

# UNSTABLE GEOGRAPHIES, HISTORY, AND THEATRICAL EXPRESSIONS: A STUDY OF THREE NIGERIAN PLAYS.

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## **Abstract**

*In this paper, we examine the effect of cultural and historical diversities on the theatrical expressions and the type of historical plays written by the new generation of Nigerian playwrights. It is also about how the dislocation of history has affected the arrangement of historical materials forcing playwrights to amend the thematic pre-occupations in their plays. The three plays chosen for this study which are written by two Nigerian award-winning playwrights – Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*, and Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*, and Ameh Oboni the Great, emerged from the colonial history of Nigeria which has forced the playwrights in their thematic expressions to re-examine the effect of forced cultural fusion – African and European – and also to arrive at a more plausible story which will encourage a new nationalistic spirit in the new generation of African audiences. The plays represent the playwrights' dilemma in representing the historical, cultural, and social dislocations as offshoots of unstable geographies, and at the same time embody the dialectic and didactic elements of theatrical performance.*

*Keywords: Historical Drama, Cultural Fusion, Nigerian Playwrights, Theatrical Expression, Literary Commitment.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Unstable Geographies refers to the continuous shifting of boundaries of relationships between nations and cultures leading to the co-existence of diverse peoples and cultures and attendant life-

changing experiences as well as the creation of new identities. How issues of diversities and identities are managed and coped with, bearing in mind that the circumstances that engendered these relationships also dictate how they are managed, are necessary aspects of a study of this nature. On the other hand, Multiple Theatricalities refers to how theatre and performance have been affected and are affecting the situation, how theatre and performance reflect and project these diversities and the attendant conflicts and collaborations, adversities and privileges.

The tension in Nigeria between the East and the rest of the country has been there since the amalgamation of the country by the British in 1914. It is only now taking a dangerous turn and has occupied discussions in the media. How we got here is actually what this paper desires to, but has not enough space to address. The history of the contact with European colonialists has left an everlasting political, social, cultural, economic nightmare for the formerly colonized people which are not even left alone to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives without continued interference, masquerading as “friendship,” from their former colonizers. The aim of this paper is to appraise the role of the playwrights in addressing this problem through the selected plays.

While the plays overtly spotlight the dehumanizing impact of colonial processes on the colonies, they also expose some complicities on the part of the indigenous people. This is what gives them their urgency, exactly. While not denying the catastrophe brought on the colonized, it is also a fact that things would not have been as bad without complicity on the part of the victims of colonization. Thus, the plays are a reminder of where the problem began as well as where it will lead if handled differently. The lesson for the future is what will keep the plays relevant for a very long time because history repeats itself and people hardly learn from it. The mistakes and oversight that rendered the colonized people powerless to rebuff the onslaught of foreign

imperialism need to be critically evaluated to avoid being perpetual victims of political and cultural dominance.

## **EFFECT OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DIVERSITIES: AN AFRICAN EXPERIENCE**

Cultural diversity is a site for cultural tension as nations find it difficult to exist without these tensions which can grow from clash of interest to a full-blown war, especially when the cultural integration was a forced one. On the other hand, no culture can exist without interacting with others. Therefore some time and somehow, diverse cultures are bound to interact. Under normal situations, nations develop along cultural lines, making them more or less homogeneous. However, a nation such as Nigeria which, through the process of amalgamation, has become a multicultural geographical entity with major cultural differences; achieving cultural nationalism has remained elusive. Again, there is nothing wrong with multiculturalism except in situations where one party strives to overshadow and dominate the other. This is why some analysts have pointed out that multiculturalism is not working in Europe because of the immigrant condition that brought cultures together there. Amalgamation forced cultural integration on Nigerians and they are not managing their new status as a federation well, hence the incessant ethnic and religious clashes, as well as the partisan politics that are devastating the hitherto blessed nation.

