

## A PEG IN ITS HOLE: AN AFRICAN VIEW OF TRADITIONAL IGBO THEATRE

The notion, spread by imperialism, that Europe as political master of the world, knows best and is the rightful arbiter and definer of all things, has led all too many of us to believe that we are not whatever we are unless Europe says so... (Chinweizu, 1987:186).

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is not to insist that Africans have drama. That would be unnecessary, for as Achebe says of the English language in Nigeria, African dramas seem more than able to defend themselves - they continue to flourish.

On one hand, this study rejects the reductionist approach to the study of the dramas of Africa, which is one of the factors responsible for the continued unnecessary argument for the acceptance of these dramas. The truth is that Africa is a multi-cultural entity. Drama is a cultural factor. Its meaning, form, and function are relative according to cultural diversities. "African drama" is too wide, and at times, misleading, a concept. As Euba rightly points out, "...there are characteristics that differentiate them, however, slightly, from culture to culture... even though they have a common African bind" (2002:3). African drama is, in my view, not one art form, but a group of associated forms. Therefore, the drama's cannot be crammed into one untidy capsule.

As a result of the above contention, this paper will demonstrate specifically, that whereas every African traditional performance may not be drama, the Igbo people of Africa have an authentic dramatic tradition. The form and function of Igbo drama will be examined here, as a means of defining the relative authenticity of the tradition.

On another hand, this study regards the disagreements over the authenticity or otherwise, of African dramas as part of the overall on going struggle against cultural imperialism. A major strategy used to conquer Africa was the denigration of indigenous cultures, especially, art. As long as a people are made to despise their own art, or at least, to subject it to the interpretative modes of another culture, the people will suffer cultural subjugation. What this suggests for the dramas of Africa is not just an

artistic problem, but a colonial problem, as well. In this regard, this paper will focus on drama as a cultural factor.

Having established the approaches of this paper, a review of some of the major critical studies of the dramatic forms in Africa will now be attempted.

### **The Concept of (African) Drama**

The most influential figure in the study of traditional African dramas is, perhaps, Ruth Finnegan. In her *Oral Literatures in Africa*, Finnegan makes what has become a very controversial assertion. According to her, Africans do not have drama in the European sense of the word:

There are, however, certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena to be found, particularly in parts of West Africa... there seems to be little or no linguistic content, though there is sometimes a rudimentary plot (1976:500-9).

It seems to me that most criticisms of Finnegan have, in a sense, been unfair. The major contention of most anti-Finnegan scholars have been with her conclusion that Africans have no drama. Some of these studies ignore Finnegan's obvious self-proclaimed European viewpoint. The fact is that she set out to 'discover' a European-modeled drama and failed. The reason for her unavoidable failure is clear; Africans do not have drama in the European sense of the word. Finnegan seems to be aware of her prejudice for she recognizes that:

Current prejudices may be false, but they go deep. And this is especially so when they are securely rooted in particular historical and cultural experiences, so that the familiar and traditional forms of a given culture come to be regarded as the natural and universal ones, expected to hold good for all times and places (p.17).

Finnegan describes the above as ethnocentric preconception. She is right. Drama is an art, and art as part of culture is personal. It should not be explained with generalities (Durrenmatt, 1967:68). Finnegan's categorical dismissal of African dramas should, therefore, not be taken seriously. Interestingly, however, she recognizes the existence of the Igbo masquerade tradition, which, unfortunately, she calls a "dramatic and quasi dramatic phenomena" (p.500).

Andrew Horn, following Finnegan's Euro-centric footsteps, concludes that "Drama... is essentially story form and, even at its most

episodic, is plotted, is a narrative acted out" (1981:197). With this view, Horn studied the Hausa Bori cult in relation to his assumed relationship between ritual and drama. He arrived at the conclusion that:

It is ...in its spectacular, theatrical qualities that ritual most resembles drama, and in its capacity to entertain and give aesthetic pleasure... But while it may in some ways be theatre, ritual is not drama (p.197).

Horn's definition of drama as essentially plotted and narrative is, of course, tailored after Aristotelian notions. As for his hard and fast distinction between drama and theatre, it has become redundant in modern theatre scholarship. That the two forms have become predominantly interchangeable is a fact that need not be belaboured here.

