of the probable origin of drama in Egyptian history, [also known as] the Memphite drama. The drama portrayed rivalry between cities of Heliopolis, the centre of worship of the Sun god Amon Ra, and Memphis, the Nile port city situated on the border between the two lands, the new capital of the then newly united country and whose god was nature, Ptah (2004:13)

During this period, one of the religious ceremonies that attracted thousands of pilgrims was the re-enactment of the Abydos Osiris passion play, which tells the story of the betrayal, death and dismemberment of the fertility god Osiris by the evil Seth. Seth then proceeds to scatter Osiris '... body parts up and down the Nile, from where they are rescued by his consort Isis and his son Horus...' (13) after which Osiris returns to life. The priesthood re-enacted the passion play, a strong indication of the bond between religious ceremonies and the origin of drama in Egypt.

Some of the elements of traditional Egyptian ways of life and entertainment during this period also contained elements of drama. According to Zaki (2004:16), music, a popular form to which the people were endeared, was regarded as sacred art in the temples and had royalty and aristocratic ladies performing it in religious ceremonies. As it is with several theatrical traditions in the world, Zaki restates that drama in Egypt evolved from various religious and ceremonial rituals, as well as aspects of the Egyptian tradition in the Pharaonic era. (2004:16)

### **East African Drama and the First Phase**

According to Chesaina and Mwangi, traditional drama in Kenya is rooted in a belief system that acknowledges the existence of '...a relationship between human beings and the cosmos and the relationship between the human and the supernatural' (2004:206) world. Once again, the age long desire of man to communicate with the supernatural forces. This is in supplication and veneration to supernatural powers thought to control all things in the natural or to avert natural disasters. The use of incantation or dramatisation of religious poetry in most communities were to invoke 'good' supernatural powers and ward off powers regarded as evil. These dramatic forms were placatory and were to entreat supernatural beings for favours.

Kenyan drama emerged as the leading dramatic voice of the East in Modern Africa. This came from the revolutionary fire and posture that erupted in the period defined as the second phase of African literature. The speeches, critical essays, plays and creative writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan revolutionary and nationalist, against colonialism and neo-colonialism placed Kenyan drama in the spotlight. The Kenyan philosophy on mortality and death also contributed critically to the development of drama in Kenya. Death is not considered the end of life but as a significant part of growth for the living, particularly where the deceased is regarded as an elderly person. Elaborate dramatic performances were engaged to help the living accept and adjust to the phenomenon of death and to help transmogrify the new ancestor into a world believed to be elevated. Death in this context is seen as unique as it is in the Kenyan ideology.

At this point in the dramatic history of Kenyans, drama played a crucial role in the execution of the rites of passage and other rituals. It symbolised the core of Kenyan customs and its traditions. Drama also played a vital role in the context of child's play in pre-literate Kenya. Most of the games children played involved dramatic forms of role-playing. This is important because it helped in gender stereotyping

and the stratification of a society where each individual's role is clearly defined. Role-playing, however, was culture-specific. In the Massai community, where house building fell on the shoulders of women, the girls played roles that portrayed home and house building (2004:206).

It is, however, considered inappropriate in certain communities, even a taboo for a female to participate or play a role in the process of constructing a home. Drama, therefore, played symbolic and signifying roles in the pre-colonial society in Kenya. It reinforced the prevalent cultural thoughts, customs, traditions and religious beliefs. This continues to reflect in almost every sphere of Kenyan life.

### **Southern African Drama and the First Phase**

Furthering the argument on the origin of drama being the de-ritualization of ritual performances, Kerr (2004) avers that 'Any history of theatre in an African region must stumble against the conceptual boulder of indigenous performing arts,' Kerr (2004: 265-273. This position reinforces the ample examples of rituals, festivals and indigenous ceremonies drawn from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Southern Africa. Kerr gives the example of the San, where the main proof of performing arts is evident in the rich artistic engagements of painting and engraving of caves found in all parts of Southern Africa, including what is now South Africa.

Kerr continues by giving as example the Chewa and Manganja people, with their Gule wa Mkulu (Big Dance) of the Nyau cult of ancestral masquerades. This cult that carries out secular functions like funerals of chiefs as well as sundry initiation ceremonies is a patriarchal secret society. The Tswana people are also said to exhibit dramatic performances through initiation ceremonies for both males and females. These are respectively known as *Bogwera* and *Bojale* (Kerr, 2004).

Zambians and Malawians perform certain religious observances during female initiation rites. The performances are carried out by engaging traditional theatrical performances These were instructive

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

performances that gave instruction and guidance to pubescent girls on femininity, ideas on sexuality, grooming and societal etiquette via musical performances, dramatic sketches and mimes. The *Incwala* ceremony among the Swazi people also satisfies the nature of drama and theatre in traditional Africa. This ceremony was a symbolic way of expressing civic responsibilities with respect to royalty and other citizens (Kerr, 2004).

The interaction of dramatic performances and the cultures of the representative regions in Africa reinforces the reality of the emergence of most of Africa's drama from rituals.

Knowing that the earliest forms of African drama was characterised by traditional drama, theatricality and performances validates the existence of the indigenous traditional or cultural festivals, religious engagements, rites, and spiritual observances. More so, this stage of African drama, often described as representing a form of drama characterised by orality largely because of the folkloric tradition it emerged from, a tradition which portrays dominant features found in performances in pre-colonial Africa.

The transitory stage of contemporary African drama under what is termed the Second Phase describes the period of colonisation by the imperialists, the British, French and Portuguese as it applied to the colonies. This phase when examined along the African regions provide a clearer perspective of trends in African drama and purposively examined to allow an encapsulating coverage. Inquiries along lines such as understanding the impact of foreign influences on African drama and occurrences in African regions at this period are instructive. The activities that influenced drama within the African region in the second phase as well as the coming of Western superpowers—British, French and Portuguese—to Africa to exercise imperialism on its different tribes and nations and the Greco-Roman, Christian and Arab-Islamic incursions experienced in North Africa, meant that the traditional African society began to explore alternative beliefs and experience new ways of life.

This inevitably affected the traditional theatre that had been in existence for thousands of years. The dramatic forms and features of these colonial powers and foreigners began to influence the indigenous theatres. Not only that, but the indigenous theatres began to lose patronage for several connected reasons. This period of colonial impression and influence on indigenous African theatre was a transitory stage that revealed a movement from pure indigenous performance art to one that shares the characteristics of the drama and theatre of at least two different worlds.

### **The Second Phase: Foreign Features and Influences**

At this critical point was when the foreign influences first began to make their way into African drama. The phase gave new meanings, dimensions, and interpretations to drama and theatre in Africa. This was because with its attendant foreign influences, African drama was no longer limited to the totality of the indigenous ritualised performances on the continent. It also began to give space to accommodate the dramatic features and principles of Western colonial powers as generally experienced in African countries. However, it must be noted that this period, in relation to its foreign influences, was earlier experienced by Northern African nations like Egypt as they had to accommodate the Greco-Romans, early Christian and Arabs/Muslim civilisations before Western colonialism.

The idea of drama in Africa as being “modern” is traceable to the cultural evolution of this period. This is because the foreign presence on the continent at that time integrated Africa and Africans to the larger world and to more formal establishments, technological advancements, and transnational, cross-cultural interactions. Thus, the production of manuscripts for drama arguably began in this period due to the influence of education and writing. With this, African drama was no longer spontaneous performances or forms guided by worship or veneration as it used to be in the traditional

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

African society. There also began to emerge definite authors for African dramatic pieces and the advent of the proscenium theatre.

### **West African Drama in the Second Phase**

In West Africa, especially Nigeria, Adelugba and Obafemi (2004:143) refer to this stage of the development of theatre in Nigeria as the nationalist phase. In Nigeria, the European churches employed theatre as an effective way to Christianise and enlighten the natives about their ways and religion. This eventually culminated in the success of the imperialists to achieve full imperialism, inclusive of religious, political, linguistic, and cultural imperialism, a determined plan to replace African ways and beliefs with a European version. The first set of immigrants started to arrive early 1839, several of the natives began to receive Western education and as a result, absorbed as infallible of the doctrines, ideology and models of Western civilisation as transmitted through Christianity. In Ogunbiyi's words:

...this class of Nigerians imported the Western and European forms of the concert and the drama which were to constitute the basic framework of the early modern Nigerian drama (1981:17)

Subsequently, groups and circles exposed to these Western forms of drama began to encourage these forms to evolve. In 1866, the leading figures in the Lagos society got together and opened 'The Academy', a place designated for promoting the arts, culture, science, and social enlightenment.

Between 1866 and 1910, several forms fashioned after 'The Academy' were founded. Some of these groups included The Philharmonic Society founded by Otunba-Payne in 1873, the People's Union founded in 1904, and the Lagos Glee Singers founded in 1910. Virtually all these groups organized shows of their own. Most of the shows featured recitations, musical glee, love songs, duets and solos that were dominant in the programme and content of

performances in the English music halls known to enjoy high patronage in the late 1860s and the early 1870s. Dramatic performances that were performed included excerpts from popular books and most of these performances were musical (Ogunbiyi, 1981:18). These performances enjoyed patronages and played to full house audiences drawn largely from the elite emigrant society of Sierra-Leoneans, Brazilians, Europeans, a fraction of the cream of the society, and the unlettered indigenous Lagosians (Adelugba and Obafemi, 2004:144).

However, there were other types of entertainment in which drama was fully represented in Lagos at this time. The Roman Catholic Church was the pioneer of this tradition. The French order of the Catholic priests, when faced with the challenge of conducting church business in Yoruba to a predominantly Yoruba-speaking community and Portuguese-speaking Brazilian emigrant group, was compelled to rely on the power of the theatre for effective communication. Thus, from 1881 when St. Gregory's school was founded by the French priest, to the end of the century, annual end of the year performances were held. However, although these contributions were crucial, they did not lead to the beginning of a truly modern Nigerian drama.

In the nineteenth century, the preponderance of performance groups and the organisation of concerts contentions between the groups and churches. *Ab initio* the musicals and concerts were for doctrinal and convert seeking purposes. The churches though initially reluctant, as seen by church that punished Duro Ladipo for introducing indigenous musical instruments into his church cantata, began to gravitate towards the traditional theatrical preferences of the public. Ogunbiyi (1981:18) observes that in 1890, the protestant church in Lagos suffered a major schism this occasioned the establishment of fourteen secessionist churches by 1917. This resulted from the call for cultural nationalism within this period. The churches that had dissociated from the Roman Catholic Church celebrated and became more positive towards African cultures. According to

Ogunbiyi

Not only was the call made for independent African churches where Yoruba music and language could be freely used, there were beginning to emerge attempts to blend European and African materials in entertainments (18).

The inspiration and leadership of these revival and inclusion of African tenets was spear headed from Abeokuta and Ibadan. Abeokuta for instance too the lead, there, for instance, indigenous masquerade songs were reworded and repurposed into church music with the intention of winning souls and converting the natives to Christianity. These churches and, particularly the Abeokuta was the enabling platform upon which the experiments carried out on form and style of the native drama tradition in Nigeria arose (Adelugba and Obafemi, 2004:146).

An example of genuinely Nigerian drama that came from these churches is *King Elejigbo and Princess Abeje of Kontagora* authored by Dr D. A. Oloyede under the joint sponsorship of Bethel African church and St Jude Church. On April 22, 1904, the play received public viewing at the Glover hall, thus earning the distinction of being the first appearance of church drama group in a public hall (Ogunbiyi, 1981:19).

However, despite all the hue and cry about the indigenisation of the church and the surge towards cultural nationalism, most of these shows were not popular and were limited to a small circle of "Victorian" Lagosians. The majority of the illiterate and 'uncivilized' population were cut off from the cultural life that the elite group promoted and actively supported. In effect, the theatre of this period was not popular, and it relied on the small class it catered to for support. Once that support was no longer forthcoming, the theatre was bound to collapse, and it eventually collapsed when professional and political interests diverted the attention of the elite that it was

relying on' (Ogunbiyi, 1981:20). For a while after the collapse of this theatre, the combined effects of the First World War and the Cinema served to dampen the efforts of the following years. It took the efforts of Hubert Ogunde to revive that interest. Ogunde, the precursor of the professional indigenous theatre in Nigeria brought a lot of ingenuity, depth and rich cultural value to his stage enterprise not only was his plays symbolic of the emergence of an unmistakable Nigerian and African performance that was itinerant it was nationalistic and ideological. Nigerian. His earliest plays, *The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God* created a form of indigenous drama that became labelled as the Yoruba operatic (travelling) theatre. This subsequently became an established theatrical tradition in Nigeria.

### **East African Drama in the Second Phase**

Chesaina and Mwangi's (2004) study on East African drama centred on Kenyan drama as being representative. It is instructive that they recognise this phase as one during which theatre practice in Kenya was dominated by the English colonial government. They described this stage in the development of Kenyan drama as constituting the dominant base and a second pillar in the evolution of modern Kenyan drama. Instead of the indigenous theatrical forms that were communal performances and that were basic elements and features associated with festivals and communal beliefs, the colonial period introduced dramatic forms that were essentially for the stage. This is in contrast to the traditional forms where the performer and the audience shared the performance space. And were collaboratively involved in the performances. The forms introduced during the colonial period redefined the acting and audience and performer relations. More so, the forms were audience-sensitive as a particular form determined the type of audience.

### **North African Drama in the Second Phase**

The Egyptian example suffices for North Africa. The Greco-Roman period, Christian era and Islamic period identified by Zaki (2004:18-23) can be subsumed under this stage. In addition to this is the period of British domination of Egypt (Brockett, 2011:280). The Greco-Roman period was both of Greek and Roman social and political values. For the Greeks, it started when Alexander the Great, the Macedonian king, entered Egypt after his conquest of Persia and Syria. He founded the new city of Alexandria north of the Mediterranean after taking over the capital city of Memphis. The Greek occupation also known as the Ptolemaic Period came to an end about three hundred years after with the passing of Cleopatra VII in 30BC.

After this, the Romans started exercising absolute control over Egypt. Egypt as a state lost its independence and no longer had its capital or ruling dynasty. That Christian era began with the arrival of Saint Mark in Alexandria in about 40AD and the subsequent official recognition of Christianity in Egypt by Emperor Theodosius. The Islamic period started in 640AD when Alexandria was held captive by the Caliph Omar led Arab army. With this, Islamic influence spread throughout Egypt and North Africa to the extent that the Arabic language and Islam became the accepted and official language and religion, respectively. The Arabic-Islamic culture frowned at theatrical performances, which led to the gradual demise of the forms and performances.

This continued until the nineteenth century, when Egypt was under British domination. Thus, playhouses were being built, and theatre companies began to appear again. European theatre styles and forms of productions began to be available after 1870. Singing and dancing as performances came to the fore in this period, and men played all the roles. Essentially, during these periods, Egyptian traditional dramatic and theatrical values experienced continuous imposition of foreign dramatic ideals and orientations.

In other North African countries like Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, this phase experienced extensive control of theatre by the French colonialists. However, it was used against the interests of these countries for the politicisation of cultural questions and national issues and not as artistic expression (2011:280).

### **Southern African Drama in the Second Phase**

In Southern Africa, this phase of the evolution of African drama has been termed colonial theatre (Kerr, 2004:277). This stage was dominated by European theatre, which flourished at the expense of all forms of theatricality and performance that existed in pre-colonial Southern Africa. This theatre of the colonialists served the function of providing white settlers and colonial officers with psychological support and connecting them to the European culture of their distant homes. It also performed the role of educating and teaching Africans Western culture and civilisation. It is observable established the influence of foreign dramatic features at that point on trends and development of modern African drama. It showed the features and functions of drama on the continent and across its different national boundaries with the evolvement of the idea of modernity in African drama. The implication of these is that modern African drama, apart from being primarily influenced by ritual performances and traditional theatre, it is also tremendously influenced by the worldview and dramatic cultures of the Occidents and the Orientals (Kerr, 2004). In the second phase, African drama was distinguished by the evident foreign features and influences. This phase is the colonial era. It is generally discussed as the point in history when Western superpowers—British, French and Portuguese—were on the African soil to exercise imperialism on the different African tribes and nations. However, it is noted that Northern African nations like Egypt started experiencing this period earlier than other nations with their experience of Greco-Roman, Christian and Arab-Islamic nationalities. This inevitably affected the traditional theatre that had

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

been in existence for thousands of years. The dramatic forms and features of these colonial powers and foreigners began to influence the indigenous theatre. It brought the idea and ideal of modernity into drama and theatricality in Africa, making it share the drama features of at least two different civilizations, hence the concept of modern African drama.

The last and contemporary stage of modern African drama under what is termed the third phase is the concern of this section. This phase describes the period after the colonisation of African nations, the postcolonial period. This period is known for its manifestation of modern African drama in the proper sense of the concept. That is, in the areas of thematic preoccupation, motif, and deployment of styles, among others. This phase has been known for unlimited modern African works in drama and criticism alike. Thus, there has been an emergence of true modern African playwrights, dramatists and critics since the inception of this phase. This phase shall also be discussed through representative nations across four African regions.

The third phase of modern African drama generally began in most African regions and nations towards the end of colonialism through the eve of the independence of African nations and continues till the present day. This period started with young African playwrights who had been exposed to the dictates and self-centredness of Western colonialists through Western education. They, therefore, felt the need to represent and promote African identity and culture as well as black nationality and consciousness through drama. They were also aware of the underlying divisions—ethnic, religious, social and political—in African nations which were created by European colonialists on the eve of independence. Many of them who remain celebrated till today saw through the gloss of unity and greatness of African nations to the plurality, comprehensive demarcation, and disunity put in place by the imperialists. In reaction, they started conscientising their nationals and creating awareness through writing.

The great dramatic works of the period are representative of the historical and contemporary fabric of Africa in terms of thematic thrust, motif and style. Perhaps the major thing non-African about this period is the use of the languages of the imperialists. Even with that, it has been argued by critics and scholars that these languages are used in Africanised sense and context.

### **The Third Phase as Modern Drama and Theatre**

The third phase of drama in Africa is the period of modern drama and theatre in the continent. This is because it has been characterised by plays and playwrights that effectively combine elements of traditional African theatre and colonial drama to produce something uniquely African. The sense of modernity in this period, which is still evolving and will continue to, is not in the use of languages of the colonial masters. Instead, modernity here is that African drama becomes part of world drama, attracting international audiences, readers and critics while still keeping to thematic preoccupation, motif and style that are typically African. Justifiably great African dramatists and playwrights, as well as dramatic pieces did not go uncelebrated even in the early days of this phase. This is evident in the recognition given to the works of dramatists like Duro Ladipo, whose tenacity won him both local and international honours and recognition, Wole Soyinka would later emerge as the first black African to win the Nobel Prize closely followed by Naguib Mahfouz who won the Nobel Prize two years after and several others attest to these facts.

### **West African Drama in the Third Phase**

This stage can be further broken down into two sub-sections: the theatrical tradition, emphasising performing arts and the literary theatre, which focuses on writing. The Activities of the Nigerian Dramatists during this period is germane to this period. For instance, Hubert Ogunde pioneered the theatrical tradition in Nigeria with his travelling theatre. When Ogunde first appeared on the artistic scene, a

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

new kind of drama called the Native Air Opera had become popular due largely to the efforts of the church movement, but more specifically to the efforts of A.K Ajisafe who started to relate church hymns to native airs at the United African Methodist Church. He was followed in that tradition through the years by renowned theatre artists such as E.A Dawodu, Ajibola Layeni, A.B. David, G.I Onimole and A.A. Olufoye. Ogunde's arrival on the scene in 1944 determined the course of Yoruba theatre for the next three decades. He freed the Native Air Opera from its strict confinements, sprinkling it with Yoruba songs and dances. (Ogunbiyi, 1981).

The fact that the Church of the Lord, founded in Ogere in 1931 by Josiah Oshitelu was less fundamentalist in its approach than its parent body was also a factor that contributed to Ogunde's innovations. Encouraged by the tremendous success of his first two plays (*The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God*) in 1946, Ogunde decided to resign from the police force and become a full-time professional theatre artiste. His first two plays were initially performed as church plays followed by *Worse than Crime*, which told the story of the slave trade. He also founded the African Music Research Party which was the beginning of professional theatre and theatrical troupes in Nigeria. Ogunde was actively involved in the struggle for self-rule, an involvement that influenced the subject and themes of his works and led to conflicting encounters with the colonial authorities. (Ogunbiyi, 1981).

Ogunde's work was premised on the maxim that theatre must reflect the societal reality. Ogunde boldly replayed the tragedy, hopes, dreams and triumphs of his time and age. He boldly portrayed the realities of society in his dramas, sometimes at great risk to his safety. He did not confine himself to Lagos but subjected himself to gruelling tours of the country, taking his theatre wherever it was needed at any point in time. On one of these tours, he met a man named E.K. Ogunmola, and he remained close to him till his death. This began a long tradition of travelling theatres influenced by his art and his

itinerant performances. Some of the artists were Duro Ladipo and the comedian Moses Olaiya. The Moses Olaiya's company (The Alawada) was actually a group that emerged from the Ogunde theatre (Clark, Jeyifo) though not often acknowledged, most of the theatrical techniques engaged by other artists of the tradition were first established by Hubert Ogunde. Apart from taking their performances to other countries in West Africa, what is remarkable about the Yoruba Travelling Theatre is how firmly established it became. Biodun Jeyifo (1984), Remi Ademola Adedokun (1981) and others aver that there were about one hundred Yoruba theatre groups which made up the Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners, and these excluded groups stationed in the Republic of Benin performing for Yoruba-speaking Beninois.

Although the drama is hardly mentioned in critical studies of the Onitsha market literature, it provides critical insights about an important literary output of a form and a regional impute of the Nigerian society (Ogunbiyi, 1981: 25). What is now known as Onitsha market literature was the product of several socio-economic centres and the upsurge in the acceptance of an egalitarian form of literature at the end of World War I. Onitsha market literature are pamphlets, novelettes, plays/styles and stories written by members of an enlightened group of traders, artisans and working-class persons for a progressive and growing literate audience. The exciting thing about Onitsha market literature is that after the narrative genres, the plays come next in number. In fact, most of its most exciting pieces are plays.

