

TRANSGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GENERATIONAL PERIODIZATION OF NIGERIAN DRAMA: THE EXAMPLES OF WOLE SOYINKA AND OLA ROTIMI

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Abstract

This study attempts to inaugurate a new approach for the study of the plays of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi. It argues that Soyinka and Rotimi are playwrights of longevity and extensive productive life and that their plays in terms of ideological frames and mechanics of composition, transcend the limit of the boundary set by any identified generation of Nigerian dramaturgy and, therefore, cannot be pushed into any single periodic category with absolute fidelity. The paper argues that generational periodization which is a dominant approach to the study of the works of Nigerian playwrights is stereotypical and seduces attention away from the texts. The position of the paper is that literary master codes like myths, Marxism and feminism, which enable scholars to group plays and their authors generationally, are ubiquitous and as such, tend to defy historical and theoretical boundaries. In view of this, the paper advocates transgenerational perspectives as an alternative and reliable approach to the study of the works of Soyinka and Rotimi because it facilitates textual interrogation from multiple perspectives.

Introduction

Dramatic criticism in Nigeria seems to suffer from undue restriction and autocracy owing mainly to the fact that critics and theatre historians base their assumptions on a poor critical tool namely, generational periodization, a histo-critical approach that facilitates the study and classification of playwrights and their works according to the moment of emergence of their writing, period of birth or ideology. Generational periodization assumes that plays produced by different generations of writers are mutually exclusive and this seems to promote the idea of flowering and decay of dramatic literature. It equally encourages the thinking that dramatic productions of a given author maintain the same tradition, among others.

This paper argues that this analytical approach is narrow, stereotypical and seduces attention away from dramatic texts. It, therefore, envisions transgenerational perspectives as an alternative critical option because Nigerian drama, as exemplified by the plays of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, seem to share active relationship of solidarity across the three identified generations of Nigerian drama. The study seeks to demonstrate that literary mastercodes used to category plays and their authors into different generations are directionless and ubiquitous and do not develop in linear fashion but transhistorically crisscross in dramatic texts.. Generational perception of Nigerian drama ignores the fact that plays are usually multicolored and that playwrights frequently change their aesthetic habit, making the frontiers of plays to be fluid and unrestrainable. In an article, "Dramatic character and the Great Transition: Imminent Paradigm Shift", Iyorwuese Hagher posits that, "The world, in its great transition, is fashioning a new social order whose main capital will be knowledge and its limits will have no borders" (5).

In attempt to respect the idea of periodization, which *The State Master Encyclopedia* defines as "an attempt to categorize or divide time into discrete named block" (1077), with the assumption

that each block is characterized by specificity and obvious uniform norms that set it apart from other time frames, some Nigerian theatre critics and historians including Ziky Kofoworola and Saint Gbilekaa adopted generational appellation in their study of Nigerian dramatic literature, using biological perspective, time of emergence of writing and especially, ideological leaning as yardsticks for grouping playwrights and their plays. In "Trend in the Theory and Criticism of African Drama: Emeka Nwabueze's *Guardian of the Cosmos* as Paradigm", Kofoworola delineates three generations of Nigeria dramaturgy in which he argues that Emeka Nwabueze is "well fitted into the category of the third generation" (27). In describing the specificity of each generation, he further states:

The first generation playwrights were produced at the throes or the dawn of Nigerian independence. That was a period of restive creative experimentation. Significant features of that period include the struggles for independence from the colonial hegemony, the search for cultural identity by the new Nigerian nationhood and the transition phenomena brought about by modern system of government, education, socio-economic changes and the need for political stability ... We observe the radical approach by the second generation of playwrights who employed the Marxist and socialist ideologies as ways of achieving liberation struggles by the African nation ... However, the usage of Nigerian/African folklores seems to me of unique features in the plays of the third generation of Nigerian playwrights (28 – 29).

The above statement suggests that Kofoworola utilizes moment of emergence of writing and the issue of ideology in his classification of Nigerian playwrights. The classification appears to be replete with problems. The socio-economic, political and cultural identity crises he posited as the features of the first generation are still being grappled with by writers such as Nwabueze whom he grouped under the third generation. Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, for example, is a play on poor leadership in the country. The play is a parody of the poor practice of democratic system of government in Nigeria, which is the subject of Rotimi's *if... a tragedy of the ruled*. Again, the usage of folklore does not seem to be peculiar to the so-called third generation. Playwrights like Soyinka, Clark, Rotimi and Ogunyemi often labeled first generation playwrights, have their plays well mortared in the tradition and folklore of their people. An understanding that the creative horizon of any playwright can be elastic and that a particular text can contain diverse features, seems to constrain Kofoworola to observe that:

The writings of the playwrights of the various categories cannot be strictly classified as some kind of water-tight compartmentalized categorization. This is because the topics of their plays, the contents and contexts are made up of admixture of themes which range from historical, cultural, sociological and political issues" (28).

