

RE-INVENTING THE POPULIST DRAMATURGY AND STAGECRAFT IN LITERARY NIGERIAN THEATRE

Olympus G. Ejue
University of Abuja

Abstract

Modern Nigerian literary drama which seeks to lay bare amongst other things the social realities of the people, must begin to evolve a new postmodern theatre language, technique and collective indigenous style which will depict a slight or complete departure from the European “dry theatre”. Like the McKnight programme at the University of Minnesota and the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, professional standards in contemporary literary theatre in Nigeria must be revised and redirect its instructions towards training budding playwrights, directors and would-be actors to reflect an indigenous performative form and character. The paper diagnoses how the Nigerian dramatist/theatre director can creatively use dramaturgical exploration, through traditional artistic resources, festival masque and stage craft in the Nigerian literary theatre to realise a total theatre experience. It sues that; for a play script and its dramatic representation on stage to be considered as African, it must possess not just the embellishment of the African phraseologies, but an entire integration of a stylized expressive representation of dramatic idioms of music, song, dance, masque, mime et cetera in order to indigenize the modern Nigerian literary theatre. The literary theatre assumes a change ideology of serving as custodian of customs and traditions of a people who had or are still suffering from the effect of colonization. The paper concludes that the efforts by budding dramatists/directors and actors to formulate the dialogue of our epoch in Nigerian literary theatre and giving an expression to its aspirations, must be mainstreamed as opposed to the conformist ideologies laid down by the forerunners of literary theatre in Nigeria. In other words, literary theatres in Nigeria must act as change agents through the content and form of their performances reflecting a complete process of cultural decolonization.

Introduction

Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi were (in fact the sole three) theatre practitioners – as playwrights, actors, and directors – who commenced the search for a new theatre language and technique, in a ‘restorative’ fashion, away from the deeply profound, terribly incomprehensive tradition/foundation laid by the notable pioneers of the literary theatre in Nigeria – Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark Bekederemo. (Obafemi and Yerima 4)

The citation above can be taken as a succinct reminder of the contribution of colonialism to provide models for the development of drama/theatre in Nigerian literary theatre. The consequence (colonialism) of this experience on pioneering African, nay Nigerian dramatists is that, they are slightly less frequently still digging in the creative sand using the absorbed Western strictures as their archetypal. Nevertheless, the time is near for the Nigerian literary theatre culture to begin a new artistic process of change management, self-esteem and psychological independence of its dramatic performances in terms of indigenous dramatic vision, performative style and spectacle. Indeed, theatre directors and dramatists laden with African traditional aesthetics must in a systematic and progressive manner strive to subvert the Western dramaturgical form of expression which was surreptitiously impose upon him/her to evolve an African performance aesthetics. It is an inward looking and relies on traditional canons, forms, and conventions for rationalising, at worst, a conscious amalgam of application of Western theatre practice vis-à-vis ‘a Nigerian personality’ in the arts in Nigerian literary theatres. This is especially so because, the sensibilities of the theatregoer in Nigeria is hitherto laden with African thoughts and ideological concern of a performance and even its structure. Therefore, instructors in literary theatres should go even beyond Western postmodernism in search of African, nay Nigerian postmodernism using multicultural theoretical approach as guide to theatre studies in Nigeria. This new pattern of dramaturgy and stagecraft should be akin to the one propounded by the concept and practice of the Brechtian theatre as if Brecht himself were an African. Perhaps it is why Osofisan, in a preface to Edde Iji’s book succinctly describes Brecht as one who:

broke away deliberately from the mainstream, classical tradition of Europe, and develop a new dramaturgy and new mechanics, which on close examination nearly approximates to traditional African praxis. For, central to

Brecht concept and practice was the reliance on non-deterministic, episodic structures, the incorporation of music and song into the weft of plot, and the shaping of the narrative in parabolic form, features the African dramatist recognizes as part of his own heritage. (iv-v)

This is a clear indication of a new configuration of dramaturgy and stagecraft which lay more emphasis on African theatrical aesthetics and traditions.

