

Philosophy, History, Intentionality and Abiodun Akinsiku's Interpretation Of Obaseki's *Idia*

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ABSTRACT

History has formed an essential laboratory for investigating the contentions of the human race overtime by dramatists across the globe. In Africa and in indeed Nigeria, playwrights and directors have applied their crafts to historiography and exploration of contemporary discourses thus adding their own voice to the appreciation and understanding of the dynamics of history and philosophy. This study takes a cursory look into these aspects of reality and brings to fore these dynamics in the staging of ideology in modern Nigeria. Using Abiodun Akinsiku's interpretation of Don Pedro Obaseki's *Idia* as performed at Lead City's University, Ibadan 2018 convocation play - the study finds a seeming fluidity in the performance and interpretation of history. Events of the past will matter again and only by telling and retelling of history will humanity confront the challenges of its present existence. The paper thus concludes that present ideologies are echoes of history and despite the controversies surrounding the accuracy of certain historical figures and events, playwrights and directors not only have an immense role to play in demystifying historical mythologies to explain phenomena but to also give amplification to the voice of ideologues on issues in every society.

Keywords: *Historicism, Philosophy, Feminism, Stagecraft, Directing.*

Introduction

Philosophers are always in the business of critically thinking existing knowledge and re-thinking already established ideas for further expansion of the old or new knowledge. Philosophy, literature and performance of drama have key quest of thinking out a plot into feasible and creative presentation. While the playwright in the theatre is a philosopher by right, the ability to critically evaluate and re-evaluate the playwright's philosophy by the director is what qualifies him as an interpretative artiste. This discourse is interested in unmasking the idea and ideals of philosophy of literature and philosophy of performance. Mikonnen (2009)

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describes that philosophy of literature is concerned with evaluating literature either as art or to approach literature with critical mindset other than what is presented. Singh (2012: 78-79) clearly ascribes ideology to philosophy thus:

All kinds of philosophy have relationship with ideology. Ideology is a set of ideas that constitute one's goals, expectations, and actions. An ideology can be thought of as a comprehensive vision, as a way of looking at things, as in several philosophical tendencies, or a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of this society. The main purpose behind an ideology is to offer either change in society, or adherence to a set of ideals where conformity already exists, through a normative thought process. Ideologies are systems of abstract thought applied to public matters and thus make this concept central to politics. The love of wisdom (philosophy) can take the form of being a seeker after knowledge. It can also take the form of being a proponent of ideas. So ideology presenters take their place among philosophers.

While the writer is undoubtedly a philosopher of his creative research and thought process, the performance of that same work of art demands that the director be recognized as an ideologue whose interpretations may intentionally be fuelled by history but crossing relevance with time.

Theoretical Perspectives/Framework

Primarily, there has been a contention in the understanding, acceptance and opinions on the interpretation of history which birthed so many variant literary theories from scholars ranging from *historicism, new historicism and radical historicism*. These three amongst many will pilot the discussion for the sole purpose of aligning which best interprets or applicable to the discourse. Historicism in literature weighs in seeking the seeming truth or balance of history and the presentation of history. If the historian tells a coherent tale, one that has point and purpose, its probability may undermine its possibility and leave the author justified as a philosopher and discredited as an historian. Paul Hamilton (2004 7). The progression or at best, presentation of historical truth may be deduced to be subsumed under the stylized aesthetic truth coloured up by the treatment of structure of history. Thus, the author is not conscripted to tell history as it is but as he sees it for the sole purposes of driving his thematic statements. Reynold (2015 276) opined that for a piece of literature to be properly recognized, it must be understood within its historical context, the event of history should be viewed within its specificity and accuracy, the rationality of historical philosophy are not eternal but seamless, fluid to reviews accommodating counter opinions and that there are no absolute historical values of any kind, rather all ideals or in this case philosophy are related to a particular culture, period and time. From time immemorial, history has been subjected to criticism from the historians, historic art writers and particularly historic-playwrights. The changing tides and

shades in historic rendering of the same narratives in Reynold's opinion is the time and period in which history is being retold. The applauded philosophy of classical historic events may be questioned or re-interpreted in a seeming modern event that reappraises same history. It is possibly at this time that history by its philosophical intents start to turn from facts to fables sometimes when the intention to articulate it for the purpose of resonating into modern climes is re-interpreted by the order in which it is presented. Herodotus (1972 9) critically reappraised the tales and truth in Greek history when he posit that

