

History and Culture as Catalysts for Socialisation in Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate*

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Abstract

History underscores the events and stories passed from one generation to another appropriately either orally or documented. History and cultural antecedents in this study are practical phenomena employed by the playwright to narrate historical accounts in multiple versions and also ensures an amicable resolution which stands as a pacesetter for peace to coexist, animosity to be buried and never allowed to resurrect. The article examines the historical sensibility of the playwright in negating anarchy between two belligerent factions. It enwinds expert-novice relationship in historical parlance, social interaction and culture of collectivity in maintaining the cynosure of theatre as a dependable catalyst for socialisation. Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* sensitises the populace, especially Nupe and Okun indigenes from Kogi State, Nigeria to forestall pride in myth and historical accounts because they premise on multiple versions with conflicting and confusing plots. The methodology employed for this research is qualitative, using the descriptive form of textual analysis. The primary data is *Ogidi Mandate* by Olu Obafemi, supported by other relevant journal articles, textbooks and internet materials. The paper concludes by espousing historical and textual combinations through the play text *Ogidi Mandate* and recommends that proper education on cultural history, tolerance and peaceful co-existence should be pursued in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Interaction, Socialisation, Collectivity, Cultural history, Conflicts, Okun, Nupe.

Introduction

The theatre is an avenue to awaken the social consciousness of the citizens, and it is a place to review causes, tensions, animosity, generational grudges and acrimony in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing and soothing in order to establish civility among warring factions or the citizens in general. The theatre has always been the place to express emotions, sympathy and reflection on various socio-political events in society. A gathering in an open space, housing performance can be referred to as a theatre performance, a church event, an Islamic event or prayer session, a regular family meeting. Meeting of a peer group can all be referred to as theatre performance. As Wilson and Goldfarb put it:

Theatre is everywhere...a wedding is a theatre, a funeral is theatre. A thanksgiving day parade, a Mardi Gras parade, a fireworks display... so, too, is a presidential nominating convention, a senate hearing, or a White House press conference. Even seemingly spontaneous, unrehearsed events, such as a high-speed automobile chase or a gunman holding hostages in a suburban home, have become a form of theatre by the time they are seen on television. (3)

Wilson and Goldfarb's analogy of a theatre gives credence to the description above on how theatre reflects or mirrors the society, practically as an avenue to change socio-political events in the society; a place to examine the exact nature of humanity in the society. The theatre is also the location where culture and religion is placed under critical evaluation. Is culture and religion a reflection of a people or are people reflection of culture and religion? Is it real or truthful? Are the indigenes or citizens under the culture and those involved in religion perceived to be sorcerers, ritualistic or persons who are divinely gifted? These and many more are some of the questions theatre interrogates.

The theatre through various productions and performances by actors is a place that accommodates all kinds of behaviour, attitude, character, discipline and field of occupations. Monta and Stanley in describing theatre professionals opines that "traditionally, theatre practitioners tell a story that embodies a theme, using the live stage as the means" (1), so if they tell the story using television, or film, or video, or yet-undiscovered or perfected means (e.g., holograms),

is it so different? It still involves bringing scripts to life with actors for an audience. This paper examines the historical sensibility of the playwright in negating anarchy between two belligerent factions. It also relates the perspective of the citizens' understanding of culture, religion and the aspect of socialisation in order to have a blend of good character and civil rule in the society. According to Gbilekaa, all the arts and sciences are interrelated and that, they are arranged hierarchically in a manner that we have minor arts and major arts. In the ultimate, there emerges a sovereign art which contains all other arts and sciences, and whose field of action and concern will include all the fields of action of the other arts and all the other fields; This sovereign art, of course, will be the one whose laws rule over the relations among men in their totality. That is politics. Nothing is alien to politics, because nothing is alien to the superior art that rules the relations among rulers ("Ideo-Aesthetics" 47). Gbilekaa expatiates how the works of a writer must reflect the societal events either consciously or unconsciously, to him:

Literature cannot escape from the class structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of intense economic struggles in society. What he can choose is one of either side in the battlefield. The side of the people or the side of the social forces that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer of politics. ("Ideo-Aesthetics" 51)