The plays deal with a gamut of subjects and themes, ranging from the imprisonment of Adolf Hitler to the dramatised biographies of African leaders, some with themes of love and some dominantly didactic pieces. Obiechina identifies three or four broad themes in Onitsha market literature: didactic love, marriage and domestic tussles, and religious and moral themes. These themes are exhaustively portrayed in the plays. The most prolific playwrights of

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

this tradition are perhaps Thomas Orlando Iguh and Dr O.A. Ogali. In language and style, the pieces written during this period were stylised in a simple and uncomplicated manner, the structured and served as models of James Ene Henshaw's well stylised and structured plays, which essentially the earliest collection of the Nigerian literary drama.

The rise of drama, regarded as serious and relatively contemporary literature in Nigeria, is credited to a set of playwrights and dramatists. Ogunbiyi (1981:27) traces the origin of serious contemporary drama to 1960, when Wole Soyinka founded 'The 1960 Masks.' However, this group was not the only amateur group on the scene at that time. There was also John Ekwere and his Ogui players, later known as the 'Eastern Nigerian Theatre Group' in the East. However, most of what was known as a serious theatre were centred on the dramatic activities in the then University College, Ibadan. This among other factors influenced the incorporation of dramatic and theatrical courses at the university in 1957, this was collaboratively handled by the English Department in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education (Ogunbiyi, 1981:71).

The literary theatre of that period therefore fed on the amateur groups which had root in the theatrical traditions of the indigenous theatres. The playwrights in this tradition were also trained in the Western tradition and education, these dual repositories of knowledge became dominant sources and influence particularly in linguistic and communicative terms (Adelugba and Obafemi, 2004:153). Some of the plays of this period, particularly Wole Soyinka's satirised the Nigerian government and began the introspective journey into the problems of nationhood Nigeria had necessarily encountered.

The theatre of the succeeding generation of dramatists characterised the materialistic bent that became social avarice. Most of these dramatists were trained outside Nigeria. The thematic preoccupations of most of the plays in this generation centred on were

committed to the reconstruction of the social strata through proletarian consciousness and class struggle. The problems associated with a neo-colonial society, such as poverty, corruption, violence, and disease, were the focus of their drama. Examples of leading figures in this era are Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kole Omotosho, Sam Ukala, and Tess Onwueme. Some notable plays in this generation are Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* and *Tegonni*, Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon*, and Tess Onwueme's *Reign of Wazobia* (Adelugba and Obafemi, 2004:15).

More dramatists have emerged over the decades who are writing, performing and producing protest dramas more in line with the theatre for development. Most of them are influenced by happenings on the world stage. Some of the new Nigerian dramatists and drama include Felix Okolo's *Mekunnu Melody* and Ben Tomoloju's *Jankariwo*.

### **North African Drama in the Third Phase**

This stage identified with postcolonial North Africa is characterised by attempts by nations of this region to get rid of their multi-cultural roots in colonial drama through decolonisation and, by implication, search for indigenous dramatic forms and structures. Evident in this stage is the point that theatre is a mode of expression. The works of playwrights during the early period of this stage (postcolonial) focus on the region's social and political injustice perpetrated by colonial governments. Later on, attention shifts to drama and performances that address postcolonial issues.

There are differences among various North African theatres mainly because of the nations constituting the region's different cultural and political roots. However, all these theatres share in common the reflection of a postcolonial sensibility informed by the state of North Africa after independence.

In Egypt, playwrights like Tewfik Al-Hakim (1898-1987) and Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) emerged. Al-Hakim was among the

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

most important Egyptian dramatists of the early twentieth century. In 1935, his play, *Sleepers in the Cave* was performed as the opening production of the Egyptian National Theatre. Naguib Mahfouz won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the Second African writer, first Egyptian and first North African to win the prize.

### **East African Drama in the Third Phase**

This stage assumed its full growth in postcolonial Kenyan theatre. At the onset, it was characterised with the establishment of theatre as a tool for entertainment and as an agent of anti-colonial crusade among Kenyans. 6<sup>th</sup> November 1952, The Kenyan National Theatre was declared open and instantly became the effective centre for the production of dramatic displays and theatrical activities. The other influential instrument in developing this phase in Kenya is the Kenyan School of Drama Festivals, initiated by the British Council and the East African Theatre Guild (Chesaina and Mwangi, 2004:217).

A notable play at the beginning of this phase in Kenya is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The Black Hermit* (1962), produced specifically for Uganda's independence from Britain. Though not rated his best play, its significance is unmistakable in that it explores the tensions and pressures that resulted from the clash between traditional African values and the modernity ushered in by colonialism.

### **South African Drama in the Third Phase**

At the outset of the third phase in postcolonial Southern Africa, there were vestiges of certain aspects of the colonial theatre. For instance, in Zambia, for the first ten years of independence, white playhouses still continued to be almost exclusively for white expatriates. This was also the case in Malawi. Later on, with strong movements of nationalist patriotism geared towards African cultural expression, expatriates began to leave the region, shifting attention to African forms of theatre and drama. (Kerr, 2004)

Dance was the most vital of these forms which earlier served a significant role in arousing the consciousness of southern Africans during agitations for independence. Kerr (2004) notes that several southern African governments tried to mobilise this spirit of choreographic nationalism in order to help build a pan-ethnic consensus. This included the National Dance Troupe under Edwin Manda which was created by the Department of Cultural Services in Zambia. This troupe usually performed prominent dances of the various Zambian ethnic groups (283).

Southern African countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana, with homogenous ethnic and linguistic formations, had traditional dances to promote national identity, national pride and renew interest in important pre-colonial political rituals. In Swaziland, for instance, the monarchy was accorded powerful control over the organs of the state. To give value to the role of the post-colonial monarchy, two pre-colonial rituals—*Umhlanga* (the Reed Dance) and the *Incwala* ceremony—were given dramatic relevance and political significance (283).

The more recent developments in African drama under the third phase include this phase covered the period following the colonisation of African nations, known as the post-colonial period. This period described modern African drama because most of the characteristic features developed within this era. The thematic preoccupations, motif, forms and style among others, had been essentially African even when there were adaptations; the underlying fabric is predominantly African. This phase had recorded the proliferation of dramatic works that had also generated multifarious critical writings and theories on African drama and theatre.

The third phase of contemporary African drama generally began in most African regions and nations towards the end of colonialism, particularly at the eve of the independence of African nations to date. The educated class, from which the young African playwrights emerged, had been exposed to the contradictions of imperialism and

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

the imperialists. They were driven by the urge to represent Africa and promote the African identity, culture and nationality through their writings. Several of these writers remain celebrated until today primarily because their writings' thematic preoccupation focused on the reality of the plurality, disunity, chaos, that imperialists had firmly put in place before and while granting independence to the African nations. Summarily, the great dramatic works that represent the temper of that period portray the history of the pre-independence and post-independence eras. This is also reflected in the motif, style and language employed in the dramas.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Theatrical Traditions and Contemporary Written African Drama**

This chapter takes bearing from four play types identified within the written forms of the African theatrical traditions: Culture plays, National Drama, Rational Drama and Neo Rational Drama. Though still evolving, these African drama and theatre traditions in contemporary African literature have been categorised into four primarily based on their thematic thrusts (Dasyuva, 1997). Therefore culturalism, nationalism, rationalism and neo-rationalism are dominant elements that drive the forms.

### **Culture Plays**

Culture plays are plays that engage elements that portray culture, folklore and traditional features that portray the tradition of a people. It is vital to understand that culture plays make up a dominant part of contemporary African Literature and more than any other form this is the most ethnographic of the forms. Theatre traditions in contemporary African literature sprang from the conscious creative and critical efforts to establish a truly modern African drama. This critical move experienced rapid growth only after the independence of various African states. All the same, these traditions benefit significantly from the resources and influences of non-indigenous dramatic forms and traditions.

Culture plays are dramatic works whose thematic preoccupation centres on African culture and identity in relation to that of the

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Western world, acquired basically through colonialism. African plays in this category probe the newly acquired European values, depicting a constant conflict between African cultures and European values. Sometimes and often, both cultures are compared and satirised to prove and justify the ideas of the African cultures over the other. More so, most culture plays are comical; in fact, they are usually higher comedies. Such plays include *The Blinkard* by Kobina Sekyi, *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka, and *This is our Chance* by Ene Henshaw.

### **Dramatic Elements in Culture Plays**

The predominant elements of drama in culture plays are satire and humour. Satire is deployed in such plays to lampoon a character or society whose follies or vices are at the centre of the play. This satire is usually a gentle, mild contempt, condemnation and criticism against such character or society. Humour, on the other hand, recurs very often in culture plays through the playwright's use of satire, wordplay, malapropism and presentation of frivolous actions and roles in which the major character is involved. The culture play by description encompasses all dramatic works whose thematic preoccupation centres on the African Culture and identity *vis -a -vis* the relationship of these works to the presence and activities of the imperialists and the influences their culture had on the African indigenous forms. The culture play, encompasses all dramatic works whose thematic preoccupation centres on African culture and identity in relation to that of the western world acquired basically through colonialism. African plays in this category plays an important role in that is able to probe the newly acquired European values, depicting a constant conflict between the African cultures and the European values. More so, these plays are mostly comical and the predominant elements of drama in them are satiric and humorous.

### **National Drama**

The predominant elements, nature as well as function of that characterise the National play privileges the form among the classes of other forms and in contemporary written drama in Africa. National drama in contemporary written African literature has its origin rooted in the nationalist crusade against colonialism and imperialism in Africa. At the outset, such drama would create awareness about African states political and national consciousness while negating the political and national postures of the imperialists. However, this became modified by and continued with the infamous postcolonial situation of disillusionment, oppression, corruption, war, and poverty in Africa. In essence, contemporary national drama has concentrated on the improprieties and malfeasance perpetrated by the leadership of African states. This, to an extent, justifies why postcolonial Africa has been thought of by some critics to be literally a neo-colonial dispensation.

Plays in this category often express the dissatisfaction of the people and consciously seek to awaken their political consciousness to make them realise and resist colonial or postcolonial disillusionment and general oppression. These plays can be called protest plays because they are generally responses to against the state's authority, which is usually represented by cruel, self-centred, selfish and corrupt leadership or state mercenary. They are often preoccupied with political struggles and nationalist objectives. More so, they usually employ savage criticism against the subject of focus. Examples of such plays include *State Visit* by Niyi Osundare, *The Island* by Athol Fugard, *Hungry Earth* by Maishe Maponye, and *Kinjeketile* by Ebrahim Hussein. National drama in contemporary written African literature represent those dramatic works that started was intended to lampoon the nationalist anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism campaign but had to continue with the inglorious postcolonial situation of Africa, which is characterised by poor governance, disillusionment, oppression, corruption, war and

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

poverty in Africa. In effect, national drama now concentrates on the improprieties and malfeasance perpetrated by the leadership of African states. Within the ovure of national drama stands out as protest drama reinforcing the national identity as well as ethnic identity which affects all aspects of the nation and its national life This explains why postcolonial Africa has been thought of by some critics to be literally a neo-colonial dispensation Rational drama is a generic experimentation of textual aesthetics and contextual element. It is a theatre that seeks to address cultural and national issues in Africa thereby, blending the features of the cultural plays with that of the national drama. The role of the modern African dramatist is that of the conscience of a society, this is primary goal is purposively portrayed in the form, content and structure of national drama.

### **Rational Drama**

Rational drama comprises of plays that blend both cultural and nationalist objectives. The significance of this is that it centres on African tradition and identity in relation to non-indigenous, especially Western culture and identity. It simultaneously arouses the political and national consciousness of Africans to make them vehemently resist the oppression and disillusionment characterising colonial or postcolonial Africa. Rational drama very often satirises Africans who have become attached to Western values and ideologies that they consider as the ideal and also, within its nationalist posture, expresses the dissatisfaction of Africans, particularly with persistent and conscious failures of African leaders that have taken over the mantle of authority from the inception of the post-colonial period.

Plays under this tradition are clearly ideologically driven; they call for simple and logical reasoning to eliminate cultural, social, political and national challenges confronting Africa. They demand the existence of an African society that is not an imitation of America and or any location in the international community. The plays, however, create awareness about the need for some sense of socio-political and

national identity that should engender stability in Africa. Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *A Dance of the Forest*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o et al's *I will Marry when I want*, and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* are examples of such plays.

Elements of drama in the rational drama also comprises dramatic elements in the culture play and the national drama. Satire, which is one of these elements, could be mild contempt or savage condemnation or a melding of the two. When the satire is the gentle criticism it follows the Horatian satire model, there could then be humour in the play. A rational drama may blend features of comic and tragic forms. Classifying rational drama as comedy or tragedy will be inappropriate because the central focus of this tradition is for the reader or audience to ponder and possibly act over what has been read or seen and not to laugh over the themes or empathise with the characters portrayed. The plays under this tradition portray issues such as African cultural consciousness and identity, colonialist exploitation of Africa and imperialism and African postcolonial dilemmas as their thematic preoccupation. Rational plays addresses African cultural and national issues effectively combining the elements and features of a culture play with national drama. It juxtaposes African tradition and identity with the non-African, especially Western culture and identity. This is with a view to simultaneously arouse the political and national consciousness of Africans to rouse their consciousness of being African and enable them repress the oppression and disillusionment that have been the identity of colonial or postcolonial Africa. This theatre tradition has arguably been able to project the role of the contemporary African dramatist as a conscience of society.

### **Neo-Rational Drama**

Neo-rational drama in contemporary written African drama centres on issues affecting nationals of a nation albeit within the milieu of postcolonial Africa. Neo-rational dramatists usually achieve the feat

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

of springing up dramatic aesthetics to drive home their thematic thrust from the abundantly rich treasury of African folklore. This makes neo-rational plays have some colouration of oral history or pristine African taste while portraying contemporary Africa. This encyclopaedic coverage of aspects of Africa and African culture makes the play data sources for ethnographers, anthropologists and sociologists.

African plays that fall under the neo-rational theatre tradition are plays that draw their materials from African folkloric traditions such as but not limited to myths, legends, folktales, communal history, long narrative poetry (of epic proportion) and rituals to pursue nationalist objectives (Dasylva, 1997). Under this category, there are attempts to redefine and reshape mythology or any other folkloric genre to cater to the present social realities. Like the rational drama, neo-rational drama calls for common and logical reasoning to fight off unpleasant socio-political and national realities especially in postcolonial Africa. This explains why neo-rational dramatists and playwrights always make their denouement open-ended to cater to the thought and contribution of the reader or audience. Femi Osofisan is the most prominent playwright that belongs to this category with plays such as *Twynkle Twangle: A Twyning Tayle, Midnight Hotel, and Women of Owu*.

### **Dramatic Elements in Neo-rational Drama**

The dominant element in neo-rational drama is song. These songs are often engaged in forms of prologues or epilogues, in interludes, as choral speech and to give clarification about a preceding action. Essentially, it is a significant aesthetic of presentation in neo-rational drama. Apart from this, character-types and characterology are also important to neo-rational drama. Neo-rational drama also engage the use of superhuman characters like gods and spirits. The roles and actions of characters are often made evident by the type of names given to them. Characters can also be marked by the social

responsibilities or civil duties attached to them as in the case of a pastor, parliamentarian and soldiers in *Midnight Hotel*. Irony, especially dramatic irony, is another significant element in neo-rational drama. Satire (whether mild criticism or savage reprimand) and humour are also frequent dramatic elements in the neo-rational tradition. The neo-rational drama focuses majorly on national issues usually within the context of the postcolonial African society. It draws materials from African folkloric traditions to pursue nationalist objectives enabling a redefining and reshaping of mythology or any other folkloric form to account for current social realities. This explains why neo-rational plays have some colouration of oral history or pristine African taste while expressing thematic preoccupation that are predominantly contemporary.

## Chapter 4

# Playwrights and Playwriting in Contemporary Written African Literature

The activities of West African, playwrights and playwriting in contemporary African literature dates back to the independence period (the late 1950s to early 1960s) of West African nations and continue evolving till today. These playwrights, having received forms of western education and remaining firmly strong in African culture, started writing plays whose thematic preoccupation and motifs were drawn from issues relating to African folkloric tradition, cultural identity, influence of European cultural values on African worldview, African social and political realities, and African nationalist consciousness.

### **Wole Soyinka and Drama in West Africa**

There exists an inexhaustible body of writings on Wole Soyinka an African playwright. Considering his significance in West Africa and Africa, this also stems from his extensive dramatic oeuvre, a basis for the 1986 Nobel Prize for drama that brought him and Africa into global limelight in literature. Soyinka not only typifies a global ideology of an African but also a West African playwright.

### **Wole Soyinka: Biographical Notice**

Born on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1934, Wole Soyinka is a dramatist whose works belong to the best of African and world literature. He remains a celebrity representing the genius of Africa because of his artistry,

intellectual efforts and the political engagement the principles his literary works portray. Soyinka's exemplary career as a playwright, an ambassador of African cultural essence as well as socio-political situation became a national endeavour with his establishment of the 1960 Masks on the eve of Nigeria's independence and the premier of his play, *A Dance the Forest*, which was intended for the celebration of the Nigerian independence celebrations. Wole Soyinka did not only teach but mentored many dramatists, theatre practitioners, drama/literary critics, and scholars within and outside Africa. He is a serial and multiple award-winning playwright and writer in other literary genres. In 1986, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, due in great part to his dramaturgy. The Nobel prize motivation for his award is: "who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence" (Nobel Prize Outreach).

He is the first African and Black to win this most prestigious prize. Soyinka's other endeavours had been well documented in several critical writings here the essence of his work is to place the trends and trajectory in proper perspective by examining aspects of his later play. Soyinka rehashes his themes of bad leadership, crisis of identity and corruption by developing national characters and themes within this work. The striking thematic pre-occupation is the cultural alienation he commences on a satirical note having paid homage to Moses Adejumo *aka* Baba Sala, the foremost African and Nigerian comedian.

### **Soyinka's *Alapata Apata***

Soyinka creates a unique setting of a rock symbolic to the national base of power in his homeland and creates characters such as Alaba, the retired butcher and other characters like Daanielebo and the General to satirise the society he recreates in the play.

The General and Daanielebo are interested in the mineral resources Alaba appears to be sitting upon, for their personal gains. The symbol of Alaba's broken atlas appears to be synonymous with

the greed and crookedness typified by corrupt leaders who engage power and misuse national resources for personal enrichment.

**Dominant Preoccupation in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata***

Cultural alienation can be said to be a dominant preoccupation in the play. This is evident in the analysis of the play's title by the author in his playwright's note. Soyinka explains that it is 'a play for Yorubafonia', 'class for Xenophiles', that is, the play is for members of his plural rich Yoruba culture who celebrate or value foreign (western) culture at the expense of theirs. The identity crisis is evident in the neglect of cultural idiosyncrasies and cultural alienation as a vicissitude is portrayed through the actions and inactions of some characters, especially those that have acquired western education, which is dominant in the text. For instance, because of the negligence of the Yoruba language, Senior Boy is unable to put the suitable tonal markers on 'Alapata Apata' and even does not get it right after the illiterate Alaba, as it were, has put him through. As a young boy, his inability to use tonal markers from childhood speaks volumes. His failure as the senior boy of a secondary leaves much to be desired about how other pupils could use their mother tongue(s) efficiently and that Senior Boy is not a complete, capable leader.

Corruption and abuse of power is pre-eminent in the contemporary African and particularly Nigerian socio-political setting. Soyinka once again focuses of the engagement of power as agency in contemporary Nigerian society. This theme is clearly portrayed through the characters of Daanielebo and General. A politician and governor, Daanielebo is never satisfied with all that he has acquired opportunistically and constantly seeks corrupt means to further enrich himself. Thus, having full understanding of the value of the mineral resources beneath the rock that Alaba has made his abode, Daanielebo proceeds to take possession of the rock by all means such that he attempts to bribe Alaba eventually resorts to using charms because Alaba is adamant and rejects the bait. General,

another corrupt official uses the military agency at his disposal for his 'Operation Longathroat' in a bid to outsmart Alaba and usurp his authority over the rock (Soyinka, 2011:42). These characters are archetypal as they represent the political and military personalities generally in Nigeria social situation who are unabashedly corrupt.

In this play, Soyinka in *Alapata Apata* is quick to condemn socio-political and cultural vices through some characters and shows the importance of being earnest and upright through Alaba's character. Alaba is modelled as a modestly upright personality. As a reader gets to know, Alaba's framing is not just because he is a veteran butcher, but more because of his uprightness. He is a man who tries as much as possible to correct anything wrong. Alaba, for instance chastises Dele for not being forthright by not bringing his second wife into his house because he was afraid of his first wife. Notably, the playwright shows that being earnest and upright is not being perfect but being ready to own up to one's fault. Alaba is always ready to accept his fault. Even though his intention was to straighten the bent globe. Alaba remains haunted by the unfortunate incident of him breaking the globe as a Geography pupil.

### **Language and Style in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata***

Soyinka effectively engages satire to enrich the play's aesthetics and, at the same time, as a social and political weapon to make comments on and correct the *status quo* on events in contemporary society. In part one of the play, Alaba satirises the unbecoming, ridiculous and shameless act of government that ought to be accountable and responsible to the citizens (Soyinka, 2011:69). The reader's attention is called to the pensioners, old men and women who are made to stand on long queues for hours in the hot sun. While in this queue, some of them who are already weak, faint. Alaba says: "I am a pensioner—I pensioned myself with my savings. I don't have to queue at the government pension office every month and faint and drop dead while waiting to collect my pension." The government can

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

effortlessly pay pensions, but their greed for wealth and material acquisition blinds them from doing so. The delay in paying the money is yet another strategy employed to profit from the meagre subsistence allowance of the aged who had served their nation meritoriously.

Through the character of Daanielebo, the playwright satirises the corrupt and rotten maggots who call themselves leaders. The playwright portrays the foolishness and stupidity of Daanielebo, who has come to bribe Alaba in exchange for the rock beneath which are some mineral deposits. After Alaba refuses the bribe, Daanielebo resorts to charms, stripping himself naked to reveal 'the full armoury of grenade, gas canisters pistol... bante made of fresh leaves, amulets... Sheathed knives ... juju necklace, a leg charm... (141 -142)' All these portray how desperate political leaders are to accumulate wealth. Daanielebo, however, flees like a madman at the sight of the boy whom he takes to be a dreaded spirit because of the painting on his face and the bunch of brooms he is holding. Finally, it is essential to note that this style aspect is presented in a mild, gentle yet contemptuous and in a style. Dasylya and Jegede (2005) describe as Horatian satire.