However, this paper is not about amalgamation or even the impact of colonisation. A lot has been written on these already. Rather the present paper attempts to examine the dramatic representation of the socio-cultural effect of amalgamation on generations of the Nigerian people. The paper looks at how drama is used to document, and reflect on the effects of the forced amalgamation, determine the heroes, villains, and victims of the clash between the

indigenous people of the African kingdoms, and the colonial powers. The paper also intends to follow two new generation playwrights' re-enactment of the colonial experience in a deconstructive manner in order to critically examine human flaws that enable the tragedies to occur, and how the protagonists of these chosen plays and their people became victims in their troubled shifting socio-political and geographical locations and sad reality.

The reason for this backward glance at an experience that should better be buried because of the trauma it unearths and resuscitates is to give an African perspective on the narrative and to help new generation of Africans see the mistakes and ingenuity of their ancestors and learn from them, knowing that what happened then can reoccur, if necessary changes are not made in the way things are done presently in the African continent. There is enough evidence to show that not much has been learned from that colonial experience hence the necessity for these re-enactments in dramatic form in order to bring the images closer to the wondering consciousness of the African people. If the lessons of the past are not learned, the mistakes of the present will be greater, and the future will remain bleak. Eric Bentley's position is very relevant here, for though the subject of his book was the great playwrights of the past, he sees it wise, to begin from the current state of the theatre stating that, "If the past often helps us to understand the present, it is the present which establishes our historical perspective" ( 3). The past gave birth to the present. The present is often influenced by the past. It follows then that in order to understand and improve on the present situation, the past needs to be revisited for clues. Thus, the primary focus of this study is the emotional effect of colonial history and the use of drama as a tool for emotional and dramatic outpour which exposes the incompetence of the political elite and their inability to interpret and learn from this historical experience which expectedly continues to lead to the furtherance of the problem of diversity.

While the playwrights use drama as a didactical and dialectical tool employed to reflect and highlight the emotional and traumatic experience in their works, these works, in turn, have become a vital part of the need to retell the people's history. While sometimes portraying both the negative and positive effects of colonisation, and at the same time pointing towards a need for social change; the plays under study, highlight the compulsory need to learn from history and prepare the immediate society for the challenges of modernity. Ultimately, it is the lesson learned from an experience that matters.

In order to go beyond storytelling; therefore, contemporary African playwrights have become historicists. Both Nigerian playwrights selected for this study are no exception. They have tried to understand the problems of their immediate society historically by finding a link of relevance between past history and new realities. Paul Hamilton explains this process further when he analyzes the process of historicism in his seminal book, *Historicism* in which he observes that:

Historicism emerges in reaction to the practice of deducing from first principle truths about how people are obliged to organise themselves socially and politically. The natural laws governing human behaviour at all times are formulated, and cultures evaluated by the degree to which they approximate to this ideal pattern. Historicists oppose this tradition, which, primarily associated with the Enlightenment, stretches, in different versions... (2)

The two playwrights selected for this study perform the two tasks posited above. They, like true historicists, take an old socio-political history, select relevant aspects and give them a new pattern and thematic focus and at the same time break with traditional beliefs

and myths of the historical narrative. This enables them to infuse such stories with new styles and techniques thereby enlarging the enlightenment spheres in order to expand the thematic focus and intention of the original tradition and history.

The playwright's interpretation of history, therefore, is drawn from the essence of his 'old people,' the original owners of the history. He reflects on the changing cultures, attitudes and geographical location. This is important to the sad notion of colonialism and forced amalgamations of different tribal entities. The new plays which emerged such as the three chosen for this study then become most important for the African society to feel the need for change in socio-political and historical thinking, and possess the new weapon needed to negotiate African modernity. We must quickly add that this is not 'negritude,' because the African has since gone beyond the identity problem, but rather this becomes a psychological opening to the closure of colonialism, a deconstruction of a falsely packaged history in order to maintain a sad status quo of inequality. It is also a reconstruction of the historical character in order to reveal why the protagonist or victim walked into the political sophistication and tragic trappings of the colonial powers. At this point, the drama is used to create a deeper understanding of the African predicament after an experience which deconstructed past realities and allows the African to inherit what is now regarded as "a false, subdued history of a captured useless race." The 'enlightenment' which Hamilton mentions above, then becomes the rearrangement of a sad political colonial history in order to understand the inner complex game of the colonial masters.

