

CROSSROADS OF VOICES AND DIALOGISM IN SAM UKALA'S *IREDI WAR*

Osundu Ahirika (PhD)
Department of Performing Arts
Akwa Ibom State University
osunduahirika@yahoo.com
08028511254

Abstract

This paper examines the intersectionality of characters' perspectives in Sam Ukala's play, Iredi War, through the lens of Fritz Heida's attribution theory. The study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the dramatic representation of social strata and their views, arguing that a multifaceted narrative of history is essential for inclusive representation. The play portrays the aged as embodying patience, women as mitigating tension and fostering hope, and youths as catalysts for change. The paper posits that history and reality can be gleaned from experiential knowledge and rational inquiry. By integrating diverse societal voices, a play can serve as a tool for recalibrating moral values in contemporary Nigeria. Ukala's work underscores the significance of aesthetic re-presentations of the past in shaping a safer future.

Keywords: Crossroads, Dialogism, Discourse, Drama, Society.

Introduction

The bustle in the human society is remarkable in the intersection of views across the numerous strata of the society. Numerous disciplines examine the coherence and changes based on the logic of their disciplinary codes. Observing the crossroads of views in the humanities requires a style of re-writing a people's history, and the historian and the poet do not present life alike. One method should be viable enough to negotiate the future the society.

A significant distinction between playwriting and other types of writing is the style and focus. A style may be conceived from the period a play is based; it may be viewed from the grammar construction, or may be conceived from the placement of events in terms of depth and insight of language mastery. Focus, on the other hand, bends to the social factor or subject matter that requires attention. Viewing playwriting from these two axes, even a play that presents an historical account of a people, is still appreciated from a distinguishable fact beyond the accurate analogy of the tale. This distinction is properly delineated by Aristotle in his description of the historian and the poet (playwright) thus:

It is, moreover, evident from what had been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen – what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose... The true difference is that one relates what has

happened, the other what may happen. Poetry (playwriting), therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal; history the particular. By the universal, I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity. (39)

By way of examining Aristotle's opinion and relevance to this paper, a playwright who engages a universal content that predicts the future is the elevated one. The universality that is crucial in this paper is the representation of voices across the social strata of the society; in this case, Nigeria.

Many Nigerian plays have, in many occasions and on different subject matters, been attempting to portray the aged as a section of the society with some distinguishable peculiarities. Some plays portray women with their identifiable peculiarities eliciting an aggregate perception to reality as any woman found in a similar situation would; so are youths portrayed with peculiarities and thrusts that make one youth act or think like another on certain matters in the world of a play. In Ola Rotimi's *If... A Tragedy of the Ruled*, Papa represents the aged, and his approach is cautious while his speech is usually about people having patience. In Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, Nkechi and Madam represent the women in the society and their actions are always a response to how others are and they become the stimulants of both negative and positive energies in their society. In Stella Oyedepo's *Alice Oh, Alice!*, women are women's problem. In Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground*, youths are portrayed as myopic, emotionally immature, irrational and quite insensitive to social reality. In Uwemedimo Atakpo's *Watering the Hard Ground*, youths are motivators of social change and their actions are rational within the scope of their pursuit. These reflect the various ways these three sections of the society are viewed in the society from the lenses of the playwrights.

However, the contemporary representation of these three sets is further identified in Sam Ukala's historical drama, *Iredi War*. The aged have a similar view, women have their full representation and view, and youths have their attitude, action and view. It is worth mentioning, that observing the society from such historical perspective in a play may be an expose to the substance, which may be beyond the mere outlook, of reality in the contemporary Nigeria. This, in a way, may give a clue on how to visualize the Nigerian future from the perspective of the old, women and youths. This paper is the analysis of Sam Ukala's representation of the various strata of the Nigerian society in his play, *Iredi War*.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on Fritz Heider's Attribution Theory. The theory came to limelight in 1968. The theory visualizes the action, speech activities, failure and success of people in the society to be a response to either external or internal influence. The theory advocates a keen observation of a person's attitude with which his success or failure is induced. According to David Matsumoto and Linda Joan, the notion is "the distinction between internal attributions and external attributions... Internal attribution specifies the cause of behaviour within a person; external attributions locate the cause of behaviour outside the person" (15). By this notion, it is imperative to adduce that the theory arrogates human behaviour to something outside the person as the likely motivator or pressure of the mindset which is the internal operation.

Attribution theory recognizes compartment and variance in human nature, emphasizing that various outlooks portend diverse instinct and practices to achieve the desires. In the view of Charles Snyder and Rick Higgings, attribution theory highlights that the influence of the society can be traceable to the outlook and conception of reality by individuals in the society. Internal attribution brings to notice what makes the mind to work the way it works, which is the psychological configuration, while the external attribution assesses people from the social background (15). Thus, “attribution refers to the process by which we infer the cause of our own and other people’s behaviour” (Snyder and Higgins 15).

