



THE MARXIST IDEOLOGY AND OLU OBAFEMI'S WORKS AS A RADICAL DRAMATIST

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Abstract

This paper examines the origin of what is today refer to as Nigerian modern drama has been traced to the numerous traditional festivals and ceremonies. These religious festival and ceremonies were presented through a traditionally established order of presentation which guaranteed their ultimate which makes –Diana – Devlin to define it as “periodic celebrations in which the whole community is involved”. This is what classifies Nigerian drama as a prototype of Greek theatre. Ogunbiyi observes that “the origin of Nigerian theatre and drama lie in her numerous traditional and functional to be found in every Nigeria society. Religious festival and ceremonies are part of the events that brings a community together. The heterogeneous nature of this aspect of a Nigeria man is so glaring that no community is devoid of one ritual ceremony, festival, ritual, or rite. Hence, Soyinka refers to these occasions as “one ARENA” one of the earliest that we know of in which man attempted to came to terms with the spatial phenomenon of his being. Also, Nwosu in his appraisal of African drama, attest to the fact that:

The African has a holistic minds that the playwrights understands the phenomenon in his environment as irreducible truths. Hence, the traditional theatre cannot be totally divorced from religious, cultural, economic, political, and agricultural activities Hence, traditional Africa Theatre manifests in the seasonal festival, ritualist performances, mythologies, folklore, and fertility dances (for earth and man) that define the existential essence of the African.

Meanwhile, in this paper, most African nations can boast of being the custodians of many popular festivals, rites, and ceremonies that have now turned to tourist attractions for the outside world. As there are many gods or deities, tribes, and lineages, so also are different festivals and ceremonies to invoke, appease, placate, mark the migration of a lineage or celebrate the exemplary feast of deified personalities.

Keywords: *Nigeria Modern Drama, Traditional Festivals, and Ceremonies, Africa/Nigeria Playwrights. Obafemi's Ideology, Nigeria Theatre*

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Introduction

Obafemi's Ideology as a Playwright

Marxism can be viewed as a way of organizing society for political and economic development wherein the means of production is owned by the workers. It is propounded by Karl Maxl and espoused by Fredrick Engels (1963) to examine the effect of capitalism on labour, productivity, and economic development. Marxism calls for classless society in which all means of production are collectively owned by the workers themselves. In this wise, all farms manufacturing

concerns trading outlets will be owned and managed by the collective – a group of people chosen generally by the workers themselves for such tasks. In literature, Marxism is a body of ideas that sees human history as one of class struggle. According to Lan H. Birchall and Erven, (1991). Marxism is concerned in analyzing the contradiction involved in capitalist system and to show how the working class can seize the means of production and establish a classless socialist society.

Marxism thought has influenced a great deal of African/Nigerian writers that their plays go along Marxian dialectics. Playwright of this persuasion in Nigeria includes

Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare and Olu Obafemi. Meanwhile, Nigerian dramatists would reveal a polarizing conflict between two groups of people in the society. These groups of people include, the people “who own the means of production and the people who provide the labour”. This is because according to Buah (1978), people who owed everything – Marx calls them “the haves” are in the minority while they needed people to work for them. The workers are usually in the majority and Marx calls them “have nots”. As a result, there exists a palpable gulf between the two always resulting into Marxian “continual conflict”. This noticeable is a play like Ola-Rotimi’s Hope of the living dead (1998) and If A Tragedy Of The Ruled (1983) it is also dissembled in Soyinka’s The Strong Breed (1974) as the whole community meet to choose Ifada (a character in a play) as a scapegoat or in The Death And The King Houseman (1975) where a family will always provide the king (ruler) and another family (the ruled) the houseman. This perpetual conflict results in a theatrical tradition of protest that ultimately leads to the emergence of a radical tradition in Nigerian theatre. Asein (1982) asserts that it is now understandable why the plays of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Wole Soyinka, Bode Sowande, and lately Olu Obafemi developed these plays to reflect the Marxist temper even when they do not pretend to be Marxists. This category is based on the complex and hybridized society that characterizes the Neo-Colonial African setting.