The Greeks have many stories with no basis of fact. One of the silliest is the story of how Heracles came to Egypt and was taken away by the Egyptians to be sacrificed to Zeus, with all due pomp and the sacrificial wreath upon his head; and how he quietly submitted until the moment came for the beginning of the actual ceremony at the altar, when he exerted his strength and killed them all. For me at least such a tale is proof enough that the Greeks knew nothing whatever about Egyptian character and custom. The Egyptians are forbidden by their religion even to kill animals for sacrifice, except sheep and bulls and bull-calves as have passed the test for 'cleanness' – and geese: is it likely, then, that they would sacrifice human beings?

Suffice to say that the age of this review, criticism or comment on Greek history is Post-Classical which conforms to the changing philosophies of historicism occasioned by the time and period. Hence, the interpreter of history is bound to his assessing historical facts and fictions from a consciousness of discoveries stirred by recent, timely and thoughtful perspectives. Perhaps, one may say new historicism is liberal in ideologies. Paul Cantor (1993) asserts that the technique is 'I can connect anything to anything', situating history or historical facts within its past, the present and possibly the future sums the thought. Kramer and Maza (A Companion to Western Historical Thought) aligns that new historicism seeks to breathe life into canonical texts. Matt Hikling (Brock Educational Journal 2) is emphatic that what new historicism does is that it makes us consciously engages us to read the past from the present. He further makes a distinction between historicism and new historicism that '...the shift from historicism to New Historicism emphasizes the relation between events and emotional response and informs the notion that such events are never to be considered neutral'. Historicism in its radical, twentieth century form is the view that history, construed as an essentially contingent process, is the ultimate framework within which to evaluate and justify the truths of human knowing and the meaning of human action. Carl Robert (Dissertation Abstract International 462) what is known by the historian and how human's react to historical knowledge of such is questionable according to Carl. Bevir cited in Stephen Turner (Philosophy of the Social Sciences 247) thinks that "Radical historicists can make truth claims provided they think of "truth" not as certainty but as "objectively valid for us" or "the best account of the world

currently on offer. In essence, the appropriation historical truth to the necessity of the present or the future is what legitimizes the historical philosophy. Hamilton (15) hinted that Hegel believes that the process on which we arrive at the truth in telling history is actually part of the truth. Radical historicism to this end conclusively seeks to embrace new truth in philosophy from the historic popularized art. If a modern playwright engages historic tales, his currency of approach will situate history as relevant in the present rather than its sacredness of the past. Dramatists overtime have navigated through the course of history and have challenged contemporary issues from a transhistoric point of view. Legendary figures and personalities who had at one time traversed the landscape of Africa and are often deified have formed the context and content of plays coming out of Africa. Interestingly, the thematic concerns of these dramatic texts have not only thrived in history but have also resonated in modern times to question the contradictions and contestations of Africa's contemporary reality. Legends such as Queen Amina, Moremi and Queen Idia have have used severally by feminist writers to triangulate the discourse of feminism and chat Africa's course in the feminine quest.

