

THE THEATRE OF WAR AND COUNTERCULTURE IN THE DRAMATURGY OF AHMED YERIMA

Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah

Abstracts

The call for authenticity and originality in the documentation of history has created a counterbalance in historiography and culture. While the intellectual polemic between historians such as Peter Ekeh and Bala Usman on the ownership of the oil in the Niger Delta and which Nigerian ethnic group is superior to the other continue to pervade the Nigerian historical landscape, playwrights such as Ahmed Yerima have resorted to creating a new left in opposition to ideologies of older playwrights, and thereby creating spaces for what this paper terms *the Theatre of War*. Consequently, we examine Yerima's ethnographic play, *Abobaku* as counterculture to Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The research also investigate various dimensions to the theatre of war in Nigerian dramaturgy. The study uses content analysis to explore the poetics of counterculture in Yerima's *Abobaku*. The paper is anchored upon Talcott Parson's theory of Counterculture, which is a tradition that poses itself in total opposition to a dominant culture. It takes the values of the dominant culture and redefines them negatively. Our study reveals that while *Death and the King's Horseman* is rooted in the advocacy for the ideo-aesthetic function of the Abobaku praxis, Yerima's play, *Abobaku* is a counterbalance to this praxis and recommends an abolishment of human ritual. This paper concludes that although Yerima is critical of Soyinka's positive stand on the Ogunian motif and ritual scapegoatism, we must understand that the (Yerima's) liberation ideology in his ethnographic play, *Abobaku*, stands on the shoulders of the giant (Soyinka). In other words, his dramaturgy is lifted up and borne aloft on the gigantic stature of Soyinka's theatre. We recommends that budding Nigerian playwrights should endeavour to further examine the Abobaku motif in their works, to facilitate a fully fledged discourse on human ritual and sacrifice in the Nigerian theatre enterprise.

Parole chiave

Abobaku, Counterculture, Theatre of War, Dramaturgy, Tradition, Ahmed Yerima

Contatti

okpadastephen@gmail.com

Introduction

Postcolonial and Postmodern Nigerian theatre is characterised with the resistance against Western hegemony. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, in their seminal work *The Empire Writes Back*, fully capture the reason the colonised and neocolonised must rewrite their culture and history. This call for authenticity and originality in the documentation of history has created a counterbalance in historiography and culture. While the intellectual polemic between historians such as Peter Ekeh and Bala Usman on the ownership of the oil in the Niger Delta and which Nigerian ethnic group is superior to the other continue to pervade the Nigerian historical landscape, playwrights such as Ahmed Yerima have resorted to creating a new left in opposition to ideologies of older playwrights, and thereby creating spaces for what this paper

terms *the theatre of war*. Nigerian playwrights tailored their creative oeuvre in the creation of historical plays and cultural, economic and politics driven ideologies. Dramatists such as Femi Osofisan in *No More the Wasted Breed* and *Another Raft*, also revel in this ideology and culture of leftocracy. The above plays are a deconstruction of Wole Soyinka's *The Wasted Breed* and J.P. Clark's *The Raft*.

In *Sikapin Seriki Wayo*, Yerima's adaptation of Jean Baptiste Poquelin's (Moliere) *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, and *The Trials of Oba Ovonranwen*, in which he creates the theatre of *Idugbowa* (Ovonranwen Nogbaisi) by refuting the historical claims made in Rotimi's *Ovonranwen Nogbaisi*, Yerima has been able to create a counterbalance in the theatrical landscape. This has graduated into a deconstruction and reconstruction of history and ideology. In fact, Yerima's *Abobaku*, his most recent and prominent reconstruction of history and ideo-aesthetics, is also paradigm shift into a theatre of war and counterculture. Consequently, this paper examines Yerima's ethnographic play *Abobaku* as counterculture to Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The research also investigate various dimensions to the theatre of war in Nigerian dramaturgy.