It is a theatre that is more of creating an alternative theatre space which is not only distinct from Western theatre, but that which encourages Nigerian literary theatre to concentrate her energies rather more on writing and directing her own plays in the best functional African style. This kind of theatre is that which Ukala, believes should rather be preoccupied with rural developmental concerns in which, “part of this theatre are the plays devised in collaboration with rural communities, aimed at solving developmental and health problems, disputably called ‘popular theatre’, or ‘theatre for development’” (32). Suffice to say that, from this approach, the language, the creative process of improvisational proficiency, audience participation and mode of dramatic composition will serve as a revitalization of the folk craftsmanship which is probably fast ceasing to exist in Nigeria.

Importantly, is the style of engaging the audience in a rapport with the performance through a narrator whose attitudes and mode of creative thinking is more in consonance with a folkist milieu. In this instance, practitioners and stakeholders in the literary theatre must provide -relevant skills in this direction. Directors, actors and dramatists must be equipped with traditional principles and the dynamics of audience participation during performances. In other words, actors for example, must be trained on how to be manipulative during a spur-of-the-moment interjection and/or physical involvement of the audience in the performance. It is against this backdrop that play directors must effectively ensure management of all theatrical devices or techniques employed in order to accommodate verbal and physical alliances of the audience with the performers on stage. The technique sought for is that which deliberately breaks away from the classical tradition of Euro/American dramaturgy and stagecraft which attempts to manipulate the audiences willing suspension of disbelief and style of presentation which removes the audience from the performance through the conception of aesthetic distance. Hence, the Nigerian literary theatre should explore a style that incorporates the ‘call and response’ technique through music, dance, and mime, song into the ‘spine’ of a plot thereby creating a psychological

sense of belonging to both actor and audience. To complete this circle, therefore, the director in this theatre must apply the dynamics of a presentational style in which actors or performers openly acknowledge the audience and sometimes even invite members to participate in the performance. By this method, the theatre director would have avoided the concept of vicarious atonement, where just one person can atone for the sins of another. Rather than having the audience pass through a vicarious experience, the director aligns them (audience) with the performance in a manner that, they feel empathy for the characters, be entertained, and yet still partake in the meaning and artistic merit of the performance.

Worrisome still, is the fact that the Nigerian literary theatre has continued to flounder in imperialist tendencies even in a post-colonial era. Goings-on still indicated that its programmes focused more on producing graduates who would be more grounded in the theories and practice of Theatre Arts as specified by European literature and drama. This has in more ways than one affected even the graphic representation of plays witnessed in literary theatres in Nigeria. The observation here, is that which simply describes the Nigerian literary theatre as an entity that is found playing tennis on both sides of the net. This is mind-boggling because, the content of the University curriculum with regards to African culture vis-a-vis drama/theatres is yet to favour indigenous performance techniques and philosophies. Suffice to say that if education is the process of transmission of culture from one generation to another, what then is the magnitude of education reforms that the Nigeria literary theatre requires for posterity? It is perhaps why Ben-Abdallah in an interview with Asiedu is saddened with even the way and manner our students conceive of issues being taught them in the classroom. In resentment he retells his personal experience with students: “We have developed an educational system that makes gods of teachers. When talking in class, what I hate most is students busy just writing”. (Asiedu 103). This scenario presupposes that, products of the literary theatre simply memorize all they are told hook, line and sinker as the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In other words, even the students are not ready to challenge certain generic ideas passed to them by Euro/American theatre concepts and practice. In the same interview with Asiedu; Ben-Abdallah had also given an account of how colonialism had affected our educational institutions and consequently, the ‘School of Performing Arts’ Legon-Ghana where: “The lethargy, the lack of creativity, the proliferation of quackery, the unwillingness to dare, to adventure, to do things, the unwillingness to confront the modern situation. People (are) locked up in the past...and that is what the students are

looking for” and all these in a way had effected the National culture (102). Indications are that, due to the Western drama orientation, most of the performances in Nigerian literary theatres put up by amateur directors are hardly integrated with the fabric and aesthetics of conscious African cultural dimensions/values and stagecraft. Against this backdrop, the role of the Nigerian literary theatre must be, particularly, to make available informed literature and other materials to correct existing distortions in order to redirect the character and trend of performance along paths that reflect our real achievements and in turn preserve our cultural heritage as a people.