### **Humour as Strategy in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata***

Humour is employed in the play to instigate laughter. The outcome of the deliberation among Alaba, mother, daughter and Dele, for instance, is very humorous. Mother and daughter have come to report Dele to Alaba about his extra-marital affair. They want Alaba to stop Dele from taking the step they believe will be unfavourable to them. However, having heard the side of Dele, Alaba encourage him to bring the new lady to his house. The reader also laughs at the solution Alaba gives three 'okada men' who come to complain about the inability to buy crash helmet as enforced by the government. Alaba therefore gives the three motorcyclists three clay pot helmets. When they attempt to protest he responds satirically. The playwright, through

this humour, tries to imply that there is always a way out in every challenging situation. Word play is evident in the different tonal interpretation given to the tacit title of Alaba, Alapata Apata. The title roughly means the butcher of the rock', indicating that Alaba abode is the rock. Through his incorrect use of tonal marks, major takes it to be another expression that refers to a person in the quarrying of rock. In one vein, Baby Picasso's and senior Boy's misplacement of tonal marks which makes the expression to mean a traditional honorary title. Soyinka's mastery of language use and literary devices in the Nigerian Context affords him the dexterity with which he communicates his ideas.

The English language, Nigeria pidgin and Yoruba are also effectively employed. The playwright thus making the play accessible to open to all readers and not just students and scholars of literature. Different oral and literary devices are used in the play include proverbs, songs. Some of which reference the marvellous acts of Alaba, the butcher. These oral literary devices especially proverbs, are mostly used by Alaba being the central figure. The teacher also makes use of praise in a number of occasions to compliment Alaba. The commonest among this is 'Alapata to n fie ran dara' and means 'the butcher that make wonders with meat'.

The political contexts typical in West African country is portrayed in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*. The vices and shenanigans of the West African leaders and the plight of their nationals in the 2000s remain a preoccupation Soyinka's remains relevant as an Africanist, a playwright of international repute whose works represent the thematic preoccupation of a dramatist that writes functionally whose, language, style and satire typifies the comedy and tragedy of his people.

### **Tawfiq Al-Hakim and North African Drama**

Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach* is the typical North African Play by a North African playwright. His significant engagements and

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

creative writing are symbolic of his contribution to African Drama Playwriting in contemporary written North African literature is traceable to post-colonial North Africa after nations in the region had officially won their independence from the English and French colonial governments. The early part of this period was dedicated to reconciling the multi-cultural roots of North African nations in colonial drama through decolonisation and a search for indigenous dramatic forms and structures. Playwrights and playwriting in this early stage focused on social and political injustice perpetrated by colonial governments in the region. The significance of North African playwrights and playwriting in contemporary written African literature is seen in the life and writings of the highly celebrated absurdist dramatist, Tewfik Al-Hakim (1898-1987) as well as by Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. Engaging Tewfik Al-Hakim is upon the dominance of his absurdist form, the originality of his thoughts and the peculiarity of thematic preoccupation which remains of global and universal concern.

### **Tewfik Al-Hakim and the Absurd Theatre in Africa Biographical Notice**

Tewfik Al-Hakim (1898-1987), a renowned Egyptian writer and Arabic dramatist, was born in Alexandria, Egypt to an Egyptian judge and a Turkish mother. He conventionally studied law in Cairo and Paris and was attorney to the Public Prosecutor in Egypt before committing fully to the creative writing. He founded contemporary Egyptian drama and was a prominent figure in modern Arabic literature. His writings include volumes of essays, autobiographical writings as well as short stories. Al-Hakim's career extended over a period of sixty years and some of his plays include *Braxa/The Problem of Ruling* (1939), *Solomon the Wise* (1943), *Song of Death* (1952), *The Tree Climber* (1962), *The Sultan's Dilemma* (1964) and *Fate of a Cockroach* (1976). The opening production of the Egyptian Theatre in

1935 was his *Sleepers in the Cave* (AL-Hakim, 1999).

**Absurdist Theatre: *Fate of a Cockroach***

The theatre of absurd is thought to have originated from the writings and philosophical thoughts of Samuel Beckett. The very essence of the absurdist is seen in the frustrations of the characters particularly the king of the cockroaches and the husband who represents the oppressed man. The play opens with a scene in the bedroom and it transports the audience from the bathroom floor, to where cockroaches rules, to a hardworking, middle age couple's morning rituals. When the husband (Adil) begins to relate his personal experiences with that of the king of cockroaches struggle to escape from the bathtub, neither his wife (Samia) nor the family doctor are able to liberate him from his queer state of mind.

Often people strive for freedom and very often these rights are found within their reach but most people are unwilling to pay the price for it Married couples, for example, must seek to live happily and portray this happiness to the entire society regardless if at home, they live miserably and cannot escape their fate. The satirical posture of the playwright lends the reader understanding of his mockery of marriage as a suffocating institution and social order that is expected to be conformed with.

Dominant features observable in the theatre of the absurd theatre include dynamics of wordplay, nightmarish or dreamlike atmospheres often marked with the protagonist's confusion at the irrationality of being and nothingness. Often it is also marked with a plot, a structure and story line that are not plausible and actions that take place in most cases are neither sequential nor meaningful. The plot and structure may not conform with the norm of a beginning an end or a sequence of actions, it is a deliberate staccato, portraying life as disorganised as it can be; the repetitive rendering of lines, portraits of characters who are trapped in unthinkable situations engaging the audience in a deliberate manner to shock them out of their lethargy or

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

question the position they safely assume in the society. The popular posture of writers of the absurd theatre is that life is absurd and meaningless. They often engage the principles of existentialism. Worthy of note is the fact that not all of the elements discussed here necessarily feature in a given play but these elements are observable in different dimensions and proportions in different forms of absurd plays which vary from different cultural perspective.

Al-Hakim in *Fate of a Cockroach* satirically creates a cockroach to symbolise the political disillusionment which exists during the socialist revolutionary regime under Gamal Nasser, who was the Prime Minister of Egypt from 1950-1970. The play may therefore be described as a political allegory. The play is divided into three acts; act one consists of cockroaches that are personified by being given human attributes of a shallow minded ruling class while act two and act three employ human characters. The playwright is able to convincingly juxtapose the attributes of humans particularly the couples in both settings. Just as Esslin and his colleagues were faced with the aftermath of World War II, Al-Hakim also witnessed the coup and the removal of British colonialists from Egypt. During this period, arts thrived in Egypt and women were given the right to vote. Nasser introduced the socialist system of government which enabled the equal distribution of land equally among the Egyptians (Dickson *et al* 2016). There are references for instance to issues that portray a number of failures on the part of governance of the country, the land reform which resulted in depreciation in food production and the implication of the unproductive agrarian reforms executed shortly after the June coup. The fall of the king of cockroaches is synonymous with the failure of the Prime Minister and the poor decisions he had made at that time.

The play also subtly satirises the political goings on at the time and after World War II. Even though Al-Hakim was apolitical, he used the play to indirectly criticise the Prime Minister after placing his predecessor on house arrest. He portrays images of a villain whose life

symbolised struggles and wars and who eventually, suffered a heart attack at the age of 52, which led to his demise he juxtaposes this with the cockroach who appoints himself king, and who ends up struggling in the tub to get freed but is unable to change or stop the inevitable which was his death at the hands of an indifferent human.

Al-Hakim's attempt at portraying some of the things that happened in post 1952 government in Egypt is done through the use of certain features of the absurd theatre. For instance, there are arguments between the couple that engage word play and little comprehension Dominant issues relating to gender issues, particularly in marriage, are also portrayed in both kingdoms. The fear of death is also seen in the animal kingdom, Queen constantly asks her husband to find a lasting solution to the terror of ants and she also demands a leadership position in the governance of the kingdom.

Another observable feature is the involvement of the audience in drawing conclusion from the actions or proposals made by characters in the play, an instance is the self-appointment of the 'King' who thinks himself most qualified because his whiskers are longer than the other roaches.

King: And I am King!

Queen: I'm exactly the same as you – there's no difference between us at all.

King: There is a difference.

Queen: And what, prithe, might this difference be?

King: My whiskers.

Queen: Just as you have whiskers so do I.

King: Yes, but mine are longer than yours... The difference exists—it can be clearly seen by anyone with eyes to see. If you don't believe me, ask the Minister, the priest, the Savant and all those worthy gentlemen connected to the court... (Al-Hakim,1999:2&3)

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

This is a suggestive way of drawing attention to the preposterous but absolute manner in which some positions are assumed in some African communities, an example is the assumption that the oldest person ought to be its king. This occurred in the case of Nasser in Egypt who introduced the socialist system of government and the one party system. The dictatorial style also portrayed in the play is to raise inquisitions and inquires in the minds of the audience.

Furthermore, the protagonist becomes overwhelmed by the chaos and irrationality that characterises his environment. This feature in the play is representative of the characters of Adil in the play who praises the cockroach unrelenting effort as it continues to fight its way in order to come out of the bath tub. Adil expresses his displeasure over Samia's action of wanting to kill the cockroach.

Most African societies are afflicted with irrational implementation of ineffective policies. The masses are usually the focus of the campaign but despite various projects supposedly carried out by the leaders to provide masses with amenities that promote better living, they still hoard these amenities, refuse to carry out the project, and enrich themselves instead. Egypt suffered this during Nasser's reign. Despite his claim of land reforms, these lands under socialist measure were in large scale under productive and unproductive and went unused. Through the portrait of a dishonest society like Egypt which lacks the distinction between fantasy and reality, which was highly reflective of the post 1952 government, Al-Hakim mirrors some of the shortcoming of various governmental regimes in Africa.

The fact the playwrights and playwriting in contemporary written North African literature started emerging upon the independence of North Africa after nations from the imperialistic suzerainty of English and French colonial governments made significant difference in the drama of Africa. The outset of this era of independence experienced efforts of the playwrights, through their plays, to get rid of the multi-cultural roots of North African nations in colonial drama

through a search for indigenous dramatic forms and structures. The playwrights wrote on social and political injustice perpetrated by the colonialists in the region. Subsequently after independence, the playwrights began to focus on the postcolonial realities of the region. Tewfik Al-Hakim and Naguib Mahfouz remained a leading dramatist in this regard.

### **Athol Fugard and South African Drama**

The significance of Athol Fugard and his contributions to African playwriting is seen in the essence of his personality as a playwright, his nationalist cause. Being a South African, his thematic preoccupation and other concerns typify the concerns to the Southern African nationalist and contemporary writer. Athol Fugard's South African nationalism and his emphatic anti-apartheid campaign is the concern of this engagement of his Sizwe *Bansi is Dead*, as a nationalist protest.

Inquiries into Southern African literary output usually focuses on the South African example. The representativeness of literature from this region is instructive because of the political experience of the country and because of its direct impact on the literary output as well as life of its writers. Until recently, this African region was a bedevilled with political and domestic challenges for the black nationals who constituted the majority of the population. The apartheid system, which was the operational system of governance for decades privileged the white minority and enslaved the black.

The system formulated and overseen by the White nationals was a system of injustice, inequality and inequity against the blacks of the country. Simply put, it was a system with racial discrimination as its underlying influence. What the blacks and coloured in South Africa embarked on therefore were campaigns against this unfavourable and inordinately partial system. Black and coloured creative writers, including playwrights and dramatists contributed to the protest and discourse through their creativity. These playwrights portrayed in

their works the manner in which the system worked against the survival of the blacks and favoured the self-centred interest and morbid desires of the whites. These plays also reinforced the resilience and unusual aplomb with which the oppressed blacks resisted the evil tides of the period and were able to sustain a sense of optimism. Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* captures the realities—domestic/family displacement, lack of access to (standard) education, lack of economic independence among many other common and civil rights—of this period. Like many other such plays, the play portrays the misery of the blacks and the manner in which they existed during the apartheid regime. Most of the plays written in South Africa at the time foreshadowed a futuristic hope of a better life for the blacks. It remains a celebration of the resilience and determination with which the blacks survived the oddities of that era.

### **Athol Harold Lannigan Fugard: Biographical Notice**

South African dramatist, actor and director, Athol H. L. Fugard, was born June 11, 1932 in Middelburg, South Africa. Fugard was best known for his portrayal of apartheid in his works and for revealing without apologies the consequences of apartheid on the natives of South Africa. His fame rose internationally with *The Blood Know* (1963) which was staged in 1961 and produced on television in 1967 in London and New York City respectively. This play was the first in what he called “The Family Trilogy” which was completed with *Hello and Goodbye* (1965) and *Boesman and Lena* (1969) and published as *Three Port Elizabeth Plays* (1974). Also in 1972, he published *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island* and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* all under the title *Statements: Three Plays*. In 1977, he published *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo* in *Dimetos and Two Early Plays*. All these plays, alongside others like *Dimetos* (1977), *A Lesson from Aloes* (1981), “*Master Harold*”...and the Boys (1982) and *The Road to Mecca* (1985), fell within the apartheid era and some of them were later filmed. After the abrogation of apartheid laws in 1990-91,

Fugard's plays have included *Playland* (1992), *Valley Song* (1996), *The Captain's Tiger* (1997), *Sorrows and Rejoicings* (2002), *Victory* (2009) and *Train Driver* (2010). Fugard was honoured with the Tony Award for lifetime achievement in 2011 and the Japan Art Association's 2014 *Praemium Imperiale* prize for theatre/film (Tikkanen 2018).

### ***Sizwe Bansi is Dead as Nationalist Protest***

The text of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* by Athol Fugard bears the names of John Kani and Winston Ntshona as co-authors and also with both names appearing as the members of the three man cast. The playwright laments about the South African racial discrimination and segregation created by the apartheid system. The thematic preoccupation of this satirical tragi-comedy is to portray the reality of the apartheid policy on the Black indigenous majority being ruled by the white minority in South Africa. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is a play that portrays the character's idiosyncrasies and experience through monologues and flashbacks.

The play which is also a social and historical drama is based on the life experiences of the blacks in South Africa. This in itself, makes the setting, the theme and the plot of the play plausible. Fugard moved by these occurrences wrote the play on the basis of his experiences while serving as a clerk at the Native Commissioner's law court in Johannesburg. During this period, identity books that were restrictive in terms of movement and employment were made compulsory for every black above eighteen years of age. Fugard witnessed the consequences of the creation of this law as black offenders were jailed in large numbers.

The 1950s witnessed the passing into law, the pass laws; this was also an influence in the writing of the play which also influenced the writing of the play. The pass laws, enacted in 1797, were typically internal passport systems that mandated South African black sixteen-year-olds and those above to have a passbook as a form of identification on them. These laws were purposive and they achieved

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

the goals of those who created it as they segregated the populace, the movements and mobility of the South African blacks, and was a form of stratification in allocating migrant labour. The pass laws were employed as an oppressive tool against the South African blacks and were effective in keeping them away from accessing areas exclusively reserved for the whites. Racial discrimination through apartheid is the dominant thematic preoccupation portrayed in Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. None the less there are several other minor themes in the play and they include survival syndrome, identity as a national issue and identity crisis, life and death are also juxtaposed as archetypal themes, hope and hopelessness are also juxtaposed in like manner.

The apartheid system was the brain child of the National Party that ruled in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. Under this dispensation the rights of the majority black inhabitant became limited and Afrikaner minority rule was promoted. This policy established the discrimination that became the bane of the life of the South African blacks and their white counterparts. The policy promoted the subjugation that turned the blacks into 'second class citizens' on their fatherland. The portrayal of apartheid and racial prejudice along its raving consequences is the dominant preoccupation of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. The play paints the picture of the people characterised by hardship, acute suffering and strife. The psychological trauma the South African blacks suffered was depicted as oppression and segregation in the hands of their white counterparts which was unfortunately legalised by the system of government enforced.

The play is in many ways, a protest to combat the apartheid regime which was the political setting as at the time it was published. Hence, the theme of the racial discrimination runs throughout the fabric of the play. Fugard also employs his characters as a vehicle for driving his position on these national issues. These characters portray the sufferings and agonies borne by the subjugated and oppressed Blacks in South Africa.

Styles typifies this as seen in his, dramatic monologue at the beginning of the play which gives the reader an insight into the plight of an average South African Blacks within the system. Styles, a photographer, is intelligent and literate. His comments on the issues he reads of in the newspapers are marked with humour through his monologue the audience understand the details of his experience as a worker in an automobile plant. There he is exploited, dehumanised and oppressed. The order is for them to work to generate maximum profit. His experience with Ford Motors is typically representative of the structure of a capitalist system, his responses to the car plant expansion reflects his full understanding of the system. The impression one gets is that the South African Whites treat the Black men they employ as slaves or inanimate beings whose sole existence should enrich the life and wellbeing of the Whites.

The playwright portrays the Black Africans as being certain that the White community is callous and inhumane. He depicts a setting that indicates that they know what is right and they refuse to do it, the hypocritical stance of Whites when the 'Big Baas' visits is also instructive. The basic and vital signs that should be put up to ensure the safety of the workers are not hung up until 'Big Baas' is expected for routine inspection. Styles is also exposed to work related hazards and is unprotected for six years because he loses his apron and asbestos gloves. It is clear that safety of the Black workers is neither vital nor important to their employers. The workers are also expected to appear joyful; they are to sing and putting on a joyful countenance while they are indeed miserable. The South African blacks are oppressed with backbreaking work, they are practically driven off the cliff to maximise profit for their cruel employers put up a posture that covers their inhumanity and brutality to their workers.

Styles, a figurative character, was sired by a man who was also a victim of racial discrimination. He had served meritoriously during the Second World War but had been alienated upon his return. He was stripped of his uniform and given a bicycle and a snuff box for his

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

efforts while his white counterparts were celebrated as national heroes. This experience is a fundamental influence and it serves as a cause of a deep rooted ideology that guides world view and his relationship with the White South Africans.

Style, the activities he carries out in his studio and his battle with cockroaches symbolise a number of issues and many interpretations have emerged from these symbols. The studio and the activities that take place in it is seen to be representative of South Africa and its many struggles. The battle against the parasitic occupation of the roaches is the yet to be productive struggle to rid South Africa of the ruling White minority. The insecticide 'Doom', the cat represents the feeble and the more aggressive efforts made respectively by the blacks against the whites who are referred to in this context as vermin.

The recurring theme here is that the South African Blacks keep making concerted efforts to be free. The poor diet of the cat is also a metaphoric manner of referring to the deprivation of the Black citizen, the segregation and stratification of the Blacks leading to them living in despicable conditions.

Sizwe Bansi also typifies the theme of racial discrimination. The first impression one gets at his first appearance is a character that is contemplative; he is portrayed as shy as well as hesitant. Fugard creates a character that somewhat represents the state of mind of the average or most Black South Africans during the period. The indication is that the people are harassed, subdued and subjugated.

Bansi lacks formal education and thinks it is a disservice to him. He is defensive about his information and embarrassed when he must reveal it. What is perceptible is the fact that the restrictive laws in the country made it difficult or impossible for the average Black South African, at the time the work depicted, to acquire formal education (Fugard, 1972:21).

Sizwe Bansi is therefore a typical example of a character that is racially discriminated against. He seeks a land full of milk and honey and decides to leave King William's town to Port Elizabeth. To his

dismay, like that of other Black South Africans before him that he is not qualified nor permitted to stay there (25). His passbook is his limitation and it states that he is 'endorsed to King William's town' (25).

Sizwe Bansi and Bantu are used by the author as voices lamenting over the numerous restrictions placed on the Black South African. Sizwe remains in a dilemma; his passbook does not endorse his stay in his supposed land of promise, and he cannot destroy it because doing so will put him in a precarious situation with the authorities. We are told that the only place the Blacks are permitted to work without particular adherence to the pass laws are in the mines. The determining factors here are purely economic; the seemingly indulgent posture is because of the love of the gold being mined. The Blacks who work in the mines are constantly in danger of sudden death because the rocks do fall and trap or kill the miners whose lives are of value as far as the whites are concerned.

Bantu's experience is used to depict the harrowing realities of racial discrimination. He is a young literate man who fully understands the working of the apartheid system he lives in. We learn that although he is married with a child, he is deprived of the joy of living with his family. He works as a live-in domestic help while his children live with his wife's mother. This aspect of Bantu's life represents the breakdown of the families in South Africa as a result of apartheid. Bantu's marriage is portrayed as a model atypical of the experience of the average black family. It is evident that apartheid has a devastating effect on the social structure and family system which also has its implication for the society at large. The family, which is supposed to be one unit, becomes fragmented to enable the individual members of the society cope better within the apartheid regime and its social structure.

Bantu is also a victim of this law enacted by the South African Whites to make the life unbearable because of the challenges of accommodation in Port Elizabeth, his being born there

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

notwithstanding. The theme of racial discrimination continually recurs in *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*. There are, however, various sub themes besides this major thematic preoccupation.

Identity crisis, a vital sub theme in the play of the play is portrayed in the quest for identity and the loss of identity that affects most of the major characters. Due to racial discrimination, most South African Blacks sense of self-respect and self-confidence are eroded. The oppression of South African Black nationals was essentially to strip them of their self-esteem, dignity and pride. Styles evidently speaks the mind of the author as depicted in the authorial comments. To him, identity means several things; his decision to become a photographer and own his own photographic studio is informed by his desire forged a new identity for himself. Through his dramatic monologue at the beginning of the play, we understand Styles quits the factory job because he realises the futility of spending most of his life working for the South African Whiteman.

Come on Styles, you are a monkey, man and you know it. Run Up and down the whole bloody day! Your life doesn't belong to you. You've sold it. For what Styles? Gold wristwatch in twenty- five years when they sign you off because you are too old for anything anymore? I was right. I took a good look at my life. What did I see? A bloody Circus Monkey! Selling most of his time on this earth to another man. Out of every twenty-four hours I could only properly call mine the six when I was sleeping. What the hell is the use of that?( 1972:9)

He tells his father that he would rather be an entrepreneur than a tool in the hands of the oppressors, that he would have a sense of being a man as well as self-respect for himself (10). This denotes his desire to define his image and create a new identity for himself that is free from influences of racial discrimination. Fully convinced that there is a

huge 'generation gap' Styles defies his father's scorning at photography as a type of job as well as his father's perception about manhood as simply being based on circumcision and the possession of a wife to pursue his dreams. Styles' dialogue with his father also portray him as a representative of a younger generation of South African Blacks who are courageous and determined to cast off the identity or lack of it that has been forced on them by the oppressive South African Whites.