Conceptual Clarification of Counterculture

Countercultures are processes and perspectives that are critical of existing traditions and practices. These processes capture the ills, foibles and weakness of already existing cultures. They construct new frontiers and approaches to life. Larkin Ralph in seminal study on *Countercultures: 1960s and Beyond* defines counterculture as culture that «poses itself in total opposition to the dominant culture. It takes the values of the dominant culture and redefines them negatively» (73). Countercultures are often dialectical to conventional practices. Ralph submits further that:

The term counterculture entered the sociological lexicon in 1951, when social theorist, Talcott Parsons used it to describe deviant subcultures, such as delinquent gangs. Milton Yinger in 1960, following Parsons, separated contraculture from subcultures as a response to a frustrating environment, citing youth culture as an example. Youth culture tended to have socialising power over its members that contradicted some norms of the parent generation (Ralph 75).

Countercultures deconstruct existing cultural standards. Countercultures are always in the left. They are rooted in protest. Paradigmatically, the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) approach to life has created new dimensions to sexuality and gender. Although queer is a subculture, it is also a counterculture. Modern Democracies are a counterculture to Tyrannical governance. Furthermore, while Feminism is a counterculture to Patriarchy, Postcolonial cultures are an affront to Colonial processes. Countercultures are often a departure from already existing norms. For instance, Postmodernism is a departure from Modernism. This does not mean that elements of modernism cannot be found in postmodern culture. In fact, without Modernism, there would be no such culture as Postmodernism. The foregoing portends that counterculture therefore, is a revolt against culture, man and life. In the context of this study on dramaturgy, counterculture means literary cum dramatic outputs that are critical of existing texts, the approach used by already and or previous playwrights in the construction of their plays. It is a deconstruction of ideologies adopted by playwrights, and a reconstruction of new beliefs and dimensions.

A Critical Study of Approaches to the Theatre of War

The concept, theatre of war, is an aggregate of theatrical performances and dramaturgies that are an affront on already existing theatrical conventions, styles and plays. By this, we mean, an affront on plays cum already existing theatrical cultures that are being distorted, deconstructed, reconstructed, modified and recreated by playwrights and directors that are critical of previous versions of such dramatic works. Sometimes such recreations are made for such theatrical experiences to fit into new cultures and contexts. Theatre of war therefore, is dialectical. This implies that it creates a theatre of divergent ideologies. In the world theatre scene, a particular play that has generated a conflict of interpretation, which has graduated into numerous modifications by other playwrights and critics, is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. *Oedipus Tyrannus* popularly known as *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus the King*, is considered the ideal tragedy by the drama critic *per excellence*, Aristotle. In his Classic, «*The Poetics*, which serve as a reference point to theatre

critics» (Ejike 21) till this day, he submits that Sophocles' *King Oedipus* is a paradigm of the ideal tragedy, due to the playwright's treatment of the plot. Aristotle considers the plot (mythos) of tragedy, as the soul of tragedy. Aristotle further articulates that *King Oedipus* should serve as a model, nay a prototype to every dramatic work, especially those of the tragic repertoire.

The Roman dramatic tradition saw numerous modification(s) of the Greek Classics. A major reason for this trend is because most Greek dramatists were captured by the Romans and taken to Rome, where these playwrights continued the theatre business. Most significant of such plays that were rehashed, was Seneca's *Oedipus*, which is a Romanisation of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. While Seneca's version of *King Oedipus* depicts Queen Jocasta, ripping her stomach wide open before the audience, we must remember that the Greek theatre forbade bloodshed on stage. As the stage was the altar of Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility and vegetation, any attempt at bloodshed would amount to desecrating the altar of Dionysus. Conversely, the Roman culture, with its thirst for bloodshed influenced Seneca's reconstruction of Sophocles' Classic. Hence, Seneca's *Oedipus the King*, fits into the Roman tradition. Modern play critics situate this play in the framework of closet plays-works that are meant to be read, and not performed on stage. In the same vein, works of the Neo-classical playwrights, amongst Pierre Corneille, and Voltaire, among others, are paradigms of the theatre of war. Corneille's, *OEdipe*, is a reconstruction of Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. In the seminal study titled *Oedipus the King: A Greek Tragedy, Philosophy, Politics and Philology*, Eikaterini Nikolarea submits that in the French neo-classical version of Sophocles' classic:

Corneille removed Oedipus from his position of preeminence, and Oedipus' quest for knowledge and truth became nothing more than the starting point and background for the love intrigue that dominates this version... Whereas in Sophocles play, the chorus of Theban elders is the direct link between the king and the citizens and always reminds Oedipus of his responsibility toward them, Corneille's characters are conscious of their royal power and privileges above all and prone to exercise these privileges whenever they can. For example, the Corneillian Oedipus behaves like an absolute monarch of 17th-century France (223-224).