The major aspect of attribution theory that affects this work is that the characters in *Iredi War* are categorized into the aged, women and youths. Each of these categories is purported to maintain a specific attitude towards social circumstance as influenced by either internal or external factor. The attitude and thrusts of the aged are observed based on the internal energies shaped by external forces such as age and experience. The approach of women to circumstances is viewed to evolve from the nature of men around them. That of the youths is determined based on the circumstances surrounding the society of which their involvement set the synthesis that authenticate a change. All attitudes, actions and identities are observed to have had some bearings with either the external or internal configuration of the mind based on the environmental influence or social situation.

Voices Intersection in Drama

Voice intersection is the negotiation of views put forth by various people, particularly, on a specific issue. According to Imoh Emenyi, it is the streamlining of “identifiable perspectives in African literature. But they are made to dialogue with others in this context in order to extend the boundaries of utterance(s) to accommodate artistic creation as gendered discourses” (61). It refers to the compartment of social order by creating a space for different group of people to express views within the framework of a discourse.

Voices intersection is the re-creation of thought about a theme from the peculiarity of human brands or a cross-section of social groups in literature. This may be obtainable in many ways. One is by using a character in a text to revitalise the view of a different writer expressed in a particular character of a different text to raise a discursive opinion bothering on mankind. According to Anietie Udofia:

In the literary discipline, writers always assume they are evolving a new discourse quite distinct from anyone else’s to discuss, but it always unfolds that one idea actually reminds of a certain opinion raised in another which clarifies that discourses actually build and spill into another. Writing then becomes an old discourse put forth in a new way... This can project absoluteness devoid of differentiation over a people’s fate, and those whose fate is sealed in such irreversible conclusiveness may be stereotyped permanently (201).

By way of evaluation Udofia’s opinion, the cloning of opinion across the various strata of the society on a discourse appears to be the subtle method to abridge the values, norms or the general configuration on human disposition from shared experience. This may be the basis Oluwole Adejare sees voices intersection as “the re-use of features or portion of existing text in the creation of a new text” (122); which by extension is creating the new man from the old men.

Another perspective of voices intersection in a play is the unification of views based on cultural categorisation of people towards cultural hegemony. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, voices intersection raises an aspect of “cultural hegemony... through canonical assumption” (7). Along this line of thought, Longinus writes that “when men of different pursuits, lives, ambition, ages, (and) language, hold identical views on one and the same subject, then that verdict which results from a concert of discordance elements makes our faith in the object of admiration strong and unassailable” (79). That means, voices intersection is not unconnected to “the split or fragmented subjectivity (that) reflects the many and often competing elements... Thus, split subjectivity can be viewed, on a number of levels, as potentially enabling rather than disempowering” (Gilbert and Tomkins 231). In this case, Emenyi addresses it as “consciousness occasioned by native intelligence and ... the interrogation of rationality” (62).

Intersecting voices in a text may imply the re-echoing of musing from diverse blocs of social orientation compiled in a literary work. In this case, a text is, thus, a re-harsh of other texts towards evolving a point of view. *Iredi War* is a distinguishable model for this cross-sectional interrogation in which the past is made to bear witness to the present as relevant literary text should. Nonetheless, all literary texts presently embody a trace of other texts. In the idea of Roland Barthes cited in Terry Eagleton:

All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts not in the conventional sense that they bear traces of influence but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a working of other writings which proceeds or surrounds the individual work – there is no much thing as literary originality, no such thing as the first literary work; all literature is intertextual (119).

This suggests that numerous interests can bring people of like-minds to think and fuse a similar view on a specific matter. In Osundu Ahirika, Okon Jacob and Mbuk Mboho, “observing the current restive circumstances in Nigeria, numerous scenes that bring young people to converge are violent-prone or money induced come-together... The size of the majority may influence the amount of pressure that is felt” (21).

Background and Synopsis of the Play

Sam Ukala is one of the renowned names in contemporary scholarship. He comes from Delta State, which is in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. He is a Professor of Theatre Arts and Drama at Delta State University. He is an actor, a poet and a novelist, who has acquired a vast knowledge of drama experimented across media such as the stage, radio, television and film. Ukala has won many prizes in writing as a frontline Nigerian scholar. He is one of the theorists from Africa. He is the originator of the famous African literary theory called “folkism”. He has written many plays. *Iredi War* is one of his popular plays.

