Retelling History, Restaging Drama: Use of Songs And Music In Historical Plays; Irene Agunloye’s Idia The Warrior Queen Of Benin And Femi Osofisan’s Women Of Owu As A Study

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ABSTRACT
The emergence of nation states and the process and path to development has often formed part of the critical cultural mass index anchoring its progress or lack of it. Invariably, the chosen path to development and the unfolding interplay of natural and human assisted events fosters an enduring legacy that are historical in nature. The merit of history albeit in its dramaturgy helps in reawakening and systematizing the socio-cultural status of nation states not only for creating awareness, but also as a basis for validating political and economic strength. Music, the documentation of history in sound in evolving societies is a critical agent in this regards. Within the context of the two plays in view, it reflects the true nature and candor of the African in its natural environment. As a functional component of the African environment, events, of major or minor essence finds meaning and signification in musical expression. Herein lie the kennel and substance of interrogating the ancient African past, drama within the musical epigrams as contained in the historical text. Thus, music in the two texts, plays multifaceted roles not only as agent of transition, for creating textual balance, as cultural progeny, and more usefully as a stabilizing mechanism for realizing the dramatic vision of the playwright.

Keywords: Drama, Songs, Music and History.

INTRODUCTION
One of the foremost leaps of man towards self awareness and consciousness started to manifest at the point when the human folk made constructive efforts to preserve the cultural environment. This effort has helped progressively in social and secular advancement in the realm of arts and science. Preserving the cultural environment presented and continued to generate concerns as to how gains of the past are preserved and new frontiers of interest developed. Social anthropologists such as Bassey Anda maintain that in man’s quest to conquer the environment, our forebears signposted their immediate environment using artifacts and tools which in time manifested in recognizable cultural patterns. Music has we have it today, form part of this cultural patterns. Before the discovery of modern forms of writing, emergent cultures developed systems of communication intra and beyond the immediate environment. The all important need to transact social and cultural activities fostered a unique a system of signs and icons which expressed the people’s philosophy within which the cultural matrix of each community are recognized and identified.