Corneille does not only locate the play in the context of the French society of his time, his delineation of character traits is different from what hold sway in Sophocles' play. In Voltaire's version of the play, of the same title, he «accuses Sophocles of revealing the outcome of the tragedy right from the beginning in Teiresias' prophesy to Oedipus. Voltaire re-arranges the plot of his own version so that the dramatic tension is maintained until the end» (Nikolarea 235). The creation and recreation of *Oedipus* by various playwrights has not only created a cult of the *Oedipus Myth* and the theatre of *Oedipus the King*, it has also generated intellectual arguments and counterarguments on how well the myth of Oedipus has been constructed, thereby graduating into a theatre of war-a process where playwrights engage in a critical polemic on how well the narrative could and should be constructed. Critical essays on *King Oedipus* have also enveloped the world dramatic and performance terrain. In fact, Friedrich Nietzsche in his seminal study titled *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, examines the limitation of Sophocles' text in understanding the tragedy of King Oedipus. He articulates that:

The myths themselves rather than the literary works should be studied and imitated. For him, the image of Oedipus that Sophocles delineates for us is one side of his tragedy only, the moral and Apollonian aspect. It should never be forgotten, however, Nietzsche maintains, that this superior serenity lying over the whole work is only to hide the monstrous, preceding events that have led to this situation (Nikolarea 244).

Sigmund Freud's psycho-critical theories, *Oedipus* and *Electra Complexes* as well as his *Penis Envy* also stem from the *Oedipus Myth* and Sophocles' drama. With Sophocles' narrative, Freud was able to appropriate theories that bother on sexuality and incest, among others.

The theatre of war is a deconstructionist and reconstructionist enterprise. This theatre tradition can also be found in Nigerian dramaturgy. Wole Soyinka's oeuvre comes to play in this theatre in many aspects. His adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, and Bertolt Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera* are good paradigms. Other dramas especially ones in the archive of first generation dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, and Ola Rotimi have undergone radical reconstruction(s), and thereby creating a drama of inter-textuality and war. Osofisan is a paradigm of dramatists who deconstruct and reconstruct works of his predecessors. In *Inter-Textualism as Radical Aesthetics and Ideology in Osofisan's Theatre*, Olu Obafemi summarises the theatre of war in Nigeria thus:

Soyinka has created his *The Bacchae of Euripides* from Euripides' *Bacchae*. *Opera Wonyosi* is an inter-textual recreation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*, Ola Rotimi's Africanisation of Sophocles' *King Oedipus* in his *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Oda Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* is an inter-text of J.P. Clark's poem, *Casualties*, Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* from Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, Osofisan's *Another Raft* from Clark's *The Raft*, Osofisan's *Wesoo! Hamlet* from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone* from Sophocles' *Anigone*, and Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin* from Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (166).

In Osofisan's war against the ideo-aesthetic focus of Soyinka's theatre, the latter's lone scapegoat (a prototype of Capitalism) is discarded for a Historico-Dialectical Materialist (socialist tendencies) approach by Osofisan. His «*No More the Wasted Breed* is unmistakably an ideologico-aesthetic reaction to Wole Soyinka's *The Wasted Breed*» (Uji 73). In the same vein, in his appraisal of Osofisan's theatre, Muiyiwa Awodiya, a dogged critic of Osofisan submits that «Osofisan has thus redefined heroism. Heroes do not abound only among the aristocrats but can also be found among the wretched of the earth» (224). Osofisan sees his *Orunmila* as a counterbalance to Soyinka's *Ogun*. While he unmask's Soyinka's *Ogun*, his dramaturgy is dialectical to that of the mythopoeist (Soyinka). He create heroes of the masses instead of the individual saviour of Soyinka. Hence, «Osofisan has reached maturation by sharply deviating and departing from the philosophy and dramaturgy of Soyinka whom he considers the master. To come to his own, he has to literally kill the father in order to achieve his prime» (Afolayan, 2011, p. 1).