John Djisenu adopts a somewhat liberal approach in his "The Art of Drama". After an examination of the concept of drama by Bernard Beckerman, John Gassner, and some other theatre scholars, Djisenu defines drama as "a creative communicative art, text-based or not, that takes place in space, time and rhythm, and is done by performers who use the creative techniques of voice and movement to affect an audience (1995:58). This is a departure from the rigid text-plot predilections of Finnegan and Horn. But here, the differences end. Djisenu, like Horn, tries to draw a neat line between drama and ritual:

...special ceremonies or crises moments, in traditional life especially, can be likened to drama and may be said to be dramatic. This does not mean that those moments are actually the art form we call drama. ...a lot of Ghanaian traditional or cultural practices such as the performance of rituals, rites, ceremonies of festivals [are not drama] (p.59).

Djisenu's view is that what distinguishes drama from ritual, is that while the one is an imitation of life; the other is life itself. It seems to me that this is an inability to comprehend the relationship of drama and ritual to the life of a typical traditional African community. Djisenu ignores the myth-drama-ritual relationship, which no serious study of traditional drama can avoid. His argument in this regard is, therefore, very weak and unsuccessful. It is like saying that drama takes from life and does not return to it. Although drama is not life, it certainly cannot be dislocated from life. In the same way, traditional ritual performances, although inseparable from communal life, are nevertheless, reflections of life and not life itself. Moreover, "...the boundary between the performance and

everyday life is arbitrary. Different cultures mark the boundaries differently" (Schechner, 1973:9).

Djisenu regards character, action, language, thought, music and spectacle - elements of Attic tragedy, as "...indispensable in any form of drama" (p.56). But he does not mention that some western drama do not make use of all the Aristotelian elements of tragedy. Misunderstanding of basic conceptual relationships is responsible for Djisenu's inability to comprehend the drama in traditional performances, which he generalizes as ritual.

Ola Rotimi's "The Drama in African Ritual display" is brief but very useful. Like Djisenu, he sees mimesis as the spine of drama. But he suggests that: "Ritual displays that reveal in their style of presentation, in their purpose, and value, evidences of imitation, enlightenment and or entertainment, *can be said to be Drama*" (1981:77). [Emphasis mine]. One of the most interesting contributions of Rotimi's paper is the opinion that ritual and drama can exist side by side in the same festival, and still retain distinct functions. His example is the Edi festival of Ile-Ife. But, he opines that:

...It is only appropriate that the word Drama when used to refer to traditional Displays should imply an immanence of suspense and or conflict within the body of the approved action. Where suspense or conflict is absent then the meaning of the form must needs rest on the broader sense of mimesis in the performance (p.80).

Rotimi suggests the adoption of some objective criteria to determine what is drama and otherwise from what he describes as "...that sometimes deluding melange of forms that is Africa's culture" (p.77). This suggestion is one of the inspirations for the approach of this paper, which isolates Igbo drama from other forms. However, Rotimi's interest in suspense and conflict - elements of plot does not seem to be healthy for the understanding of the dramas of Africa.

The relationship between drama, theatre and ritual is an interesting and controversial one. It is the subject of Michael Echeruo's paper entitled "The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual". Faithful to Finnegan, Echeruo emphasizes the importance of myth (plot) in dramatic composition. His argument is that "drama flourishes best in a community which has satisfactorily transformed ritual into celebration and converted the mythic structure of action from the religious and priestly to the secular plane" (1981: 138). Using Igbo festival as a platform in the study of the Mbom

Ama festival of his native Umunumo town, and the Aku Odo festival that he sees as an Apollonian event, Echeruo concludes that in Igbo festivals:

The dramatic content is... buried in the ritual purity of the festival. What is needed then... is to force that ritual to yield its story; to cut through the overlay of ceremony to the primary events of the *mythos*. Ritual is, and has always been, a dead end, it cannot grow (p.147).

What then is drama, and what is ritual? Echeruo opines that "Drama is to the society what ritual is to religion: a public affirmation of an idea: a translation into action of a *mythos* or plot just as ritual is the translation of a faith into external action (p.138). Echeruo is apparently preoccupied with plot, which he calls ...'the gem of drama' (p.148). But plot is not the gem of drama. Action is the gem. It is this fixation with plot that informs his argument that the drama of the Igbo is trapped in ritual, which he regards as being antipodal to drama. All the same, Echeruo's views on Igbo drama are very important to the extent of their provocation of further research on, and better understanding of the true nature of Igbo drama.