Accentuating Populist Drama in Nigerian Literary Theatre

What is actually difficult for people is to see art as a powerful instrument that can affect, influence and bring about innovative opportunities of understanding our world better. Hence, a theatre that is accessible and connected with ideas and opinions of ordinary people would rather most appropriately give meaning to the role(s) we can play in it as up-coming theatre practitioners. In the context in which we experience and practice it (theatre) in Nigeria, we must strive to interrogate it (theatre) as something that is weighty and has meaning to human existence. Timothy-Asobebe’s submission on ‘the future of African theatre’ puts it in perspective that; “our theatrical production should reflect African life in a realistic way. That is, attention should be focused on national tradition” (113). In this wise, the theory of relativity as developed by Albert Einstein which says that the way that anything except light moves through time and space depends on the position and movement of someone who is watching. In this regard therefore, the need for drama/theatre to be orchestrated by a recreation of a people’s reality through considerable technical proficiency or creativity, new applications for old remedies in building a theatre tradition in educational theatres must receive assiduous attention.

This is especially so, when one reminisces on the establishment of the British Arts Council in the late 1930s whose aim it was to encourage cultural exchange and cross-cultural transformation. It is significant therefore to mention the existence during this period of the British artists who made deliberate visits to the colonies with dramatic presentations laced with political underpinnings. It is these goings-on that Yerima perceives that:

For example, under the auspices of the British Arts Council, The Nottingham Playhouse, a British based Professional group brought *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night* and Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* to Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra

Leone. The emphasis on drama and its uses by the colonial rulers also had its political implications. The colonial masters were well aware of the new class of native that was growing, especially after the Africans had had the benefit of western education. (44)

These drama presentations bore fruits; hence the likes of Hubert Ogunde in 1943 had started his theatre which no doubt had influences of the Western culture in terms of concert songs, opening glee, and dramatic presentation. As if this was not enough, the issue of parochialism and the need for the theatre to have a nationalistic tone were reflected in many articles in the press at the time. The press had reflected that; although there were obvious manifestations of great creative resources and talent in stage craft by Ogunde's theatre, "one pitfall that has usually been in the path of African enterprise is individualism. Our local theatre as it is now in its infancy, should discard this weakness from the very beginning" (qtd. in Clark 29-30)

On the level conceptualised above, the Nigerian situation must not be so subsumed in the Greek-based Western perceptions of life which is obviously individualistic in nature. To push this further, Sofola reminisces on the African, nay Nigerian worldview, which becomes pertinent as she remarks that, "emphasis is hoslistic harmony rather than exclusionistic individualism of the European world" (3). Therefore, underlining the tradition of populism which proposes that rights and powers of ordinary people are exploited by a privileged elite(s) and therefore support their struggles to overcome this, would consciously evolve aegis of tutelage that will hone and enrich further, the dramaturgical explorations of the dialectical theatrical traditions already emerging in the contemporary Nigerian theatre. Although it is a political doctrine that appeals to the interest of the common people, it still would not be out of place for this emerging literary theatre with democratic principles to see art as not completely being adjudged from the European world view point. A view point that Azeez shares in, as his search for the social relevance of the Nigerian theatre in the twenty first century reveals that: "the modern artist or activist of the theatre must go beyond Brecht, beyond Picastor, beyond Satre and Beckett. He must, in Nigeria use Soyinka's experiment as a pivot to solve the people's problems" (46-47). Thus, seeing the stage is a catalyst to socio/cultural and political rejuvenation, the literary stage would require a "reconstruction on the prevailing artistic canons that have plagued the consumption and appreciation of our literature and entertainment art which has so much been shaped by stereotypes

foist on us by the exigencies of colonial experience” (Nwaozuzu 42). Our polemic here hints on finding out the extent to which intercultural interactions can transform the Nigerian literary theatre narratives to theorize for the nation and national development.

Thus, beyond the usual conceptual and theatrical performances, the literary theatre in Nigeria must assume a new posture with the understanding of the Nigerian culture and the adaptation of its elements for socio/political, educational and economic integration and development. This will serve as an enforcement within a cultural continuum that would strengthen not only our identity as a people of common origin and language, but creating a populist theatre with a manifesto aimed at demystifying completely Western theatre influence on the Nigerian theatre.