Ola Rotimi in *The gods are not to Blame*, has also opened new vistas for critical engagement in the theatre of *King Oedipus*. However, he does not attempt to deconstruct Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. His engagement is a Nigerianisation of the Greek play. Rotimi has been able to build upon the framework of the Oedipian culture, thereby, generating other dramatic discourses and counter-discourses by other playwright such as Otun Rasheed and Bakare Ojo-Rasaki. The Rotimian's ideology of man as instrumental to his downfall, is corroborated by Otun Rasheed in *The gods are Still Not to Blame*. Conversely, this is not the case in *The gods are the Scavengers* by Bakare Ojo-Rasaki.

A major experiment in the enterprise of adaptation, is Dapo Adelugba's experiment on Moliere's popular play. Adelugba, the late renowned Nigerian theatre director, adapted Moliere's (Jean Baptiste Poquelin) *Les Fourberies De Scapin*, a Three Act comedy of intrigue. His rehashed version of this play was titled *That Scoundrel Suberu*. This play captures the antics of Suberu, the Scapin character. Yerima also adapted Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* to «*Sikapin Seriki Wayo* at the Ahmadu Bello University» (Julius-Adeoye 243). Many decades, after Adelugba's adaptation, this researcher also performed in this same play, directed by the theatre director, Godfrey Enita at the Delta State University Theatre in 2010.

The dramaturgy of war and counterculture hold sway in the theatre of Yerima. Apart from his adaptation of numerous Western plays into the Nigerian situation, some of his works are an affront on already existing plays especially of the corpus of history. One of such is his drama, *The Trials of Oba Ovonranwen*. In this play, he does not only deconstruct Rotimi's *The Trials of Oba Ovonranwen*, his play has also creates a cult for Oba Ovonranwen. By this, we mean the dramaturgy of Oba Ovonranwen-a theatre that continue to deliberate on the history and life of Idugbowa the Oba of Benin who was deposed in 1897 by the British Colonial government of Moor, and sent to Calabar on exile.

Another theatre of war worthy of note in this paper, is the construction of the Yoruba tradition of ritual scapegoatism. The first attempt at documenting this culture with the medium of playwrighting (at least in the literary tradition), is in Soyinka's play, *Death and the King's Horseman*. This play, which is one of Soyinka's most appraised works by critics, articulates the Yoruba belief in the world of the living, the dead and the unborn. While valourising the culture of an Elesin Oba committing suicide to accompany the late king to the land of the ancestor, he further advocates continuity in this practice. Although Hope Eghagha does not corroborate this ideology in his dramatic engagement *Death not my Redeemer*, it is in Yerima's *Abobaku*, that a counterdiscourse is fully appropriated. Consequently, we examine Yerima's ethnographic play, *Abobaku* as counterculture to Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku* as Counterculture

Ahmed Yerima is the most prolific of the third generation playwrights. His creative oeuvre is evidenced in plays such as *Idemili*, *Ameh Oboni the Great*, *The Trials of Oba Ovonranwen*, *The Sick People*, *Attahiru*, *Kaffir's Last Game*, *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, *Otaelo*, *The Lottery Ticket*, *The Bishop and the Soul*, *Akuabata*, *Orisa Ibeji*, *Heart of Stone*, *Tafida*, *Igatibi*, *No Pennies for Mama*, *Tuti*, *Mojagbe*, *Dami's*

Cross & Atika's Well, Ajagunmale, The Silent Gods, The Liman and AdE Ire, The Angels and Other Plays, Hard Ground, Little Drops, Ipomu, Thank You Lord, Pari among others. Perhaps, apart from Femi Osofisan, the master of the second generation dramatists, there is in Nigeria, no playwright who is as prolific as Yerima. He has not only been an influence on budding Nigerian playwrights, his excellent literary engagement has also created a platform for a publication of two Festschrifts in his honour. Yerima is in the category of playwrights Ameh Dennis Akoh calls «the New Voices in Nigerian drama» (263), categories of dramatists «that in their search for aesthetic ideology they attempt disparately to reach new goals or build on or re/deconstruct old dramatic canons within ideo-aesthetic boundaries in both language and theme» (Akoh 260).