In several cultures of the world especially in Africa, music and musical icons and symbols served as a cultural progeny and platform for systemizing their collective univocal apparatus which the music idiom provided. Beyond the quintessential element and allure of music in the realm of entertainment, lie a profound music franchise of integrated order which supports and chronicles the patriarchal establishment and worldview of many African communities. The old independent union of Senegambia, a union of Senegal and Gambia, had a well-developed body of music repertoire which represented the existence and soul of the people.
Music and Songs in the Dramatic Space
Of immediate relevance and concern here, is the provident agent of cultural vanguard that songs and music present and represent in an unfolding dramatic milieu. Within the trepid African cultural terrain, music, songs and dance are a functional component of the organized social and spiritual structure and establishment. They not only serve as a store of valuable cultural identity, their exploration in performance in context reveals an expansive residue of cultural exfoliation and taxonomy of kinesics which defines the overall cultural question of the people at any given time. Bringing them to bearing in a dramatic works invariably serves as a recall to historical appropriateness as defined in space and time of the epoch under consideration and review. Many observers are more often likely to see song, music and dance in drama as apropos to surfing for aesthetic color and value rather recognize the extant agent value it posits in the cultural space the drama reveals. Just like props, décor, stage setting, costume etc, music, song, and dance in drama attempts to interpolate the past in the present in a bid present a near factual rehash of existent order in the past in the present. Thus, music and song in drama, especially drama of African extraction is not done in vacuum without recourse to substantial amount of cultural polemics which subsumes any other errant signals that may arise invariably in performance.
In their composite form, songs are vocal expression of cognitive poetic formulae of cultural relevance conceived as a body of thoughts signifier. Songs in their folkloric compass, encapsulate the people’s ideologue, philosophy and worldview. In a broader sense, they form part of the oral literature of a particular culture. While songs are primarily vocalized, they are also realized as instrumental music version as voice surrogate. It may be helpful to note that music in general terms refers to sound and sound from performance on music instruments, the voice inclusive, pleasant to the listener. Songs are particularly more attuned to historical drama performance because of their textual and contextual fluidity. On the one hand, many African languages are tonal by their cultural construct. What this means, is that a particular word could mean several things depending on the vocal inflexion. Secondly, traditional African oratory and discourse is consistent with the use of metaphors, proverbs, aphorisms and other figures of speech. It is a saying among the Igbo’s of Nigeria that proverb is the oil with which words are chewed and eaten. A leader’s or an elder’s vastness and competence in cultural discourse are often weighted against the backdrop of his or her dialogic web spiced with relevant proverbs and other figures of speech.
African theatre and drama invariably adopt the traditional idiomatic formulae in accessing the ingrained folkloric philosophy and worldview that form part of community store of values. There is value in words, and when words are subjected and carried on the wings of sound play, a new dimension manifest with varying degree of aesthetic substance. To the adept in traditional African literary arts, the phrasal use of idiomatic expressions in African drama, may be seen as condensed appropriation of the thought and spoken idiom within the shortest spatial possibility. In other words, saying and speaking volumes at a short time. The playwright Irene Agunloye aptly demonstrates this idiomatic substance in Idia, the warrior queen of Benin. Queen Idia suffused in deep thoughts appraises her circumstance thus:
A rag abandoned in one corner of the house will someday become useful. A blind man is never known to be shy. When a child throws a stone into the market place his mother or kinsmen may be hit. A bird that perches on a rope causes uneasiness for both the rope it perches on, and itself. It is the wind that fetches firewood for the cripple. A traveler who constantly asks questions about his direction can never miss his way or get lost. … (p.1).
Songs in traditional African performances invariably adopts one or more or all of the following vocal styles and technique suited for each context. The logo-genic or word borne, melogenic or melody borne and the pathogenic or the expression of feelings, each presents a facsimile template for realizing specific mantra and phenomena in the society. These expressive idioms are also emblematic of certain cultural practices and readily expose the cultural agents at work at any given period. For instance, Yoruba hunter’s poet and poetry adopts the logogenic formulae in performance known traditionally as rara. It is a speech/song technique used in Sango chants the patron god of hunters and craft men that use iron as part
of their vocation among the Yoruba of Nigeria. Historical plays and drama dedicated to or featuring Sango the Yoruba god of thunder invariably follow this pattern. The place and position of music in drama, especially drama having historical or mystical background issues forth from the existential realities surrounding the drama. Arguably, some cultures see music as a language of the spirit world. Contact with the ethereal order of higher existence where the ancestral spirit dwells require that one possess knowledge of the glossary of music to pierce the realm of the invisible. Of note also is that some of the gods are deified heroes of the cultures that venerate the gods as they once lived among the people before transition to sainthood. A case in point, is Bata drums music used in the worship of Sango in Yoruba ancestral pantheon. Akpabot notes that: Among the Yoruba, the Bata group of drums used in the worship of the god Sango, the god of thunder consists of Iya Ilu Bata (mother drum), Emele Ako (male drum), Emele Abo (female drum), and Kudi (child drum). (27).

Viewing the presence of music in drama in its historical context does not totally eliminate the substance of music as agent proximate to the social and non social activities of the people. The dominant relevance of music in African cultures lies in its centrality to minor and vital issues and activities. Music is associated and linked with daily activities from the mundane and profane to the spiritual. Thus, the resort to music as a mechanism and conveyor belt of the playwright aspiration to recall and generate the requisite mood, atmosphere, empathy, and create a spectacle of realism is not farfetched. Appropriating the right musical dialectics as part of the overall dramatic substance presented in performance is seen as going closer to the natural environment in which the spectacle existed in real terms. The functionality of music in the cultural environment that owns the history being revisited on stage in this regard cannot be glossed over casually. Clark’s ozzidi Saga is in this category of music drama, where music forms the fulcrum of the dramatic element. In this regard music is not seen as mere appendage for generating circumstantial relief, but represents the dramatic élan.