Writers in this context are required to be more exceptional in terms of even individual commitments in respect to championing certain ideologies in their writings rather than just claiming to be more Marxist than Marx for instance. It is on this pathway that Asigbo argues further in his cataloguing of the goings-on of Nigerian playwrights in the 70s and 80s which coincided with the peak of the cold war as well as the apogee of the Marxist cant. Asigbo had berated this seeming posture of deceit by certain persons in the academia who rather paid lip-service to the philosophies they seemed to be professing at a time. He rebuked that: “It was thus very normal then to see academics sporting Marxist beards and proudly claiming to be Marxist...because when all is said and done, there was really nothing exceptional that the second generation did both in their individual capacities and as writers to privilege them as being more committed. Notice also that that Marxist beards have virtually disappeared from our campuses” (21).

However, as already exemplified by the likes of; Ogunyemi, Rotimi, Sofola, Osofisan, Sowande, Ukala, Tomolaju, Asigbo, Utoh-Ezeajugh, Oyedepo, Yerima, Bakare etc, the Nigerian literary theatre will nevertheless serve as a premeditated workspace for domesticating Western theatrical elements. In fact, budding playwrights, directors, actors and other technical workforce not just within the educational circle, but even outside of it, would serve as catalysts for the furtherance of the theatre space in the larger society. As Nigerians, this will not only position them ideologically to confront the society they found themselves, but to also use theatre as a transformational tool either conversely or overtly. The optimal choice of this perception in contemporary Nigerian literary theatre is simply because drama or dramaturgy is rather more profoundly embracive particularly when the issues raised in it (theatre) are on the side of the masses. This approach was however typified by the theatres of Hubert Ogunde,

Duro Ladipo, Ojo Ladipo, Akin Ogungbe, Oyin Adejobi, the jesters, Ishola Ogunsola, Moses Adejumo (Baba Sala) and a host of others in the late 1990s. The expectation is that, this hypothesis should in the long run produce more dramatists, directors, actors, and theorists whose beliefs in espousing the rights, wisdom or virtues and growth of the social realities of the common people in a more profusely unflinching manner.

Hopefully, these now neo-liberal budding dramatists, directors, and actors with a view to professionalizing would begin to seek more pragmatic and indigenous methods to explore a new nuance of theatre language, technique and style embellished with all the African wherewithal of addressing issues of moral judgement, mores and cultures of Nigerian peoples and environmental factors as well. This ideological consciousness of a contemporary Nigerian literary drama could be likened to the “Mcknight Program” at the University of Minnesota which was established to promote students of theatre who showed interest in becoming both artists and scholars. This programme which was both sponsored by the University of Minnesota Theatre and the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre revealed clearly the misperception that could exist between the literary and professional theatre, and how both if creatively deployed could be of immense benefit to their society. It is this process of artistic creativity that Klein opines further that:

The program was predicated on the assumptions that educational and professional theatre could work together and that a good working relationship between the two theatre communities would prove beneficial to both. An appraisal of the program’s first four years reveals that its originators were not unrealistic about its potential. The first of the program’s projects, that of advancing the careers of the artist-scholars, has progressed satisfactorily. (182)

Indeed, the basic conception of a new populist dramaturgy in the contemporary Nigerian literary theatre should therefore reflect as a hard taskmaster upon which the professional theatre should draw inspiration from. Such inspiration must integrate and foster relevant indigenous scholarship on contemporary Nigerian theatre with the objectives of its originators entrenched with African aesthetics and cultural preservation in terms of theatre practice. According to Olufemi and Yerima; this will strengthen theatre practice in terms of its “resourceful deployment of the mechanics of indigenous performative mould, and spectacular” (4). This is particularly so because, in the long run it is the products of the literary theatre that are expected to eventually enter into a relationship with professional

practitioner with a strong view to maintaining set standards. Importantly too, the instructors of these contemporary Nigerian literary theatres would need to revise, re-direct their act, practice or method of teaching in the literary theatres to evolve a Nigerian approach of acting, stagecraft business etc that would reflect a total theatre concept form of expression.

This will fast-track and mainstream the contemporary Nigerian literary theatre in a fast changing world. On the face of it, it is understanding that; even though notions and concepts appear to move fairly fast, things (and that includes money, instructors, curricula and the like) tend to move more slowly inside the University than outside of it. To be realistic, it is wishful hoping that these notions and concepts from the literary theatre can be applied effectively in praxis beyond the educational institution. The corollary of this, is that, the literary theatre artist is often constraint with the establishment of a machinery for security, confident and pride of being as relevant to the society as any other professional. This implies that, instructors must intensify their efforts at identifying essential indigenous characteristics of actor-training, directing and playwriting to forestall the required qualitative transformation of the literary theatre that intends to rub elbows with professional theatre and together re-invent the African experience in the educational theatre. This will discourage the predominant ideology of conformism that the contemporary Nigerian literary theatre is still pre-occupied with.