The thematic preoccupation of Yerima's works traverse various cultures. He has written plays that fully capture the Nigerian and African socio-political, cultural, political and economic realities. As a postmodern playwright, he also captures the Boko Haram imbroglio, the Niger Delta crisis of resource control, religious conflict, among others. Apart from his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, into the Nigerian situation (the product of this adaptation is *Otaelo*), his artistic foray has culminated into his deconstruction, and reconstruction of dramatic texts of notable Nigerian playwrights. His 2015 play, *Abobaku*, is an affront on Soyinka's advocacy for a lone hero in *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Yerima's *Abobaku* begins with Ajibade (also known as Baba Kekere), affirming his commitment to remaining the King's Horseman. In Yoruba cosmology, the King's Horseman otherwise called *Abobaku*, is the King's right hand man in the physical world and the hereafter. He accompanies the king to the world of the ancestor when the king dies. This action is a voluntary one with the medium of suicide. At the death of the king, he joyfully kills himself to join the king as his servant in the world beyond. The king's horsemen are regarded in high esteem. They are not only custodians of tradition, they also bridge the gap between the living and the ancestors. To this end, Ilari sings Ajibade's praise alongside the chiefs and populace of Adeoti village at Ajibade's acceptance of this role. Ajibade accepts it despite the fact that the king, Oba Karunwi is critically ill, and is at the verge of death. He concedes total allegiance to Oba Ajibade when he takes the oath:

Balogun: How well will you serve him?

Ajibade: Oba Karunwi, I shall serve you in life and in death. I give my soul to you willingly, till death after (*Kisses the sword*) (Yerima, 9)

Above: ... Treat him with the care of royalty. Let him eat and drink like the king. Let him know no want. Let him enjoy life to the fullest (Yerima, 10).

The king's horsemen are fed fat from the table of the kings. They are held in high esteem. In fact, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, on his way to meeting the late Oba at the world beyond, Elesin sees a young woman whom he desires. Although she is already betrothed, Iyaloja facilitates his having her.

Immediately Ajibade becomes Abobaku, Faramola knew that death draws closer. The death of the king connotes the death of her husband. The life of her husband depends on how long the king survives. Faramola wishes she has the capacity to prevent the king from dying.

Soyinka's construction of the Elesin Oba in *Death and the King's Horseman*, reveals that this role is a privilege for whoever is chosen. Praise Singer and the market women, led by Iyaloja sing the praise of their saviour in the first scene of the play. While Elesin Oba is visible in the process of his preparation for the ritual, he revels in his desire to accompany the late Oba to the ancestral world where his role is to continue his service to him. Conversely, Ajibade's construction by Yerima shows him as unenthusiastic about the role he is to play. He sees himself as someone who has no choice but to carry out this duty. He is trapped in his desire to become king of the Gbalefefe people, but his becoming king while his wife and unborn child prepare to pay the price for his escape from Adeoti village is something he cannot bear. Yerima delineates Baba Kekere from Soyinka's Elesin with the element of 'will'. Elesin seems to be more prepared for his duty than Baba Kekere (Ajibade). Although the former is forcefully arrested by Mr Pilkings, he still savours his desire to complete his mission. While the white man justifies his (Elesin's) arrest, the latter tells him the implication of his action to the existence of his people. This makes him scold Mr Pilkings for arresting him. Dialectical characters are created in Ajibade, the Abobaku. When Faramola, his wife confronts him, he tells *Ilari* that he is not ready to die, at least, not ready to leave his beautiful Faramola. His willingness to use himself as a ritual scapegoat for the betterment of his society eludes him. Ajibade runs away as advised by *Ilari* and Faramola.

Yerima creates some characters that doubt Baba kekere's willingness to commit suicide. Ifadeyi doubts the potency of the oath Ajibade makes with the king and the townspeople. Despite Mama's position on Ajibade making himself meat for the land, Ifadeyi is sure that the ritual will fail to materialise. This is contrary to the situation in *Death and the King's Horseman*. It is expected by all the villagers, except Mr and Mrs Pilkings, that Elesin Oba will commit suicide as it is customary, to escort the late king to the land of the ancestors in order to bridge the link between the living and the dead. Even when his son, Olunde learns about the death of the king, he expects to see the corpse of his father (Elesin), on his return. However, he is shocked to see his father still alive. The son sees this as a shame and disgrace to his identity and that of his community, especially with Mr Pilkings' arrest of his father. Consequently, Olunde places himself in the shoes of his father. Despite his Western orientation, Olunde uses himself as a ritual scapegoat for the betterment of his community. In death, he redeems his people.