The kingdom of Owa has a good rapport with the Europeans who are in charge of the Agbor sub-district the kingdom belongs. The good relation is cemented by the orderly and cautious interplays of Chichester, the District Commissioner in Agbor, and Igboba, the King of Owa Kingdom. In Chichester’s absence, Crewe-read, his assistant who is a young man of 24, takes a tour to Owa to compel carriers from the people. His approach is seen by the Owa people to be aggressive. The

people, though offer him good hospitality; they fail to yield to his major need which is the carriers. They postpone the meeting to the following day but Crewe-Read sends young men to burn down the shrine and deities of Owa. This action repudiates the people and they scheme to avenge the desecration of their object of beliefs by all means.

The war that breaks between Owa people and the British officers results in the death of many white men including young Crewe-Read. Many black servants and soldiers also lose their lives. Igboba knows he is in-between life and death. He decides to gird himself and confront the whites as they approach to arrest him and sack the city as their incursion project portends. He is surprised to see his wife, Nneka resolve to fight along with him. Though many casualties are recorded; many prisoners are taken; and many Owa sons and daughters tried and sentenced to death, Igboba cautiously presses his right to defend his people. Nneka encourages his resolve. The young men unanimously fortify themselves and fight the famous *Iredi War* that took place in 1906. However, each set retains a remarkable view in dialogue and actions that are peculiar to their set to form the ultimate discourse of the text.

Voices Intersection and Discourse in *Iredi War*

There is a natural divide in *Iredi War*. Each character belongs to the aged, the women and the youths. The world of the play exposes the characters to social expectations that coerce them to respond naturally to their challenges based on the group they belong. This position reflects the idea of Eddiefloy Igbo that “much social learning takes place when people are confronted with new strange situations. Such unfamiliar events or situations call for responses... enhanced or inhibited by a number of given roles and shared agreement” (144). In many cases, the intersection thrives from what Elijah John identifies as “a continuous development of opposition... (which) is the secret of all development and all reality” (94). On the other hand, other scholars view this voice representation, confrontation and resolution as the panacea for social integration. Thus, for this interaction to yield the literary purpose in a play, “the voices in the social system must interact for the purpose of cultural communication” (Bakhtin 94).

The play has mentioned many characters with identifiable age. The age-range considered in this essay as the aged. In the text, those viewed as the aged are within 55 and above. Those identified in this category are Igboba (99), Echolem (87), Iwekuba (75), Nwobi (65), Ekome (50), and Chichester and Rudkin; Bates, Nneka, and Gilpin are inclusive. Women are Nneka and Nwoma. Youths are Crewe-Read, Oyenla, Nwoma, Uzun, Afopele, Jamba, Ebie, Lawani, and others

Aged vs Youth

The discussion between Igoba and the, ADC, Crewe-Read, is a significant portrayal of the intersection of the aged and (the) youth. The dialogue below is an example:

Igboba: (*Pouring Libation*) God of our land! War has come. Our ancestors-

Crewe-Read: (*To Igboba*) Excuse me, Chief Igboba, perhaps, you haven't noticed that I didn't chew your kola (*Raises and drops on the table the lobe that he was served*).

Igboba: You didn't chew it? Why, Mr. ADC?

Crewe-Read: DC will do (*As Igboba makes to speak again*) Don't rigmarole, Chief Igboba. I said, DC will do (p15).

The dialogue above showcases the aged as a conformist, the law keeper, the sets who attempt to allow the foundation of precedence and continuity to proceed for peace. Youth, on the other hand, is portrayed as insolent, self-conceited and intolerant. Igboba is a king, he addresses Crewe-Read by his title, ADC. That is Crewe-Reads formal title. Crewe-Read, a boy, orders him to subsume the "A" which is "Assistant" so that he would appear higher; not actually that he is. The aged loves to be called what they are while the youths prefer to answer what they ought to be.

Another instance is the dialogue below:

Ekome: (*To Lawani conciliatorily*) You are our own brother. Greet him 'Obi Agun' or 'The king shall live forever'.

Lawani: (*Expansively*) There is only one king in the United Kingdoms and British Dominions, including Owa. His name is His Majesty, King Edward VII.

Igboba: I warn you sergeant: don't ever say that again.

Lawani: You can't warn me... I have come to arrest you, Chief Igboba. So therefore, you are under arrest.

Mwobi: My brother, the little dancing bird has drummers underground.

Igboba: What did you say, Sergeant?

Lawani: You heard me well. You are under arrest.

Iwekuba: It is your father that is under arrest, young man.

Lawani: Retreat or I shoot (*Aims at Iwekuba*) (pp 34-35).