Performance of History

Many American cultural historians have adopted a "climate of opinion" model to relate these phenomena. Performance events are understood as part of a general consensus of values and ideas which somehow reflect and express larger and presumably more powerful social arrangements and forces. In seeking valid interpretations and explanations, all historians face the problem of relating small events to broader contexts. Mindful that the general trends of a period always limit specific occurrences within it, most historians will also insist that some events lend shape and direction to their age. Theatre historians confront one variety of this dilemma when they attempt to relate performance events to the historical society and culture of which they were a part. McConachie (*Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 229) being a part of history to remodel for the cultural relevance of the present age as opined is in itself subjective. History maintains its original or different form while it is being communicated, transferred, and preserved in any and every art form. Be it in literature, poetry, painting, music history is usually taking the narratives of the author of it. Seeing that history may reductively be coloured-up, the performance of history of the past in the present qualifies the interpreter (performance author) to communicate his thoughts, his world and the aesthetic representation of the world he understands from the history in producing his own history. These circlicism of history reproduction may largely reduce history to fictional pieces and opinions or preserve

history in different shades and forms. Greg Dening describes the performance of history as hallucinating the past as merely the present in funny dress. Hallucination in this regard undermines the historic past as mere tale which is only fashionable if retold in its aesthetic present state. This aligns with the opinions that the historic past should be relevant in order for it to be appropriated in the present. Collingwood argued that the task of the historian is to re-enact the past in one's mind. Perhaps the fidelity to history is at play in Collingwood's opinion or the freedom of the expression of the interpreter wholly can be argued to his reference to 'one mind'. Joseph Roach maintains an idea that negates distorting history without researching it when he asserts that the pursuit of performance does not require historians to abandon the archive, but it does encourage them to spend more time in the streets. Katherine Johnson (History, Memory, Performance 4) considers the mode of re-enactment of history as a source and a method. In the attempt of the performance reconstruction, it becomes necessary for the historic materials to be carefully assessed as equitable for appropriation or in alignment with the social currency of the new interpreter. It is until this had happened that the performance reconstruction of history can be regarded as a *living art* in the words of Johnson. History is an organization of time: "An insight: in one hour's time, sixty minutes will have passed," says Danton in Georg Büchner's *Danton's Death*. The question is: How will this "insight" be understood after this hour has passed? And will it still be an insight then? Or just a painful recognition of a routine which must be repeated over and over again every sixty minutes? Freddie Rokem (Performing History: Theatrical Representation of the Past in Contemporary Theatre xi) in his discourse on the performance of history, questions the re-enactment of history and comments that history should merely take its original form or its originality and deploys creative artifices to concretize the past in the present. He further asserts:

By "performing history" it is possible to confront this sense of separation and exclusion, enabling us to believe in the witnesses who have seen what in some way has to be told again. What other possibility remains unless we are willing to submit ourselves to a discourse or a theatre totally devoid of references? The theatre "performing history" seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again. (Performing History: Theatrical Representation of the Past in Contemporary Theatre xii)

Fidelity to historic materials is not arguable in these opinions but creating the topicality of the past in the present re-enactment of history is of artistic necessity. This in itself is contribution into history and making history survive across climes, times and spaces.

History and Philosophy of *Idia*

One of many history of the historic Benin icon ‘Idia’ was captured in the article of Alexander (The Metropolitan Museum of Art). He recounts that the kingdom of Benin (in present-day Nigeria) was plunged into a state of turmoil at the end of the fifteenth century when the Oba (king) Ozolua died and left two powerful sons to dispute succession. His son Esigie controlled Benin City, while another son, Arhwaran, was based in the equally important city of Udo about twenty miles away. The ensuing civil war severely compromised Benin’s status as a regional power and undermined Benin City’s place at the political and cultural center of the kingdom. Exploiting this weakness, the neighboring Igala peoples sent warriors across the Benue River to wrest control of Benin’s northern territories. Esigie ultimately defeated his brother and conquered the Igala, reestablishing the unity and military strength of the kingdom. His mother Idia received much of the credit for these victories as her political counsel, together with her mystical powers and medicinal knowledge, were viewed as critical elements of Esigie’s success on the battlefield. To reward and honor her, Esigie created a new position within the court called the iyoba, or queen mother, which gave her significant political privileges, including a separate residence with its own staff. As mother of the king, Idia and later iyoba wielded considerable power.