Styles is portrayed as a character mindful of his identity and who dresses the part as a symbol of self-respect. He is an attentive dresser whose dressing does not only carry a stamp of his identity, but also to add an overall aura of dignity and self-confidence to his person. It appears that Styles makes conscious efforts to his keep appearances in order to earn respect. Through his work, he also redefines and creates the identity of the South African Black who comes to his studio to take pictures. In the course of his dramatic monologue at the beginning of the play, he describes how some people walk in and out of his studio for photo-shoots. He can understand that the encounters they have and the significance to these individuals makes the place a temporary nirvana. Styles' studio is a place where the South African Blacks can have a reprieve from the bleak realities of their society and also enjoy a brief moment in which they are anything they desire to be. Styles himself refers to the studio as a "strong room of dreams," a place where the South African blacks can dream, live their dreams and explore their own unique identity, even if it is only for a few moments. Styles represent the revitalisation of identity and heritage of the South African blacks.

On the other hand, Sizwe Bansi represents the essence, as well as signifies the absolute loss of identity suffered by the South African Blacks within the apartheid system. Even the title of the play denotes this theme of total loss of identity as a result of racial discrimination. In the play, the playwright simply calls Sizwe 'man.' He does this to emphasise on the fact that Sizwe stands for the South African Blacks

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

who lost all sense of self-esteem due to oppression.

Sizwe lacks a name which is crucial to establishing the identity of an individual, and this is the same for the blacks in apartheid South Africa. They have been so thoroughly dehumanised, subjugated and oppressed that they no longer know who they are. When Sizwe first appears in the play, he is described as wearing 'an ill-fitting new double breasted suit...his manner is hesitant and shy' (17). The suit Sizwe is wearing is symbolic. Although the audiences doesn't know it at this time, he has just taken on another person's identity and he carries his identity the same way a man would wear a clothes that are not made to suit him. The identity he's carrying is not his, and it is as ill-fitting as his clothes.

Sizwe, we are told, eventually loses his identity and has to take on a dead man's own. He resorts to desperate actions to ensure that he is allowed to stay in Port Elizabeth. Initially, Sizwe displays his Black man's pride in his name when he tells Buntu of his unwillingness to let go of his name. Buntu, is however, quick to remind him that his passbook is more important than his name. Without a legal one, he cannot work or take care of his family (34-39).

Through Sizwe, Fugard presents the extent to which the black man is dehumanised in South Africa. Their passbooks were the passes with which they were recognised and allowed existence. As important and as symbolic as a name is the name of a South African black held no value and was therefore inconsequent. The South African Whites, in refusing to acknowledge the humanity and the existence of the South African blacks, gradually and increasingly caused disillusionment; a dominant factor in the misery of the South African Black was existence without identity. They suffered this void and accept the loss of their uniqueness and individuality as a way of life in order to cope in the harsh apartheid system.

Buntu also typifies the theme of identity loss. He is an educated black man who understands the workings of the apartheid system. Buntu represents the new and younger generation of the South

Africans that is no longer content to just sit down and take whatever the South African whites dole out to them. He represents a new generation of blacks in South Africa who dares to use the apartheid system to their own advantage. This is seen when he exchanges the passport in Sizwe Bansi's passbook for that of a dead man's and vice versa. This scene portrays him as a smart man and quick thinker.

However, he also represents the resignation of the black man to the loss of their identity. Through him, Fugard portrays the meaninglessness of life under apartheid for the South African Blacks. When Sizwe complains that he does not want to live his life as another person's ghost, he retorts,

...wasn't Sizwe Bansi a ghost... when the white man looked at you in the labour bureau, what did he see? A man with dignity or a bloody passbook with... numbers? Isn't that a ghost? ... all I'm saying is be a real ghost, if that is what they want, if that what they've turned us to (38).

Life and Death are also portrayed as being symbolic in the South African context being captured. The concepts of life and death are interwoven in the play. Most of the South African Blacks portrayed are callously treated and oppressed by the Whites that they believe they can only find a lasting reprieve in death. The location of Styles' studio beside funeral parlour helps to place emphasis on this theme.

Styles' studio is symbolic. It represents a place where the Blacks go in order to get temporary relief from the harsh realities of apartheid. It is an emblem of life of freedom for the South African Blacks. In his words,

this is a strong room of dreams. The dreamer? My people. The simple people, who you will never find mentioned in the history books who ever get statues, erected to them... people who would be forgotten, if it wasn't for Styles (38).

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Thus, Styles' freedom is not just an emblem of life; it records and relives the lives and dreams of the South African Blacks. Through his camera, Styles immortalises them forever and allows them to live their dreams for the brief periods they spend in his studio. He translates their dreams on paper; thus giving them a form of immortality. An example is the photos of an old man and his family taken by Styles after which the old man dies two days later. The man's family have reasons to smile through their tears because they have his image to remember him with.

Styles' studio affords the Blacks opportunity to forget about the seeming meaninglessness of their existence in the shadows for the few moments and allows them to be happy, confident people with hopes and dreams. Thus, Styles' studio and even Styles' himself represent life and hope for the South African Blacks in an unyielding society.

Dhlamini's funeral parlour on the other hand, represents death. The Blacks believe that death is the only escape from their pitiable condition in South Africa. Buntu touches on this belief when he tells the story of Outa Jacob, a Black man who suffered a series of tragedies in his life before he eventually dies. He also goes on to say that the only time they will find peace is when they dig holes and press their faces down in the earth this statement mirrors the belief of the South African Blacks in the apartheid system.

However, Fugard's placement of Styles' studio beside Dharamini's funeral parlour is symbolic. Even though it is Dharamini that informs Styles of the vacancy of the space that becomes his studio, Fugard by so doing juxtaposes the imagery of life and death, the impression he creates is that the South African Blacks have two choices; life or death. They can deliberately choose to live life with a sense of freedom and happiness or continue to live the meaningless life where they are treated as ghosts.

The author by this juxtaposition covertly suggests that until the South African Blacks make a conscious effort to rid the society of the oppressive minority White rulers, racial discrimination will continue

to be a problem in South Africa.

The life and a play of the South African playwright, Athol Fugard's life and play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, typify the South African experience during apartheid. Athol Fugard purposively wrote as an anti-apartheid South African playwright and his play, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* a symbol of nationalist protest.

An examination of literary engagements, specifically dramatic and theatrical, in Southern Africa in contemporary written African literature is no doubt incomplete without the example of South Africa. This is because the nation's long experience of the racist government system of apartheid against the black majority and coloured spurred the dramatic creativity of this class of South Africans.

Black and coloured playwrights and dramatists thus reacted to this system through their creative capacity by capturing how this system worked against the survival of the blacks and for the self-centred interest and morbid desires of the white minority. They also use their plays to appreciate the resilience with which the oppressed blacks have subsisted in the evil tides of the period and create some sense of optimism. Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is one of the plays that readily capture the realities—domestic/family displacement, lack of access to (standard) education, lack of economic independence among many other common and civil rights—of this period. Like many other plays written in the period, the play presents how the blacks of the country have been reduced to nothing by the apartheid system. It also projects some better time to come and celebrates the resilience and determination with which the blacks have been survived the period.

## Chapter 5

# Tragic Drama in Africa

Traditionally, tragedy is regarded as a narrative with a sad and sorrowful ending. In drama it is particularly characterised by the death or deaths of significant or prominent characters. These characters would have been playing critical roles in the drama text to warrant the empathy and emotions as well as the pathos experienced by the audience or the reader, roles in the. African tragedy is perhaps the Africaness of the characters, the theme and setting that portray the African milieu. This does not necessarily differ from the traditional elements and features of tragic drama. Centring on Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* and Clark's *Song of a Goat* one identifies the peculiarities of African tragic drama by examining at the deployment of different elements and markers of African tragedy in the plays.

Tragedy is arguably the oldest form of drama and theatre that is still surviving till today. The history of Western drama explains that it is as old as theatre itself which, as a complex and organised art back then in Greece, is at least 2500 years old (Brockett and Ball,2004:3). This dramatic form is that which Aristotelian dramatic aesthetics celebrates and centres on. To Aristotle, any form of drama outside tragedy is too banal, lacks seriousness and above all, is not worthy of critical examination. In this sense therefore, tragedy started its evolvment as the hallmark of dramatic attainment. It is a play about a character from the topmost echelon of the society—kings, queens, warriors, and other persons of noble birth. So was its audience. Its language is sublime and it is supposed to have a specific structure in

terms of place, time and action. This is known as unity (of place, time and action). The evolution of this form cuts across cultures, spaces and times in the course of which some of its elements are modified, adapted ignored or sustained. Thus, it has given rise universal perceptions in diverse cultures. In Africa, it follows after the worldview and belief system of Africa and Africans; hence the existence of African tragic drama.

The word tragedy is from the Greek work *tragoidia* which means song of goat. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as

...the imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being used in separate parts of the play; in form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.  
(K.Arvanitakis,1982)

Expressed in this definition include the establishment of tragedy as a dramatic genre—it imitates an *action* and it is clearly stated to be a *play*—and the features of this genre in terms of its structure and content.

The structure is in its completeness and magnitude (the three unities—of place, time and action) while the content is expressed through its seriousness, use of embellished language and artistic ornaments and purgation. The seriousness of tragedy in Aristotelian aesthetics is in its tense conflict while purgation or cleansing (catharsis) comes up as the conflict starts abating as a result of the fall of the tragic hero. By embellished language and artistic ornaments, Aristotle is, among others, foregrounding the sublime nature of literature. That is, aesthetic and stylistic consideration must come to the fore in a tragedy. This is also a way of confirming that the major characters in a tragedy belong to the highest ranking in the society. Today, tragedy still remains recognised as a type of drama. Although

some critics have tried to widen it as a literary work dealing with tragic event and having an unhappy ending in relation to a character or group of characters, tragedy remains peculiarly dramatic just as fiction remains a genre of prose literature and not just any literary work (drama and poetry) that is based on imagination.

In African tragic drama, some of these features are modified, sustained or ignored by playwrights just as is the case in modern drama in other parts of the world. For instance, the central character in African tragedy is not necessarily someone of noble background but an important member of the society in his own right and there may be no adherence to completeness and magnitude through the three unities. In the light of this therefore, African tragedy is worth being studied and understood in its own right through representative African tragic plays.

### **J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* as African Tragedies**

In examining both plays as African tragedy, there would be an attempt at discussing the unifying features seen in both plays. Having suggested that there are no clear-cut features or established conventions defining African tragedy an attempt will be made at comparatively discussing the unifying features of J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death*. The absence of 'universal truth' in spite of the peculiarity the African belief system or non-conformity is a remarkable feature of African drama. For African tragedy ascertained as being African, it must be written by an African and its thematic preoccupation should be African. J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* and Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* are portrayed as African tragedies by their settings, dramatis personae in the members of cast and the thematic thrusts. The Africaness portrayed in the texts reflect African culture, traditions, belief systems and worldviews, and the playwrights are Africans.

### **Setting, Plot and Thematic Preoccupation in *Song of a Goat* and *Song of Death***

Both *Song of a Goat* and *Song of Death* are set in Africa. *Song of a Goat* is influenced largely by the Nigerian Izon tradition and philosophy which holds that a man determines his fate on earth, not the gods. If a man discovers that his fate is unfavourable, he can seek the advice of the gods through the oracle on how to change it but tragedy only occurs when after consulting the oracle, the petitioner refuses to heed the counsel and instructions of the gods and the deities. This is why the overwhelming outrage pride of Zifa and Ebere in out rightly refusing to consider and in rejecting the counsel and instruction given to them by the gods on how to change their fate leads to their misery. In Izon religious beliefs, choices are free and any consequence can be reduced or altered through propitiation to the gods in atonement for wrong actions (Clark, 1983).

#### ***Song of Death* is set in Egypt.**

As established in the pre-Islamic account of Jahiliyah (period of ignorance), Arabs tended to be unforgiving, revengeful and violent. The story discusses the Upper Egyptian anomalous ideology of seeking revenge for a family member's death. The notion that citizens of Upper Egypt can spend a lifetime and include that of a subsequent generation on a vengeful vendetta intended to avenge the murder of a loved one or relative is common knowledge. The blood continues to flow as a counter response so long there remain brave and courageous offspring of those who had been killed in like fashion and the cycle continues until someone becomes sick or tired of the needless killings and vengeance done out of ignorance or blindness. As seen in plays, it is understood that the different African societies from which the texts emanate from the influence the plot of the texts. Worthy of note is the fact that these themes are archetypal and are found in world literature. The plot development gives us a clue to the cause and effect of actions that makes up the story of the plays (Al-Hakim, 1999).

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

In *Song of a Goat*, Zifa is rendered impotent through the curse of the gods because he brought the corpse of his father home too early thereby polluting the cosmic wellbeing of his community. The father was struck with leprosy by the gods because he killed within his clan, a taboo among the Izon.

In Tewfik Al- Hakim's *Song of Death*, Alwan has been destined to avenge the death of his father by taking vengeance on Suwelian Thawi, the murderer of his father. He was taken to Cairo on account of this at the age of two to be trained as a butcher. However, Alwan joined Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This, supposedly in this context, marks the beginning of his misfortune.

The dominant themes in these texts are woven around the African issue of infertility and impotence and vengeance in Clark's *Song of a Goat* and murder and vengeance in Al- Hakim's *Song of Death*. The issue of infertility is a crucial issue in African society as seen in *Song of a Goat*. Like we mentioned earlier, culture and traditions usually influence African tragedy and this is portrayed with the issue of infertility in this; the Izon society believed that having just a child is as good as having no child. Clark's interpretation of the Izon posture towards infertility is that reproduction is taken as a serious matter, a matter of life and death, he avers that a man without an offspring is neither loved nor accepted. Zifa's problem is however compounded because he is not only infertile but became impotent. The attitude of the Izon community and the diagnosis of the problem in the text is rooted in both.

The theme of murder, revenge and vengeance is portrayed in *Song of Death*. This play portrays the belief of the Arab society in an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. They see the inability to take revenge as a very shameful act. Asakir represents a typical example of this society by resolving to kill her only son because of his refusal to avenge his father's death, the reason he was sent to Cairo. Other themes raised in the texts include the evil of incest, the evil passion for vengeance and the conflict between old and modern tradition.

### **Tragic Flaws, Form and Language in Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* and J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat***

The inherent weaknesses and sentiment which the protagonists are given to also makes their unpleasant ends unavoidable. On the one hand, Asakir's insatiable desire for vengeance destroys her and her family beyond what Suwelian Tahawi enmity could have. She, with deliberateness, wipes out her offspring, and by so doing brings an end to family line. This is rather tragic than hateful because like Sophocles and Elektra, she is true to the logic of tradition that creates her.

On the other hand, Zifa and Ebere's overwhelming pride to accept their fate as posed to them leads to their destruction. Ebere rejects the advice of the Masseur who tells her to re-knot marriage tie with her husband's younger brother by observing a sacrifice with the material for it being a goat, cowries, a big gourd of palm wine and kolanuts. The sacrifice is to be made to the gods so that she might give birth and be satiated as a married woman. Zifa who is made impotent by the gods cannot accept the reality of the condition; he rejects the counsel of the priest.

The play, *Song of Death*, is written in acts and scenes while *Song of a Goat* is written in movement which can be categorised as one act of the four scenes. This set in particular the text as type of African tragedy. *Song of Death* has a prosaic presentation of its ideas while *Song of a Goat* is written in verse and embedded with the use of metaphorical lines. In *Song of a Goat*, the playwright's use of indirect devices and riddles add riches to the Masseur's formal poetic languages and heightens the tension of the play. More so, his use of imagery and symbolism makes his thought more profound and satisfying for those who study and understand his imaginative use of language.

Orukore uses symbolic language to convey her thought. She is a character who is doomed by the gods to see vision but will not be believed because of her overwhelming vanity and pride in her beauty and high positioning in the society. In movement two she foretells the

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

disaster that will befall her family through illicit love affairs between Ebere and Tonye. Her cry that she hears the cry of a goat is symbolically stating that somebody will be killed in the family because goat is a sacrificial animal.

In drama the significance of characters is of utmost importance. For instance, a character's voice and lines are critical, very often, they are the authorial comments of the dramatist or playwright as the case may be. The playwright deliberately creates the characters achieve his or her goals. In tragic plays in particular, the portraiture is can be achieved via the description of the looks of the character(s) the actions and inactions of the character(s), the ideology of the character(s) and the opinions and views of other character(s) about the character(s).

Examining the character types in Tawfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* and J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* lend more credence to the characterology of tragedy in this context.

Asakir is a dominant tragic character in the *Song of Death*. She a peasant is 'reared' in the old vendetta tradition. This ideology has been ingrained in her that she has no other way of life. To her, family honour is the supreme honour. Therefore, the loss of respect in the family and village is the greatest shame and ultimate misfortune. Asakir's long drawn patience is tied to the restoration of the honour her family lost by the murder of her husband. Her utmost desire is that Alwan, her son will be the avenger of her husband's death and restorer of family honour but he disappoints her. Her decision to eliminate him is rash but satisfying within the context of avenging her husband's shameful death. She apparently regrets that decision because she is the greatest loser in the final analysis.

Alwan is fated to suffer misfortune. Raised in Cairo, he is under the tutelage of scholars and this makes his world view and belief pattern conflict with his mother's and the societal expectation of him. He is portrayed as a typical idealist young student in Cairo, and as a young man who believes in brotherhood not vengeance. His falling

short of his mother's expectations leads to his death. He represents the conflicts between the traditional belief pattern and the liberation and freedom education gives.

Sumeida behaves true to type, because he is reared within the unproductive and outdated and destructive ideology of vengeance which is in sharp contrast to what Alwan represents. He is also a tragic figure. Though the play does not portray this, Sumedia's punishment is implied.

Zifa in *Song of a Goat* is a fisherman. He becomes impotent and infertile having been cursed by the gods for disobeying them by bringing the corpse of his father into the community for funeral earlier than the stipulated period. He is punished for contaminating the cosmic well-being of his community particularly because his father was struck with leprosy by the gods because he killed within his clan, a taboo among the Izon. Ebere, Zifa's wife becomes frustrated because of her husband's sudden and unexplained impotency which eventually brings about her consistent outrage and eventual incestuous relationship with Tonye, her husband's younger brother. The tragedy becomes heightened because of the consequences which leads to complete destruction of the family. Orukorere is Zifa's half-possessed aunt. She is cursed by the sea god of the land to see vision, which no one believes because of her refusal to be her handmaiden. As a girl she did not consider the preferment worthy of her beauty and status.

Tonye is Zifa's younger brother assistant fisherman. He hangs himself rather than allow his brother to kill him after he discovers his incestuous relationship between him and his wife.

Masseur plays the role of a priest, family doctor, confessor and gynaecologist. He relays the cause of Zifa's problem and gives the solution that is required of him by the gods. He assures Ebere that she is not the source of her problem, but the husband and that she can still give birth if she will agree to be betrothed to her husband's younger brother Tonye after observing the sacrifice specified by the gods.

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Dode is Zifa and Ebere's only child. He watches helplessly as the people he loves destroy themselves. Dode, like Tonye, is a victim of circumstances; a goat, in that he is also sacrificed for personal happiness of his mother. Dode is the figure that arouses pity in the reader for his life is changed from happiness to misery through no fault of his.

### **Elements of African Tragedy in the Plays**

In most African societies, a man's fate is believed to be influenced by the choice of a man. This is often influenced by the temperament of the man. This is portrayed in the African tragedy through the apparent freedom of choice exhibited by the tragic figures invariably this dominates the realities surrounding them.

For instance, in *Song of Death* in which Asakir, the tragic heroine, could have sought for justice through the civic law as suggested by Alwan. The situation would have been different in the *Song of a Goat*, if the tragic figures chose the option suggested by the Masseur, which is customary.

In a typical African milieu, there are mystical beliefs in supernatural interventions. African tragedy is often laden with overpowering presence of the supernatural. For instance, in *Song of the Goat*, Zifa's family is cursed by the gods. Zifa is plagued with impotency for violating the conduct of the society. His impotency fostered his doom and the societal belief held by the Izon people (setting of the play) that man's inability to mate or procreate is of serious magnitude which drives the play's tragic course.

The societal factor only applies to *Song of Death* set in the Upper Egypt where inability to revenge is seen as a shameful act. Revenge is not seen as a shameful act; rather, it is an act taken seriously by this people. In this situation, justice should have been primal aim of Asakir in avenging her husband's death, which could have been made possible through the civic law, but the prevailing social orientation and process of revenge is of primal motive. Revenge, the social

misnomer in the play, numbs the tragic heroine's senses to choose a better option this triggers the actualization of the tragic conflict.

Tragedy is often justified through the lapses of the tragic personae imbued with the will and freedom defined or limited by both tragic flaws as well as external forces (society and supernatural forces).

In African tragedy there is a cathartic representation of the suffering of man inflicts on other men or him. In *Song of Death*, Asakir is seen inflicting societal biased judgement on her son which is results from the murder of her husband while in *Song of a Goat*, Zifa and Ebere's refusal to take the counsel given by the representative of the gods makes them to suffer the consequences of their inactions and their actions. The character of Tonye, an innocent boy is comparable with Alwan's in *Song of Death*. In essence, the tragic characters archetypically drive the conflict in African tragic plays. These tragic figures are portrayed as weak in that they are unequal to the challenges posed by the universe, which is portrayed as a calamitous place. Zifa in *Song of a Goat* commits suicide; this shows his inability to bear the burden of the calamities that has befallen him. Alwan in *Song of Death* who chooses not to avenge the death of his father left his home. This is does not necessarily conform to the 'Aristotelian' ideology of tragedy or any other idea that poses that the tragic hero is brave even when he is not.

In these two plays, tragic course is seen permeating from one individual to another. Tragedy revolves around a character and sucks in other characters who were in involved. In *Song of a Goat*, Zifa's father killed a member of his clan, so he is cursed by the gods with leprosy and Zifa's efforts to lay the soul of his father to rest before the appointed time attracts the curse of impotency. Orukorere's unwillingness to become the priestess of the oracle leads to her drunkenness and the misfortune of foretelling the future without being believed.

Alwan's father in *Song of Death* was murdered by Suwelian Tahawi because he believes that Alwan's father killed his father. The

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

vengeful act led to the death of Alwan whose innocence is not enough to save him from the recurring tragic trend.

The African worldview is comparable in several ways with worldviews in other continents, however, an understanding of the African worldview will aid the understanding of some universal elements, theme, character portraiture that characterise African Tragedy For instance, the audience or readers of these plays should be familiar with the Izon community to have a better understanding of *Song of a Goat* and with Upper Egypt for better understanding of *Song of Death*.