The discussion above typifies the unguided temperance of the youth against the cautions temperance of the aged. In the scene, Lawani is the custodian of power. He tries using the power as an instrument of oppression. Iwekuba wields supernatural powers, even at the point of danger, he refuse to unleash the dangerous part of it; rather he used it for self-defense. The text portrays youths as a desperate class while aged is portrayed as reactionary. Thus, it is the external force from the youth that triggers the reaction of the aged. However, it is the internal urge to control that motivates the actions of the youth.

There is an aspect of concern over discourse in the dialogue between Chichester, soldier and Igboba. These two sets reflect their group in the discussion below:

Soldier 1: (*Hurting forward, orders Igboba*) Stand up!

Chichester: Not necessary, Corporal... and don't you ever give orders in the presence of your superiors.

Soldier 1: Yes, sir

Chichester: (*To Igbo*) How do you do, my friend? (p 91).

Another outlook of the aged is portrayed in Chichester and Igbo while youth is portrayed in Soldier. Even in the tension between the colonial officials and the people of Owa, the aged are still calm. They still keep to rules. Youth on the other hand, takes advantage of the situation and easily go emotional. It is only the rules of office or spontaneous assignment of immediate glory that youth indulges. The play portrays the aged as reconciliatory while the youth is portrayed as vengeful.

The Aged versus Women

Although women portrayed in the text belong to youth and aged, there is a unique disposition that retains the dimension of their voices. An example is identified in the dialogue below:

Nneka: Please, go to bed. The antelope shouldn't dance – break his legs before the public presentation of the dance. You need some sleep.

Igbo: Sleep on a night like this?

Nneka: All night were created for sleep, my Lord (p 48).

In the dialogue above, Igbo is depressed; Nneka, his wife senses it. Instead of reflecting her fear for the impending war which women are usually vulnerable, she is dispelling the boredom. The play is portraying Igbo as aged-man; the aged absorbs fear. Nneka is portrayed as the aged-woman; the aged dispels fear. On the other hand, Igbo is further depicted to be reflective, pensive and nervous; while Nneka is depicted as revitalizing, energizing and soothing. The aged inhibit fear; women exude strength.

Another instance of aged and women is portrayed in the scene below:

Nneka: Seriously speaking, didn't you wonder why Iwekuba, a younger old man, retired from Ekumeku and from being chief warrior?... When I watched your stiff bones prance about with your spear, I understood why Iwekuba had to retire.

Igbo: Your tongue will kill you soon. You are calling me stiff bones, eh?

Nneka: (*Sighs*) We all wish we could do this or that as we used to, but... Go to bed, my one-and-only. At least, you still have energy to sleep.

Nwoma: (*Re-emerging*) I knew it. (*To Nneka*) look, if he's going to any bed tonight, it should be mine... It is my turn (pp 51-52).

The dialogue between the aged and the women in the lines above portray women as precipitates of emotions in men. Igbo is reminded of his powers by Nneka, and he actually regenerates the

verve. He subsumes the pervading tremor of war to the sizzling ripples of romance the wife stimulates. On the other hand, women are also portrayed as object of sex and relaxation. Nwoma does not care about the war in the land, the devastation looming, or even the husband's pensive mood; her concern is to have her share of sexual satisfaction.

Youth + Youth

The voice of the youths in the play is significant to some extent in their thrust of action and goal. Ukala portrays an aspect of it thus:

Jamba: ...You are trembling

Afopele: (*Trembling with righteous anger.*) I am a prince and I went to school, Jamba, even though I've been doing *mumu-mumu* all this while,... I'm so angry, I could kill you now!

Jamba: (*Rising*) Me? What have I done?

Afopele: Give me those telegrams at once.

Jamba: (*Hands the telegrams over*) Here! (*Afopele tears them up, squeezes the pieces and throws them away...*).

Afopele: If you like, go and report me to your small-boy Oyinbo. This is my opportunity to snatch my freedom... (p 56).

The dialogue between youth and youth has reflected the desperate attitude of young men in the society. Youths are portrayed as inhibitors of burden, and they are also depicted as the agent of change. Virtually in scenes youths are engaged, their actions portend a storm for birthing a new age. Thus, youths are portrayed as the instrument of change in *Iredi War*.

Conclusion

The portrayal of the old, women, and youth in *Iredi War* reflects the insight of the playwright in observing the categorization of mankind in the society. His sense of identity appropriation unfolds in his proper intersection of voices of these natural groups. The unification of these groups has indicated the values each faction values. However, the reassessment of the contemporary society from the perspective of the old, the young and across gender basis may relate experience to reasoning. Experience and reasoning are the harbinger of enlightenment required to revitalize the duty of man to another man, the actions that intersect humanness with the mindset needed for others to cohabit the society alive, and the values that set the boundaries which help to protect man-the-good from the inordinate actions of man-the-bad toward a healthy transformation and continuity of life in the contemporary Nigeria.

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