Amongst many tales of the fearless queen mother, Alexander’s account seem to also capture the essence of Idia’s power when he stated that two vertical bars of inlaid iron between the eyes allude to medicine-filled incisions that were one source of Idia’s metaphysical power. Within the court, the queen mother’s political status was equal to that of a senior chief, and she enjoyed the right to commission precious works of art for personal and devotional use. However the Idia College Old Girls Association of North America added that Idia was the first woman to go to war, also that ‘the queen mother’s palace (Equa-iy’Oba) was built for her in lower Uselu. Till date, it serves as the final resting place for every Iy’Oba (Queen Mother)’. The Kingdom of Benin webpage added that some kingdom of Benin territorial expansions associated with Queen mother Idia include Igueben. (Source: <https://www.kingdomofbenin.com/queen-mother-idia.html>) Aneni (2016 23-24) seemed to align with the entire build up but more importantly noted that Idia did not only gave meaning to the throne as Iyoba but stirred the acts of selfless support and political inclusiveness of other Iyoba’s in the political landscape of the Benin till present.

The Playwright's Presentation of History

The postcolonial struggles of the Benin to have the artefacts of Benin returned, including the bronze head of Idia which the playwright said 'rests under the security at the Metropolitan Museum in London, this agitation for repatriation perhaps is what fueled the presentation of the historic tale, as this served as an important opening glee for Don Pedro Agbonifo Obaseki in *Idia*. The narratives of the playwright started with the tragic monologue of Uke who hinted on the death of Oba Ozolua. Fast enough, Idia in her dealings with Izevbokun, her personal maid was presented as a politician whose quest to support Osawe to the throne led to the deal of granting Izevbokun freedom as freeborn of Benin Kingdom. A similar tale of the whiteman trying to meddle in the socio-cultural event of the Benin recorded in Overanwen N'Ogbaisi during a ritual process was in a way borrowed in this tale but this time, the Portuguese. Since history recorded that Benin had interaction and trade with the Portuguese, particularly Oba Ozolua, the playwright hinted it. The playwright referred to the Portuguese as 'potokis' and that they were sighted at Ughoton amidst a meeting of chiefs while seeking answer to the question 'who will ascend the throne'? Obaseki using the narration storytelling technique rested the tale of how Esigie defeated Aruanran with the help of Idia in the presence of the entire Benin on Uke, who playfully in a session with Izevbokun recounts the adventure. While it is worthy of note that history is silent on these characters (Ogidogbo, Uke and Izevbokun), the playwright's possibility or probability of existence must have led to the character build up. Esigie's first task after ascension was the revenge on Uzea i.e. those who poisoned the late king. It may be apparent that the creative contribution of the playwright to history is to ascribe Oba Ozolua's death to poison while historically, it is not a popular knowledge or arguable. However, undoubtedly the brilliance of tying the slave trade exchange of the Portuguese to the flirting of Imaguero who is vain and lust after foreign gifts is creative and delivers the conflict. Imaguero is wife of Oliha who is considerably the paragon of beauty at the time. History recorded of how Oliha boasts of Imaguero's beauty amongst the chiefs which led to the conquest of Oba Esigie seeking to conquer the beauty while satisfying is emptiness for a huge challenge. This historical abominable action of Imaguero with Esigie facilitated by Uke who presented the coral beads and mirrors to her as a demand of love by the king, consolidated the Idah war which Oliha led. While the playwright noted these tales, the historical account that Imaguero first refused the Oba's gift and that the Oba threatened to kill Imaguero's family was not emphatic or possibly creatively hinted in passing in the text to avoid too many scenes.

Imaguero: What?

Uke: Surprise, Don't be, beautiful one. The reign of Esigie is good news for Benin and he spreads his generosity to man and beasts alike. Male and female. My lord sends his greetings. They are gifts from the potokis from across the sea. Only you can have them.