It must be noted that the colonial game of domination and amalgamation has not disappeared, because, to date, the development of Africa as a continent depends on the parameters of growth as determined by the Western world. This is why the two playwrights selected for this study used drama with its power of

imitation, recreation and manipulation to reawaken the fixed tampered mind of the African to start a new thinking, one that will lead the new African to appreciate the earlier frailties of the victims of history, and begin to unravel, to think out of the enclosed box of false history into a new meaning of how to tackle these same problems when they reappear. In order to achieve this, the new African playwrights have had to re-arrange old stories from a concerned clearer consciousness and vision, as they find that the thematic issues of the past are even more consciously relevant to the present. The mistakes of the past are being replicated in the present. But with new critical energy, the snares of the past incompetence and inadequacies will be exposed, and the new generation will be able to avoid those traps.

Ahmed Yerima has always sounded the warning that to avoid an ugly situation one must be alive to the problems of his neighbour and the larger society and play his part in helping the neighbour arrest the situation before it escalates. This belief affirms the popular saying that when it touches the nose, it touches the eyes because though they are apart, they are interconnected. The task before the audience who will receive these new historical plays is to find new meanings in the history as told in the history classes, and as written by white scholars, in order to understand why their old legends and heroes took certain decisions in the face of frustration and their inability to confront a stronger power. So when Attah Ameh Oboni commits suicide in order to avert the shame planned for his person by the British colonial government; when Sultan Attahiru leads a hundred soldiers equipped with nothing but bows and arrows, against a better equipped British colonial forces and their allies, in order to protect his Islamic kingdom, and when King Igbooba confronts the British army for burning the shrines of his people, the audience and the larger society are able to reason for their seeming foolhardy decisions and empathize with their predicaments. It endows the three heroes of these plays with the

cloak of the complete tragic heroes. Against all the odds, even with their limited resources compared to the sophistication of their aggressors, they dared to defend their land and fell as heroes. These leaders, no doubt, prove themselves as great leaders and put up a gallant fight against foreign attackers. However, because of some factors, both internal and external, they lose the battle.

### **AUTHORS' CITATION**

Sam Ukala is a Professor of Theatre Arts at the Delta State University, Abraka in Nigeria. He is also a literary icon whose plays have won awards and recognitions including *Akpakaland*, 1989 winner of ANA/British Council Drama Prize; and *Iredi War*, the 2014 winner of the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Limited, sponsored Prize for Literature. His novel, *Skeletons* won the 2000 ANA Prose Prize; also in 2000, his collection of poems, *In My Hermitage* became the first runner-up for the ANA Poetry Prize. His other plays include *The Slave Wife*, *The Log in Your Eyes*, *The Placenta of Death*, *The Last Heroes*, *Odour of Justice*, *Break a Boil*, and *Fumes of Fuel*.

Another award-winning playwright is Ahmed Parker Yerima, a Professor of Theatre Arts at Redeemers University, Ede in Nigeria. Yerima is a prolific playwright, an actor, a director of international repute, an administrator, former Director-General of the National Theatre, former Artistic Director/ Director-General of the National Troupe of Nigeria, former Director-General of the Abuja Carnival. He was the Dean, College of Humanities at Redeemers' University. His most influential play *Hard Ground* has won two awards including the prestigious Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Limited (NLNG) sponsored Prize for Literature in 2006, and ANA/NDDC/JP Clark Drama Prize also in 2006. He has published over fifty plays, which cannot be listed here for want of space, but the two of them that have been selected in this paper are *Attahiru* (1999), and *Ameh Oboni the Great* (2005).



## SYNOPSIS AND ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS – *IREDI WAR* BY SAM UKALA, *ATTAHIRU* AND *AMEH OBONI THE GREAT* BY AHMED YERIMA

The three plays – *Iredi War* by Sam Ukala, *Attahiru* and *AmeH Oboni the Great* by Ahmed Yerima – are studied here not because they are written by award-winning playwrights but because they represent the dilemma which postcolonial literary artists are made to face as they try to depict and interpret for the new generation, the historical and cultural predicament of their past leaders as they face life-changing experiences of foreign political interferences and domination. Thus, all three plays relive the catastrophic encounters between colonisers and the colonised nations, an encounter that has left an indelible mark on the colonised nations who are now struggling to rediscover their identity.