Gbilekaa in his perception states that all theatre is necessarily political because all the activities of human beings are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error, and this is a political attitude. He further opines that a writer could during his/her lifetime be influenced by anything around his or her environment, which will, in turn, trigger a turn-around in philosophy and approach to writing. To support this claim, the idealists raised the issue of *commitment*. In their coinage, it is stated: commitment can be defined from different perspectives. Some writers believe their responsibility or commitment is only to their art. They are guided as said before by their 'inner sight' and not by some 'extraneous' social concern. Some, on the other hand, have a traditional sociological view of art. (Gbilekaa, *Radical Theatre* 34). Being a Marxist, Gbilekaa avers that

commitment in art is dialectical. It entails going to the root of the problem and unearthing the class formations, the on-going class war that perpetuates injustice, misery and poverty. In other words, the committed writer preaches the changeability of the old archaic institutions, demystifies capitalist's myths by attacking the status-quo, educates the people, and creates hope in them in such a way that they become confident in making changes (*Radical Theatre* 35). According to Brecht cited in Gbilekaa, reality is a dynamic process produced by humans and can be changed by humans. If, therefore, the theatre has to serve its function, it must not reflect a static reality. It will show that characters and actions are historically produced and so are prone to change (35). Obafemi's creative ingenuity narrates the historical accounts of the two warring ethnic groups; the Nupe and the Okun people in colonial Nigeria. *Ogidi Mandate* is a reconstruction of history to describe the age long feud between two ethnicities in the 20th century. And being an historical play, it informs the reader/audience about the generational differences between two major ethnic groups, Nupe and Okun in the present day Kogi State, Nigeria and sues for peaceful co-existence.

The Nupe People of Nigeria

Nupe is one of the major languages spoken in Kogi State, Nigeria. The people who speak it occupy the central northern part of Nigeria, which is the region where Kogi State is situated. Mohammed in his historical account records that the Nupes are found in Bida, Agaie, Lapai and Kontagora emirates in present-day Niger State; and Patigi, Lafiagi, Tsonga and Tsaragi emirates in present-day Kwara State (2). A good number of Nupe speaking people are also found in Lokoja, Ajaokuta, Shintaku, Kotonkarfe, Abaji, Eggan and Budan, among others, in present-day Kogi State; in Umaisha, Toto, Shamenge, Kanyehu, Gadabuke in present-day Nasarawa State, as well as in Gwagwalada and Zuba in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Nupe of old was noted for its ability to exert tremendous influence on the political, socio-cultural, religious, linguistic and artistic transformation of not only its immediate neighbours but far away non-neighbours alike (Saidu n.p.).

Lord Lugard describes Nupe as one of the most important communities in Nigeria. At the same time, Nadel himself gives his high impression on the Nupe political, social and economic

formations, which he regards comparable to those of the ancient centres of civilisation (Nadel, iii). The socio-cultural practices among the Nupe, just as it is with other groups can be said to have been as old as Nupe history. Evolution of such practices might have been an attempt to solve both individual and general problems of existence very much related to the environment in which they found themselves. In achieving this, the resort was made to the institutionalisation of religious belief systems centred on cults and rituals (Mohammed 50). Trade and commerce played a significant role in the introduction of Islam into Nupeland in the early period. Mohammed's account underscores the importance of this factor. Through trade and commerce, between West Africa (Nupeland inclusive) and the Arabs, through North Africa, the exchange of goods between the two areas became a common phenomenon. The Arab traders, in addition to trading, must have attempted introducing the religion of Islam to their hosts. The hosts must have been receptive and accommodating, even if it was nominal, of the religion and its practices brought by their guests. Such reception, accommodation and liberality might have accounted for the involvement of Muslim scholars and clerics in the administrations of the local kings. They were, for instance, reported to have served as advisers, interpreters, diviners, chaplains on spiritual and secular matters among the court officials of the Nupe kings, long before Mallam Dendo arrived in Nupeland.