This suggests that generational periodization may be a narrow and circumscribed way of looking at plays which seem to defy any stereotypical perception. Saint Gbilekaa in an article, "Ideo-Aesthetics in Third Generation Nigerian Drama", examining Nigerian drama from generational perspective, states:

When we talk about the first generation Nigerian drama, we are obviously referring to the play of James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka J.P. Clark Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi and to a certain degree Wale Ogunyemi eventhough

Rotimi and Ogunyemi bestride the first and second generations. The second generation comprises playwrights like Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sownde, Olu Obafemi, Iyowuese Hagher, Tess Onwueme, Tunde Fatunde, Tunde Lakoju, Segun Oyekunle, etc. The third generation comprises younger and recent voices that are emerging in Nigerian dramatic scene. These include Stella Oyedepo, Julie Okoh, Irene Salami, Tracie Uto, Alex Asigbo, Bakare Ojo Rasaki, Barclays Ayakoroma, Philip Begbo, etc (1).

In discussing the specificity of the first generation, Gbilekaa notes that the playwrights under this category crafted their plays after the critical realist tradition whose works lean heavily on the cult of the individual, “a conception of art that disinherit the masses, denying them the opportunity of initiating changes that would move the society forward” (2). He further maintains that:

The tragic world view which the first generation Nigerian playwrights, Soyinka, Clark, and Rotimi painted was somewhat static and bizarre. Their plays particularly those of Clark, are peopled with desperado-protagonists, helpless victims of fate who cannot deliver themselves (*Radical Theatre in Nigeria* iii)

The above suggests that the plays of the first generation dwell on mythic issues, lacking Marxist ideals in promising degree. Luis Vargas posits that periods serve “useful purpose in drama as long as they are recognized as shorthand symbols to describe the basic coloration of a play” (*Guidebook to the Drama* 152). Otherwise, he maintains that a play is “often an amalgam of diverse elements” and cannot be pushed into any one period “with absolute truth” (152). It is in recognition of this that Biodun Jeyifo attempted to analyze some of Wole Soyinka’s mythic plays from materialist perspective. The idea of a noticeable paradigm shift may have compelled Gbilekaa to note that Rotimi and Ogunyemi bestride the first and second generations. In *The Radical Theatre* Gbilekaa states that Rotimi romances with the Marxists in *Hopes of the Living of Dead* and *if ... a tragedy of the ruled*. To buttress this Effio B Uwatt observes that:

What makes Rotimi and Ogunyemi bestride the first and second generations are not certainly biological criteria, but ideo-Aesthetics that hinges on class and social issues that is located in the class contradiction of a neo-capitalist economy that does away with cynicism and despair and in their place introduced hope and instilled confidence in the masses (“The Limit of Generation Periodization”)

It is clear from the above that playwrights mature and their perception of issues often change from time to time. This is the reason Odun Balogun observes that “the taste of human beings in a matter of art and indeed in all areas of expression always change in time” (*The Contemporary Stage* 17). Uwatt cites Pinder to have discouraged generational periodization on the ground that “its representatives undergo further development”, which frequently “separates them from their origins” (19). In the same direction, Ulrich Weisstein states that “A single poet can belong to several generations and his writings can exemplify various periods styles which need not, however, follow each other in strict chronological order” (*Comparative Literature* 87). In distinguishing the first generation from the second generation category, Gbilekka writes:

The gloomy and bleak picture of the future characterized by the plays of Soyinka, Clark and Rotimi, the single history -making individuals gave way to

the masses hero in the drama of the new generation of playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Bode Osanyin, and many others (*Radical Theatre* v).

Also in explaining the feature of the third generation, Gbilekaa observes that except for feminism, “this generation suffers the crisis of solid ideological persuasion and aesthetic style” (“Ideo-Aesthetics” 3). From Gbilekaa’s categorization, it is discerned that the first generation seems to grapple with mythical issues, the second, Marxist and the third, feminism.