### ***Attahiru* (1999)**

*Attahiru* (1999) is a dramatization of one of the many historical wars of conquest of the British on colonisation mission in Nigeria. This play re-enacts the arrival of British colonisers who arrived under the pretext that all they wanted was to trade but soon displayed their intention to conquer, plunder and decimate the nations. The battle took place between the British army and Sultan Muhammadu Attahiru 1, the 12<sup>th</sup> Caliph and the Sarkin Musulmi of Sokoto who fought to defend Islam and protect the honour of the Great Sokoto Caliphate against British onslaught.

The play opens at the entrance to the mosque where three commoners – Ahmed a date palm seller, Yakubu a seller of Islamic religious accessories, and Abbas, a beggar – are chatting. Their chat reveals the tension brewing in the region. Kano is fighting a war of

resistance against British imperialism and political interference; Kontagora, Bida, Zaria, and Yola have already fallen, and the white man is now marching towards Sokoto with his “pagan black soldiers.” We also learn from the three about the sudden death of Caliph Abdulrahman, and the contest for the throne between Princes Mohammed Attahiru and his brother Muhammad al-Tahir Aliyu. The two warring brothers are considered good soldiers and leaders, but the trio hope that the brothers will not distract themselves squabbling over who should be on the throne, while the white men are already close with their soldiers. They also discuss the friendly visit from Lugard and express mistrust for British friendship following the fall of Kano and Zaria under the weight of British friendship.

Attahiru eventually becomes the new Caliph with full awareness of the turbulence ahead from the British invaders. He is also faced by internal bickering that is threatening the much-needed unity in the Caliphate such as a land and well dispute between Sarkin Fatake and Sarkin Zango, as well as the marriage case between Fatake’s son and Zango’s daughter. The issues are resolved rather quickly, but not a moment too soon an ominous letter arrives from Sir Frederick Lugard instructing the Caliph to replace the Emirs of Kontagora and Bida whom the British deposed on bogus accusation of oppressing their people, engaging in slave trade, and organising stealing parties. After deliberating with his palace officers, the Caliph sends a reply to Lugard part of which reads, “Tell the infidel that we did not invite him to interfere in our problems. He has his religion, and we have ours. As my predecessor, Caliph Abdul-Rahman had earlier said, the only relationship that can exist between a believer and an infidel is ... war!” (33). On receiving this reply, the British begin to rally their allies including Muhammad a-Tahir Aliyu, whom Attahiru had beaten to the throne together with all the new native rulers whom the British installed after deposing the bona fide rulers. With a force better equipped and better coordinated, they are ready to meet the ill-equipped and

uncoordinated forces of the Caliph. The result is predictable in spite of the support of soldiers from the fallen cities of Kano, Gombe, Kontagora, Nupe, Bauchi, Missau, Katagun, and food supply from Katsina and Gusau. The end of Caliph is narrated by Yakubu the seller of Islamic religious accessories thus,

Yet the greatest moment was when the Caliph fell. As the bullet struck him, he raised up his sword and screamed 'Allahu-akbar! Allahu-akbar!.' He was a great man indeed. With the bullets he still cut down two more soldiers, then his Rawani loosened, and his cap fell. He twisted in pain. Holding on to nothing but his guts. Slowly he started to fall, and as he fell, the Madawaki noticed him, he covered him with his shield, the Ubandoma, all forming a human shield. But the Caliph had fallen, and with his last breath, he screamed again. Amidst the noise of the guns, and dying men, a gentle breeze blew, and as if we all knew ... the Caliph had gone with the passing breeze. That was when the thunderous call came ... (65).

His story is greeted with a thunderous chant of Allahu-akbar! Allahu-akbar! And the play ended on that note. Though they just lost a great leader, the chant indicates that their spirit is not broken.