The Tradition and Origin of Okun People

Nigeria is a nation with multiple cultures and rich traditions. The theatre is a veritable medium through which young and old, literate and illiterate can independently learn the historical account, political association, economic dependence and interdependence between different ethnic groups or nations. Bakinde describes the early history of the Okun people as preserved in oral narrations to be multifaceted; he opines that it could be grouped into two categories with each consisting of many variants. The official history; referred to as migration history traces the origin of Okun people to either Ile-Ife or Oyo Ile (Bakinde "A New Perspective" 27). Although all the dialectical groups in Okunland can ascribe to one form of migration history or the other, the tendency is high that there are significant differences in the details of these histories. An example is the Owe

and Oworo groups and most of the Ijumu group except for Ikoyi who claims Ikoyi-Ile as their root, accept Ile-Ife as their original homeland. Additionally, the Yagba groups except for Ife-Olukotun, which trace their origin to Ile-Ife, claim Oyo Ile as their original homeland (Bakinde "Oral Narrations" 56). Moreover, the Bunu and Kirri groups have a mixture of the tradition of origin as some of them claim to have migrated to their present location from Yagba or nearby settlements (Iyekolo, 2006, Olubiyo, 2002 in Bakinde "Oral Narrations" 56).

The second tradition maintains that the people are aboriginal to the area they currently occupy. This version avers that the Okun people did not come from anywhere as they have been within the Okun landmass since the beginning of times. Ijagbemi recorded a version of the tradition thus:

At the beginning of things goes the tradition: there was an old man who lived (at Iya) who had five sons and five daughters. These he sent out to the people, the world, one couple were the fore-parents of the Yagbas, they went North. From the couple who went East the Bunus are sprung; and the Akokos from those who went South. The Ayiedes descended from those who went West. (205)

This second version, which is very popular among the Ijumu subgroup, holds that the people are endemic to the study area. Bakinde's version claims that each lineage migrates into each of the villages within the vicinity of their current settings in waves while in search of pasture and game. This version opines that the Okun people had no direct ancestor. Here, every clan and lineage in Okunland came to their present area of habitation at a different time from the others. Consequently, Bakinde relates an account with the Ona dynasty. According to him, the first set of people to settle in any of the Okun settlements are the Ona people. He states further that the Ona hold sway in all the cultural practices of the Okun people on account of being the first group to settle in the land. As a consequence of the above tradition, the Okun people did not evolve a state system as in other parts of Yorubaland where there is a ruling house. Instead, they evolved a rotational system whereby the kingship rotates from one quarter to another at the demise of an incumbent king.

The location of the Okun people situated geographically at the confluence area of rivers Niger and Benue in North Central Nigeria makes them a boundary group. A boundary group is a region that is politically open to areas in physical entity between organised societies. The Okun people satisfy most of the criteria for being in a boundary region. For instance, they were surrounded by the Igala kingdom to their east, Nupe kingdom to their North and the Old Oyo Empire to their Northwest at the beginning of the 16th century. "Activities taking place in these three kingdoms shaped events that took place within Okun land up till the time of the coming of the Europeans to the Niger-Benue confluence in the 20th century" (Bakinde 27-41 "A New Perspective").

***Ogidi Mandate* by Olu Obafemi**

Ogidi Mandate by Olu Obafemi is a reconstruction of history to describe the age-long feud between two ethnicities in the 20th century. Being a historical play, it informs the reader/ audience about the generational differences between two major ethnic groups, Nupe and Okun in the present-day Kogi State, Nigeria. The play narrates the story of Mallam Dendo, a jihadist, who has two sons who are power-drunk (Zaki and Masaba) from two women. The kernel of the struggle between the two step-brothers on who rules the land leads to the war between the Ibons popularly known as Nupes and the Okun people of Kogi State. Zaki and his military command pitched their tent in Nupe axis while Masaba moved towards Yaagba and Okun people to prepare for war. The disagreement between Mallam Dendo's sons caused great animosity from generation to generation even up to the 21st century as depicted in the play.

Catalyst for Socialisation and Interaction

Socialisation in Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* is the catalyst among the several works of literature that fosters a particular generation from cohabiting with hatred against a fellow human being. An oral account of war can hurt the fragile mind, thereby causing animosity to degenerate further. In maintaining a strong catalyst for socialisation and interaction through dramatic action/character, the playwright aligns his thought with Brecht to redirect the historical

understanding of the people. He uses his creative medium to awaken the critical consciousness of the people, and revitalise their belief. Boal reveals the proposition of both Brecht and Aristotle according to him, Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator gives power to the character, who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case, a 'catharsis' occurs; in the second, an awakening of critical consciousness (Boal 97). Both catharsis and an awakening of critical consciousness are sufficient resources the playwright uses to resolve the historical deficiency in the society as reflected in *Ogidi Mandate*. As a catalyst for socialisation, Olu Obafemi in *Ogidi Mandate* affirms the integrating factor through the character Tsobaza and Seye's supposed and proposed relationship.