Imaguero: I cannot accept

Uke: To refuse is to refuse the Oba. May our Oba never falter.

It is safe to say that that in the narratives the voice of Uke in this beat, is the voice of Oba Esigie. Hence, the threat in history and her refusal was mildly stated by the playwright. Further to Obaseki's presentation of history, the news of Imaguero having an affair with Uke who was characterized as cripple broke from Oloton, one of the chiefs. Popular historic tales stated that the king tricked Oliha by stating that one of his slaves had an affair with the wife which made Oliha bitter, he therefore confronted Imaguero. Imaguero being embarrassed, confessed to Oliha and committed suicide as presented to her by Oliha. The account of Obaseki presented Imaguero's readiness to die skipping the confrontations or the confession. It was perhaps taken that the readers understand since they must have read or seen the Oba flirting in the forest scene. Oliha tricked the Idah army that Benin will attack them while stating the vulnerabilities of Benin army and how he will guide them to penetrate Benin and capture the Oba on his knees. The relationship of Benin with the Portuguese aided the victory of Idia in the one year long war. The Portuguese contributed guns as a support for the war. The playwright in an intense dialogue established how Esigie forbid the mother to go to war and she insisted that if she can deliver the throne to Esigie, she can win the war. The king reluctantly and worriedly agreed. Idia's trick at the battlefield was to feign dead and sound the alarm to the Idah army thereby drawing them out. Obaseki's emphasis on the super-woman, super-intelligent Idia in the threat speech of Idia to Oliha's soldier confirms it:

Idia: ...A woman he calls me, let him know that all men are born of a woman. Tell him that this woman surpasses all the women who birthed his uncircumcised sons, and mothered his barren daughters.

The playwright's account submits that Oliha died in the war and his body returned to Benin by Idia and pygmy warriors.

Idia and other Women Warriors: The Director Philosophy of History

Don Pedro Agbonifo Obaseki's *Idia* was a choice of play to be staged for the convocation ceremony of Lead City University, 2018 and was directed by Abiodun Akinsiku whose directorial concept bears the mark of historic deconstruction while maintaining the playwright's tale. Beyond the historic feat of Idia which is largely the past, the director in his

directorial statement imbues the present. His directorial remarks was essential to the understanding of his interpretations and intentions when he wrote:

...a woman's place is in the kitchen...

We grew up in a world where women are battered for speaking and much worse murdered for speaking the truth. We grew up in a world where their voices resonates only in the bedroom and much worse confined to silence, truncating their expressive nature forgetting that 'all men are born of a woman' (Idia 37). History has recorded great women who were pathfinders, innovative way makers and indelible personalities. Like Ogun in the myth of creation, these women forged, smoothened and wielded their swords for others to follow. Today, they can be regarded as heroines, legends and martyrs. These qualifiers necessarily do not have suitability or preferences to gender and thus, they are weighed on the scale of effectiveness, probity, selflessness and bravery. The chauvinism in embodied feminine specie of great women like Idia who hits milestone victorious expeditions is indelible. Like Aminatu, who ruled Zazzau Kingdom and commonly known as Queen Amina of Zazzau alongside Olufunmi Ransome Kuti, a woman who led a protest when the Alake of Egbaland planned to impose taxes on women which heralded a season of women participation in politics, Mariam Makeba (Mama Africa) who was a prominent radical activist and was part of a civil right movement against apartheid in South Africa and many others cannot be forgotten. They were women, yes, they were!.