Ossie Enekwe's "Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland" is a response to Echeruo's paper. From the outset, Enekwe contests Echeruo's fondness for myth. He insists that "...drama does not have to evolve from myth... if it contains elements of myth, the myth is not used for itself, but, rather, for social restructuring" (1981: 150). Citing examples from the Balinese, Indian Sanskrit, and even Shakespearean drama, Enekwe rejects Echeruo's notion that drama is dependent on plot. To him, drama is more than story telling. He is of the view that impersonation and interactive activity are the elements, which give meaning to drama. Enekwe's conclusion in this regard is that "...function determines the form of drama in every culture" (p.151). This is an echo of Aiken's assertion that "...taste in art varies greatly from individual to individual, culture to culture, and age to age..." (1979:2578), which in turn, is in agreement with Parker's opinion that "Art is voluntary and dependent on tradition and culture" (1946:13).

On the relationship between ritual and drama, Enekwe's opinion is that both forms are functionally reciprocal and structurally similar:

...context, not fundamental structure, distinguishes ritual, entertainment and ordinary life from one another. Hence, ritual can easily be transformed into theatre and vice-versa - in a number of ways. A ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency (p.155).

Enekwe's paper is very insightful. It is a very valuable study, which any serious research on Igbo drama can hardly ignore. But, it appears that in his bid to respond adequately to Echeruo's claims, he relatively plays down on kinds of Igbo drama, which do not involve any ritual at all.

The ritual-drama reciprocity motif is evident in James Amankulor's "Ekpe Festival as Religious Ritual and Dance Drama". Amankulor's paper begins from the premise that Igbo cultural activities "...contain the gems of rich poetry and prose, excellent music and lively drama..." (1981:113). From this he proceeds to an extensive description of the Ekpe festival of the Ngwa Igbo, which he points out, is drama rooted in traditional religion and ritual.

Amankulor's study is very enlightening. It is perhaps, the most notable pioneer research on the dramatic elements of the Ngwa Ekpe festival. However, what could have been a very illuminating discourse on Igbo drama is watered down by Amankulor's apologetic approach. The major weakness of the work is its author's attempt to find the meaning of an Igbo drama in a Greek (Aristotelian) model. His efforts at establishing what would have contributed immensely to the appreciation of Igbo Masquerade theatre as a unique and dynamic form collapses in his attempt to dress the Ekpe performance in borrowed robes.

Another scholar who has done a very intensive and illuminating work on the performance aspects of the religious festivals of a traditional society is Robin Horton. His research is on the Kalabari people of Nigeria. In a paper entitled "The Gods As Guest: An aspect of Kalabari religious life", Horton closes the gap between ritual and drama, and this results in the compound term "ritual drama" which Horton regards as the most important part of Kalabari religious life:

This involves the dramatisation of the gods' presence by human actors who go through sequences of behaviour which in some way or other typify their characters and attributes - a procedure seen by Kalabari as bringing the gods as guest to the village... and on such occasions Kalabari often talk of people "playing with their gods" (1981:90).

Horton describes the various dramatic forms of the Kalabari; the mime, the masquerade, and the possession (similar to the Hausa Bori). His conclusion is that:

In much of the ritual drama in this culture, religion and recreation are inextricably blended. Men play with gods... The motives of dancers and audience in the drum-answering competitions are no longer focused on concern for the gods (p.101).

Elsewhere, Horton says of the Kalabari Masquerade performance, "...words here provide no more than a bare, crude outline of meaning, and it is left to the language of the dance to fill in the detail which makes the masquerade rich and satisfying to its audience" (1963:6). A major significance of Horton's research among the Kalabari is the specificity of his interest. This agrees with one of the recommendations of this paper - that African drama be studied as distinct, albeit related forms. However, Horton seems to concentrate too much on the structure and function of the festivals at the expense of the dynamics of performance.

A very sweeping and unsparing study on the concept of traditional drama in Africa is Oyekan Owomoyela's metacritical book, *Visions and Revisions: Essays on African Literatures and Criticism*. The relevant chapter is the seventh one entitled "Give Me Drama Or... The Quest for Drama in Traditional Africa". Owomoyela's work is very important as it comments on most of the other works already mentioned in this paper. This also informs its use for the conclusion of this segment.