Although Gbilekaa and Kofoworola, among others, distinguished three generations of Nigerian drama, they do not seem to agree on the building blocks of each generation. Their views appear to contradict each other. For example, while Gbilekaa argues that apart from feminism, the third generation lacks solid ideological base, Kofoworola posits that the third generation is characterized by folkloricism. Let us make this point clear. Soyinka and Rotimi are no doubt folkloric playwrights. In his article, “Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Nigerian Theatre” Joel Adedeji notes that as folkloric playwrights, Soyinka and Rotimi “explored not only the wealth of Yoruba myths, legends and history, but also her rich and prolific poetry, music and dance (137). He states that Soyinka and Rotimi’s plays “span both literary and historical categories of oral tradition and explore the philosophy of Yoruba religion” (137). He further posits that in *A Dance of the Forests*, “The gods behave like humans full of foibles and obscenities. Instead of “illustrious ancestors” we believe them to be, we see them as “spirits of the restless dead” (139). Adedeji argues that:

It is the extent to which Rotimi use oral tradition that makes his *Kurunmi* an invigorating theatrical experience. The juxtaposition of the tragic and the comic elements in the same fare is a judicious use of Yoruba sense of humor (140).

In fact, Soyinka and Rotimi tend to keep Yoruba traditional mores inviolate in their plays in order “to reflect traditional sensibility and induce mass appeal” (147). As Kalu Uka would say, these playwrights use familiar myths, legends and traditional performance idioms and histrionics to “push our consciousness deliberately back to roots” (141).

The above studies reveal that the epistemological foundation of generational periodization of Nigerian drama appears to be very unstable and, therefore, offers us unclear analytical tools for textual analysis and interpretation. There is no sustained effort to show whether a generation is determined by biological criterion or denoted by the moment of emergence of writing. When Kofoworola states that “The first generation playwrights were produced at the throes or dawn of Nigerian independence “[28], he deploys partially the concept of the moment of the emergence of writing in addition to ideology as criteria for his classification, but he fails to show when that period ended and another began. Gbilekaa favours ideology, ignoring time frame, which is a fundamental factor in periodization. All this demonstrates that the studies of Nigerian plays and playwrights like Soyinka and Rotimi based on generational periodization are chaotic; deeply flawed and obviously leaves one floundering in dark waters of confusion. Lack of cohesion in the views of the champions of generational approach to the study of Nigerian drama and indeed literature, seems to leave this histo-critical option with much less to be desired.

However, it is important to state that Soyinka and Rotimi, for example, are playwrights of longevity and extensive productive life and because these authors span many generations in terms of age, their plays seem to be vehicles of diverse ideas exemplified by these generations and, therefore,

can only be meaningfully approached from transgenerational perspectives. It is pertinent to know that immersion in myth and the enchanted world does not seem to make Soyinka and Rotimi loose grips of issues such as class struggle and women empowerment in their dramatic enterprise and this makes their plays by-pass the limit of the boundary set by any given generation.

Transgenerational perspectives as analytical and interpretive experiment is envisioned by this writer as an alternative to generational periodization, which seems to be a dominant and received approach to the study and categorization of Nigerian playwrights and their plays. It advocates a multiple-pronged and unrestricted approach to the study of Nigerian playwrights and their dramatic literature; believing that a single-perspective critical option which dramatic critics and historians have allowed to enjoy a field day is not only narrow and stereotypical, but seduces attention away from texts.

This new attitude to dramatic criticism assumes that every dramatic text or play is multicoloured. It argues that the literary mastercodes such as myth, Marxism and feminism, used by the critics and theatre historians to lump Nigerian playwrights and plays into mutually exclusive generations, are ubiquitous, walking back and forth, nay directionless in literary productions, defying historical and even theoretical boundaries. This, essentially, is the reason it is possible to link or appreciate plays with analytical theories inaugurated before or after their period(s) of constitution. Today, for example, we can analyze Sophocle's *Antigone* as a feminist play, even though that play was written centuries before feminism came into currency as a literary theory.