### ***Ameh Oboni the Great (2005)***

This is yet another representation of the resistance against British invasion of Nigeria. This play, *Ameh Oboni the Great* by Ahmed Yerima, captures the situation in Igalaland of Eastern Nigeria under colonial rule. Here we are exposed to the Attah Umaru Oboni's clash with and resistance to the epidemic called British rule. As the

ruler of a people, he sees it as his duty to protect the sanctity of Igalaland against the incursion of British imperialism.

The play opens one morning when the Attah, unusually fails to wake up early enough. The fuse and worried mood in the palace on account of this situation will be made clear throughout the play. When the king wakes up eventually, everybody's fear is confirmed. The king is worried by a recurrent dream that has gone on for seven consecutive days. In the nightmare he finds himself running for his life and ending in the royal cemetery. He is strangled and as he is dying his dead mother calls out to him to call his people. He calls, but receives no response. He is alone. Interpreting the dream Ohioga, the diviner tells him that the gods are angry with him and consequently have chosen him to be sacrificed because he has made a number of mistakes that cannot be forgiven. Among other things, he spent four days of the nine days of his coronation process, just because he wants to secure his staff of office from the British Resident Officer. Secondly, he disrespects the gods by refusing to send a gift to his first wife whom he had sent away to the shame of her family. Thirdly, he was supposed to listen to nine predictions from nine diviners, but he listened to seven and sent the rest away out of boredom. It turns out that the ninth prediction would have warned him about his possible shameful death. To avoid being sacrificed, the king attempts to negotiate his way out of that fate, pledging to do anything including offering another person to be sacrificed in his place. When Ohioga tells him there is no alternative for him, he gets angry and orders him out of his sight.

Tension continues to mount as his chiefs are not happy because of his high-handedness and disrespect for them. This plays out when they plead with him to forgive his son, Gumuchi, whom he had banished for selling out to the Whitemen. He declares, "I am the Attah, I have a right to sack an erring officer of the Native Authority" (26). He is no doubt a visionary and a dynamic ruler but one who is faster than his chiefs and elders who apparently

cannot keep up with his pace of development and are, in fact, threatened by it as indicated in Amana-Attah's complaint, "My lord the chiefs are not happy. They feel Gaaba'udu has overshadowed their importance with his successes. Your stature erodes the meaning of their presence" (34). Attah's response only escalates the already bad situation, when he replies "The chiefs are chiefs, and I am the king. There is a difference between the ocean and a stagnant stream. What have they done? What can they do? I gave them education ... I gave them development ... I gave them pride. What have they given in return? ... nothing." (34) He continues, "I want us to be equal to the rest of the world. I want every Igala man to hold his head up high, walk tall and stand tall." Etemahi cannot take it anymore, and he loses his cool at the king, "You want, you want. Has the Attah ever asked us what we want?" This is an ominous question, and the king in his wisdom seems to see it for what it is and mellows down by asking them to suggest what should be done. Unfortunately, this rare good gesture has come a little too late as indicated in Etemahi's forthright answer, "Too late, your highness, the lost dog, deafened by its pride has already started to gallop ...(35).

The Attah also sees that it is too late for him when he receives intelligence that the District Officer, Muffet, wants him to leave Idah and relocate to Ochaja. The Attah is aware of the fate of other great kings such as Oba Ovonramwen of Benin, Nana of Itshekiri and King Jaja of Opobo, "Great kings whom the British Empire fought, trapped and dragged out of their kingdoms in chains with soldiers guiding them to faraway lands, to die" (26). He swears he will not let them humiliate him that way. Abandoned by the gods and his people, the Attah laments, "what sins have I committed? What harm have I done to my people that they will make me stoop so low? I have tried to be a leader to my people..." (45). Though broken he remains resolute to have the last laugh. He will not surrender and be humiliated, and he must be buried in the royal

cemetery, not in exile. He consequently escapes to Dekina, after placing a “curse on all those who have a hand in the downfall of Igala land” (47). He commits suicide, by hanging. His body is brought back to Idah and given a befitting burial, against Muffet’s directive that he will never come back to Idah. He makes good his promise not to be humiliated. He does come back to Idah and is buried in the royal cemetery and not in exile. He dies a hero.