Yerima sees the above occurrence as a shame culture, as one that is barbaric, and must be eroded. But we must not forget that even in the Christian tradition, the politics of redemption and salvation in death hold sway. There is the belief that Jesus Christ, with his death and resurrection, redeemed mankind from total destruction by God. According to Saint Luke chapter 9 Verse 22, «the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life» (1039). Instead of incorporating a white colonial administrator like Soyinka does in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Yerima uses Christianity as a binary of the traditional belief system of Adeoti, where the Aboboku norm holds sway.

In Soyinka's play, Yoruba traditional mores subdue modernity. Mr. Pilkings' attempt to foil the king's horseman (Elesin Oba) suicide culminates into his arresting him. Olunde, Elesin Oba's son, despite his education in the Western culture, fills the vacuum left by his father. Soyinka seems to advocate a continuation of the ritual practice. *Abobaku* holds a contrary view to Soyinka's. In the voices of Mama in the last situation in the play, Teni and Woli, the *Abobaku* recommends an abolishment in the belief of the potency of human ritual. It unveils the barbaric framework in which killing oneself to redeem a people is located. Furthermore, unlike Olunde, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Prince Adegoroye, in *Abobaku*, sees the *Oro* rituals as barbaric, mundane and pristine. He supports the missing Abobaku. In fact, he requests an animal substitute for the human ritual. Abore and Samu reject this. Like Iyalode in this play and the eponymous character of Kurunmi in Rotimi's work, they refuse to sway to the tide of modern culture and postmodern orientation. The potency of Ogun and other gods in human affairs is watered down in *Abobaku*. Although at the beginning through the middle of the dramatic piece, the playwright paints a potent picture of Ogun, at the end of the play (after the numerous deaths), he lampoons such rituals and unveils them as unnecessary in this modern age. Faramola also reiterates the belief in eroding the culture of human ritual from Adeoti. Her profound love for Ajibade, expressed by her, emphasises the playwright's belief in the sacred nature of human life. To the playwright, there is no basis for the shedding of human blood. Prince Adegoroye's suggestion of a goat in place of the missing Abobaku, is the playwright's advocacy for a total obliteration of human sacrifice. Faramola's statement below fully articulates Yerima's stand on human sacrifice:

Faramola: My husband must not die, he cannot die! Let us cut the noose from his neck. Let us set him free father (Yerima 32).

From the above lines, it is obvious that Yerima believes that women are imperative in the process of societal reconstruction. The playwright has always placed women at the forefront of socio-cultural reconstruction in most of his plays. We must also remember that, in his ecoplay, *Hard Ground*, Mama convinces Nimi never to return to the creeks. In ...*Little Drops*, Memekizie, Azue, and Mekume advocate the crusade for resolution of the oil crisis in the Niger Delta. This is also replete in *Ipomu*. In another dimension, the play, *Abobaku*, is critical of one's total service to the palace. Ilari, the old messenger laments his total dedication to Oba Karunwi who he sees as his god. Faramola, Ajibade's wife counters Ilari's notion of the king as god. She refutes him thus:

Faramola: Go, old man! Go! My god is Olodumare and he lives on the other side of the world...(Yerima 15).

Soyinka's support for human ritual is strengthened in the pregnancy of the young woman who Elesin has sexual intercourse with. This is not only an advocacy for the tradition of sacrifice, it also depicts the regeneration cum continuation of the culture of ritual scapegoatism. Conversely, Yerima is critical of such.

Although Faramola is pregnant, she dies with her unborn baby. The death of Ajibade's unborn baby is a call for a stop to the culture of human ritual. It is a counterbalance to Iyaloja's concluding speech in *Death and the King's Horseman* where she refutes her people from mourning the dead (Elesin Oba and Olunde), instead, they should focus on the unborn. The unborn symbolises the unborn child of Elesin Oba. Perhaps, with the death of Olunde and the failed Elesin Oba, it is traditional of the unborn child to be the subsequent horseman. Yerima's *Abobaku*, is thus a theatre of war that counters Soyinka's culture of human scapegoatism and sacrifice. Yerima also pitches his tent with Osofisan with his (Yerima's) emphasis on the *Orunmila* motif in this play. Mama sees where *Orunmila* sits with his *Ifa*, as a place with light that shines brighter. In fact, Faramola curses Ogun when Ajibade enters the house. She sees Ogun as the god of death, and not a liberator, unlike Soyinka's valourisation of Ogun in his plays. Mama also resorts to meeting *Ifa* to solve her problems. She pours her woes before Ifadeyi, the diviner.