Not long in our history, during a ravaging plague of an endemic virus, a top Nigerian endocrinologist 'Dr Ameyo Stella Adadevoh wielded the 'sword' to combat Ebola that saved many lives but took her life. This feat is no lesser than the heroic acts of Sango in his apotheosis, Shaka Zulu, Jaja of Opobo, Usman dan Fodio and even Nelson Mandela. If history regards these individuals as heroes by charting a course for their world, Adadevoh is a hero in her right considering the bravery in the face of a life threatening situation. More recently, an incredible feat as reported state that 113 female students bagged a first class out of 161 entire first class graduates of the Nigerian Law School (2018). These accomplishments in our world today has relocated the place of a woman and placed her suitable for the palace. Nature has blessed women with the power to nurture, and thus a woman evolves from a girl-lady-lover-mother-queen-grandmother. The creator was deliberate to have awarded women with the highest honour of concretizing procreation, making women a multiplier with the womb. As the workplace industries are progressing into a more gender-equal environment, a woman's place is definitely tilting away from what Ero said '...is by the fire-place', a woman's consciousness,

dreams and aspirations are getting heightened towards developing, innovating and solving problems both at home and in work place. Dora Akunyili comes to the fore as a revolutionist and innovator in her clime as she successfully launched a fight against fake drugs. Away from the notion that a woman is a baby making machine, a woman carries more responsibilities than merely 9 months pregnancy, nurtures life till she dies. The word caregivers, caretakers, life giver will suffice when a woman nurtures. A child doesn't suck milk to survive but to live. Hence, a woman gives life. A woman, a true woman knows when she carries a lion or a chicken from the kicks in her womb, for women are born with great intuition

...my body persevered for nine full months
For I knew,
I carried a leopard in my fragile womb (Idia 30)

A man is always in need of a 'forerunner and a confidant' i.e. woman. Such men though may not agree publicly to the perspective that women are more strategic, observant, physically and psychologically organized but they enjoy and marvel at the inner strength displayed by women. Ask Esigie, he will tell you that Idia did not win the war that brought lasting peace to Benin by physical strength alone but combined with 'sense'. Ask Izevbokun, she will conclude that 'women make fair deals and are compassionate'. Ask Oliha and Aigbo, they will tell you of the tactical strategy of war, of the blade in Idia's sword and the fire in her guns. A woman is not voiceless. Give women the voice that is ideal and they will create an ideal nation suitable for all. To all the men who give women wings to fly, history will never forget you.

Performance Interpretation of History

Call: Nigeria is our home
We have no other home
Res: Nigeria is our home
We have no other home.

The play started with montage of invaders not of Idah armies but of men dressed as Northern insurgents popularly known as Boko Harams led by who we will later come to know as Oliha trying to flood into the space. With a chant by Idia which came up twice, first in the beginning and next when the Idah thought Idia was dead and drew them out in crossfire.

Idia: Idia is not dead
Idia is alive. Attack!

A woman in her war robe, who we will later come to know as Idia charged her armies and slaughtered them all. Over the beheaded Oliha, performers dressed in Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba took their place on stage singing the above song. The individual ethnic divide came together while selected members of the ethnic group took turns to deliver the dialogue of the woman called Idia, her mask and how it is in the Metropolitan museum in London. The directorial intention clearly is driven not only towards history but the present that a woman or women can possibly also quell the crossfire of insurgency in which the nation is experiencing. This is predicated on the call for many things in our socio-political sphere. One of such is active women participation in politics, a possibility of a female president etc. It was after this directorial re-creation using the playwright's historical account that the mourning of Oba Ozolua was introduced.

The overriding concept which informed the aesthetic choices and icons expressed in the performance as well as the energy of the principal actor is sourced from the playwright's dialogue of Idia:

Idia: The king is god. Oban'Osa. Yet the king, like all men is born of a woman....

Esigie: I am Esigie! The sun that shines over Benin. The prowling home-leopard. The tree panther, swift on feet, brave in battle! In the name of my father and his father's before him, I order you home to Uselu at once!

Idia: I am Idia n'Iy'Esigie, mother of the dreaded masquerade of the Bini race. My body persevered for nine full months; for I knew I carried a leopard in my fragile womb...