Obafemi’s plays in particular fulfilled De-graft’s (1976) Maxim of the utilization of socio-political reality as pulsating raw materials presentational instances of the separatist temper of the Marxist scholars. Again, Obafemi’s interpretation of the theatre seems to align with Adedeji’s (1998) quoted that the purpose of theatre is to impact experience not to provide meaning, or moral, or riddle and not to tell story.

Obafemi performance theory can be encapsulated in this statement he made in Nigerian Writers On The Civil War. He declares that the purpose of writers is to “create” a serious art that deals with the ghastly problem of society. He, therefore, belongs to the generations of African/Nigerian writers that often treat socio-political realities in their creativities, kill and Rowe (2000) affirmed that Obafemi’s art is not directed to criticism of the society alone but pointing out the problem. This is the precinct of socialist. Obafemi’s (2009) further stated in an interview with Sarah Town Sendat Tennessee Technology University that:

I am interested in writing a play that is both political and also profound. I want to entertain as much as I want my message to go. But I don’t want to film the audience into robots who are hearing my instructions.

Mphahlele’s (1979) observes in Writers and Commitment that Obafemi is equally a propagandist in his approach to play performance that:

Propaganda is always going to be with us. There will always be the passionate outcry

against injustice, war, fascism, poverty etc. It will keep coming at us, reminding us that man is as wicked as he is noble and that the mass audience out there is waiting to be stirred by passionate words.

Again, we can observe that Obafemi is audience centered in his approach to playwriting as he stated categorically in another interview that: No literature is written in a vacuum.

I write for my immediate audience because it is their experience that I am reflecting in my literature. It is the difficulties of existence and the socio-incoherence which have led to so much poverty in the midst of plenty and opulence that I am concerned about. I write not just to denounce the deprivation which misgovernment or dysfunctional government has brought about to propose alternatives as to how these can be corrected to the advantages of the people.

Moreover, one could say that Obafemi writes to satirize the antics of the power that be or exposes the system that keeps the people poor, thus inciting the consciousness of the audience to their giving reality and gives them a way out from the impact.

Obafemi’s View of Nigeria Perspective.

Nigeria has really come of age in dramatic and theatrical output in the few decades of her existence as a nation. Great and world-acclaimed dramatists, even a noble laureate has been produced within her shores. This is because world notables such as Wole Soyinka, African first noble laureate in literature. Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Niyi Osundare, and Ahmed Yerima bstride the world stage like colossus and display pageant of plays with rich cultural diversities in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. While, Nigeria can boast of a rich corpus of critical studies on the first generation of Nigeria dramatists mentioned above, such as Soyinka, J.P Clark, and their Contemporaries, a few of such critical studies are available on younger playwrights such as Ahmed Yerima and Olu Obafemi to mention but a few. This must have prompted Johnson, (2001) to assert that :

The plethora of published and unpublished dramatic works that presently adumbrate the literacy, dramatic and theatrical landscape of the country and also in the innumerable stage, radio, television, and video productions of these and other play scripts, and dramatic creations by professionals, academic and amateur groups.

One can even ascribe measure of national impact to Ahmed Yerima because of his activities as a Director of Nigeria National Troupe. Olu Obafemi enjoys even less as he is relatively unknown in Nigeria dramatic circles. This might be

due to what Eghagha(2004) describes as "undue colonization of the works of these early writers while shutting out others".

Nevertheless, Eghagha observes that "Obafemi is one of the strong emerging and original voices of Nigeria dramatic literature. Again, perhaps because literature presents critics with new and fresh viewpoints that may easily arrest the attention of connoisseurs, a critical study of Obafemi's play such as these will unarguably go a long way to externalize the playwright's ideology.

Conclusion

Olu Obafemi has not been relatively recognized as a dramatists of repute in Nigeria, rather as a Marxist theorist. Yet, he has written a number of plays that have been produced on the Nigerian stage at different fora but lacks the exposure noted with other more elderly Nigerian playwrights, which arguably could be linked with what Eghagha describes as canonization of some Nigerian playwrights.

Meanwhile, Obafemi in his thematic approach in most of his published works has remained within the confine of his immediate society. Although in Nigeria, his works are expositions of the peculiar in the African continent where issues such as politics, poverty, corruption, egotism, and oppression and Mal-administration are raised for critical discussions.

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