Like Hope Eghagha in *Death not my Redeemer*, Yerima further seeks refuge in the enclave of the Western religion. As he hides under the façade of Christianity, he is critical of animism. Faramola and Mama's visit to Woli a pastor, captures Yerima's position:

Faramola: ...I escaped from the palace to go to church once. That night, I climbed to the hilltop for prayers and blessings...

Mama: What did he say?

Faramola: After the prayer, I knelt before him, soaked in the holy water with a candle burning in my hand... I promised if he saved my husband, I would give my life, his life and that of my unborn child to Jesus (18).

Faramola takes solace in the Western religion. At this time, she sees Christianity as an alternative to Ogun. She is now critical of Ogun who takes delight in human sacrifice. Faramola seeks a superior power that will subdue her animist religion. Even in the black clothes wrapped around her body, Faramola still depends on Jesus. However, the day she dreads arrives:

Faramola: ...Iku has won. Are you the ones they have sent?

Iyalode: Yes. Oba Karunwi is asleep, waiting for your husband so that they can proceed on the final journey (42).

Death finally takes Oba Karunwi. It always does. *Iku*, the Yoruba word for death is a respecter of no man. Faramola is aware that *Iku* is inevitable, irrespective of one's race, ethnic affiliation, wealth, position in the society and religion. She had been expecting this day, the tragic end of Ajibade her love. In Yoruba cosmogony, the Iyalode is a women leader who is saddled with the responsibility of mediating between the women and the government. He is the intermediary between the king and the women in the community. As a chief, she attends palace meetings. Like Iyaloja in *Death and the Kings Horseman*, Iyalode is an advocate of tradition, a mirror of custom and a custodian of culture.

In this play, Yerima unmasks the masquerade. His lampoon of the shrine of Ogun is an attack on Soyinka's ideology. In traditional African societies, most masquerades are strictly a male culture. The *Oro* mask tradition in Lagos and Ekiti, the *Oloolu* of Ibadan, the *Odumu* in Idoma land among others are paradigms of the chauvinist syndrome of the masquerade. However, in *Abobaku*, the masquerade cult in desecrated with Faramola, entering the shrine of death. A woman, wearing the toga of death is a taboo. Balogun is exasperated at the garb of death worn by Faramola. A woman is not suppose to confront Ogun, a powerful god in Yoruba cosmology. Ogun's potency is not only known in Adeoti, the people of Gbalefe are also aware of the strength this god of iron possesses:

AWO: ...My only fear is when Ogun is angered, he takes more than the people bargained for... (57).

Awo knows the potency of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron. Ogun does not make compromises after an oath that has been made with. Awo knows the veracity of the oath Ajibade makes to this god, hence, he is pessimistic. Faramola, the dutiful wife resolves to play *Abobaku*, to answer the call of the ancestors, for her love for Ajibade. But Mama and Iyalode goes to Gbalefe village to convince Ajibade to return home to complete his task. Like Iyaloja in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Iyalode tags Ajibade coward. Reality downs on Ajibade that he is about to lose an innocent wife and an unborn child. Although he returns to complete his task, it is too late. It is always too late in such dramatic discourses on ritual scapegoatism such as *Abobaku* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. In the former, Faramola dies with the unborn child, even before Ajibade's suicide. He is late in his entry into the arena to dance to the rhythm of death, accompanied

by the *gbedu* drums. Similarly, *Death and the King's Horseman* captures an Elesin Oba who delays his duty with sexual escapade with a young female virgin. At his arrest by Mr. Pilkings, his son, Olunde, steps into his shoes. However, Elesin commits suicide out of shame, albeit, his death is a sham, a non-heroic death since Olunde had accompanied the king to the other world. The closing scene of *Abobaku* is an affront on Soyinka's belief in ritual scapegoatism as a cord that binds the living and the dead. This is fully portrayed in Mama's lines below:

Mama: ...Can you see them now? One by one, they take a seat. See how they seem to recognise one another... But why does Ajibade sit on the floor. Is he still as lowly there as he is on earth? Haa...the cursed fool is not even given a welcome...not even a welcome by Oba Karunwi...He does not recognise his *Abobaku*. What a deceitful notion...and stupidly we believe...Oh how sad. So all these sacrifices were for nothing... (71).