While one agrees with Stanley Osanyemi, et al (61) that the dream is dramatic technique that foreshadows the tragedy in store for King Ameh Oboni, the optimism of the writer that the situation could have been avoided if appropriate caution had been applied is doubtful. The nightmare here is prophetic. It reminds one of the fate that befell Oedipus the king in Sophocles’ play, Oedipus Rex. If he could, Oedipus would have circumvented his fate. But all his efforts towards avoiding the prophecy from being fulfilled, acted as a catalyst for its fulfillment. Ameh Oboni is fully aware of the fate of other great African kings such as Oba Ovonramwen, King Jaja of Opobo, Oba of Benin and the rest of the African rulers who fought against European imperialists and were humiliated.

### ***Iredi War (2014)***

This play, like the two plays discussed above, is a dramatisation of yet another tragic encounter between an indigenous community and the British officers on an expansionist mission to Nigeria during the colonial period. The play is structured in three parts, The Beginning, The Middle, and The Ending, and the action is narrated through folktale technique with two Narrators and flashbacks. In The Beginning, the Narrators tell a proverb that captures the situation that will unfold in the play thus;

NARRATOR II: Okay. (To AUDIENCE.) People, we have this proverb: ‘One does not sit in his own home and crush his scrotum in the process.’ But our story tonight belies that proverb.

NARRATOR 1: Yes, Obi Igboba of Owa was sitting in his palace, and he crushed his... Say it if you dare. (12)

Thus suspense has been created about an unusual and tragic incident to happen to no other than the ruler of Owa kingdom, the Obi Igboba and his people. Tension begins to mount at the “Beginning” when the Assistant District Commissioner Offley Stuart Crewe-Read meets with Igboba and his chiefs and demands for another supply of fifty carriers, “able-bodied, vivacious young men.” He gets angry when the chiefs remind him that he is yet to return the initial fifty young men that were given to him under the agreement that he will return them before requesting for more. In his anger, he threatens to flog the chiefs if they do not keep quiet so he can speak with the king alone. That is an abominable utterance against the most important personages of a sovereign community, but the king takes it in his stride and the meeting proceeds. During that meeting, the sinister intentions of the British mission come out through Crewe-Reads condescending utterances and attitudes towards, not just Owa kingdom but black race as a whole. He reveals British opinion of the black race as ungovernable people because the black race is “primitive, excessively emotional and unreasonable.” Even the court clerk, Gilpin has the effrontery to address Iwekuba, a highly respected chief, the war minister of Owa kingdom, in an insulting manner, “Mr man, you need to maintain demonstrable decorum and tangible tranquillity” (21). There are more respectable ways to express that. This patronising attitude is understood when Crewe-Read reveals that they do not recognise Igboba as a king, and this explains why the District Commissioner addresses him as Head Chief, and the assistant District Commissioner calls him just chief. The only king that Crewe-Read recognises is His Majesty, King Edward VII of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, of which “Owa is nothing but a teeny-weeny part of British Dominion” (19). After

thoroughly insulting the king and his council of chiefs, rubbishing their “primitive” culture, desecrating their shrines, and mocking their language as “indolent and wobbly rigmarole with words,” he demands that every adult citizen should pay a levy of two shillings each in addition to the existing levy of yams and palm oil. These demands are becoming impossible for the indigenous people to fulfill. To add salt to injury, the next day, all the shrines in Owa are set ablaze, and Owa warriors are not able to fight because they have no mandate from the king. This makes Igbofa lose his temper and gives a mandate to his warriors to fight back. Ekome’s suggestion to make peace with the Whiteman rather than war is not popular with the chiefs. In any case, either way, nothing can stop the British team from getting what they want. They have it all planned out, and Owa is too militarily ill-equipped to confront her adversary. As the king and his chiefs are busy deliberating on the proper line of action to take, they are not able to meet the British team at 5.00 pm as agreed the previous day. Crewe-Read orders the arrest of Igbofa, and Lawani, a Bini man, is to lead some Constables on this mission. While carrying out that order, however, Lawani shoots and kills the assistant youth leader, Uzun. Sgt Lawani is in turn killed. The youth leader is handcuffed and dragged away to Crewe-Read who dispatche him to a prison in Agbor.