The ubiquitousness and directionless of mastercodes in dramatic texts not only in Nigeria but all over the world, make the idea of perceiving Nigerian dramaturgical writings in mutually exclusive terms, myopic and peripheral. It is pertinent to state that even though a group of playwrights may give dominance to a particular mastercode, it is easy to look at the plays of preceding or succeeding generations, and find that same mastercode dominating or competing for attention in a promising degree. It is on record that Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, which to this writer, seems to be the best example of feminist plays in Nigeria, was written in 1966, in far away United State of America, many years before feminism was accentuated in the country as a dramatic theory. Similarly, a good example of Marxist play in Nigeria, *The Beautification of Area Boy*, was not written by the so-called second generation group, but by Wole Soyinka and in a time-frame dubbed by critics and theatre historians as the third generation. Also, Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), to mention but a few, is awash with class struggle and revolution, yet, the play was written before Marxism takes the front stage in Nigeria drama. This suggests that ideologies do not develop in linear formation but crisscross in playwriting. This eloquent statement buttresses the fact that in drama one may not be certain of relationships in time perspective unlike in pure history where obvious landmarks are used for time demarcation. Theatre history shows that similar ideas occur in plays written in unconnected historical times. For example, the plays of William Shakespeare are studied as instances of romantic tradition even though they were written centuries before Romanticism gained currency as a literary movement. In fact, in his *Anatomy of criticism*, Northrop Frye situates Shakespearean plays within two traditions of writing, namely Realism and Romantism. He argues that in Shakespearean plays, "there is a struggle between two levels of existence, the former like our world or worse, the latter enchanted and idyllic" (44). The point which the above view vivifies is that playwrights can be pluriform in terms of ideas.

In "The Yahoo Generation and the Tropes of Sleaze", Damola Awoyokun reacted against the received idea of classifying Nigerian literature generation-wise. Specifically, his essay is a rejoinder to Nnolim's "Contemplating Contemporary Nigerian Fiction", in which he delineates three generations of writings in Africa in general and Nigeria particularly. According to Awoyokun:

A body of literature from diverse writers histographically unified only by time is insusceptible to easy summaries and categorizations. It is replete with complexities, tensed with (sub) thematic contradictions and every of its walls are unavoidably fluid. The critic must have those in mind as an operational background. (46).

His argument is that a piece of literature can be transhistorical in perspective and that we have typical instances of the so-called first generation writers publishing works outside of generations designated as theirs, and that these works have "concerned themselves with the realities, visions and anxieties of these later generations". And "this makes the man-made partitions of generational grand themes shifts and crumbles making room for the project of intertextuality, collective dialogue across time". (47). He sees Nnolim's generational perspective as placing empathy where it does not belong. According to him:

When Nnolim says that the first generation burdened itself with 'the fight against apartheid and colonialism', it is easy to look at their later works and see no such fights but the current zeitgeist. When he says the second generation press their works as vectors of ideological theories, social justice, and feminism, it is easy to look at their later works and see no such thing but status quo. And so when he says the New Nigerian writing is replete with hedonism, corruption and idioms of debauchery, it is easy to recognize the older works' grand themes resonating similarly. (47).

Transgenerational perspectives seek to demonstrate that playwrights are not bound by external absolute laws and that their subject matters oblige them to mix up ideas or change their creative habit, in order to effectively show all the characters in their different poses and various motives, even to typify the struggles in the plays. It is important to state that drama by its nature is multivocal and this multivocality inheres in dramatic characters. In conventional dramatic situations, we have protagonist and antagonist who represent forces of opposition. Every good play is rich in friction of ideas and this can make such play to belong to different periods.

The above factors are the reasons the researcher envisions transgenerational perspectives as a theoretical alternative to generational periodization in the study of Nigerian playwrights and their plays. This study argues that the works of playwrights like Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi are guardian of many values and, therefore, defy easy categorization. It posits that the interface of literary norms, their ubiquitous nature and directionless movement, make a single – perspective approach a blurred vision. Transgenerational perspectives assume that different facts emerge when texts are subjected to diverse knowledge or theoretical frameworks. It suggests that multiple – pronged approach to dramatic analysis and interpretation will widen intellectual horizon and make critical studies to acquire depth and to illuminate the diverse worlds of texts. This proposition promotes criticism of rigor and objectivity; it enables one to think long and deeply, to use Ann B. Dobie's parlance. It assists one to savour the inexhaustible richness of reading critically. Let us now

substantiate our view by reviewing and commenting on some of what scholars have said about some plays of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi.