Yerima's ideology is fully captured in the above rendition. While he is critical of Soyinka's Ogunian theory, he also warns against the foolhardiness of man's absolute belief in the metaphysical. If man must tackle his socio-economic, cultural and political woes, then he must focus on the root of such problems, and not seek succour in only the transcendental/the metaphysical. In Nigeria for instance, socio-economic and political issues are all channeled into one religious house or the other, for divine restoration and solution, instead of creating spaces for rational approaches in tackling them. The end product of dependence on religious leaders by gullible adherents, sometimes is being duped by a Pastor, Imam, Alfa or a Chief Priest. Yerima's play therefore advocate a realistic approach to creating a balance in the society. The dogged playwright is a humanist of some sort. Perhaps, his ideology tilt towards the belief in Nietzsche's *Superman*.

Conclusion

The theatre of war is an aggregate of dramatic works and performances that focus on a particular subject matter. The diverse approaches, divergent views, ideologies and counter-ideologies employed by dramatists, on a particular subject matter, is what defines a theatre of war. The age long Abobaku tradition of the Yoruba people, explored by Wole Soyinka in his *magnum opus*, titled, *Death and the King's Horseman*, has created various counter-arguments by playwrights such as Hope Eghagha in his play, *Death Not My Redeemer* and most recent, Ahmed Yerima. Yerima's position on the Abobaku culture, is dialectical to Soyinka's ideology, which shows that he (Soyinka) is an evangelist of Ogun and the culture of ritual scapegoatism. while *Death and the King's Horseman* is rooted in the advocacy for the ideo-aesthetic function of the Abobaku praxis, Yerima's ethnographic play *Abobaku* holds a contrary view on this norm. In fact, it is a counterbalance to this practice and recommends an abolishment of human ritual. This paper concludes that while Yerima is critical of Soyinka's positive stand on the Ogunian motif and subject matter of ritual scapegoatism, we must not forget that the (Yerima's) liberation ideology in his play, *Abobaku*, stands on the shoulders of the giant (Soyinka). In other words, his dramaturgy is lifted up and borne aloft on the gigantic stature of Soyinka's theatre. This paper recommends that budding Nigerian playwrights should endeavour to further examine the Abobaku motif in their works, to facilitate a fully fledged discourse on human ritual and sacrifice in the Nigerian theatre enterprise.

Bibliography:

Awodiya, Muyiwa. *The drama of Femi Osofisan: A critical perspective*, Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd. 1995.

Akoh, Ameh. *The Constraints and prospects of Post-military literary engagement in Nigeria. Nebula*, Vol. 6 (4): 2264-2272 2009.

Ejeke, Solomon. *The Renaissance interpretation of Aristotle's poetics*, in S. Ejeke (ed.), *Theatre Business 2* (16-37) Abraka: Delta State University Press 2014.

Julius-Adeoye, Ratimi. *The drama of Ahmed Yerima: Studies in Nigerian theatre*. *Leiden University Repository* 221-250, retrieved 25th May, 2018 from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20858> 2013

Nikolarea, Ekaterini. *Oedipus the King: A Greek tragedy, philosophy, politics and philology*, *TTR: traduction, terminologie, redaction*, vol. 7 (1): 219-267 1994.

Obafemi, Olu. *Inter-Textualism as radical aesthetics and ideology in Femi Osofisan's Theatre*, in O. Obafemi (ed.) *Politics and aesthetics: Essays in drama, theatre and performance*, (165-172) Ilorin: Haytee Press and Publishing Co. Ltd 2008.

Ralph Larkin. *Countercultures: 1960s and beyond*. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* 73-79, retrieved 2nd May, 2018 from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304188975_Counterculture_1960s_and_Beyond 2015

Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horseman*, London: Methuen 1975.

Uji, Charles. *Ideologico-political persuasions in the theatre of J.P.Clark and Femi Osofisan*, in J. Malomo and S. Gbilekaa (eds.), *Theatre and politics in Nigeria*, (59-66) Ibadan: Caltop Publications Limited 1993.

Yerima, Ahmed. *Abobaku*, Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited 2015.