In “The Middle” part Crewe-Read declares war and requests for reinforcement, arms, ammunition, and provision to fight the insurgency. Owa warriors/youth under their new leader, Ebie, prepare for war with bows and arrows, spears, few local guns, swords. They also equip themselves with black magic to prevent bullets from penetrating their bodies, and take an oath to fight to the death for their king and their community. During the first clash, Crewe-Read is killed, but in the end, the Owa warriors are overwhelmed.



In "The Ending," Igboba is tried for crimes including, incitement of Owa people against His Royal Majesty King Edward VII; ordering the killing of Crewe-Read, and for personally killing Sgt Lawani. He and his household are sent into exile along with some other members of the Owa community. It is the height of humiliation for the king to live, die and be buried outside his kingdom. Other Owa warriors are sentenced either to prison or to death.

All three leaders presented in the plays were historical figures, not fictional characters. This makes the three plays compelling to read, not just by the descendants of the victims of colonialism but also the offsprings of the perpetrators of the above gross human rights abuses. The fear, however, is that history repeats itself and present African leaders still do not know how to save their people from servitude.

## **CONCLUSION**

All three plays studied in this paper are historical dramas based on Nigerian colonial history. Colonial rule ended in 1960 when Nigeria won her political independence from Britain, which is why some critics would wonder if it is still important to dramatize the events now. It is the desire to demonstrate the relevance of these re-enactments that motivates this paper. What the playwrights have done is to tell their stories with a new African sensibility different from the physical shift of geographies of location in the forced amalgamation of tribes into different national entities which in summation represents geographies of the colonial powers coming from Europe to a native and innocent virgin land which has its traditions and customs eroded due to the process of cultural hegemony. And then there is the shifting of the psychological geographies of the mind as well, which manifests through the introduction of new ways of life, new rules, new ethics, and attitudinal perceptions which contrasts with the known traditional ways of the African people, until they are forced to react to the

colonial domination. Although the three plays are unified by the backdrop of the colonial presence within each given society, the reactions of the leaders who end up becoming victims not protagonists are different. They agree with the Aristotelian concept of tragedy in the sense that they are all of royal birth but differ in the sense that instead of being in conflict with the gods, they are in conflict with superior forces which control their destinies with the power of domination and authority. This is why they appear as victims, rather than protagonists. The 'reversal of fortune' is shared. The tragic essence is shared. And their emotional sensibility, although it emerges from self, concerns the society they represent. Interestingly, it is this tragic fall of a people that allows the heroes of the plays to become good subjects for the selected plays of this study. Their frailty or flaw is the timidity of their innocent people who face a more powerful force.

The playwrights, through their plays, retell the story of colonisation first from an African perception and second, from a critical standpoint. Published accounts of colonial processes are often written by the perpetrators of colonial imperialism, no matter how liberal they claim to be. There are always two sides to a story or to a conflict. European writers' account of colonial adventure in Africa is prone to emphasize European interpretation of the incident and justify their role in it. Africans had not developed the art of writing at the time, and so they were not able to write their experience as the victims of political domination and the dehumanizing experience of a process that was going to turn their lives upside down and reverse their perception of who they are. Consequently, what new generation of Africans know about the colonial experience is based on the writings of European anthropologists mainly, and the few oral narratives that have managed to survive. This enables the playwrights to codify and deconstruct historical accounts in order to expose missing links and interrogate the narrative technique and perspective of the writings about Africa. Also, these playwrights are appropriately categorized as committed

writers by literary critics. A committed writer, according to Elechi Amadi, “is not out to make a general statement; he is out to change a particular situation or to initiate, reverse, or modify a mode of thinking” (38). True to type; therefore, the playwrights discussed in this work are motivated by the current situation in world politics and the place of Africa in it, to remind Africa of lessons to be learned from the colonial experience so that Africans would avoid making the same mistakes and remaining downtrodden.

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