By and large, theatre training in the academia would not only grow what is humanly and institutionally possible, but would also benefit student-artists with rather remarkable strides towards professionalizing to make a difference in the larger theatre space. In this context, Western theory should be pitted against the backdrop of integrating African dramatic idioms of music, dance, mime, song etc in its dramaturgy and stagecraft whose *raison d'être* is to formulate new ideas from the old as pertinent to our norms and culture.

Stagecraft and Change Management in Nigerian Literary Theatre

Decades after the denigration of African arts and culture by Western imperialism, some critics like Egwu (2010) censures the critical attention given to African literary arts that capture the people's traditional culture. He foresees an urbanised Nigeria where the younger generation are so distanced from traditional life as to create it in contemporary art forms. (Ezenwanebe 152)

The above assertion lends credence to the fact that modern Nigerian drama is an offshoot of Western education which has also conditioned the fashion in which we conceived of drama and stagecraft in Nigerian literary theatre. In line with this, Ahmed Yerima as (cited by Ajima and Shittu) attempts to trace the origin of modern drama in Nigeria as he brings to the forefront the likes of James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi and Mabel Segun. According to him: “These first generation dramatists employed a varied style of imitating the classicists or Shakespeare or the style of modern theatre” (34). This presupposes that in so many ways than one, the Nigerian literary theatre is self-possessed like a ‘theatre of surrender’. A theatre enmeshed in Western theatrical aesthetics and approaches that glamourize the weighing scale of colonial hangover of the classicists, romanticist with all the trimmings of ritualistic formalism of the Greco/Roman theatre. Suffice to say that, it is this outlandish Western dominance that Ihonvbere, (6) berates as “a culture of authoritarian nostalgia – where people begin to admire previous dictatorships- set in and demands were even made for a return to the colonial days”. To this extent, even though “the first report of a European-style play performed by Africans appeared in 1866...these plays did not assimilate traditional African theatre. During the colonial period, traditional African theatre was devalued and even suppressed, while theatres with Western stages, curtains, and proscenium arches were considered indispensable” (Downs, Wright, and Ramsey 242). Even in the later years, where Soyinka’s plays were observed to be deeply rooted in African myths, dance and rituals, one still got a reminder of his Western education background by Downs, Wright, and Ramsey. On Soyinka, they posit in the most succinct manner that: “But he was also influenced by Western drama, including ancient Greek theatre, Shakespeare and European non-realistic plays” (243). In other words, the literary classical styles known as classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism, symbolism, expressionism etc are still presented from the conventions of the Greco/Roman era without a clear form of relating same to Nigerian culture.

Therefore, the mentality that still considers the Western literary canons and all its theatrical elements more superior and the African indigenous one as hypothetically detrimental, requires a reassessment. It is perhaps this act of disparaging the dramaturgy and stagecraft in Nigerian literary theatre that has prompted a theatre scholar and social critic Ukala to put it another way: “Consequently, Western drama influenced African students of Western literature, as well as a great number of non-theatre-goers to interpret the world the way the colonial planners of the African curricula wanted them to and to imbibe the Western social habits and pastimes reflected in Western drama” (29). This gives

one the impression that most of the ideologies, styles and approaches observed in literary theatres across the country today are still laced with the profundities of Western dramaturgy. Though we can see that, Africa, nay Nigeria did not have theatres in the Western and Oriental sense before the advent of colonialism, we would like to explore a blend of certain contemporary stagecraft methods with how they can (methods) be deployed in traditional arenas like; shrines, courtyards, temples, king's palaces should the need arise.

Nonetheless, as a people with a robust culture, we must begin to systematically resist and seek the progress of replacing them (Western social habits and pastimes) with techniques that exemplify the functionality of the African life in all its theatricality in order to create an African, nay Nigerian postmodern theatre theorization and identity. Certainly, contemporary Nigerian literary theatre should as a matter of urgent concern encourage a dramaturgy of cultural renewal and revival of traditions that have been all these years suppressed by Western theatrical principles. This is on the premise that, Africa, nay Nigeria has entered the postmodern period with the rest of the world. Citing Synge, Asigbo and Okeke therefore observe that "All writers and artists are creative borrowers who dip their pen into their respective cultural wells for inspiration. In turn, the artist repackages such borrowed materials in ways that may be regarded as unique to the artist in question and represents to his immediate environment" (16).