Tragedy is as old as theatre itself which, as a complex and organised art is at least 2500 years old. Therefore, it is the oldest form of drama and theatre that is still surviving till today. In fact, tragedy began its evolvement as the hallmark of dramatic attainment. To Aristotle, any form of drama outside tragedy is too banal, lacks seriousness and above all, not worthy of critical examination. It is a play about a character from the topmost echelon of the society-kings, queens, warriors, and other persons of noble birth. So was its audience. Its language is embellished and ornamental, and it is supposed to have a specific structure in terms of place, time and action. This is known as unity-of place, time and action.

The evolution of this dramatic form is across cultures, spaces and times in the course of which some of its elements are modified, adopted or sustained. Thus, it has given rise to perceptions of the tragedy form universally. In Africa, it also goes in line with the worldview and belief system of Africans; hence the existence of African tragic drama with its own nature and peculiarities. In Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Song of Death* and J.P Clark's *Song of a Goat* are features of African tragic drama. Both are largely influenced by the African worldview and continue to influence the African worldview.

## Chapter 6

# Critical Movements and Ideology I

### **Nationalism in African Drama: The Soyinka and Ngugi Example**

Nationalism is a dominant ideology in Africa that foregrounds the thematic preoccupation, motif and poetics of African drama from the beginning of the postcolonial phase. Examples of dramatists that have consistently explored this as an ideology in their plays abound. However, the symbolic plays of two major African nationalist playwrights: Wole Soyinka's *A Dance in the Forest* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I will Marry when I want* rallies into prominence in this chapter.

Nationalism undoubtedly is borne out of the patriotic feelings of modern African playwrights for their nations. They identify themselves with their various nationalist problems facing their nations and nationals. This is reinforced because sharing a common history and background, interests and goals engenders a desire to free themselves and liberate their nations from the cultural, social, economic and political domination and imperialism of colonialist nations and (subsequently) resist the neo-colonial inclinations of postcolonial African leaders. Nationalist plays in Africa are evidently laced with the urgent desire to bring about a progressive and a rapid change in Africa a thought that dominated the pre independent and post independent writings in Africa.

The works of nationalist playwrights are preoccupied with the evils done to Africa, its culture, economy and physical and social space through the disguise of civilization and enlightenment

intended through colonialism. The works are intended to make the reader and audience conscious that colonisation is a way of achieving absolute exploitation of Africa and to enrich the colonialist nations. It is a way of fully exercising the year-long self-acclaimed supremacy of the white-skinned Western colonialists over black Africans and also a way of satisfying other selfish interests and morbid desires at the detriment of Africa and Africans.

These playwrights apparently argue out the point that suzerainty is inhumane, immoral and illicit. These playwrights would also start to lament the inopportune situation of African nations after independence. Africa, across its independent nations, has largely been a continent of dwindling economy, political instability, cultural alienation, corruption, malfeasance and impropriety. Therefore, African playwrights express their disillusion over this situation and condemn the African elites and leadership aiding and abetting them. Dominant voices among these African playwrights are Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Femi Osofisan, Athol Fugard and Niyi Osundare.

### **Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest***

Aroni, one of the forest spirits, begins the play in a prologue where he gives the background to the action of the play. The living come together in a celebration of an epoch making event, a "gathering of the tribe" (symbolic of Nigeria's independence). One of the purpose is to placate the deities and the spirits that inhabit the sacred groves and request ancestral presence symbolic of the success and the glory the new community would begin to enjoy. The forest spirit, especially the forest head and Aroni (the lame one) is aware of the communal evil doings of members of the community, and instead decide to confront them with their avarices with historical antecedents as evidence.

The dead, restive in their occupations, are messengers on errand to the living to convict the living of their collective conscience that had long been buried symbolised in the lives and presence of the-dead man and dead woman, who carries a baby, the unborn, "the living" in

her grave (5). The dead man represents “he-who-is-enslaved.” His role also reminds the audience of the involvement of Africans in the enslavement of other Africans a trade described as man's greatest inhumanity to man.

Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* has been used by the playwright to portray the foibles in the society and raise issues that the celebrants seem to be unaware of and it mystically proposes solutions to the same by stating how things will get better if their past mistakes were not repeated. The play is a political satire and also helps to promote Yoruba culture through myths, ritual and the use of proverbs.

### **National Themes in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest***

Bribery and Corruption as the Bane of the Society is an unfortunate phenomenon that has been in existence in different shades and guises. *A Dance in the Forest* portrays different images of corruption showing us that corruption resides not only at the leadership level but starts from individuals. An instance in the play is the story of a lorry named incinerator. This lorry's carrying capacity is forty but is manipulated by one of the council workers because he has taken bribe, thereby endangering the lives of 65 people who are eventually burnt to death because the lorry caught fire. Another instance is the case of a historian (Adenebi) who deceives the slave dealer who is also advocating for the sale of the soldiers into slavery. Adenebi is also in the present generation. The simply emphasises the fact that bribery and corruption are societal avarices that should not be allowed to permeate the society because of the far-reaching consequences.

Soyinka portrays credibility and the campaign for the sustenance of African culture as critical. Soyinka earmarks the collaboration of the imperialists and the realities of this for the immediate future of the new country. He, in several ways, celebrates the beauty of African culture particularly the Yoruba. The Interrelationship of Art and Politics is also critical. The symbol of the great reunion carved by

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Demoke, the carver, who was condemned by Eshuoro (the wayward cult-spirit) because it was carved with oro's sacred tree, araba and araba's height was dismissed. Oromole, a follower of Oro, an apprentice to Demoke fights against the sacrilege (diminishing of araba) to the gods. He wins with the support of the carver who was tied to earth and begins to work above his master's head. His unfortunately pulled down by Demoke.

Soyinka in this work bridges the gap between the humans and the supernatural realm by portraying Ogun as the protector of Demoke because he (Ogun) is the patron of woodcarvers, creativity and explorer. Even though he is one of the forest dwellers Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* is a call on creative writers, and artistes; all who can affect the positive change in the society and lay a strong foundation at its independence. The call was, at it were, a plea for a nationalist posture that could indemnify the society from ills and degradation this he does though juxtapositions.

One other theme is the death of justice. The soldiers are sold into slavery by Mata Kharibu, because they do not agree to fight an unjust war. They are not allowed the right to free will or even appeal. The leader who is Mata Kharibu in this book pronounces judgement the way it suits him. He does it in a way that injustice still parades the society. People that are supposed to have been condemned to death are still living.

Futility as against hope is another national theme in the play. Demoke's attempt to save the half child came to nought. He is portrayed as the hope for future generation. The playwright also employs various elements to achieve confusing and moody atmosphere in the play. The conversation is serious though they are comprised of relative simple diction. The proverbs elevate the diction of the play and affect the themes that are portrayed. For instance, he writes, "Have you seen as a woman throws away her pestle when she really meant to pound yam? The thematic concerns of the play are not to be taken lightly. The Nigerian Civil War of 1967 illustrates the

severity of the warning raised in the work. The play is an apocalyptic work of the ruling class's failure to heed the alarm the play had raised.

**Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I will Marry when I Want***

The plot as well as the structure of the play is linear which engenders cause and effect. Ngugi satirises hypocrisy of religion, capitalism and the people that engage these as systems for personal gain at the expense of others. Greed is portrayed as a social avarice. The storyline centres on a Kenyan peasant farm labourer, Kiguuda, and his family, Wangeci (wife) and Gathoni (daughter). It portrays their challenges (social, financial and spiritual), the frantic efforts they make to hold on to their culture and to protect the small piece of land they own. The conflict really is the confusion created by the imperialists whose sole aim is to possess the land by all means and build a factory where insecticides will be produced on it.

The title deed of the land which the Kiguudas display on the wall is the most valuable possession of theirs. Though they are dissatisfied because they could have had more landed property if not for the wrong counsel they took from the Christian leaders. Wangeci and Kiguuda own one and half acres and could have more had they not listened to the Christians who implored them to give up materialism and the fact that a *Mau Mau* group that liberated Kenya took possession of most of the landed properties and sold them most of the land and sold the estates to Americans, Japanese and Japanese peoples. The bane of the lives of Wangeci and Kiguuda is the gullibility of believing the counsel of the church and acting on the advice on the need to redo and celebrate their marital vows.

They would later find out that their daughter, Gathoni, had become entangled in a relationship with the son of the wealthiest man in town and had agreed to marry him. Wangeci and Kiguuda turn to Ahab Kioi Wa Kanoru to organise the wedding ceremony. Kioi Wa Kanoru a villain who pretends to be a Christian convinces them that he will consent to the marriage if the Kiguudas prove their

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

conversion to Christianity by having their union celebrated in an expensive church ceremony. They not to rob their daughter of what they considered an opportunity they hesitantly agree but come to the realization almost immediately that they were too poor to fund their weddings blessing or themselves or the daughter's. They sought financial assistance from Mr Kioi but he refuses and instead takes advantage of their gullibility by giving them two option of either selling off their only land or to use the land as equity or collateral in securing the bank loan for which he is ready to stand as a guarantor. Kiguunda rejects the first option but without considering it a red alert for the dispossession of his prized land releases his title deed.

Gathoni is put in the family way by John Muhuuni, Kofi. She is subsequently rejected by his family who claim that her family members are not matured enough and that she is wayward and therefore a prostitute. At this point Kiguunda demands reparation from Kanoru. Himself and Wangeci proceed to make Wa Kanoru sign an agreement, his wife however counters them by pulling out a gun which scuttles their plans. Consequently, the bank takes over the Kiguunda's land and auctions it to Kioi. The play ends on the note of defeat, portraying the desperation of the imperialists and the gullibility of the natives who gave in and sold the land with the hope that their placement in the social strata will change.

Exploitation through marriage and betrayal are dominant themes in this play. The dominant theme of the text is marriage even just going by the title of the play *I Will Marry When I Want*. Mr Kioi exploited the Kiguundas and cheated them out of their land by taking on their gullibility as peasants with little understanding on issues of marriage in the Christian way. Gathoni, the daughter of Kiguunda is in love with Kioi's son John and because Kiguunda wants her daughter to get married they decide to accept the proposal of getting married in the church so that both (Gathoni and John) can be married. However, they do not know that Kioi who has interest in their piece of land appears to be giving his support does so as to get the

land, this eventually happens at the end. The Kiguunda's lose on both sides. Their daughter, Gathoni, gets pregnant and is jilted by John and they also irretrievably lose their precious land. The Kiguundas are betrayed by the Kioi's through the latter's takeover of their land, after conspiring with the bank to auction the land out. The Kiguunda's are devastated when they discovered in the end that it is the same person who stands as guarantor for them that also goes behind them to get the only possession that gives them pride.

Symbolism is a major device that is engaged by writers particularly playwrights in achieving their goal. In the Kenya, ownership of land is a source of pride and treasure. This is evident in the play. Kiguunda's land is his pride as he guards his title deed jealously. There are people in this play who sell their lands to the Blacks (Kenyans) that work or serve as watchdogs for the Whites to relocate to remote parts that are underdeveloped while the minor Black elites stays in estates, have good roads and access to well-equipped hospital. The falling of the title deed in the play and the Kiguundas not picking it up, symbolise the letting go of the land by the Kiguundas.

The name "Ahab" and "Jezebel" are also symbolic. As earlier noted, Nguigi Wa Thiong's was a devout Christian and his ability to bring biblical allusions through characters that are known for greed and wickedness is another way of attacking the British imperialists and their religion which they engage as opium on innocent and believing 'faithfuls' in Africa. Nguigi uses these archetypes from their religion to reprove them. Ahab and Jezebel in the bible were the characters that coveted Naboth's vineyard even when their own was better than his own and eventually killed him in order to have his land. This applies to what happens in the play between Kioi and Kiguunda. Though there is no killing physically but the loss of his land which is his pride is sufficient enough to result in death.

**Flashback, Irony and Music as Style in *I will Marry when I Want***

Nguigi Wa Thiong's style include the use of flashback which serves as forms of reflections about the past, and the Kenyan ways of life, culture and other important activities that depict tradition, heritage, song, dance, dressing among other and particularly and the conscious struggle against imperialism and campaign for a return to their roots.

The engagement of dramatic and situational irony which shows the style employed by the capitalists to exploit the poor for their selfish reason are dominant. At the beginning, the Kiguundas think that the Kiois are coming to pay them a visit to discuss arrangements concerning the marriage of their daughter to their son but are disappointed when the latter come and discuss their conversion to Christianity. In the middle of the play, the Kiguundas expect that Kioi being a Christian will be able to help them with the arrangement as well as the preparation for their proposed marriage but are disappointed when he rather gives a difficult option. It is really ironic that the acre of land that the Kiguundas believe must have been taken over by the bank is possessed by Kioi.

Music and musical accompaniment are engaged in diverse ways in the work. It not only educates but punctuates moments of heightened conflicts. It is also a major way in which the past is recollected and the flashback made plausible. Nationalism remains a major ideology in African writing. It recurs in African drama as thematic preoccupations, motifs and poetics of modern African drama from the beginning of the postcolonial phase. The contributions of dramatists that have been consistently focused on nationalism helped to evolve and develop the ideology.

Nationalist playwrights are concerned with the anomalies suffered in terms of culture, economy, and the physical as well as social space through colonialism. Their ultimate goal is to ensure that their audience as well as readers come to the full understanding that colonisation was engaged as the a tool of exploitation, playing out the self-acclaimed supremacy of the white-skinned Western colonialists

*Adedoyin Aguoru*

over Black Africans was also a part of the strategy. These playwrights also lament the inopportune situation of African nations after independence. Africa, across its independent nations, has largely been a continent of dwindling economy, political instability, cultural alienation, corruption, malfeasance and impropriety. Therefore, African nationalist playwrights express their disillusionment over this situation and condemn the African elites and leadership aiding and abetting them. Other African playwrights with nationalist focus Femi Osofisan, Athol Fugard and Niyi Osundare.

## Chapter 7

# Critical Movements and Ideology II

### **Feminist Movement: Ghanaian Female Dramatists**

Feminism emerged from the omnibus experiences of women, the movements and efforts of women to restructure the imbalance that exists between the male and female gender. Popular opinion, history critical, and creative writings reveal that the ideology began as a protest that snowballed into a movement, from which a theory emerged and from which creative and critical writings emanated.

Female dramatists in Africa are women who engage this praxis in the dramatic contexts to transform gender relations that are oppressive to women. This section examines two Ghanaian dramatists of repute: Efua T. Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo.

### **Efua T. Sutherland: Biographical Note**

Efua Theodora Sutherland (27 June 1924-2 January 1998) is a Ghanaian dramatist, artist and educator who was instrumental to and a founding member of the Ghana Association of Writers and the Ghana Drama Studio, which was declared open in 1961 by President Kwame Nkrumah. Sutherland considered drama to be a communal activity which led her to establish the first community theatre in Ghana, the Kodzidan (House of Stories). This thought also explains why her works experiment her creativity with narratives storytelling and several indigenous Ghanaian oral traditions. Her dramatic identity was formed by her ability to translate traditional forms and imagery like that of the spider into contemporary dramatic elements.

The success achieved through this experiment is evident in her development of the uniquely Ghanaian genre of Anansegoro, on which *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) is based. *Edufa* which was published in 1967, developed out of a drama called “Odansani” performed at the Ghana Drama Studio, which was a significant output of Sutherland's pursuit of the Experimental Theatre Project supported by Rockefeller Foundation and the Danish organisation, Geelack and Gilles. Other projects she embarked upon for literary and dramatic development included the Children's Drama Development Project and Ghana National Children's Commission. She was, in her lifetime, regarded as the mother of the theatre movement in Ghana and remains the precursor figure in Ghanaian Drama.

#### **Ama Ata Aidoo: Biographical Note**

Was born on March 23, 1942 to Chief Nana Yaw Fama and Maame Abba Christiana Ama Aidoo was raised as royalty, and a princess among the Fanti people of Abeamzi Kyiakor in the South Central Region of Ghana. Aidoo's grandfather had been gruesomely murdered by neo-colonialists which made the environment she grew in stiffly anti-colonial. Her father in spite of the tragic experience understood the value of Western education and ensured that she was trained at Wesley Girls High School in the Southern Seaport town of Cape Coast, Ghana, after which she proceeded to study English in the University of Ghana. Ama Aidoo was an undergraduate when she wrote and published her first play *Dilemma of a Ghost*. Ama Ata Aidoo remains a leading voice among female writers in Africa. She taught in various universities in Africa and across continents.

Ama Ata Aidoo in 1982, became the Minister of Education in Ghana, an office in which she served before resigning after eighteen months. She was a lecturer in English at the University of Cape Coast and was appointed chair at some point in the same institution. Her publications include plays; *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) and *Anowa*

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

(1970), novels, collections of short stories and poetry. Her works are consistently centred on gender issues engaging African oral forms as sources and resources for her works. Her significance is in being able to match the tenets of the anti-colonial struggles from the feminist perspective.

### ***The Marriage of Anansewa: Comedy***

*The Marriage of Anansewa* is a comedy. Its dramatic elements, themes and characterisation were intended to be humorous while concurrently satirising the society that creates personalities like Ananse and his gullible followers. The vanities of his daughter and immediate family as well as the suitors and the church are juxtaposed to portray the shift in societal and moral values.

In the play, the chief characters, Ananse and his daughter Anansewa find themselves in a serious fix as the drama develops. However, at the end, the action ends happily as they untangle the knot wherein they have entangled themselves. There are diverse arguments as to whether the *The Marriage of Anansewa* is a comedy or a farce, that is, whether it is a high comedy or a low comedy-farce. One thing is sure: *The Marriage of Anansewa* is a comedy. Traditionally comedies are dramatic pieces with happy endings. The thematic preoccupations that are neither intense nor serious, the characters portrayed are often without the class structure or social elevation associated with tragic characters. Nevertheless, there are elements of farce *The Marriage of Anansewa*, not only does Ananse and his family change class in the social structure by marriage, Sutherland extricates from the preposterous context they lodged themselves in. Whether this is plausible is an entirely different argument.

Efua T. Sutherland, in the foreword of *The Marriage of Anansewa*, describes the character-Ananse, who is the chief character in this text, as one who 'appears to represent a kind of Everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination (Sutherland,2005:3).' This description of Ananse opens

the reader's imagination to... the kind of picture of Ananse that he (the reader) is to create in his mind. George Kweku Ananse finds himself in a ludicrous situation: receiving money from four chiefs, using his only daughter as bait, gradually entangling himself by promising to give Anansewa to all four of them, not knowing exactly how to come out of the mess but trusting his wit to help him overcome his situation.

When all four chiefs indicate readiness to simultaneously to pay Anansewa's bride price, Ananse comes up with the idea of faking Anansewa's death (as a means of untangling the knot he has tied with his own hands as a result of his greed and selfishness), a stunt he smoothly pulls with the help of Christina Yamoah—a fashionable woman who is in love with Ananse and is willing to go to any length to get his love. Through the dialogue between Ananse and the servants of all the chiefs, he is able to determine the right husband for Anansewa. *The Marriage of Anansewa* achieves its comic effects through the sustained brilliance of its chief character, Ananse. The dialogue between Ananse and his daughter in the opening scene is amusing primarily because of the language employed. It is important to note here that language, in any drama text, comes through dialogue, soliloquy and aside. This is also true of the use of authorial comments and other such sentiments of the playwright.

### ***Edufa: Tragedy***

Efua T. Sutherland's *Edufa* is the story of the eponymous character, Edufa, who desires to have his lifespan elongated. He consults a diviner who gives him a charm and orders that he ask someone who loves him whether such a person is willing to die for him. With the diviner's charm at work, Edufa jokingly asks if anyone in his extended family could die for him, hoping that at least one of his parents will accept this. However, his wife, Ampoma, accepts this out of her apparent unflinching love for him. Knowing the consequence of this fully, Edufa is shocked and secretly tells his beloved wife to renounce

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

the proclamation. However, she remains adamant despite his persuasion. Ampoma later takes ill as a sign of the proclamation working with the force of the charm.

Edufa does everything to prevent Ampoma's death to no avail. She eventually dies, leaving Edufa in a disturbed and unsettled state of mind. This play is an addition to literary works on the question of death and the fear it brings to individuals. With the type of ending it has, it is implied that a quest to overcome death, known to all as an inevitable phenomenon, will always be futile. It reveals that the desire and quest to overcome death are unjustifiably and inordinately greedy and evil.

The play has a prologue that creates templates for the complex plot to be enacted later. Abena, Edufa's sister, soliloquises bitterly in such a way that creates a moody and sad atmosphere that eventually pervades the drama text. The play proper begins in *media res*—in the middle. Some actions have already taken place, and the solution to the problem is being acted out before the audience. The drama begins with Ampoma, Edufa's wife, being sick while Edufa and Segura rally around, seeking a solution to the problem. The cause of the sickness is not revealed at this time. Being a tragic play catharsis—“cleansing”, “purgation” or “purification”—is also inherent in the work. According to Aristotle, catharsis is a psychological purgation of the emotion of fear, honour, pity, pathos and sympathy accumulated in the audience while experiencing tragic actions and moments is sustained. In *Edufa*, the tragic death of Ampoma as a sacrificial lamb for Edufa's wealth and a reversal in his psychological well-being brings catharsis.

Similarly, Edufa's error of judgement exposes his weakness and tragic flaw. He makes the powerful charm that will protect him and his business after being teased by his loving wife that he could not bear for once to shut away from his precious business and society. Unfortunately for Edufa, Ampoma, his wife, unaware that he is carrying on him a powerful charm swears to die for him.

Kankam, Edufa's father, persuades Edufa to either confess or denounce the powerful charm that is the bane of his life and his family. Edufa is unwilling and does not take the counsel he heads on and into the tragic moment, violating the moral codes of the society. Kankam's finally says: "Pity him, you spirits. He grew greedy and insensitive, insane for gain, frantic for the fluff and flattery... Did I not warn him? I tried to make him stop at the point when we men must be content or let ourselves be lured on to our doom. But he wouldn't listen. He doesn't listen, it makes me ill..." By inference Edufa is aware he could revoke the course of his wife's illness but his stubborn posture indicates that he has no regrets about making the charm, he merely felt bad that it was his wife

### ***The Marriage of Anansewa and Edufa in Context***

*The Marriage of Anansewa* has a linear plot structure as there is unity of action (artistic whole). Here, the dramatist purposively sets in motion the work through the structured actions, activities and occurrences that are ordered in a sequence to achieve her goal. The plot of *The Marriage of Anansewa* develops from the exposition of the characters. The audience is introduced to the major characters, Ananse and his daughter, and the actions of the drama to complication/rising action, which is where the conflict begins. The complication in the drama starts when in Act One, Ananse argues with his daughter, Anansewa, over her marriage to the chiefs to take care of his financial and material needs. After the exposition and complication, is the crisis/climax. This is the point where Ananse receives the news that all the chiefs that he has been collecting gifts and money from are coming to pay his daughter's bride price at the same time.