The mother does not only bore the son but makes the son as much as the socio-cultural communal space of the African world, the mother therefore shapes the child's attribute largely. Directorially, it became imperative to substitute the hypes of the son to the mother. Hence, in practical demonstration, Idia was made to be swift on feet, walking on her toes and prowling making a mannerism of claws with her hands. The son of home leopard is birthed by a mother who by right is a mother leopard. The mother is a moulder. Although the contest of motherhood and kingship is stated by the playwright.

Esigie: Mother! Tradition demands that you listen and obey the king of Benin!

Idia: And that same tradition demands that a child obeys his mother! King or pauper!

The director obviously yield with the later opinion that after all, a king is born of a woman. This ideology frames the design of Idia's personality and the palace which is not in conformity with the palace in history but a creative statement.



Scenic Design: Leopard

Idia, fierce and fast as the Leopard.

Oludamola Adebawale (2020) comment on the ideology of the Leopard as both spiritual and art for the Benin when he assert:

Benin cosmology is governed by three major creatures, the dual role of the spirituality and physicality is represented in almost every Benin Bronze art. These creatures are the Leopard, the Mudfish and the Ibis (also called bird of prophecy). At the center of all these mystic creatures and the importance they hold in Benin culture, the Oba of Benin meditates as the intermediary between the world of man and the world of the gods. The leopard is not just another wild cat in Benin cosmology and Benin art. Among all the animals that hold significance in Benin art and spirituality, the leopard is the most revered.

The directorial imprint of the leopard is much more of importance to the intelligence of Idia. The director downplays the spirituality but opined that Idia's triumph is largely about her diplomacy and politics when she made a deal with Izevbokun

... you will be slave no more, your slavery ends tonight, (2)

The trick to have Osawe crouch behind Aruanran at the lake to emerge king and the trick to draw out the prey i.e. idah army and pounce on them, the idea of bringing the door to the kings front and lowering it thereby forcing the white men to bow is a wild intelligence which qualifies her to be a leopard birthing another leopard. Hence, her spiritual status as history boasted is perhaps limited in comparison to her strategic leadership style, sensitivity when she 'smelt ill in the wind' (2) and as a fair leader. Idia is therefore projected as a social reformer, revolutionist and an activist using the fela's posture with a cultural emblem of the maracas when she said 'Benin will remember that Idia was here'. (2)



Osawe becoming Esigie at the Lake



Idia: Benin will remember that Idia was here

Popular history described Oba Ozolua's death in Esan land as a result of the war between Benin and Uromi which lasted for about 7 years, the playwright however recounted that Oba Ozolua was victoriously returning from the battle when he camped at Uzea to sleep and was poisoned by his own soldiers. While these two opinions are disparately conflicting, the fidelity to history will have the director align to the playwright's report of history but did not find the clarity of being poisoned in the sleep which will drift to spiritual substance most likely. This became questionable in interpretation since the director was play-acting or re-enacting the narration of Esogban, it became an option to replace poisoned with 'he was murdered by his own soldiers' thereby making the 2 surviving soldiers stab Ozolua after he had killed the first two. The interest of the director is to question why a king who is a warlord in history, be cheapened to die without a fight. Hence the need to have him wake, kill two of the soldiers while the last two survived and stabled him.



Esogban and the chiefs: ...he slept (pg 4)



The re-enactment of Oba Ozolua's death

The play on word or musicalizing the dialogue is a major tool of creative emphasis in this interpretation. The director makes punch dialogue to be echoed, re-echoed, chorusly chanted while some are sung. This aided the control of pace and contributed to the pulsating rhythm accentuated by the drums and the chants. The interpretation of Imaguero's death is a statement or rather an activism for the protection of women's right who are largely victim of patriarchy and are sex toys in the hands of men like Imaguero was to Esigie.