Many critics of the literary drama in Nigeria appear to praise the plays of the second generation for their ideological clarity, while the plays of the so-called first generation playwrights are repudiated for being ideologically unclear and for lacking solid class perspective. In his article entitled, "The Season of the Mind: Wole Soyinka and the Nigerian Crisis", Abiola Irele observes that Soyinka's interest in ritual aesthetics and "disregard for the concrete framework of events and his refusal of a clear sociological or ideological conception of the forces present in the Nigerian conflict leaves one with the notion of insubstantiality" (47). Irele believes that by being vague in his ideas, Soyinka runs away from painting an obvious picture of the root of his indignation. He argues that the abstract nature of Soyinka's plays makes it impossible for them to be grounded upon any discernible sense of actuality. To rest his case against his perceived shortcomings of Soyinka's dramatic writings, Irele suggests that "Soyinka needs to give an intellectual direction to his works, for at the moment, what he has to express has not strike yet as arising from a defined groundwork of ideas to which his outlook on the world can be said to relate in a fundamental way". Irele's views above over generalize issues. Apart from *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road* and *Madmen and Specialists*, which are based on the abstract concept of existentialism, the other plays of Wole Soyinka notably *The Jero plays*, *A Play of Giants*, *The Beatification of Area Boy*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, etc, can be said to deal with issues and history directly pertinent to Nigerians.

Again, when Irele states that Soyinka must be specific in what he says, he means that he must embrace a clear-cut ideology preferably the working class ideology. To insist on a solid class ideology is to miss the point because ideology has a wider reference than Marxism alone can account for. Drama does not reflect class discourse alone, it equally examines issues that are trans-class, trans-generational, as well as those across gender. How does one handle the issue of hypocrisy from class perspective? Hypocrisy is a general disease found among men, women, rich people and poor people throughout the ages. Certain plays of Soyinka may not directly present us with a clear-cut ideology, nonetheless, they present the reader with ambivalent values from which he or she can construct one. This manner of presenting dramatic art exercises the readers' imagination, which is the faculty of artistic perception. It is necessary to point out here that artistic perception is usually eminently satisfying when the reader is able to decipher the import of a play through close reading than when it is forced upon him by the playwright. In support of Irele's view, Bernth Lindfors in his book, *the Blind Men and the Elephant*, becomes even more caustic in his criticism of Soyinka. According to him:

As poet, playwright and prose writer, he too often offers nothing but scrambled messages, subtle verbal puzzles that scholars must labour to decode. Certainly he cannot claim to be addressing the common man. The ordinary Nigerian has no hope of understanding him when he lapses into one of his mystic trances and turns on the faucet of foaming words full blast. Even intelligent Nigerian undergraduates and their professors are known to be baffled by his more delirious conundrums (53).

Lindfors is not sparing at all in the above statement. He seems to be very unparliamentary in his description of Soyinka's attitude or style of writing. He becomes even unrestrained in describing

A Dance of the Forests. For him, that play is useless and has no meaning that is “capable of disseminating itself” (55). He feels that:

This is a pity for there are several scenes of intense dramatic power which could have been harnessed to serve a larger purpose than that of merely keeping an audience visually entertained. Soyinka by attempting to be sly and subtle at every turn, frittered away theatrical opportunities that might have made this a telling play. As it stands now, it tells far too little (55).

Although about *The Road*, Lindfors regards Soyinka as “an intellectual trickster who playing hide-and-seek with his audience again”, pursues “what seemed to be the least promising of all the theatrical paths he had traveled before” (56), he nevertheless, finds “this obsfuscator” doing something different in *The Lion and the Jewel*. In reference to this play, he observes:

The Lion and the Jewel is a brilliant sex comedy in which the magnetic field of attraction and repulsion between three characters caught in an amusing African variation of the classic love tangle is presented with absolute clarity. We understand the characters and the situation perfectly, yet Soyinka succeeds in springing some surprises on which, in retrospect, seem not only extremely well motivated but delightfully inevitable. It is impossible to loose the thread of dramatic discourse for the action is always unambiguous, the dialogue deliciously crisp and the comic interest constant. Even if Soyinka has not written nothing else, this theatrical gem would have won him a reputation as one of Africa’s most extravagantly talented playwrights (54).

Lindfors’s foregoing statements appear ambivalent, for they swing from vituperation to praise, from crucifixion to redemption, which marshalls support for the playwright’s compositional dynamism. The idea of not maintaining one habit of writing, which Lindfors’s views seem to denote, gives credence to transgenerational perspectives as an alternative to generational periodization.

In “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos”, Femi Osofisan argues that the tendency of the first generation plays to subsume history within the framework of myth and ritual is anti-revolutionary, anti-change. He maintains that the “animist conception of cyclic phenomena, the very metaphysics upon which Soyinka’s rituals are rooted”, does not “differ much from fatalism, that antidote to human progress” (75). For Osofisan, myth and history should stay apart. In unequivocal terms, he posits:

The truth is, at this moment in history, the world-view which made for animist metaphysics has all but disintegrated in the acceleration, caused by colonialism, of man’s economic separation from Nature. However, one may regret it, myth and history are no longer complementary and to insist otherwise is to voice a plea for reaction (75).