The falling action at this point, Ananse seems to control the cause of events until the denouement, which in French means unknotting. This is where Ananse gradually sends off the servants of the chiefs who have come to give their condolence to the supposed dead

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Anansewa. Being a comedy, conflict is settled in Ananse's interest and therefore, the play ends happily.

Conversely, in *Edufa*, the plot is designed to achieve tragic effects. Sutherland does not create room for resolution and the play is brought to an end with the unsettled conflict. In the case of *Edufa*, it is catastrophe. At the end of the drama, despite Edufa and Seguwa's efforts to save Ampoma, she dies. Edufa loses his mind, seeking to deal with death for taking his wife.

As the drama's plot evolves, it arouses suspense in the audience/reader as he patiently waits to see/read on to know how Ananse overcomes the situation he has put himself in because of his greed and selfishness. There is also an element of surprise at the end of the drama because what happens is contrary to the audience's expectation. Ananse wittingly and skilfully unties the seemingly 'impossible to untie' knot at the end.

In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the chief character is flat or two-dimensional as in most comedy. In the case of this comedy, there is no exception, as all the characters are flat. The method of characterisation employed by Efu Sutherland is known as telling, where the author/playwright does not suggest but clearly communicates what needs to be understood about the character and the character's idiosyncrasies and shenanigans. In the foreword, she informs the reader who Ananse is: 'Ananse appears to represent a kind of everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to portray man and the psychology of human passions, ambitions and follies as revealed in contemporary situation.' The author also informs the audience that 'laughter is the main social response to Ananse as a character.' (Sutherland, 1986:3)

Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa* creates the 'confidant' (feminine form is confidante), a character who is the significant other and plays a complimentary role by being the one with whom the protagonist is intimate with or shared concerns and innermost thoughts with. The role also affords the playwright another outlet for

authorial comments and also allows the thoughts plans of the character to be shared without employing flashbacks or soliloquies. In *Edufa*, Seguwa serves as Edufa's confidante. In Seguwa's words, '...you have chosen me to share this present burden with you...' In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Christie (Miss Christina Yamoah) serves as Ananse's confidante.

Worthy of note is the activity of the chorus in *Edufa*. Traditionally the Greek, referred to the group of masked performers as the chorus. Their renditions included chants and songs which were similar to those recited at festivals or observances during ritual worship. They do not only enrich the aesthetic value of the performances but are vehicles through which dominant themes are musically communicated in the plays. In *Edufa*, there is a chorus of women from the town; they also serve the same purpose as they bring in informative interjections, deliberately interspersing with value adding comments.

The setting of a dramatic work lends credence to its plausibility. The playwright necessarily creates within a fictional or factual geographical or geopolitical setting. This could be 'major minor, physical or psychological, it may be political or socio-cultural it may even be economic all reflecting the historical moments. (Ogunjimi,2003:7) In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the playwright gives precise stage descriptions of the actors' positions and organisation of properties for the drama, while in *Edufa*, the playwright clearly indicates the setting to be the courtyard and inner court of Edufa's expensive house.

The mood and the tone of the work significantly affects the setting, and the totality of the atmosphere created. This can be the entire signature tune or prevailing emotional or psychological setting that runs through the entire play. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the atmosphere initially was that of uncertainty, especially during the crisis stage of the plot. However, the atmosphere later changes to a happy one as the drama ends happily *Edufa* has a gloomy atmosphere

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

is sustained from the prologue to the end, creating a tragic atmosphere that runs through the entire fabric of the play.

In *Edufa*, comic relief is achieved through the character of Senchi, both monologue and dialogue, the seriousness of drama is alleviated. Both *Marriage of Anansewa* and *Edufa* have feminist undertones; they focus on gender issues and portray feminist and tempers of the early African female dramatist. The plays are portraits of father/daughter, husband/ wife, and man /mistress discourses. Musical and comical interludes are often used as dramatic devices. Just like *kyōgen* in the Japanese operatic tradition, interspersing comic scenes and characters reduces the heightened tension of tragic plays. They are often included as scenes or as part of the character's mime or dialogue with the intention diverting attention from the suspense or easing the pressure generated by the tragic occurrence.

As a common thematic preoccupation, they have employed the engaging, trading and sacrificing of women in exchange for wealth. Similarly, both plays have a woman playing the confidante to the protagonist which is significant to the theory of the feminism that the playwright portrays.

As earlier noted, *Marriage of Anansewa* is comic while *Edufa* is tragic. In *the Marriage of Anansewa*, the cast includes a storyteller and musicians referred to as players, while in *Edufa*, the author makes use of a musical group the playwright refers to as the chorus.

Sutherland portrays pure love and sacrifice as a dominant theme in *Edufa*. This is portrayed in the play through the character of Ampoma, *Edufa*'s wife. She loves her husband dearly and cannot imagine not sacrificing herself for his life. When *Edufa* tells her the consequences of her declaration, she weeps profusely but does not change her stand. Her love for *Edufa* is true. *Edufa* is miserable and tells her that she should not have made such a fatal declaration. Ampoma is aware that she will die. She decides to come into the garden to enjoy life and dances with the chorus. Although she falls three times, she still puts on the gait and appearance that *all is well*.

In the play, there are portraits of the traditional beliefs and methods of healing. We also see the use of herbs for these purposes. Edufa asks Seguwa to keep burning the incense while he and Ampoma bathe in the herbs. Furthermore, he sends Sam to a place to heal Ampoma of her sickness. Africans still believe that these traditional herbs can cure illness and they place so much faith in them.

In the play, Edufa is a proud man that does not want to let go of his ego no matter the cost. Owing to this, he keeps Ampoma's illness away from the people who can help him. When his father confronts him about his wife's illness and the role he, Edufa, has played, he refuses his father's advice to denounce the charm before the whole house because of his pride and ego.

Deceit is also a dominant theme in *Edufa*. Edufa deceives many of people in the play. He deceives his mother-in-law. He tells her that he and Ampoma want to enjoy themselves as husband and wife. He sends his children to stay with his mother-in-law. Edufa deceives the chorus into believing that all is well with Ampoma. He deceives his own sister by refusing to tell her the main cause of Ampoma's sickness. However, Edufa does not succeed in deceiving his own father, Kankam because his father confronts him with the truth. Edufa deceives himself also. He thinks that Ampoma will live after the purification rites but she later dies.

Two themes, greed and self-centeredness underlie Ananse's actions and inactions in this play. As a result of his greed and machinations, he takes the photograph of his daughter and travels around his world, showcasing her to men of wealth who will undoubtedly make him wealthy. His self-centeredness leads him to decide to market his daughter and eventually give her out in marriage to the chief that appeared most committed. The mason is also portrayed as another greedy man. His work is apparently not lucrative so he decides to make most of the opportunity to work with Ananse. The mason, painter and the carpenter are supposed to work for three

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

weeks, but the mason insists on five weeks and later doubles it to ten weeks just for him to continue to extort Ananse. The entire play is full of intrigues based on deceit and greed. Ananse deceives several people, particularly the chiefs. He also deceives his mother and aunt in a bid to send them away so that he will be able to carry out his ultimate plan to feign Anansewa's death and find out which of her suitors is the most committed.

### **Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa***

*Anowa* is an adaptation of an old Ghanaian legend. Anowa, the play's heroine, is portrayed as a stubborn woman. Her tragic flaw is the archetypal ego of a woman courted by several men, refusing each. The old men and women are perplexed about her and we are told that no one knows what is wrong with her as she follows her own advice and listens to her own tales (Aidoo, 1970:7). Anowa is also thought of as being influenced by supernatural forces that have predestined her for misfortune. From the predictions of the old woman Abena Badua there is a foreshadowing of the tragic events that would occur in the play.

### ***Anowa* as Feminist Drama**

Most of Ama Ata Aidoo's protagonists are unconventional women. Anowa's father sends her to school against the expectations of the society. Schooling during her time was believed to be the exclusively reserved for men; women are seen as mere properties to be taken. Her personal experience reflects in the choices she makes and her authorial comments. The old man observed:

...beautiful as Korado Ahima, someone's thin-thread.  
A deity little pot well baked and polished smooth to set  
the noble man's corner (1970:7).

Anowa is “thingified” Aidoo uses the character of Anowa to demonstrate the specific moment of transition. That would be the

moment Anowa shifts from typical African woman who listens to other people particularly elders for advice (elders). It is clear that the old man is displeased by the new narrative and identity of the Anowa. The game has changed and the men no longer determine the narratives nor possess it not even when a woman is yet to have a child as in the case of Anowa.

Ama Ata Aidoo is able capture succinctly the story of Anowa in three movements: as a young lady in a mate selection stage and who was particularly choosy about her future partner. She falls in Love with Kofi Ano who her mother does not support but she is strong willed and marries him.

As a young bride and supportive wife who is concerned about being infertile and who wants her husband to participate in honourable and legitimate businesses she can participate in. On the infertility she suggests that her husband explore Western medicine or take another wife. The third phase is when her husband has become accomplished in the dishonourable business she had discouraged him from they are still childless, she is idle and still persuades her husband to take another wife.

She finally wears Kofi out with her discontentment and he wants her to leave but she would not be humiliated in such fashion at the point that she realises that he is impotent she calls the members of her house hold and reveals Kofi's inability to father a child Kofi commits suicide and Anowa decides to take her life too by drowning.

In Africa it is popularly assumed that when a couple is infertile it is because something is fundamentally wrong with the woman. Ama Ata Aidoo in Anowa portrays infertility as a challenge that could be from either or both of the couple. This play that barrenness can be a challenge of either of the spouses. Anowa is shocked to when she realises that her husband is infertile and incredulously understands that he is the one that is the woman in their own case. In Anowa, the burden of bringing up a child's left to the women. Osam confidently states this to reinforce the fact that his concern over his daughter was

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

extra ordinary as the responsibility of raising a well-behaved child and ensuring that they get decently married was that of his wife and not his (1970:71).

Allegory is a device that creates a representation of an idea through a symbol or suggestive resemblances. Ama Ata Aidoo engages that through the use of styles and structures in this play. There are some characters in the play whose actions are symbolic. Anowa, just like many women portrayed in African literature, can be seen as a symbol of Africa; her destruction represents its conquest and the consequent breakdown of morality, spirituality, and the strength of the African society. Anowa's dream captures her memory of certain questions directed to Nana about the white colonisers and their slave trade. In the dream, the body symbolises the whole African continent as implied in her words 'I dreamt I was a big, big woman' (1970:106). She also saw the lobsters, which symbolises the white coloniser and the slave traders who have been described earlier in the play by Nana.

Kofi Ako's role in the play is symbolic of bourgeoisie activities. He buys slaves and accumulates wealth through their work for him. There is speculation that he uses his manhood to attain his affluence. The implications of dealing in Slave Trade in Africa and the subsequent colonial experience still have quantifiable vestiges. Kofi Ako, by these activities, defines himself as a bourgeoisie dealing in slavery. This has far reaching consequences at the end of the play as he commits suicide by shooting himself. Anowa is betrayed by Kofi Ako; a representation of bourgeoisies through his male figure by refusing to yield to Anowa's insistence on not buying or engaging in slaves.

A dominant source and influence in the writing of *Anowa* is oral traditional narratives. The play emerges from a folktale in Ghana. Thus, traditional storytelling influences the narrative structure of the play. For instance, there is the use of a mixture of monologue in verse which are cues for dialogues or stage business. The insertion of stage, songs, and chorus depict the oral traditions of the people of Ghana.

The role of the story teller at the opening and closing is also symbolic the archetype of the sage. His role lends authenticity to the narrative and the form.

Another way the use of oral narratives influences the play is in Aidoo's use of language. She engages proverbial sayings which gives the work the paremiological quality that reflects Africanness. Aidoo also engages song, dance and music, particularly music. For instance, the songs of praise at the end of Phase two and at the beginning of Phase three are symbolic.

Another dominant source and influence on the play is the Bond of 1844. In 1844 the Fante, on behalf of Gold Coast (now Ghana), signed a pact with the British which led to the region's colonisation. It was also responsible for the later development of seeking and buying human beings into slavery. There is a traditional saying in Aburiland, said by the old man at the concluding part of Phase 2, which notes that catastrophe awaits the household of anyone who engages in slavery. Perhaps, this is why Africans were able to subdue the Europeans and gain independence from them.

The writings of Efua T. Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo reflect the concerns of the African female dramatists who had joined the male dramatists in writing Africa into history and creating the authentic narratives to wipe the falsified imagery of Africa and Africans off the memory of the international community. Some of these feminine concerns on mate selection and the Marxist perspective to women's ability to develop themselves own money and properties are engaged in Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* and *Edufa*, and Aidoo's *Anowa*.

### **Feminist Movement in Nigeria: The Zulu Sofola Example**

Zulu Sofola, the first female dramatist in Nigeria and her plays are representative of female dramatists and drama in Nigeria. Two of her plays, *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Songs of a Maiden* will be analysed are considered *vis-à-vis* her significance in the African dramatic

tradition.

Feminism as a critical movement in Nigeria with regards to contemporary written African drama is well established and has continued to enjoy patronage. There have been playwrights and theatre practitioners especially women whose works portray strong feminist identities and postures in their works. These portray issues affecting the welfare of the female *vis-à-vis* the domination of the other such as patriarchal chauvinism, challenges of motherhood, challenges of widowhood, levirate marriage, girl-child education, genital circumcision among others. Zulu Sofola, the first female African Professor of theatre arts, was a pioneering playwright, dramatist and scholar in Nigeria and in most of these respects.

### **Zulu Sofola: Biographical Note**

The life and times of Zulu Sofola is as intriguing as her dramatic output. Born 22nd June, 1935 in Delta State, Sofola is the first female published dramatist in Nigeria. Therefore, her contributions to Nigerian drama and theatre are thought of to be legendary. Zulu Sofola in her lifetime, was the first African female professor of Theatre Arts. She was a renowned scholar, critic, dramatist, director and actress. Some of her published plays include; *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) *King Emene* (1974), *The Wizard of Law* (1975), *The Sweet Trap* (1977), *Old Wines are Tasty* (1979), *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986) and *Songs of a Maiden* (1991).

Though she studied in the United States of America, Sofola represented the essence of African womanhood. Her opinions and creation of women is seen in the traditional roles played by women in her writings. Sofola's dominant critical voice is on the issue of abuse of the rights of women in the older more patriarchal societies.

Several critical opinions have defined Sofola's identity as a writer and feminist critic. She has been described as reactionary (Efakponana, 2010). Ewrierhoma (2005) describes her as a writer that identifies the need for women liberation from all forms of political

and socio-economic marginalization. Sofola also made a distinctive mark by refining and redefining the gender roles and particularly that of a woman. She is also in the forefront of promoting the need for African women to articulate this reality in their literary writings (Efakponana, 2010).

### **A Comparative Reading of Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Songs of a Maiden***

Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* is set in the Igbo society of Nigeria. Sofola in these plays engage the dynamics of the patriarchal communities as well as intra-gender hegemony which plays out in the cultural practices enforced by the males, families, and other groups in the society. The play portrays the idea that there are several contradictions in the belief system of peoples particularly the academics represented by the professor and the people of Shao.

According to Sofola in the production notes (1972), the playwright situates the play *Wedlock of the Gods* within a tragic ambit which plays out in the rupture of the sequence of a ritual of death and mourning. An underlying theme therefore is the distortion of the traditional solemnity expected in the performance and observance of such ritual. Ogwoma, rather than honouring and observing the normal funeral rites and rituals expected to purify as well as ensure that the departed soul transitions to the world beyond, chooses to be liberated from an unwanted marriage particularly because she could envisage that widowhood inheritance is going to be the next line of action to be enforced by her in laws if she completes the process. The bereaved mother vents her anger on her daughter-in-law by performing rite intended to destroy her son's widow for supposedly being unfaithful to her son and ultimately being responsible for the death of her son.

Ogwoma the young unwilling bride is given out in marriage to Adigwu. Her resistance is largely because she is not prepared for marriage, has no feelings for him and is in love with Uloko who

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

unfortunately is poor and unable to pay her bride wealth which is desperately needed to pay for treatment for her younger brother, Edozie, who is sick unto death. Adigwu suddenly dies three years into the marriage, a union that evidently lacked the love and affection expected. The mother Odebei who has watched the entire process with displeasure had justification for suspecting her son is killed by the woman who initially vehemently opposed their marriage.

Ogwoma commences the mandatory three-month mourning. The expectation is that there will be no male association of any kind after which her husband's brother is expected to inherit her as wife as the custom dictates. It is this tradition of levirate marriage that Ogwoma rebels against. She encourages Uloko, her embattled lover in waiting, to visit her and becomes pregnant for him during the period she is expected to be in mourning. The premature association with the opposite sex and the sexual relations triggered by it is regarded as the height of defilement of the customs and rituals associated with death and the rites of passage and the repercussions of which are as grievous. Ogwoma and Uloko remain defiant in their posture claiming that their love justifies their actions and that they hope to win the battle against the tradition they had broken.

Critics believe Sofola's posture in the work *Wedlock of the Gods* depicts her candid opinion about the oppressive traditional practices particularly as it relates to marriage and widowhood practices. Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* portray several other themes which border on and emphasise the disadvantage of forced marriages irrespective of the temperaments of the persons involved, the problems that often arise as a result of charging utilitarian bride price, widowhood dispossession and wife inheritance also known as levirate marriage.

The crisis that triggered the tragedy in the play arose by Ogwoma's forced marriage. Adigwu's reasons for going along with the arrangement despite the fact that he knows that his bride to be had reacted vehemently against the arrangement are personal and never

revealed, this his mother confirms after his death. He could have also given the money to the family as a loan since he had the wherewithal without tying it to the acquisition of an unwilling bride who is out rightly resisting because she is in love with another man. Ogwoma's position therefore never changes all through the play, she remains adamant in her posture even in her conversation with her friend, Ogwoma: You do not understand how my heart beats. Because you were not tied like a goat and whipped along the road to a man you hated, you are not able to understand what my heart tells me (Sofola, 1972:9).

In Sofola's *Song of a Maiden* some academics are on research to a village and are advised to live on the hill because of their presumed eccentricity. The impression given to them is that there is need to placate the Gods and have one of them Professor Oduyinka marry a maiden in the land in following the whims of the deities of Shao land. Unlike the characters in the *Wedlock of the Gods*, both Prof Professor Oduyinka and the maiden cannot see the logic in the forced marriage proposed and refuse to go along with the plan.

While the conflicts and the way they are resolved in the *Wedlock of the Gods* portray a patriarchal society that is insensitive to the feelings and sensibilities of women, the characters in the *Song of a Maiden* resist the societal structures that are restrictive and harmful to their existence. The members of the family as a unit that ought to protect the interests of its members in the *Wedlock of the Gods* do not show compassion as expected. They proceed to silence Ogwoma and blackmail her so that she can comply with their expectations. There are other questions of preference of the male child raised, would her brother have been so sacrificed for her even if it was a similar life-threatening situation?

Edozie's illness and the costly ritual prescribed by native doctors are good reasons to treat his sister as a commodity. Ogwoma's parents feel that the bride price offered for their daughter's hand in marriage is the only way out. Her parents therefore make her personal need of no

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

consequence and rate their economic challenges to be of more consequence. Anwasia's comment confirms this in many ways "Our people" She says, "say that a man's daughter is a source of wealth to him" (Sofola, 1972:9).

In spite of all of these, Sofola does not rupture the expectation of the society in her portrayal of the outcome of the conflicts and the manner of resolution of the conflicts. She makes it clear that Ogwoma apparently fights a lost battle and predicts her death when she says "I will be buried alive before I become Okezie's wife" (Sofola, 1972:22). Her prayers and wishes does not come to fruition even after her husband's death, she discovered she will never be free from the marriage her family and Adigwu's family contracted. Her plan to escape with the pregnancy unnoticed is also thwarted as she is discovered and turned into public ridicule. She is condemned and attacked by her mother-in-law, her immediate family member as well as the entire community. Her rebellion as well as Uloko's fails as Odibei successfully avenges her son by poisoning her.

Uloko also avenges Ogwoma's death by killing Odibei. His rebellion also fails utterly as he loses the love of his life and his expected child. He takes of the poison Odibei administers on Ogwoma and dies in like manner. Another theme that is subtly portrayed in the work is the theme of harmful widowhood practices that are known to be rampant amongst the Igbos in particular. Ogwoma in this case is made to sit in the ashes as a sign of mourning and is expected to look ragged all through three month period. Odibei emphasises this as she scathingly says to Uloko: 'What a man of respect would find the house of a woman in mourning inviting? Is it to see her shaven head or her body in ashes that you have come? Or is it to see what dwells within her?' (Sofola, 1972:15).

Yetunde in *Song of a Maiden* is portrayed as a character that does not conform to the expectation of a society that is contrary to hers. She is symbolic of a change agent in the society. Her audacity and reaction is in sharp contrast to the expectation of the patriarchal

society that groomed her forbears to be a voiceless group easily taken advantage of. The Yetunde Sofola creates is a non-conformist and she uses her resistance to infer that women can always resist oppression of all kinds. Unlike Ogwoma, she refuses to take the step that would most likely lead to destruction. She refuses to be used as a “bridge” to connect the gap between literacy and illiteracy.

Unlike Ogwoma's predicament Sofola portrays Yetunde in a manner that makes her to see nothing of importance in the money and education of Professor Oduyinka represents but to see her individuality and the damage that is being done to womanhood when such decisions are taken and executed. Aduke, her mother, stands by her and with her decisions and confronts her husband squarely on these matters and even matters that border on theophany. She consequently raises a daughter as assertive as she is. Ogwoma in *Wedlock of the Gods* is portrayed as being rebellious but utterly helpless as she eventually dies rebelling against a hopeless cause.