SEYE: From the sound of your name, you must have a Nupe origin, not so?

TSOBAZA: Yes, I'm Nupe. What about it? I am proud to be Nupe. But what has tribe got to do with love?

SEYE: (Cynical.) Yes, you are proud of it. You should, shouldn't you?

TSOBAZA: Look, let us not get into all that past ... tribal clashes are much too depressing a subject for our progressive generation. Love is a better and happier and healthier affair than wars.

SEYE: Love? Did I hear you say love? You must be basically ill-informed or plainly shallow ... This is travesty. Just go away.

TSOBAZA: No. It is love between two grown-up members of the same generation, willing to curb hate and grow love and peace. (Obafemi 22)

The character Tsobaza above believes the past should be noted as bygone and the errors of their ancestors to foster war instead of peace must be neglected and forgotten. The dialogue above is a sensation of good interactive skill on the part of Tsobaza to express love to a lady from another ethnic background even with his historical knowledge of strong hatred among the two ethnicities and response

to Seye above is the reason why socialisation should be a course for concern among the citizens. Knowledge and skills cannot be part of a society where socialisation is absent, and interaction among the citizens that lack love. The society is expected to be a peaceful place but in situations where the generational wars and hatred still persist, peace and love will be non-existent, socio-cultural and inter-ethnic relationship such as marriage will definitely be an impossible task to achieve.

Through creative skills, the playwright approbates the theme of love even amid lousy blood due to the history of anarchy between two warring ethnic groups. The playwright also rejects the story that makes one ethnic group behave cowardly towards another. The expression below is a sign of wisdom from the captain to protect the women, children and the elderly in the village who are weak and cannot withstand the war. This is another historical account by the playwright to dispel cowardice and replace with wisdom.

WARLORD: Ogbade, our ancestors greet. The forest is not so deep that the epithet will not hit the sun. Our ancestors stand behind you. Now, lay out your plans. Let it unfold. Let the enemies perish at the exposure of your deep war thoughts...

OGBADE: My Lord, I have not been sleeping because the thatch on my roof has been set ablaze. I and some of the bravest warriors in the land have gone round the hills, ridges and mountains and they have spoken to us. On Orioke Uta, the historically strategic Uta Mount, where all our people ought to be hidden while the warriors fight out there, the story is sweet and worth savouring. We have found some big caves that can contain all the children and women in this village. I will remain steadfast and alert, as always, waiting for your command. When I smell the death bearing trail of the Ibon, I shall blow the trumpet. That is the sign for all the women, the little children and the old and tired bones of our elders shall go into hiding...Then I shall sound the battle bugle....

WARLORD: Good. Very good indeed. Yet, we should all take note of the fact that there is more to this thing than merely planning. We must resolve to fight this war to its logical conclusion. Let it be known that after this war, there shall be no more 'Ogun Ibon'... (Obafemi 30)

The wisdom of the captain and his soldiers above corroborates a popular Yoruba adage that says; *Mòjà, mòsá, ni ti akínkanjú; akínkanjú tó bá mọ̀ọ̀ jà tí kò mọ̀ọ̀ sá á bá ogun lọ* (A good warrior must know when to fight and when to run; a warrior who knows when to fight but not when to run will perish in battle). Timing is crucial; wisdom knows when to pursue, defer or quit.

The ability to approbate and reprobate in historical records of war between the Okun and Nupe people in Kogi State, Nigeria further coincide with Pescaru's opinion that "socialisation has as a primary purpose the realisation of the ability to obey the exigencies of social norms and ideals materialised in the cultural values of the group to which man belongs" (21). The play-text generally combines the expert and the novice in one breath, Baba the storyteller represents the expert with substantial knowledge of history. At the same time, the students are novices who only believe in the oral story passed on to them either by their parents or a random teacher.

Catalyst for Culture of Collectivity

Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* is a cultural play with historical antecedents. The playwright reveals the ignorance of many indigenes about their culture. There can be no socialization and interaction when the people have no factual knowledge of their culture.