Osofisan’s view above appears to be borne out of an exuberant attempt to glorify the revolutionary aesthetics, which is said to be the pivot on which the second generation plays revolve, and to demonstrate his conception of how far the first generation plays especially the plays of Wole Soyinka are from embodying revolutionary spirit. However, it is necessary to state that many of Soyinka’s plays are certainly not antipodal to revolution and change. Yoruba traditional world picture

is not presented untrammelled in Soyinka's plays as suggested by Osofisan, who himself lends support to this assertion in the same essay where he states that when Soyinka "stands within history, and mediate experience, he presents a dialectical momentum which enriches both the ritual form and the thematic exploration" (76). This is evident in *Death and the King's Horseman*, where the narcissistic Elesin Oba's effort to continue with the decadent ritual suicide is challenged by the Pilkings. The Ogunian spirit is equally rejected by the "gathering of tribes" in *A Dance of the Forests* with Demoke running away from the effigy he produced. Even though Soyinka is not an avowed Marxist, his plays like *Opera Wonyosi* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*. And even *The Bacchae of Euripides*, broach on the class thesis of the Nigeria problems. According to Hagher, "Wole Soyinka bridges the gap between the ritualistic and the radical with his highly topical and political plays, *Opera Wonyosi*, *A Play of Gaints* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*" (10).

In his recently published book entitled *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonality*, Biodun Jeyifo, locates Soyinka's writings within the precinct of "big man literature" and the tendency of such writings according to him, is to enact "conspicuous subjectivity in, and through language, specifically in written texts published in the adopted "world" language of the colonizers" (xviii). According to him, the 'big man' in politics is talismanic and "its inscription in Soyinka's writings and career dialectically involves both positive and celebration of the heroic, revolutionary currents of the tradition and at the same time very scathing, ironizing parodies of its pretensions and mystifications, especially in their yield of cycles of catastrophic violence and tyrannical misrule" (xx). However, in spite of the tinge of mystification in the above view and the feeling that Soyinka's works appear to be an intersection of myth, artistic avant-gardism and political radicalism, Jeyifo still recognizes a stylistic shift in Soyinka's dramaturgy. In what he considers to be the third phase of Soyinka's dramatic writing, he states:

The third and most current period has provided the leanest harvest of plays in Soyinka's career as a dramatist. And again, this seems traceable less to a waning interest in the medium of the drama than to the over determining fact of an enforced near total absence from the theatre due to this being the most intensely activist phase of Soyinka's involvement in the unfolding political crises of Nigeria and the African continent. Indeed, it is symptomatic of this condition that the plays of this period are not only the most intensely ideological and political of Soyinka's plays, they are also noticeable in being unambiguously partisan on the side of the disenfranchised masses. (91).

Jeyifo goes on to elaborate the above view by suggesting that "The ambivalent solicitude of the plays of the two earlier phases towards working class and déclassé, lumpen characters, as individuals and as a social group, is replaced in the three plays of this phase – *A Scourge of Hyacinth*, *From Zia with Love* and *The Beatification of Area Boy* – with a cautious faith in the ability of the urban poor and disenfranchised to liberate themselves from their degraded intolerable condition of existence" (91). The implication is that certain plays of Wole Soyinka seem to be avowedly Marxist in their orientation and, therefore, belie attempt to exclude Soyinka from the Marxist school of Nigerian drama.

In "Soyinka De-mythologized: Notes on a Materialist Reading of *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road* and *Kongi's Harvest*", Biodun Jeyifo argues that the playwright situates his vision "in precise historical conjectures, in determinate modes of production and their corresponding forms of

consciousness". (13). He maintains that in *A Dance of the Forests*, for example, "the locus of the 'tragic' conflict is ideological: alienated deity consciousness fails to confront the consequences of its own self-mystification and reification; the humans leave their 'problems' to a reified godhead incapable of solving these 'problems'. Jeyifo believes that in "*A Dance of the Forests*, there are two levels of representation, the spheres of the humanity and divinity, or as spatially presented in the play, the forest and the village". (18). For him, the action of the play is structured around this polarity of human and divine in ways that are decisive for a materialist interpretation" (19). He maintains that in the text supernatural world of the deities and the forest dominate the human world of the village, making the humans to be supplicants to it. In fact, the humans behold the divine in many ways and this relationship manifests everywhere in the text. For Jeyifo, the destruction of the Araba tree by Demoke provides the materialist basis of most of the conflict in the text. He argues that the disrespect of man to nature in this instance parallels man's violence against his kind. According to him, therefore:

The entirety of the central, emblematic scene of the play, the dance-trial, is a visual and symbolic representation of this decisive parallelism in the action of the play-just as the two restless dead, the triplets (objectified corruption of man), the half-child (human life aborted by human cruelties) and the ants (the millions of workers - "the masses" - ground underfoot in the 'normal' run of productions) all rise to condemn the humans, so do the spirits of natural phenomena and objects testify to the humans' external war against nature (23).