Owomoyela detests what he regards as the stubborn insistence of some African scholars that Africans have drama. To him, "...these scholars refer to various forms of ritual, which they equate with drama" (1991:140). Starting from the premise of myth-criticism, reminiscent of Echeruo, the author contends that:

...if drama is universal, there must be some basic common traits or benchmarks that would transcend culture - specificity, such that scholars interested in a cross-cultural comparative study would know where to look in each culture for its peculiar example (p.142).

He rejects Enekwe and Horton's functional approach to the definition of drama, and upholds Finnegan and Echeruo's distinctions between the religious and the artistic, as well as their plot-linguistic criterion. In the same manner, the author endorses Horn's differentiation of drama from theatre:

[Horton's] study of *bori* spirit mediumship in Northern Nigeria shows that ritual often incorporates certain characteristics in common with drama, and can be theatrical without being drama... whereas ritual involves communication between the human and the

supernatural, drama involves humans communicating with humans, or with a human audience (p.151).

To buttress his argument that Africans do not have drama, Owomoyela quotes Oyin Ogunba as observing that most African cultures do not have any word for drama. He wonders "If drama in different cultures exhibit no resemblance, and have different uses, by what token, one might ask, do we call them by the same name, thereby implying some affinities" (p.147). The answer is simple - linguistic convenience as a result of colonial cultural conquest.

Drama as a modern word belongs to what is referred to in structuralist criticism, as metalanguage. The word derives from the Doric Greek *dran* (to do). It was conceptualized to fulfill the identification of a specific cultural phenomenon. As a result of its culture specificity, the term drama, as a metalanguage, cannot be extrapolated across cultures. Instead, words or ideas, which suggest the same meaning in other cultures, may be related to it, even if their values do not represent exact factors. In this regard, the metalanguage can only provide a concept of the relative word, and not replace the word itself, for as Tschumi points out:

...the degree of objective validity of any metalanguage is always necessarily inferior to that of its corresponding language, for it has to objectify non objectifiable and to determine non predictable components... (1976:61).

The concept of drama as a lexical item is a creation of thought, the thought of the same tradition, which through colonization, slavery, and imperialism, has sought to denigrate African cultures.

Owomoyela's argument is not surprising, considering his metacritical attitude. As Cassirer rightly observes:

The notion that name and essence bear a necessary and internal relation to each other, that the name does not merely denote but actually is the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name ... is one of the fundamental assumptions of the mythmaking consciousness (1946:3).

Whitehead dismisses this notion of the "uniformity of the texture of experience" as a mere illusion (1962:13).

The foregoing does not foreclose the validity or adequacy of metalanguages for the description of cross-cultural phenomena. The



danger is mistaking metalanguages for languages, and arbitrarily applying them without recognizing the autonomous development of their corresponding languages according to cultural relativity.

Igbo drama is usually contained in masquerade performance. The performance includes music, dance, and mime as necessary appendages. The Igbo do not draw a strict line among these performance modes. They are mostly conceived as being complementary, and in some cases, even obligatory. For instance, whereas Europeans may have dance without music, the Igbo would not comprehend such. To them, *Nwa Nnunu na-agba egwu n'uzo nwere ihe na-akuru ya egwu n'ime ohia* (The bird dancing on the road hears music in the bush). Similarly, to the Igbo, there can hardly be a masquerade performance without music and dance. When the average Igbo person says "*ka m je lee mmonwu*" (let me go and watch a masquerade), he is talking about a performance encompassing dance, music, and drama, among other art forms.

The issue here is that "...different traditions obviously utilize different techniques to imitate action. It would therefore be misleading to review African mask performance in terms of the dramatic technique of another culture" (Okafor, 1991:40). To use Owomoyela's own food analogy, let us examine the use of the word 'soup' across cultures. *Ofe* is the Igbo word, which can be translated in English as soup. The Igbo soup does not look like the English soup, or for that matter, the Chinese soup; neither does it taste like either. The essential thing is the function that soup serves in different cultures. It does not matter that while the Igbo usually use their soup as a complementary sauce, soup for the average Westerner is sufficient in itself. It is also noteworthy that just as the Igbo may not have a word to differentiate between drama and performance, they do not have any word to differentiate between *soup* and *stew* like Europeans do. In a similar way, though the Igbo have always had windows in their houses, they do not have a definite word for it., like they do for door; at least, not in pre-colonial Igbo vocabulary. That these differences should constitute the basis for judging the legitimacy of one cultural expression against another is ethnocentric prejudice. It is, like the Igbo would say, ignoring the trapped elephant to hunt crickets. Like Eneke says, "what the Igbo need they have developed, based on their own tastes, outlook, and the resources available to them" (p.162). The Igbo do not have to have a word that approximates to drama in Finnegan's "European sense of the word," to experience a tradition that fulfils a similar meaning and function for them.