Sofola's posture and position is clear in both plays. She portrays the reality and experience of women in patriarchal societies. She is critical of social structures that promote intra gender hegemony and highlights the fact that most of the practices that are harmful to women may be societal but are inflicted and are executed by other women. Sofola's plays also do not encourage complete disrespect of culture or traditional practices in that she does not allow Ogwoma and Uloko to live happily ever after in the world even though she creates an impression that there is a world after, a place where discontented lovers find solace or fulfilment. This is a dramatic technique which leads to the purgation of the emotions of the intended audience in *Wedlock of the Gods*. Zulu Sofola's life and writings typify the origins and advancement of the feminist creative movement in Nigeria via two of her plays, *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Song of a Maiden* are analysed.

## Chapter 8

# Contemporary Plays: The Example of Ahmed Yerima and Femi Osofisan

The more contemporary plays of Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima fall within this category. The ideology and the shift in content and form having been prepermitted is the basis for the inclusion of these aspects of their writings. Osofisan having enjoyed tremendous critical attention will be studied *vis a vis* his characterology of deities and gods. Two of Yerima's plays *The Wives* and *Tuti* is studied more for their forms and thematic preoccupation.

The evolution of written drama in contemporary Africa took an encyclopaedic dimension. There are numerous distinguished playwrights and plays that are masterpieces which constitute the cannon of modern African drama. The effort therefore so far in this chapter has been to representatively aspects of written African drama in its complexity. Here, the focus is on some of the works of Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima as contemporary plays. The concern is to examine alternatives to emerging thematic thrusts and styles in Modern African drama. It is clear that the plays of these writers is are not limited to themes and motifs of national and cultural concerns; they also discuss sociological issues of marriage, family, domestic life, religion with some depicting settings that suggest urban life in their plays.

They capture the lives of individuals—men and women—in their societies and portray the role of culture, economy and other social values play in ennobling them. These issues, with regards to the

example of Yerima, are portrayed with much stylistic experimentation in structure and content. This approach also brings about the evolvement of new character-types and generic forms. It must be stated clearly here however that the analyses given here are insufficient to give a comprehensive representation of the plays of Ahmed Yerima or Femi Osofisan. Examining other plays in the rich folio of both playwrights will therefore be a rewarding exercise. Femi Osofisan's here are examined *vis-a-vis* his portraits of gods as political figures.

### **Ahmed Yerima Biographical Notice**

Ahmed Yerima is an award-winning playwright, theatre director and scholar. He is one of the contemporary dramatists in Nigeria whose works cuts across the dominant trends on Nigerian drama. He studied at Obafemi Awolowo University, formerly University of Ife. Yerima, a director, actor and scholar has published about thirty plays some of which have won him awards including the drama category of the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas literary prize (NLNG) which he won in 2007 with his *Hard Ground*. He has also published critical essays on drama and theatre in Nigeria. He was, for several years, the Director General of the National Theatre and the National Troupe of Nigeria. He is currently Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Professor in Redeemer's University Ede. Some of his plays include *Yemoja*, *Mojagbe*, *Attahiru*, *Erelu Kuti*, *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* and *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen*.

### **Interrogating the Comic and the Tragic in Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives***

Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* is based on a gripping story of Chief Theophilus Gbadegeshin Olowokere. It raises keen philosophical questions in the mind of the reader and audience and exposes some of the ills in our society. Before the death of Chief Olowokere a wealthy polygamist, he made a decree that his will must be read after

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

his burial. While Chief's loved ones are still trying to coming to terms with his passing and his brother Baba Ajagbe, the head of the family makes arrangements for his final his rite of passage in order for him to join his ancestors. The eldest son, as tradition requires, is expected to recite specific panegyric and family chants as part of the rites of passage.

They soon discover that the child assumed to be first son and first child of the first wife (Mrs. Angela Olowokere) is not the first son of Chief Olowokere. Angela Olowokere feels there is a sort of conspiracy to cheat her son of his inheritances and makes effort to stop the rites. The late chief's lawyer reads the will and in the will, Olowokere bequeaths his entire estate to his first son. When the Ifa oracle is consulted it reveals that Chief Olowokere had, at some point, engaged in incest with his sister (Antimi) and his first son, a product of that illicit relationship is the lawyer; Barrister Solomon Akande.

*The Wives* thematically focuses on salient issues in our society one of which is polygamy though several polygamous families live in peace and tranquillity, the popular opinion is that there is need for tolerance for peaceful co-existence Chief Olowookere was a polygamist in his life time, he had three wives continually envied one another and appeared to be always at loggerhead. Angela and Cecelia rained their anger on Tobi because she got the most of chief's attention before he died; being the last wife, she is the youngest and most naive. At the commencement of the play, she is detained in relation to her husband's death because he suffered a heart attack in their most intimate moment; she is later released when Auntimi intervenes. Subsequently after the release of the autopsy result which proved that Chief died of heart attack, Angela refuses to believe and keeps on calling Tobi the witch and a prostitute who killed her husband. Polygamy in essence is portrayed as an institution that hardly promotes peace but allows envy and rivalry to thrive.

The play portrays the contemporary posture to traditional African practices and the impact of Western influences on it. The

children of the deceased, who are based abroad (London and Spain) and are absent during their father's burial. We see Seyi's mother (Mrs. Angela Olowookere) complaining in the play that even if her son is around, he does not know anything about the performances of the observances because he has lived all his life abroad. Another evident reality is that she did not want her son to be initiated into the cult his father had belonged to. Before the increase in migrant students the average young and new generation of Africans whose parents have the wherewithal prefer to school abroad, work there and sometimes marry foreigners.

In Seyi's case, his mother is proud to imply that he has forgotten home, forgotten his, culture, language and identity. Western influence on African culture is also lamented we tend to "Westernise" everything even the most sacred things. The wives and Auntimi are supposed to be mourning wearing the mourning cloth but here; they are dressed elegantly and even make a toast and play a favourite song of the late Chief Olowookere. In an atmosphere that is supposed to be sorrowful, they drink and dance. Agbaye and Ifagbayi are very angry with the wives. He insists that women were not expected to announce the death of their husband particularly a man of his calibre, until the calabash of life was broken. After which the elders in the family should have declared that he is dead. Here we see women, for whatever reason or guise, dancing before the corpse of their husband.

Chief Olowookere is denied a church burial and funeral service because of his involvement as a high chief in his family cult. This conflict is portrayed when Ifagbayi places the horsetail in late Chief Gbadegeshin's right hand and the cross symbolises Christianity on the other hand. Obviously, the traditionalists assume that their own rites are scared and superior and do not want anything to be done to the corpse before their arrival. Even Cecelia, one of the wives also complains that she does not understand how in contemporary times (her husband who is a Christian (church goer) as he goes to the church and could still hold the traditional religion in high esteem as

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

he is costumed in his outfit for the shrine where he worships the deities). This she also points as one of the reasons why she leaves the home and the fact that his family are fetish. She even refuses to swear by any other god when Baba Ajagbe asks her to swear that she is still not one of the wives.

Divination and taboos are part of certain practices, beliefs and customs that are considered sacred in the African society. This play classified dark humour and the combination of humour with tragedy is the essence of the form. The main conflict is based on the incest, Chief Theophilus Olowookere, commits with his sister in their youth. Theophilus unfortunately puts his sister, Auntimi, in the family way.

Incest is an abominable act in Yoruba land. Theophilus and his sister keep this act as a secret till and after the child is born. After the birth of the child, Theophilus mysteriously hides the child away and claims it died after the delivery. Auntimi does not know the truth about the child until the end of the play when she was unriddled among Theophilus's wives.

More significantly, Chief Olowookere does not just make his sister a mother but also his wife as he hands her the calabash of life and, at a point, drives away her lover with a gun. His actions and in actions became clear revealed to the audience/reader through the consultation of *Ifa* and the fact that his death is not normal; his swollen face and body shows something is amiss. As in Yoruba tradition, when asked for the calabash of life, it is the older wife that should have it but, in this case, Auntimi, the sister to the husband which automatically made her his wife.

In this play, Yerima satirises the hypocrisy of some church. The church benefits a lot from Chief Theophilus Olowokeere's in his lifetime without questioning his lifestyle or bothering to know details about him or his sources of income. When he dies, the church refuses to give him a Christian burial because he syncretises traditionalism with Christianity. His name is removed from the grand Bishop's chair

and the piano he gave to the church. Attention is however drawn to the fact that the house he had built for the Bishop in his life time is neither demolished nor handed back or over to the family of the deceased (11).

### ***The Wives as Dark Comedy***

Yerimah in his author's note states that he has written 'a dark comedy... Avery dark one...' (2007:7). Dark comedy is a form that is rarely taught or conventionally adopted in playwriting. Plays are mostly characterised and described as tragic comedy, tragicomedy, farce and the occasional burlesque. Dark comedy as a form is essentially comedy that is characterised with grim, dreary and perturbing elements. There are elements of humour which are ghoulish and satirical.

Interestingly a lot of studies and critical writings have emerged on diverse genres of literature that have explored dark or black comedy. Bruce Jay Friedman's writings popularised the term in 1950s and 1960s. Dominantly the form thematically preoccupies itself with issues, occurrences and ideas that are considered to be taboos and these include heinous crimes, murder, the evil and barbarity of war, sexual abuse, incest, paedophilia, queerness, terrorism to mention a few.

Suffice to say that the purpose to which the form is put to use is to make light yet shock the audience and readers with these universal issues and deliberately force the audience and reader to think about the issues even though they are over laced with humour. Yerima makes this quite clear in his note, said he:

I did set out to write a comedy in this my new play. One that would make the audience laughs from the beginning to the end. But I found out that life is not always that easy to laugh at. Sometimes, what makes us laugh is quite capable of making us cry...Incest, another damnable human act, frightens me, yet drew

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

me to the play.... Which I hope will force us to think about our own lives... that part that we have always shielded, and hope no one will ever find out (Yerima, 2007:7).

Yerima's play, *The Wives*, makes light of serious matters such as death, funerary, contradictions in religious syncretism, challenges of polygamy, cradle snatching in the context of the old man marrying a child, deceit, the challenges of divorce and the sexual deprivation and strain that goes with it. Yerima closes the play upon the resolution of the identity of the first born, the lawyer who is to execute the will is the offspring of Chief's incestuous relationship with his sister.

### **Style in Yerima's *The Wives***

Ahmed Yerima uses suspense and surprise as dramatic devices. He is deliberately economical with the information released per time in an attempt to heighten and sustain the interest of the reader. The information that is important in resolving the problems in the story are released gradually to the audience and reader. This is evident in the discovery that the actual first son of Chief Theophilus Olowookere is the lawyer. This is really a strategic revelation because Auntimi had been portrayed as Theophilus's relative and a stabilising influence in the household being older than the wives. This is a poetic device but at times, it can be used in plays. Yerima engages apostrophe as a stylistic device. The four wives (the fourth wife being the deceased's sister) as portrayed, talk to the corpse of Chief Theophilus as if it were alive and capable of hearing them. Soliloquy is also employed to know the thoughts of the sister. At beginning of the play the audience encounter Auntimi first, talking to herself.

Satire, the overriding technique helps to define the imagery as well as choice of words which reinforces the intention of the playwright. There are specific diatribes targeted at the society, the world of the rich, the vanities of honouring the dead. For instance, from Auntimi's

soliloquy, the audience understand that the corpse of Chief Olowookere was honoured with the national award of Grand Commander of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (GCFR) (Yerima, 2007:12). The playwright uses this to satirise the Nigerian Government that give unmerited to individuals in the society. The make believe that goes on even in making up a corpse for lying-in-state is also ridiculed: 'I think the make-up was trifle too much. The undertakers were overzealous (13)'. The overblown face of the corpse of Chief Olowookere seems to wear a 'smile' and seems to be having fun at everyone's expense: 'He has a smile on his face. Is that for real?' Yerima portrays a corpse laughing at all the ceremonies, the skirmishes and even the discovery of his intrigues and his secrets which he wanted to be revealed when his will was read.

The playwright engages symbolism making the characters to represent different schools of thoughts. In the play, Ajagbe and Ifagbayi represent traditionalists who are rooted in culture. Angela represents the category of women that are not bold enough to assert themselves or and make decisions on their own. Tobiloba, the youngest wife represents modern and young ladies who are naive of the essence and challenges the marriage institution presents and Cecelia is representative of the assertive and decisive woman.

Dramatic and situational irony are also effectively engaged in *The Wives*. It is ironic that the women have distinctively erroneous impression of the husband's relationship with each of his women. Cecilia who appeared to be the toughest and appeared to have severed relations with their husband unknown to them was still in an intimate relationship with him. It is also intriguing that the status of Auntimi was unknown to the other women who believed that she would be at their mercy financially and that she had no family nor children. The wives deliberate on what to do with their lives after the funeral and all think of helping Auntimi with money and a shop for her upkeep. Ironically, it turns out she gains more materially with everything her late brother wills to her son whom she was not aware existed not

aware till the news broke.

**Ahmed Yerima's Two-man Play: *Tuti***

Ahmed Yerima's *Tuti*, a two-man play, is the story of a man, Father, whose past actions of siphoning money from the church's coffers for unclear purposes led to the untimely death of his wife and also fuelled the repulsion and hatred of his daughter towards him. It is while he is dying and struggling earn her respect and love that it is revealed that Father's past actions are actually for the sake of his family, particularly the daughter, Tuti, who is the woman mistaken for a mistress.

The essence of *Tuti* is vital to the society particularly from the point of view of the individual and families. The hidden improprieties and the impurities behind the glossiness most people put on and man's appearance of moral uprightness rather than the sound judgement that is expected. Corruption as a social avarice has penetrated most social institutions, including the church, family and the society. The extent of the rottenness is characterised by human's individual greed and hypocrisy. The members of cast of this play are limited. One notes immediate that the casting will it is to reduce the production cost whenever it is produced but it also fundamentally portrays reflect the significance of the family in the society. This significance of the seemingly small unit is portrayed crucial within the molecule of the society.

In *Tuti*, a question seems to beg for an answer, who is the hero or villain? Tuti or Father? Although, Tuti is the one who is has a proper named and even is an eponymously character, the play centres more on Father. It exposes the fall of Father, his loss of the trust the family and society places on him among other themes. The play is didactic in nature. Through the experience of Father especially with regard to his very tragic fall, the reader is encouraged to covet and adopt up better morals than Father does. The play portrays the weaknesses of the characters and impresses a need to be morally upright upon the mind of a reader.

**Ahmed Yerima's *Tuti*.**

Ahmed Yerima employs a variety of literary styles in this play. As in *The Wives* Yerima writes outside the orthodox convention of playwriting. Yerima's *Tuti* is without act and scenes. The play is one long uninterrupted stretch of dialogue and action. This is uncommon in playwriting and stands Yerima out as one who challenges the status quo in his form of play writing.

Yerima's style of plot does not follow the conventional in terms of structuring with acts and scenes. In his own way, he portrays the world as fluid and not sequential. Events happen without being meditated. At point where Tuti realises the truth about the use to which her father put the money and Father's death, Yerima softly portrays perhaps greatest short comings of short comings of women: the ability to jump into conclusions based on notions and following instincts. The play is conforms to the traditional three unities of the classical Greek tragedy; the unity of time, place and action. The play begins and ends in Father's apartment and also does not last more than twenty-four hours. The plot is in unity; there is no conflicting action. This enhances the simplicity of the play as a way of celebrating the simplicity and beauty of the family setup.

Yerima's *Tuti* engages characterology excellently. The focus of the characters is on their attitude to life. In the brevity of the play, the reader is exposed to the worldview of the major characters in the play. The characters are seen majorly from what they think of them as well as position to critical issues around. Tuti and Ayo are the only characters with proper names while the focus is on the young and growing family/generation. The subject matter revolves around what the older generation has left for the younger, how the parent generation/family affect the daughter generation/family. Unknown to Father, Tuti negatively reflects on her parents' mistakes. This also portrays the generational gap that exists between a supposedly close knit people.

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

The playwright also employs very simple everyday diction in the writing of this play and also precise stage directions. The story however relies on the flashback technique in order to resolve the conflicts in the play. It is by flashback that Father understands the depth of his betrayal not only to his wife but also his daughter. The analogie of Yerima and two purposively selected plays of his are to works we advance the conversation and complement the discussion on playwrights and playwriting in contemporary written African literature.

Ahmed Yerima unique playwrights and plays that have emerged in contemporary modern African drama. The works of Ahmed Yerima and Femi Osofisan under this category showcase dimensions of the emerging thematic thrusts and styles in African drama. These plays are not limited to themes and motifs of national and cultural connections; they also discuss sociological issues of marriage, family, domestic life and religion usually with settings that suggest cultural as well as urban life in their plays. Both playwrights attempt to capture the lives of individuals, their experiences, the societies they live in and issues humans grapple with. Yerima, like other playwrights like Femi Osofisan, radically explore new modes and models of drama, and characterology with a difference and other distinct generic forms.

### **Femi Osofisan**

Diverse and extensive writings on the works of Femi Osofisan have exhaustively examined dimensions of his plays and his theoretical postulations. My inclusion of the Osofisan plays is to purposively highlight his understanding and re-interpretation of gods in the Yoruba pantheon and their roles in African drama.

### **Biographical Notice**

Femi Osofisan whose pseudo name is Okinba Launko is a playwright, dramatist, actor, poet theatre director, critic, novelist and biographer. Prof Osofisan worked for several decades at the University of Ibadan

where he remains an Emeritus Professor while serving as Distinguished Professor of Literature at Kwara State University. His creative folio include, four novels, five poetry collections, countless essays and over sixty plays. His plays and adaptations from books have been performed across continents and he is a recipient of several distinguished prizes globally. Prof Osofisan was Director of the Nigerian National Arts Theatre. He is and remains consistently influential in African theatre and dramatic discourse. One of Osofisan's most remarkable accomplishments, is the celebration of his cultural values and his understanding of the full implication of writing them into history and culture.

Osofisan on ideology and style is quoted:

For many of us... who had ourselves risen from lowly peasant or urban working backgrounds, Marxism was the without dispute the tool by which the vicious gap then already developing between the rich and the poor in our nascent nations would be halted and erased. It was also the formula by which our ideal of an egalitarian society would be achieved out of the chaos of our underdevelopment... this understanding of history and of our perspective role in it led naturally to specific artistic choices and strategies... we were no longer interested for instance in the nostalgic voyages back to the past on which Negritude drew its intimidating anthems. Instead our focus was on the present state of our society, on unmasking the class forces at play within it, revealing the material sources of exploitation and injustice, demonstrating how the masses could liberate themselves. Naturally the question of style and form had to be settled. For us, the audience was the crucial factor... p 154, (Osofisan: 2016:153 &154)

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Armed with these goals and determination among other ideologies, Osofisan carves a niche for his creative writing by creating deconstructed character types. A unique feature of Osofisan's folio is his creation of characters that are deities within the Yoruba pantheon. For instance, Olokun, possessor of the sea and his wife are the two deities portrayed as the gods in Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*. Osofisan in this play demystifies the overarching mythical agency that paralyses the cultural agency that holds the society spell bound. This also makes the oppressor to be constructed as authority that cannot be challenged. Osofisan's unapologetic Marxist ideology is the signature tune of his dramatic world, its social centeredness and masses oriented approach. Osofisan deconstructs the sacredness of these agencies by reconstructing the masks of the traditional idiosyncrasies and beliefs and repositioning the same in a societally functional role play. Dasyuva, 1997 corroborates this and references *No More the Wasted Breed* and *Morotountodun* among others (Dasyuva, 1997).

To Niyi Osundare (1980), *Once upon Four Robbers* and *Morountodun* are Brechtian. He observes that the engagement of the audience in Osofisan's works is similar to Brecht's use of alienation techniques and is also anti-illusion. Osundare also avers that Osofisan is quick relieve people's minds of mythical clutches and also demythologises the theatre to enable it become an agency of socio-artistic communication.

The deities are therefore portrayed as oppressors who are unable to deliver their followers and worshippers from their stifling experiences. The people are their destiny. Saint Gbilekaa (1993) perceives Osofisan's plays as a part of the first folio of amongst Nigerian literary drama thematically devoted to the proletariats and the peasants. From his point of view, Osofisan's drama is instructive prompting the have-nots to challenge the status quo. In his view Osofisan's practical approach permits him to juxtapose aspects of mythology engaging them in pitching his ideological convictions.

Ethnographically speaking, anthropologists regard myths as religious truism in a narrative form and acknowledge them as sources of information on religious observances and beliefs (Iloanusi, 1954:5-6).

However, Claude Levi-Strauss 'a posture on myths as an embodiment of cultural categories, and a repository that makes a people conscious of their roots, giving them tools with which they can navigate human existence'. Osofisan's assertive posture shapes his unique vision of drama engaging the classical contribution of African myths, legends, and folklores as predating 'world civilisation', and before the Greek secularisation of theatre through adaptation of religious festivals. Ojaide, (1997) in engaging Osofisan's works reinforces the significance of Yoruba traditions and its folklore, celebrating the redefinition of *viz-a-viz* his relationship with the society.

### **Yoruba Divinities and the Drama of Femi Osofisan**

Awodiya in *Excursion in Drama and Literature* (1993) describes Femi Osofisan as a second-generation Nigerian playwright with an alternative sense of tradition when compared with the earlier dramatists and the likes of Wole Soyinka. Awodiya also avers that a dominant element that sets off Osofisan's drama is his search justice in a world that despises it.

According to the theatre critic:

The significant thing about Osofisan's drama is not much its philosophical content as its posture of revolt. Its restless search in a world of abandoning justice (13).

The Nigerian society itself is enough fabric with which inspires the dramatist and provides the inspiration, as well as sources that influences his writings. Sources whether historical or oral, legends and myth, as alluded to in *Morountodun*, or even ritual observances as

### *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

portrayed in *Twingle Twangle...* abound in the works of Osofisan. Osofisan's strategy is to deconstruct and demystify myths and religious observances in a more analytic and logical manner. Soyinka for instance portrays his divinities in a *Dance of the Forests* as demigods but he does not in any way question their existence or relegate their significance in the pantheon. Whereas Osofisan goes all out to challenge the divine by unmasking the 'masquerade' of indigenous African beliefs and in their place erect new mythic structures to perform new and relevant roles. This is evident in *Morountodun* (Dasyuva,1997). Osofisan's thematic preoccupation is woven around revolt against the totality of oppression all forms of injustice.