The retreating of the forests beings before the noxious fumes and the beaters at dawn indicates that their domination of the humans' is not absolute. Jeyifo states that:

It shows the dialectical self-dissolution of mythical thought in history and new forms of consciousness; the shafts of sunlight dispel the spirits and gods because they are the fantasized creation of alienated absolute consciousness, and the petrol fumes - a pollutant, mark - irritate the forest beings because the elements of a new mode of production rupture the ecological balance and the material base which subsume and validate the alienated animist consciousness (27).

Osita Ezenwanebe's essay, "The Representation of Women in Nigerian Theatre: An issue in Theatre Development," suggests that certain plays of Wole Soyinka are not averse to the female question said to be the ideological backbone of the third generation. According to Ezenwanebe, "Soyinka in most of his plays, does not portray women as little dolls without brains, voice or choice" (67). She demonstrates how this is the case with Sidi in *The Lion and the Jewel*, Iyaloja in *Death and King's Horseman*, Iya Agba and Iya Mate in *Madmen and Specialists*. She argues that these women characters are bold, powerful, independent-minded and assertive. With respect to Iyaloja, Akporji argues:

Iyaloja functions simultaneously as Elesin Oba's motivator and antagonist. Along with the Praise-Singer and the market women, she motivates him in his dance to transition, showering praises on him and meeting even his banal needs. Following his failure to successfully complete the dance, she execrates him for having betrayed the community and confronts him because of the dangers

inherent in his failure which are heightened, rather than lessened, by his son's Olunde's completing his task for him (190-191).

The role of Iyalaja in the play is geared towards communal well being. She finds the community's spiritual harmony more important than narrow personal interest and this is her reason for granting Elesin's request for the young bride already betrothed to her own son. For this woman, no sacrifice, including ritual suicide, is too much for the spiritual safety of the community. This is why when Elesin's action keeps the community precariously hanging in the balance, she vociferously attacks him "because of his addiction to left-overs," his proclivity for the pleasure of moral life in preference to the honour and glory accruing from service to the community" (Akproji 140).

V.U. Ola A.E. Anigala, Saint Gbilekaa, Effiok Uwatt, and Victoria Adeniyi's studies of the works of Ola Rotimi, among others, deal with issues variously associated with the three generations of Nigerian dramaturgy. In "The Concept of tragedy in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*", V.U. Ola examines *The Gods Are Not to Blame* from mythic perspective which is said to dominate the dramaturgy of the first generation playwrights. He agrees with Paul Roche that the message of the play does not change from that of *Oedipus the King*, which is that:

We too need to be told that man is limited and contingent creature, subject to sudden disrupting forces. Success is not finally to be measured by fame or material prosperity. Human greatness consists ultimately in nobly accepting the responsibility of being what we are: human freedom is the personal working out of our fate in terms appropriate to ourselves. Though we may be innocent, we are all potentially guilty, because of the germ of self-sufficiency and arrogance in our nature" (iv).

Ola's study firmly situates the text within the sphere of fate. He maintains that the idea that Odewale will kill his father and marry his mother is given sufficient weight to convince one that the play is the drama of the gods. For him, Odewale's hot-temper, which is derived from Aristotle's concept of tragic flaw, is a strong enough propeller of Fate (24). He contends that Rotimi's "evocation of tribalism as a contributor to his temper is not convincing, and remains the central weakness in an otherwise powerful piece of drama" (25). He sees the introduction of tribalism in the text as constituting a blot which tends to cause the play to sacrifice the universal to the particular. Ola's submission brings us to the question of adaptation. In a paper presented in European Conference on African Studies held in Leipzig, Germany in June 2009, which incidentally deals with *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, this researcher contends that adaptation is never an end in itself, but a means to an end. He argues that an adapted work ought to be a vehicle for the conveyance of ideas crucial to the people for which it has been recreated. In other words, "the new play must address the question of intelligibility within its contemporary setting" (2). The introduction of tribalism is a way of imbuing the text with timely spirit corresponding to an experience meaningful and understandable to the new audience/reader. Tribalism is a disturbing and palpable human condition in Nigeria. It is a "national question around which a great deal of our national life revolves, and in the name of which all sorts of crimes have been perpetrated against the nation" (Ikime 20). Ethnocentrism is used in the idiom of the play to provide a springboard for Odewale's catastrophe in order to alert us on the danger of ethnic bigotry, which, in fact, has led to a civil war in the country.