### The Meaning of Igbo Theatre/Drama

Igbo drama is embodied in a rich masking tradition. Although there are several variations of this tradition from one sub-group to another, masking serves largely similar purposes across Igboland. As Onyeneke rightly points out:

Masquerades are a widespread and ancient institution in Igboland and there is hardly any village group where it has not been in practice for at least sometime. Masquerading is therefore a unitary phenomenon in Igboland and should not be considered multiple (1987:41).

Igbo masquerades serve religious, political and social functions. These functions overlap in some circumstances. But for the purpose of this paper, emphasis will be laid on the social dimension, for herein lies the dramatic significance of Igbo masquerade. It is not within the scope of this paper to enumerate the various Igbo masquerades that serve social function. Instead, the overall average features of these masks will be discussed.

The Igbo masquerade "...is a synthesis of many art forms, including costuming, impersonation, miming, sculpture, music, dance, poetry, movement, dialogue and painting" (Enekwe, 1987:56). The festival is its usual performance avenue. At these occasions, the people come together in a communal experience that fulfils for them, religious, political and social aspirations. On yet another hand, festivals serve as avenues for interaction between the people and their ancestors/gods. The masquerade is the vehicle for this interaction. But it also serves as entertainment for the spectators. In fact, in the immediacy of the performance, other functions of the masquerade are subsumed in its aesthetic relevance. As Jones observes, "Here the play itself is the important thing; the supernatural element ... recedes..." (1945:196).

Similarly, Onyeneke opines that:

...the masquerade is first and foremost a social symbol in Igboland... the dominant operative meaning is the collective will and sentiment of the existing village community. This is a value of its own independent of any particular religious system (p.73).

The views expressed above do not exclude the fact that some masquerades serve predominantly religious functions. But participation in these types is mostly restricted to cult members and the masquerades

are usually nocturnal. These forms are less dramatic. They are mostly ritual performances used for socio-religious affirmation and restructuring. The masquerade in this regard becomes a vehicle through which the Igbo control and organize their environment (Voltz, 1982:38).

A fundamental factor for the appreciation of Igbo masquerade as drama is an understanding of the animistic character of Igbo cosmology and worldview. The Igbo masquerade is an interface between the invisible world of spirits and the visible world of humans. This is actualized through impersonation and pretence. Myths and constructed activity are reenacted to sustain traditional values and relieve social tensions. In some kinds of masquerade performances, like the Afikpo *Okumkpo*, satire is the essence. Igbo drama is an embodiment of stylized acting, ritual, dance, song, music and pantomime:

Each type of masquerade has a characteristic rhythm, which is produced by a subtle and intricate combination of voices, instruments, and stylized movement, and this rhythm supplies a compulsive force to the performance, as the plot does in European drama (Boston, 1960:55).

The important thing in Igbo masquerade activity in its social context, is that the performers and spectators are aware of their roles in the festival space, and through interaction, participate in an imagined act demonstrating communal values. This is important, for, "Drama occurs when one or more human beings isolated in time and space present themselves in imagined acts to another or others" (Beckerman, 1979:20). In Igbo drama, performance is the essence. Symbols play a very significant role in the drama. They are used for the expression of deep-seated mythical values in the collective unconscious of the community. For the Igbo, with their non-literary but oral tradition, ritual is a necessary encapsulation of these mythical symbols. Masquerade performance constitutes one of the perimorphic means for the transformation of the symbols to dense experience, a process of cultural transmission.

The ritual process of interpreting and transforming the symbols endows masquerade performances with a certain mystical atmosphere:

[The] mystical air has often been interpreted in some studies to mean a religious element in the masquerade. It should be noted that it is part of the play and make-belief element in the masquerade presentation. The mask would not be a presentation of a spirit if it did not include the mystic air of being more than human (Onyeneke; 88).

Nevertheless, the spectators are not enchanted. They are conscious that the entire performance is constructed, is an imagined act. They are aware that the mask envelope human beings, who in some cases are even familiar to them. Achebe demonstrates this consciousness in his description of the *egwugwu* masquerade scene in *Things Fall Apart*:

Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves (1977:63-4).