SEYE: (Cynical) Yes, you are proud of it. You should, shouldn't you? (Angry) You are from that monstrous, savage tribe that killed and sold our people into slavery. Yes, your ancestors decimated our people and left our race depleted, fragmented and ravaged. You ought to be proud of your decent from among the vandals. (22)

Seye's reaction above depicts her anger towards the Nupe people. Unfortunately for her and like many others, she is only furnished with one historical account on the conflict between the Nupe and the Okun people by her parents. The character's knowledge of socialization and culture is meager. Baba, the peacemaker, an old man with the knowledge of the gods intervenes: Baba: It's okay, my children. My son, Tsobaza. Come here (He steps forward) Seye, my own daughter. Come here too. (She is shy but steps forward in obedience. My children, all of you. I plead with you. It is time to sink our differences and come together as one

(p. 63). The inter-ethnic union is evident in the play when Seye and Tsobaza eventually settled their clannish differences to give love a chance.

Baba: (He takes SEYE's hands and places them gently in TSOBAZA's). My children, only love survives. It outlives years of war and hatred. It binds and brings unity and harmony. These two should provide that symbol, the end of a chapter of mutual destruction ... My children, war only destroys. Love builds. Let us drop our weapons and build for the future. (Obafemi, p. 64)

It is, therefore, pertinent to understand the value of oneness in ensuring love, which supersedes hatred, animosity and anarchy. It is also proportionately benevolent to understand that culture is arguably beyond the dance, music, food and general entertainment when peace and love are not rooted in a particular region. It is beyond the pattern of social celebration, rituals on birth and marriage, cuisine or sport. The playwright uses his skill to mediate between the two ethnic groups by imploring the tactics of bringing up inter-ethnic marriage to boost cultural phenomenon in the play and society. Beyond the final show of affection among the characters in *Ogidi Mandate*, culture is about people's whole way of life; the way people coexist peacefully, live, eat, worship, produce, create, procreate, recreate and most importantly show love to one another. The play is in multifaceted dimension to douse the age-long tension among two different tribes in a particular state.

OBA 1: Great gentlemen. Today is a day of history - for us and our people. Our children will read the decision of today in their history books and watch it acted out on their school stages. They will be proud that they had forefathers with strong strong manhood within their thighs and grey matter on their heads...(The royal persons rise in joy, with a sense of fulfillment singing and dancing as light fades. Eme de' Biti peja. (56)

The dance, especially the songs portray the unique culture of the Okun and the Nupe ethnic groups. The theme song is an example:

Okele kele Afiran mo jabit
Oyangan yangan, Oko Ijo ghoin oo
Agha ki s'oro lo

Agha ki s'oro lai sojo
Agha ki s'oro lai baru

Le a bagha re lo
Le a bagha re lai sojo
Le a bagha re lai baru o

Le a bagha re lai sojo} repeat to faster rhythm and tempo
Le a bagha re lai baru

Translation

Night Spirit, weaver of all night deeps
Who offends but is never guilty
Oyangan yanga, host of all festivities
We are members of the Oro rites
We are devotees of the Oro conclaves
Dare any non - initiates accompany us?
Dare initiates match forth to the deeps?
Onward then to the conclaves of the nights. (Obafemi 3)

The song above is from Nupe culture; the playwright used the song as the theme song for the play. The artist or playwright is a creative god with a benevolent nature that uses his or her art to sensitise the citizenry into adjusting sensitively into this alienated world.

Conclusion

Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* exposes the critical nature of human being to survival, prejudice, hatred, harmony and love. Through the playwright's ingenuity, the ethnic clash is resolved via love and emphasis on solving the past occurrences through living in harmony with one another in the society not minding generational differences. The theatre has been the 'home' of empathy for the weak; it does not subtract mere sympathy from the strong ones who are eminently ready to liberate themselves and make a positive change in the society. The playwrights, actors, artistic directors and even spectators all have productive roles to play in order to ensure sanity is restored in every sphere of life. Sanity and maintenance of public order should be the concern of all that is related to literary works and theatrical performances. This article, therefore, aptly awakens the critical mind and social consciousness of all the players in the theatre world and

society at large. The theatre cannot save or release humanity from the oppressive situation as the law would do, it can only point ways to the direction of good governance and educate people from historical ignorance just as the dramatic corpus of Olu Obafemi does to pique the readers/audience to reason appropriately.

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