Admittedly, there are traces of this in contemporary Nigerian theatre, however, more vigorous attention is required in order to sustain the momentum of those in the literary theatre. Nwosu Canice gives more impetus to this argument as he considers that: "Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that African postmodern theories negotiate boundaries and build bridges across gulfs using multicultural approaches...they transcend boundaries and shatter conventions and ideological rigidity" (95). This breaking away and finding of new boundaries like, neo-traditional techniques would in itself harness the distinctive indigenous features of the Nigerian literary theatre practice to perhaps becoming folkloric and performative in outlook. To this extent, Umukoro also re-echoes that:

The theatre of literary culture communicating predominantly in English, is largely a post-independence phenomenon which finds eloquent expression in the works of Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, and other western-educated playwrights who attempt to evolve a peculiar brand of dramaturgy which blends the folkloric elements with decidedly alien concepts.

Hence, in spite of the celebrated dichotomy between the professional and the academic streams, the flowering of academic theatre is the natural consequence of the inevitable cross-fertilization or artistic pollination by the age-long professional theatre. (129)

Still on Western influence, paraphrasing Graham-White's discourse on colonialism, Ukala observes that the nationalist struggle for independence created the negritude movement all over Africa to resist the assimilation policy of the French colonialists (108-9). Albeit these movements, especially after independence repositioned most African nations for revival of African cultures using their African intelligentsias. The likes of E'skia Mphahlele, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Chinweizu, Madubiuke et cetera are exemplified in this direction of seeking for African aesthetic independence. From this time, the options available to the contemporary Nigerian literary theatre, which is not even enough, ought to have rather stirred more reworked versions of Nigerian legends, history and storylines of heroes/heroines like: Kurunmi in *Kurunmi*, Kimathi Wa Wachiuri in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ame Oboni in *Ame Oboni*, Akpaka in *Akpakaland*, Otaelo in *Otaelo*, Emotan in *Emotan*, Queen Amina in *Queen Amina*, Caliph Attahiru in *Attahiru*, Ozidi in *Ozidi* Kinjiketile in *Kinjeketile*, Oba Ovonranwem Nogbaisi in *The Trials of Oba Ovoranwem Nogbaisi*, Akaraogun in *Langbodo* et cetera as a strategy to berate strict Western theatre conventions. This presupposes that: "students of drama therefore need to be able to determine something of the playwright's attitude to his audience and of their ideological assumptions, as well as the social and economic conditions under which they live" (Bradby, Thomas and Kenneth 236). This supposition becomes clearer, if we consider the problems of producing Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, a play from the medieval period for a contemporary Nigerian audience for instance. This is because, as a Nigerian theatre director, my interpretation of the play (*A Doll's House*) would largely be governed by particular set of social conjectures and the broad differences in audience assumption taking into consideration the difference in the two cultures.

Conversely, Ukala, while assessing theatrical translations/adaptations of African fables and culture by some artists like, Solomon Plaatje who translated into Setswana, Shakespeare's *A Comedy of Errors*; Julius Nyerere's adaptation into KiSwahili, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Dev Virahsawmy's translation and adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and a host of others, summarized the dilemma and flaws in these works. According to him:

In many cases, these plays do little more than faithfully reproduce their sources and, sometimes, have a narrator come in-between scenes to advance the story. They are also hardly critical of the African heroes and culture. Their primary aim is to show off the greatness of Africans and their culture, not to criticize them. This is a flaw, but it does not detract from the laudability of this pioneering effort in the African Literary theatre to cast away a deeply-entrenched colonial mentality, which caused the African to be ashamed of himself, past and artistic heritage. (31)

Discouraging to note also, is the unimaginative replication of the original Euro/American proscenium stage in most Nigerian literary theatres. The geometric design and configuration of this theatre is outlandish and as such devoid of the African order of unending continuum of a circle. This is simply that, this kind of stage does not provide the African feel with the past and the future meeting at the point of the present. Suffice to say that, the simultaneity of the African arena setting or theatre-in-the-round would enhance more physical and psychological intimacy between the actor and audience. The director in this theatre, “is free to experiment with movement and other element of directing to physicalize the dramatic action of the play in question” (Ejeke 23). Against this backdrop, the audience tend not to see the actors from a pictorial and illusionary point of view where theatre is presented as a real life experience.