In this regard, the mask (with its necessary ritual) is a distancing technique for the suspension of disbelief, rather than an evocative incrustation. In its arena medium, the mask plays a similar role as the proscenium in much of the Western theatre.

Igbo drama must be approached with the understanding that its essential nature, in consonance with Igbo worldview, admits the interpretation of the sacred and the secular. In *Arrow of God*, during the appearance of Ezeulu to reenact the coming of his god and the consecration of the first Chief priest, he goes back to history and myth in order to explain who he is. But if you ask an Igbo man what is going on, he will not differentiate between drama and religion. To him, everything is rolled into one religion, drama and mythology in the service of art and society (Kalu, 1981:5).

### Conclusion

Inability to appreciate the composite nature of Igbo drama and a curious attempt to study it outside its overall cultural context have been responsible for the failure of some scholars to accept the authenticity of Igbo drama.

Another contributing factor to the misconception of drama as it applies to the Igbo is a Euro-centric bias for literary drama. This seems to have misled the Finneganist scholars, with their literary orientation, to erroneously regard drama as literature. It is interesting to note that Ruth Finnegan's book is entitled *Oral Literature in Africa*, Owomoyela's book is *Essays on African Literatures and Criticism*, and Echeruo hopes that his paper included in this study "will be found not only valid for the study of Igbo traditional literature, but also helpful to our creative writers..." (p.136). [Emphasis mine].

My position is that drama is not essentially literature. It is a theatrical activity. Literary drama is legitimate, but as Cole notes:

Theatre grew not out of playwriting but playwriting was a product of theatre. Theatre grew out of the festivals of the people - their social and religious celebrations and ceremonials (1979:13).

Drama is therefore not subordinate to literature. The authenticity or otherwise of the dramatic tradition of any culture should not be predicated on a reliance on literature. Attic drama emphasized the poetic characteristic of drama among a people disposed to literary poetry. Western drama, in the spirit of European Renaissance, has largely emphasized the syllogistic aspect of drama after the Greek tradition. These predilections are legitimate but that is as far as they should go. They should not be regarded as absolute. Literature is a medium for the transmission of dramatic modes. But it is hopeless, even senseless, to attempt an absolute subjection of an experience to one of its modes of expression.

Owomoyela tries to sound Afro-centric but he is trapped in a colonial mentality, which provides fodder for imperialism. His conception of what constitutes drama is a mistake. Fanon is right in his observation that "a frequent mistake, and one which is moreover hardly modifiable, is to try to find cultural expressions for and to give new values to native culture within the framework of colonial domination" (1963:244). Along the same line, Ngugi locates cultural imperialism within the entire colonial structure which was accompanied by a repressive political agenda and an attempt to replace indigenous art, religion, education and language with imperialist forms (1983:79-80).

It is important to return drama where it principally belongs - in performance. But above all, the imperialist Finneganist School should realize that:

...in each sort of theatre production in every locale, vital human energies are at work in a creative effort. One need only perceive them in order to understand and experience the lives and institutions of other people (Smiley, 1987:43).

Theatre scholars will do well to include the study of African dramas within the larger picture of colonial research with awareness that drama is a cultural expression. They must regard seriously the fact that "Two of the basic and intertwined problems of theatre in Africa are language and colonial influence" (Brockett, 2003:578).

My thesis is that Igbo theatre practitioners and researchers should realize that the denigration of Igbo drama by western and western-oriented scholars is an outfall of African colonial conquest. It is no longer enough to be satisfied with Igbo drama flourishing in Igboland. The world is now a global village. No nation can be relevant in isolation. It seems to me that the Igbos need to do what the Asians did. They should take their drama to the world. Cultural counter-penetration is the hope for the liberation of African culture from imperial bondage. When the Asians adopted a similar strategy with the Japanese Noh and Kabuki, western theatre was stirred and its face was changed forever, as experimental theatre became the trend. Whenever performance oriented drama confronts literary drama, the latter bows.

Instead of begging for its acceptance, the Igbo should make the language of their drama *understood*. The major barrier to the appreciation of Igbo drama by the west is ignorance, for "No man can understand another whose language he does not speak (and 'language' here does not mean simply words, but a man's entire world-view) (Achebe, 1976:64). As long as Africans attempt to dislocate the strand of their drama from the overall fabric of imperialism, they will continue to pay cultural reparation. Begging for the acceptance of their dramas is one manner of payment.

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