His engagement of the supernatural and divine is to trouble shoot their role and commitment to the wellbeing of the people that worship and serve them. In the war ridden village he portrays in the play *Morountodun*, Osofisan asks:

We fall on our knees, we multiply our supplication, and  
we pile up sacrifices. But suppose Niniola, just suppose  
the gods are indifferent to us? (33).

It is Moremi that boldly challenges the status quo by by-passing her husband and Oronmiyan as well as the other deities in resolving the mysteries behind the attacks. Osofisan here deliberately recreates the Moremi myth to suit the contexts of contemporary Nigeria as well as infusing the ancient energies in the resolution of contemporary injustice and oppression. *No More the Wasted Breed* has as peculiarity in its challenging the ritual perspectives as well the posture of the older generation of writers like Wole Soyinka. Soyinka whose contribution to African Drama had earlier been discussed in this work was engaged by the dramatists that followed hot on the heels of his generation as he had become established as a dramatic institution and agency from which other writers especially in Africa could take bearing or disagree.

As specific reaction to *The Strong Breed* by Wole Soyinka, the Osofisan's play takes a deliberate turn. In Ajidahun's comparative analysis of the two, he examines the divergence between texts and according to him the centrality of the thematic preoccupation is unmistakable. However, the ideological stance of both are influenced sharply by ideological postures and generational gap. The exception Osofisan takes is largely in the manner in which Soyinka portrays the gods as 'inviolable' and human destiny as 'irrevocable'. He challenges the carrier motif as oppressive and retrogressive, argues for the possibility and reality of man's ability to have control of his destiny and societal cleansing as a collective responsibility and not a sacrifice that must be borne by a single carrier (Ajidahun,2012:9)

Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* revolves around a situation arising between the gods of salt, a fisherman and freshwater. Biokun's son is ill and, in his desperation, to get him healing he prepares to carry out the sacrifices recommended by the priest. Olokun the god, insists that his wife, the goddess Elesu, waters had been polluted by the villagers and whose worship the village had neglected was to accompany him. Arriving ashore, the gods recognise Biokun the carrier, who was pre-destined to do their bidding just like his late father.

The play begins with Olokun (the god) and Elesu (the goddess). Olokun is shocked at the vengefulness of Elesu who has flooded and suffocated the community and destroyed the farmland. Elesu is particularly upset that the Egure community continually desecrate her waters and beauty which they were obligated to celebrate and protect, in her words:

You were not her to see the humiliation they piled on me. I have waited for twenty-five years ... Were we not given our laws and taboos? Were we not bidden to guard them jealously or else wither and die ... but see, look at my face! See what the human beings have made of me, a cess pit of rotten flotsam! See how they choke

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

my breath with oil, my belly with cement! And shit...  
They turn my bosom into a restless market of  
strugglers and pimps and murderers (Osofisan,  
1993:89).

The provocation is heightened by the fact that they did not only rupture the injunction of honouring her beauty and not fish in her, they also refuse to propitiate her with 'sweet smelling foods' (1993:89).

Olokun, portrayed as a god of justice is more mature in expectation of humans and in assess the consequences of the action that his wife had taken. She accuses him of being overly permissive and indulging the humans which emboldens the contemptuous behaviour of the human beings:

They know that all it will take is a few humble prayers at  
your shrine. The priest rings his bell, they sing a  
dolorous song, and a ram dies. That's all. Your heart  
melts at once like a kiss of salt (1993:90)

However, this time, Elesu is more determined and battle ready. She insists humans must face the consequences of their negligence despite Olokun's persuasion. He insists that they need to hear from the humans before taking the absolute decision Elesu intends to mete on humans she is convinced that 'Human beings only learn from suffering' (91).

It is at this point that the couple proceed to interact with the humans. The Egure community suffers under the punitive suffocation of Elesu. Her 'beautiful' waters submerges everything like a carpet the shores, beaches, the waters drown the boats of those who attempt to escape, and the farmlands become swamps and streets at the doorstep of huts. Elesu proudly states 'I am a terrible goddess of vengeance!' (1999:88) She relishes in the fact that her waters have cut-off the entire community for several months and the fishes sent to other shores,

plantation have been destroyed and a plague begins to rave in the community.

Erindo, Biokun's only son suffers from the plague and Biokun's willingness to visit the gods is in order to obtain healing for him irrespective of his reservations towards Olokun. At the shrine, Olokun, Elesu, the priest, Togun meet Biokun and Saluga. From them, Biokun learns first time that he is the carrier chosen to save the community. 'To carry it across troubled waters and set it again at the safe side' (1993:38)

Togun explains 'Olokun has a wife called Elesu, a goddess who presides over the shallow waters of the creeks whose banks Egure people drive their daily life activities'. In conclusion he states, 'they cannot worship Olokun without worshipping Elesu'. Elesu's had become greatly offended, her waters polluted in Togun's words; 'She longs to meet her carrier again like before at the appointed place' (1993:103)

The implication therefore was that reigniting her worship would bring an end to the plague 'The water will withdraw and fishes return. All the dying will live again' (1993:103).

Saluga, a scorner of the gods discourages Biokun from worshipping the gods. He refers to them as cannibal gods' (1993:103) who prey upon sacrifices of the poor, and still take advantage of them. Osofisan's authorial voice is loudest in Biokun's questions:

You complain being abandoned, but who brought the predators who impoverish our people and turned them into grovelling slaves? Did they not berth in your water goddess? (108).

Saluga's audacity and effrontery are critical to the significance of *No More the Wasted Breed* as an African drama. Those interrogations become Osofisan's ideological postulates as well as the logicity or contradictions of perceptions of gods wherewithal in overseeing the wellbeing of their worshippers, watching out for their concerns and

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

protecting them from evil. His position is that the gods who neither assume responsibility for, own or appropriate the care and wellbeing of their worshippers should not expect adulation or propitiation and should not complain of abandonment. From Biokun's point of view, the wellbeing of the people ought to automatically translate into gratitude to their gods therefore 'Only a happy people pay homage to gods' (1993:109).

Saluga without mincing words points this out to Elesu, who had in displeasure killed her carrier Osoosi. The discontentment of the gods as portrayed is because of the cosmic disharmony which they themselves had initiated. Osofisan creates a Saluga who in *No More the Wasted Breed*, resists the docility with which the average member of a community or worshipper relates with deities. He audaciously accuses the gods of being inconsiderate, oppressive and exploitative. He does not only query the class form which the carriers are selected from, he also campaigns against the tendencies for the gods to be oppressive and destructive.

Tell me, why is it always we who give our lives? Why is it always the poor who are called to sacrifice? Why is it always the wretched, never a wealthy man, never the son of a king, who is suddenly discovered to bear the mark of destiny at difficult moments, and pushed on to fulfill himself in suicidal task? Why? (1993:105).

Even though Osofisan balances this narrative in *Twingle Twangle* where he picks on a, courageous princess as a carrier he drives his point home in *No More the Wasted Breed* by Saluga's inquiries.

Saluga in *No More the Wasted Breed* insists that the gods can be partial and collaborate with the oppressors, the predators and the plunderers who are able to provide them sumptuous sacrifices that are pleasing to them. Osofisan does not for a minute portray the radicalness of Saluga as not having consequences he loses his life as an infuriated Elesu provoked by Saluga's sacrilegious posture reacts

uncontrollably.

Saluga's stance remains:

I am not afraid; I have no respect for gods who feed on their worshippers (1993:107).

Osofisan through Saluga recommends to the society that the messianic role is not the solution and the life of a carrier needs not to be sacrificed when the people can choose to drive the indices that will determine their success and achieve their goals. His further condemns social stratification which leads to the oppressive class structure.

In *No More the Wasted Breed* Osofisan redefines the relationship of gods and humans from the socialist perspective and of a necessity concientise his audience to have a more introspective relationship with history, legends and myths in a manner that will be beneficial to contemporary challenges. The play calls for the abandonment of superstition and oppressive religion as well as the need to challenge oppression even if it is perpetrated by rulers or the gods.

Olokun, god of justice overrules Elusu. He allows Biokun to express his shock and the confirmation of what Saluga had observed:

What is the justice when you hack a tree down and blame the handle of the axe? You complain of pollution but who brought the ships of merchandise from across the oceans to our shore? Did our conquerors not come from across your sea Olokun? Did they not berth your waters goddess? ...We fed you with the best of our seasons praying for peace and abundance. But instead you brought us white slavers, who carried off our best men to far plantations. To anguish and humiliation ...They rode on your shoulders and brought terror of gun corruption of cowries. And now they have seized control of the mainland over there, have seized our richest lands... you ask no sacrifice of them no token

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

of allegiance... and Saluga saw it all and spoke out, he had great courage he has paid with his life... 108-109

Olokun to the shock of Elusu revives Saluga. The implication being that Elusu the goddess takes his place in death.

Osofisan concludes his argument in saying:

Beloved, time is no longer on our side... See the men have changed we must fulfil our appetite by other means, for they do not demand protection anymore but food; but justice. I have no choice I must respond (109).

Saluga upon waking says ... it's a new world! The poor shall raise their heads! Men shall be free! (110)

From Osofisan's ideology it does not require messianic intervention or sacrifice to commence a change process the collective consciousness of the people stirred by courageous individuals is what is necessary for the desired triumph. This is juxtaposed with simultaneous action as the waters begin to recede Biokun's son recovers:

Togun: And the people bursting of their huts!

They are dancing!

Saluga: Drums, I hear drums!

Togun: The whole world is awake!

Saluga: The whole world is awake again! Leaves are turning green, look!

Biokun: Lets us go! Let's go and join the dancing!

(1993:111)

The villagers can rejoice because they are in firm control of their lives. Osofisan in portraying a Biokun liberated from the carrier role and Saluga from the wrath of gods sets the people free.

In this section I take a specific look at Osofisan's demystification

of myth, culture and tradition in *Twingle Twangle: a Twynning Tayle*.

This drama engages twins as a separate representative ideological perspective. When the wins come of age they decide to explore the world in doing this they go on their separate ways. Kehinde whose ideology Osofisan engages for demystification journeys and arrives at a community named Etido. He chances upon a procession leading a beautiful princess as a carrier and sacrifice to the water gods. Lawunmi the innocent princess has been prepared for the ritual and she is about to be sacrificed. Her father engages her in the following dialogue:

Moluwe: Lawunmi, my daughter, do you know the purpose of this journey on which we are sending you?

Lawunmi: Yes father, Kabiyesi!

I am going dear father to a market far, far away. The birthplace of fable and song. The market where our ancestors, they say, trade with the gods (1993:19).

Osofisan unapologetically strips the sacrifice of any other meaning asides failure of generations of leadership, cowardice, exploitation and unwillingness to confront a problem that can be resolved through alternative means.

Chief Priest: Kabiyesi, you must step forward now, look at the moon! Put the blindfold on her and let's quickly get away! (1993:21)

The Chief Priest evidently speaks like the leader who is ready to lead his followers to a danger point and abscond. He momentarily forgets that the ritual subject is a child of the king. 'You can see the men trembling already, Bilisi will soon be here' (1993:21). These types of leaders willingly sacrifice other lives while they are quick to hide away at the fear of death. It is interesting that the ritual about to be performed was needless and could have been stopped if specific action had been taken across generations. The human sacrifice was

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

therefore a face-saving sacrifice.

Moluwe: No, No, I won't enough of the masquerade!  
The deceit must end! She won't go! I'll not pronounce  
the incantations! For you all know the truth, that all this  
is just a smokescreen! A charade! She is going into the  
jaws of monster! Don't go Lawunmi! It's all lies. You're  
going to die, uselessly, because of our cowardice  
(1993:21).

Moluwe reveals to everyone and his daughter because he realises he is going to lose what is precious to him. One imagines the countless innocent souls he and the community had sacrificed before it came to the turn of his daughter. Therefore we infer that certain policies are made to suit the leaders and a different set of policies or regulations for the followers. Here the king confesses because it's a loved one whose life is on the line. Moluwe, leader and king of Etido in the tradition behind the ritual says 'we've been feeding you lies!'... Let her know the truth!' (1993:21). This is no devotion, just an abject submission to cowardice' (1993:22).

Osofisan satirises the cowardice, deceit and unwillingness of most leaders and their readiness to accommodate injustice, oppression and other avarices that hampers the growth of the society or limits the wellbeing of their people. He in the juxtaposition of the ideologies of the twins show cases the leadership problems that are synonymous with the problem of leadership in Africa.

In spite of the revelation of the truth Lawunmi, bravely offers to go because she realises what is at stake for her people:

Lawunmi: Do not despair, father. So much the better  
now that I know. I shall still go someone has to go, at  
least till you find a way of defeating the monster, Bilisi  
(1993:22).

Osofisan portrays Lawunmi and her lady-in-waiting Aanu as being bold and courageous:

Lawunmi: It's coming Aanu! It's coming!  
The gods of our ancestors, give me courage! Runaway,  
Aanu!  
Run and leave me alone!

(1993:23-24)

Aanu: No, I'll not abandon you! We'll stay here together, till  
death (1993:24)

Kehinde who stays in a strategic location is intrigued:  
Kehinde: Touching! They are sacrificing the girl to a  
sea monster! Nonsense, it's barbaric. I'm not going to  
let it happen (1993:23).

Kehinde with the help of Digbaro his servant, intervenes by defeating the monster and the ladies are saved. Thus, bringing about the desired change. They all together at last and Kehinde are able to kill the oppressor (Bilisi)

Digbaro: Congratulations, Master! You did it!  
You killed Bilisi! (1993:25).

Osofisan's ideology of collectivism is seen in this work. Kehinde having obtained victory was given Lawunmi as wife and King. Osofisan criticises this rashness because people did not do their due diligence neither did they try to find out about his background among other things. Osofisan in several of his works continues this mystery of demystification, such texts include *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* and *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*.

He uses the Twingle-Twangle song to end his play but invariably his ideology is presented to the people.

The Twingle-Twangle song;  
You who sat and watched our play  
Now's the time to have your say

*Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

Twinkle-Twangle, a twynning tale  
Has no end but what you say  
Let your minds unfurl their sail!  
Let them sing like joyous bell!  
We took you to Ereko  
And brought you to Etido  
Each of these towns, as you see  
Represents a philosophy. (1993:92).

The song depicts numerous ideas, fundamentally we are shown two communities managed by two ideologies. The portrait painted is that the quality of leadership determines quality of results. The functionality and the demystification this archetypal character type is unmistakable.

In Osofisan's *Tegonni*, the courageous African princess in the Yoruba community of Oke-Osun is portrayed. The fabric of the conflict is woven on her personality, her ability to question aspects of traditional beliefs and practices coupled with the fact that she has unusual interests in fine art contrary to the societal expectation from a female.

Osofisan reinterprets the sea goddess myth legend of the past in *Another Raft* where he recreates the archetypal role of the sea goddess. Osofisan's Yemosa is not the typical image of the fish tailed human. His is the god as man without identifying with the merworld. He strips them of divinity in the lines they render in the script to emphasise his insistence on men seeking solution where it ought to be found.

Yemosa I: We're like this, as you can see...

Yemosa II: We're merely the figures of fantasy  
(1996:35).

Yemosa removes his costume (1996:85) not only to destroy the illusion of women as goddess, but also to prove that there is no god or goddess but man. That the

*Adedoyin Aguru*

idea of god exists only in the minds of men.

Yemosa I: Gods and goddesses breed in the minds of men as hyacinths in fertile water (1996:83).

The denials uttered by Yemosa is to deliberately rupture the sacredness of the sea goddess with a view to demystifying the real or imagined construct of the concept of the sea gods among humans.

Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima in this chapter have been examined in terms of the diversity and unique components of their plays. Their being unorthodox stands them out in ideology and style. Showcasing dimensions of the emerging, ideological postures, thematic thrusts and styles in African drama, Ahmed Yerima, like Femi Osofisan, radically explore new modes and models of drama, along characterology with a difference.

## CHAPTER 9

# **Dramaturgy Of Identity and Regional Themes in the Works of African Women Playwrights**

In bringing this inquiry into drama in Africa to a conclusion, it is germane to draw attention to the fact that studies in African playwriting and studies of African playwrights exhibit definite gaps in critical writing on African female dramatists and drama. With exception to a few inquiries carried out on the dramaturgy of three African regions, for instance, no comparative interrogation of the African identity dominant in regional themes succinctly distinguishable in the folio of the African female playwright has been investigated.

This section argues for furthering studies on the dramaturgy of identity that will emerge from the regional themes portrayed by these female playwrights. Selecting representative plays of female authors from the five regions of Africa whose works significantly embody the identity and ideology of women authors from these regions, for instance, will shed light on the efforts of these classes of African writers. Adopting comparativism as an analytical strategy should bring to the fore the elements that typify regional identity and feminist ideology in the plays of female African writers.

Drama in Africa has its root in the multi-sided cultures of Africans. Post-colonial Africa witnessed the vocalisation of African women who had been under-represented or stereotyped in the African literary corpus giving rise to prominent voices of female

dramatists. These voices portray the experiences of the continent's women in the communities and nations they belong to. Thus, the dramaturgy of these playwrights becomes a manner of identification with fellow females regarding their socio-cultural, economic and political experiences, as evident in their thematic thrusts. Evidently, there is a definite rotation in the thought and behavioural pattern of the African woman, which has produced remarkable women writers who, despite numerous limitations, continue to be the voice of the African woman, portraying and juxtaposing the ancient and the contemporary challenges of the woman in Africa. The peculiarity of the drama of the women of the five African regions should be given a lot of attention.

Studies on women and their literary activities have become contemporary issues that remain dominant in critical and theoretical scholarship. Whereas it appears as though much ground has been covered in women studies, there are dimensions to the lives and writings of women, particularly in Africa, that are yet to be fully explored. The nexus of female/feminist ideology and the comparable forms of regional identity of the African woman, should be the kernel of such an investigation study, are invariably connected. The indisputably prevalent thematic links that run through the drama of women in the African regions are also not disconnected from the historical, political, sociological and cultural contexts of the African woman playwright who, through her dramaturgy, creates and recreates the world of the African woman.

The issues proposed in this section are broached from three standpoints. The first considers ideas from existing studies on feminist theatre and theory, particularly the theories propounded by Keyssar (1996), Forte (1996), Kruger (1996), and Croacher (1996), among others whose positions were largely determined by the trends in the emergence and evolution of the feminist theatre in America. The second takes its bearing from the fact that while drama, like other genres of literature is characterised by universalism the theoretical

## *Drama in Africa: Agency, Aesthetics and Ideology*

positions and indices that could be used in explicating texts from non-African nations may not necessarily be valid in the African context; hence the need to engage works from African female playwrights within other contexts. The third seeks to establish, through comparativism, a cross-cultural critical approach that engages the dominance of identity; gendered, individual or communal.

Indisputably, the efforts of Box, Farfan and Ferris and Perkins attest to the emergence and steady growth of drama by African women from all the African regions despite all the limitations and challenges they face particularly in the publishing industry. Perkins's efforts which have produced several anthologies of plays by African women continue to create global visibility for the African female playwright privileging African women who are domiciled in Africa. Several other scholarly writings have focused on ideological as well as sociological perspectives to the writing of African women playwrights and some have compared the writings of women with their male counterparts at the national level.

It is from these varied positions explicating the dramaturgy of contemporary African playwrights with a view to open new vistas in issues such as strategies and structures that can, for instance, distinguish a feminist play from a conventional sensationalist play or, from a drama that celebrates identity to a drama that encapsulates the totality of Africaness and African culture within which the African woman finds her place.

Drawing the attention of scholars to the potentials of this regional study is to throw up new vistas in that direction and to ensure that these women and their writings attract the much deserved critical. Works like Fatima Gallarie's *You have come back* (Princesses), Julie Okon's *Edewede* (The Dawn of a New Day), Nathalie Etoké's *Better Days come in Bitter Ways*, Andrian Kisia's *Home Coming* and Sindiwe Magona's *Vukan* are regionally symbolic and captures the Africaness of these writers and their thematic preoccupation. From the polemics

of comparativism and the theories of comparativists emerge engaging structures and forms that are essentially African. From these writings regional characteristics such as, ideology (and in this case the feminist temper), authentic setting, themes expressing national and regional sentiments and aspirations, characters representing national and regional types, plots and situations developed from myths and legends as well as indigenous literary forms are identified. Most inspiring are the evident comparable structures and forms such as influences, trends, forms, motif-types, affinities, universality, conformity and lack of it in forms, content and style which reflect the regional and, by extension, continental features of African female drama. The frontiers of knowledge with regard to studies on African women playwrights are yet to be thoroughly. The potential for comparative regional engagement of drama of African female writers will without doubt continue to bring to the fore the overt and underlying tropes and thematic constructs of female African drama therefore unarguably linking the yawning gaps in the study of female African drama with their male counterparts.

Studies in African drama and dramaturgy will continually evolve: national, regional and continental characters and features will also continue to evolve making it an ethnographic centred enterprise.

## Conclusion

Drama in Africa has taken a most definitive posture in the recreation of Africa's Identity that had been eroded in several ways by the ideology of imperialism and its execution in colonialism Playwrights that took the lead in this rewriting and redefining of Africa's image and identity did so largely to the advantage of the imperialist orthodoxy seeing that most of the plays were written in the languages of the colonisers and only in a few cases were original texts to indigenous African Languages .

This also speaks to the reality of the dominance of the linguistic imperialism that persists in Africa and the inability of the African nations to resolve the language and linguistic contentions.

Suffice to say that the dramatic and literary arts which captured the ethnography of Africa has repositioned the continent culturally, nationally, and politically. The drama of Africa negates all the earlier postulations of Africa portrayed as a place and people with strange and unfamiliar customs. Articulated judgements can be drawn from each of the playwrights as well as the ideologies discussed in this work. From each of them we are able to comprehend the individualistic and nationalistic views of shared experiences and therefore understand the complexities present in the cultural and social –political contexts in Africa.

One cannot but agree with Ezekiel's Mphahlele (1967) who categorically states that African playwrights, through the dramatic and theatrical agency carry out the 'propaganda' of countering the imperialists narrative effectively and initiated campaigns that did not only offer panoramic views on existing issues but conscientises the

*Adedoyin Aguoru*

nationals and peoples of the country they write about and write for.

This interrogation of African dramatic ideology, tempers forms, stylistic creations, thematic preoccupations, and genderised perspectives as situates drama as an ethnographic resource that Africans have taken advantage of, this ethnographic value of drama makes engaging African dramatic and theatrical forms instructive.

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