That is the explanation for why as a Nigerian dramatist, one should not shirk conditions for creativity that will encourage strong identification with actors playing on stage. Hence, in the words of Ayckbourn, “as a playwright it may be your intention to build a vehicle to take us to the stars. But do make sure you have people aboard”. In essence, to make his play an actor/audience filled experience, the playwright in the literary theatre must transmit in a manner that his audience will be quick to respond. He must think of the African theatre as cyclical in nature, so as to impel a meeting of the ancestral with the unborn at the domain of the living. This establishes the fact that: “the traditional performance space in the African society is such that readily encourages the blend of...arts as the people’s way of life is closely incorporated into their performances” (Ogunbiyi 7). In other words, the African, nay Nigerian audience can never assume an inorganic posture, therefore the Nigerian dramatist must anchor his/her creativity on the way he/she says it than with what it is that he/she is actually saying. In fact, the choice of an opening glee, use of Western musical instrument, plot structure et cetera should

not be over glamorized at the expense of traditional dramatic instruction or entertainment forms in literary theatres across Nigeria.

This is essentially so, as it could create a distancing of physical and psychological closeness of the actor to the audience, thereby jeopardizing cultural affinity which is a common characteristic with the Western theatre where the audience is physically passive and non-participant due to the conventional apartheid allied with the proscenium stage. Ejeke strengthens further this contention by reiterating that: “The proscenium creates a technical barrier between the actors and the audience, a separation that alienates one from the other” (22). Hence, a suiting stagecraft technique would be to tutelage budding dramatists and stage directors in the literary theatre on how to construct adaptable theatres that can meet stage dimensions and home-grown style of dramatizing their narratives. Undoubtedly too, this will stimulate a new spatial relationship that could heighten and bring about an increased audience participation in literary theatre performances. It is a proposition that is African, indeed, Nigerian and sees, “culture as a product of their interfacing life, with the past in the present for the future” (Ezenwanebe 154). It becomes expedient therefore that: dramatists and theatre directors in Nigerian literary theatre have expertise on methods of inducing some sort of joint performance between actors and audience. In this wise, the stagecraft establishes a punctuation point in the course of a performance in which dances or songs are introduced in a total theatre practice with the expectation of the audience taking part in the performance.

Conclusion

The Nigerian literary theatre in its rush to improve theatrical training has more often than not, recorded a dereliction of robust indigenous components to dramaturgical principles and stagecraft. Its search-light is rather more focused on the use of Western standards and philosophies of drama and performance, particularly as imbibed and laid by notable pioneers of the literary theatre in Nigeria like Soyinka and Bekederemo. Nevertheless, exploring the dynamics of our indigenous stagecraft mechanism, our contemporary literary theatres should endeavour to provide a postmodernist framework for integrating multipart structure of interrelated cultures with a view to rationalizing Western stagecraft and literary canons on our stage. This will be on the strength of what people like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Zulu Sofola, Kole Omotosho, Olu Obafemi, Ahmed Yerima, Ola Rotimi, Stella Oyedepo, Alex Asigbo, Tunde Fatunde, Ojo Bakare, and others had started.

Besides, when we consider the imperialist educational structure foisted on the black race (Nigeria) to chart a certain Westernized consciousness vis-à-vis our cultural heritage we may begin to realise the need to carve a new ideological framework to guide the goings-on in our literary theatre. This new theatre language and stagecraft should rather encourage a performative style that could heighten audience participation, and at the same time, exploring the use of music, dance, song, mime, masque dramaturgy etc into the weft of plots in the most Nigerianized manner. In other words, as colonized Nigerians that we are; we do not need to continue in an artistic manner that will warrant us citing Shakespeare or Marlowe's works in a more proficient English style than Shakespeare and Marlowe themselves would. Or better still, exhibit great directorial competence in directing Luigi Pirandello's plays better than we will of a Soyinka, Rotimi or Yerima's. Simply put: student-artists in our literary theatres cannot afford to be more English than the Englishman himself, in terms of his culture and theatrical sensitiveness.

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