“Feminism in Ola Rotimi’s Dramatic concept” is A.E. Anigala’s attempt to examine *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* from the perspective of the struggle for women empowerment. The study demonstrates how the arrival of Lekoja-Brown’s Kenyan-born American wife, changed the prevailing husband and wife relationship in Brown’s house. Before Liza’s arrival, Mama Rashida and Sikira, Brown’s Nigerian wives, were completely domesticated and under the heavy yoke of tradition which never allowed them any say in a world dominated by male chauvinism. Liza, the American-trained wife is shown to have lionized these hitherto servile women through her lectures on the equality of men and women, as well as on the means of achieving economic empowerment. This enabled Mama Rashida and Sikira to develop a new form of consciousness and drive to push even for a total power transfer. The study, in fact, demonstrates how the myth of male superiority is destroyed in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, written even before *The Gods Are Not to Blame*- an essentially mythic play.

In her article “Male Ego and the Crisis of Gender in Modern African Drama, Osita Ezenwanebe evaluates how the male ego fuels gender crisis in contemporary Africa plays, including Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. She sees the ego as “a social mask, a façade contrived and used by men to subdue women” (278) She demonstrates in the analysis of the play that men’s claim to superior intelligence, physical power, their claim to the ownership of everything and everybody, including their wives, etc, have been proved to be “shallow and unfounded” (280). She argues that Liza’s display of intellectual power is unmistakable and that her influence enables the local wives of Lekoja-Brown- Mama Rashida and Sikira to turn their backs against the suppressive life of full time house wife” (295).

In “Proletarian Philosophy in Ola Rotimi’s Drama”, Victoria Adeniyi examines *If ...* and *Hopes of the Living Dead* “from a dialectical materialist perspective (127). She argues that the two plays are a radical departure from the ideological camp that has tended to bind Rotimi, Soyinka, Clark and Ogunyemi together. The plays are said to abandon the concern for the aristocratic class to embrace and stress the importance of the common man in the society. Adeniyi observes that the committing of ideological suicide enables the playwright to change “from presenting tragedy through the eyes of the noble people to presenting it through the eyes of the proletariat. Emphasis is shifted from nobility to ‘commonness’ to demystify the myriad of bourgeois myths for pedagogical intent” (140).

The pedagogical imperative of dramatic art derived from the Marxist philosophy which the plays espouse, is hinged on solidarity as a purposeful means of collective struggle. The lepers’ request for a permanent leprosiarium is granted on the account of their solidarity. Likewise, in *If...*, the tenants, in spite of their differences, are together in rejecting the landlord’s increase in rent and quit notices. Adeniyi’s study is another statement that a playwright can toy with ideas which makes it untenable to classify him under a particular generation.

Effiok B. Uwatt in his book, *Theatre of Feast: The Dramaturgy of Ola Rotimi*, examines some of the plays of Ola Rotimi essentially from two perspectives-the plays as they relate to the question of myth and metaphysics as well as revolutionary aesthetics. The plays examined from mythic and metaphysical angle include *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and *Kurunmi*. Those studied from revolutionary aesthetics are *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *if... a tragedy of the ruled*.

This study attempts to articulate a new method of studying Nigeria drama in a more critical and profound way. It sees generational study and grouping of Nigerian drama as a deeply flawed analytical approach because it tends to put boundaries around plays that are malleable, thereby limiting interpretive possibilities. In its stead, the paper advocates trans-generational perspectives. The argument as exemplified by the review of some comments on certain plays of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, is that Nigerian plays defy stereotypical perception because what they entail transcend the limit of the boundaries set by generational grouping. Dramatic texts, by their nature are often constructed upon multiple worlds and in terms of master codes and mechanics of composition, they tend to maintain active relationship of solidarity across generations. Transgenerational perspectives assume that it is possible to find footprints of diverse generations even in a single play. Criticism should reflect all the contradictions in a given text not just one aspect of the play. Transgenerational perspectives promote the type of criticism where thinking supercedes dogma.

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