Scenes depicting Imaguero's death

Fidelity to the script is sacrosanct to fulfilling the directorial duties but subtle metaphoric visual statement is the directorial rights. Imaguero is to choose either the sword or ogun or poisonous cup of oru. She chose the cup and immediately she started the dirge for the dance of shame to death, women cladded in black and stylishly designed as her cover came in to cover her nakedness. She removed her red velvet wrapper and when she had taken the poisonous cup, they covered her with the black and red wrapper. It is clear that these women, the characters created by the director were her angels of death. The directorial opinion is that women deserve to be protected every time especially when they are victims of the system. Therefore, instead of dancing and dying naked, they were her cover thus making her a victim of the society that bore her instead of a villain of history that the playwright and several historical accounts posit. Critical to the directorial interpretation is the gender profile of women embedded in the script. In the dialogue of Ero after Ohen Osa communicated that only a woman can win the war since a woman caused the war, he stated that:

Ero: A woman's place is in the kitchen, by the fire place.

The response was an opportunity for the director to flood the stage with women who were first trying wrapper. Idia led them to the chiefs and a directorial response which was not written in the script was fiercely articulated by the women thus:

Idia Women: A woman's place is not only in the kitchen
A woman's place can also be at the warfront.

Immediately after this, the women who were once in wrapper, unveiled themselves to be armies of Idia. This transition and directorial dialogue addition follows the activism of a social re-orientation about women particularly of this age that drives the concept.



The death of Oliha is hugely silent in many available historic accounts of Idah war but the word of Idia in the playwright's account that 'he was a traitor, but he was a brave one, a true general.' Typically confirms that history condemns Oliha. In contrast to this opinion visually, the director made the soldiers mourn, mounted a guard of honour for his body to respectfully transit. It is basic that history is only fair to the victor of the war whereas the victor may be victim and victim, the victor. It is a matter of perspective and who is recounting history. The director is merely unbiased to take side with the playwright's account but as a commentator, he is of the opinion that war of any kind is unnecessary because it makes some, the victims and others, victors. The judgment most often is time and chance. While the director celebrated the gallantry and chivalry of Idia, just like the beginning, the director created dialogue while Idia is emphatically positioned on stage to celebrate women in a candlelight procession using the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba typified characters:

All: Today in history, we remember great women who wield their swords and made sacrifices for our race, history will forever remember you.

The allusion to ‘history will forever remember you’ is an addition to the remark of Esigie to Idia that ‘Benin will forever remember you’. The directorial intentions are clear, first to mourn these great women and secondly with the same candles to state that they have been light in our world.

Yoruba woman: Stella Adadevoh, a top Nigerian endocrinologist who wields her sword to combat Ebola and saved so many lives but lost hers. History will never forget you.

Hausa Woman: Mariam Makeba, mama Africa. A radical activist, who fought against apartheid in South Africa. History will never forget you.

Igbo Man: Olufunmilayo Ransom Kuti, a woman who led a protest when the Alake of Egbaland decided to impose taxes on women. This is a season that heralded women participation in politics. History will forever remember you.

All: To all women, mother and girl child, history will forever remember you.

The directorial account of this history evidently submitted to celebrating all women while using Idia as a signpost.

Conclusion

The contest of history being accurate is questionable and always subjective. Therefore, we see the need for playwright and writers of history to write probable and artistic historic truth. Seeing that history itself is from perspective of who is telling it and the time it is being told, the writer cannot be nailed for taking sides in history neither will the interpreter of historic accounts be questioned for making history speak their truth of the present. While it is possible at the end of the play to question the director’s additions in dialogue, the creation of beats, scenes and montage, the conclusion ties his directorial statement to the current discourse on women emancipation from cultural slavery that condemns them to beings who are subservient and may not even have the mind of their own. The present state of this performance of history occasioned the need to revisit that women are actually wielding their sword in different capacity just like Idia and are winning wars. The director’s intention and interpretation to history is consciously in conformity with new historicism and radical historicism typically exemplified in his deliberate disruption of the existing tale to imbue the present from the past. This history is being retold at a time where aesthetics and spectacles of history will not be

enough but criticism of history. In essence, the director became a commentator, a co-writer and critic of history in his interpretation.

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