**The use of Music in Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin**

The context in which the drama unfolds has a strong and direct bearing on the fledging run of events which stamped an irreversible compulsion on the chain of events that became the story of Idia, the warrior queen of Benin. The playwright presents us with a synopsis of the initial incidents surrounding the play thus:

When she went to Benin with her village dance group, for a dance performance at the Oba’s palace, Oba Ozolua, full of admiration for her, immediately asked the Esigie of Isi, to direct the newly installed Eholo of Isi to use his Igban authority to marry Idia into his harem...Before he could carry out this assignment Idia’s parents got wind of the plot and immediately proceeded to disfigure her by putting some marks on her face. This made it difficult for the Eholo to identify Idia. After a long search, the Eholo of Isi was advised to offer a sacrifice to the shrine of Ugieghudu in Idia own village... After this he was able to identify Idia, and took her to Ozolua’s harem. In a matter of months, Idia...had a child named Osawe, who later became Oba Esigie. Traditionally Queens were sent to their mother’s home to have their babies. Upon delivery, the Queen’s parents were to inform the palace of the Oba of Benin immediately, of the birth of the royal child. Prince Arhuanrhuan, was delivered a few hours before the birth of Esigie, but his mother delayed in informing the palace of the birth. As soon as Esigie was born, the smart Idia quickly announced the news to the palace. As a result; he was recognized as the eldest son and installed in accordance with the law of primogeniture. ... This led to succession dispute and conflict Arhuanrhuan was eventually defeated with the help of Queen Idia.... Prince Osawe ascended the throne of Benin kingdom in 1504 AD with the title Oba Esigie. In 1507 A.D Queen Idia was installed the Iyoba Oba of Uselu. In 1515 A. D she went to Idah war and returned victorious in 1516 A.D. (p.vi-vii).
From the synopsis, a picture of intrigues, insurrections and conflict is an overcast that hangs in the air. As the initial incidents suggests, the Bini people are a musical society. That the primary context which serves as a pivot for the unfolding dramatic spectacle is a dance event/contest provides an insight into the social and musical habits of the Bini people and their kin. The revelation of such a cultural exercise in drama further strengthens the extant role of drama as a historical document. Dance contest by maidens was an avenue where eligible suitors meet their prospective wives for the first time in many African societies. Going by the dialogic style and dramatic web, the drama presents fast paced series of events which suggests an uneasy calm and conflict culminating in an inevitable crisis. The war scene by Idia forces as they encounter the Igala opponents in the precincts of Idah presents us with the first music experience in this play. A war song is in the air to invigorate the Bini forces and to drive fear into their opponents. As part of the plot of the drama, the playwright suggests series of songs suitable for each scene. Excerpts of the war song go thus:

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\text{No ma webge ghe reo} \\
\text{Ghe vbe erimmwin khian ven} \\
\text{The weak hearted should stay away} \\
\text{Warriors from the spirit world are wrestling (p.99).}
\]

In the ensuing encounter, Idia emerges victorious and this heralds a celebration. Traditionally, victory parades hold several prospects for the conquering Oba to revalidate his authority, to acknowledge the support of the ancestral gods and the invisibility of the Oba and by extension the safety and security of his loyal subjects. However, the first direct beneficiary of the ground shaking jubilation that unfolds is Idia who’s is the Queen mother. Acknowledging her overwhelming influence in affairs of state, she is eulogized thus:

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\text{Solo: Okhuo ghi, yo okwo o o} \\
\text{Chorus: Sokpan Idia mwen ’ni Iye Esigie no Oba} \\
\text{No woman has ever gone to war} \\
\text{With the exception of Idia, the mother of Esigie (p.91).}
\]

Riding on the crest of the overflow of jubilation and conviviality, Esogban proclaims: Beat the royal drums in stately tones. Let the news resound across the world, over the hills, and over the mountains; let the tiding spread’ (92). All present at the celebration demands more of the music and dance. Ezomo in joyful mood exclaims: Beat the royal drums [as] (he steps out to dance) beat them; beat them in high and rapturous pitch’ (p.93). The Iyase, emboldened by the musical rapture, the frenzy and rising profile of Idia, adds his voice in support of celebrating royalty. He opines: Speak royal drums, I hear you well, speak the praise of our mighty Queen and I will interpret it to those not versed in your speech’ (p.92). Iyase by this statement touches on a fundamental aspect of African drum performance; the ability to use the drums as voice surrogate. Beside the capacity of African drums to talk eloquently, they also play certain musical cliché’s or pieces, in praise of and also associated with specific family tree and personalities in the community.

The royal drum in question is the Emoba set of drums. Akpabot observes: ‘The Emoba drum of the Edos is used exclusively at the palace of the Oba of Benin’ (16). Each royal court usually maintains a crop of resident musicians. Their duty is to welcome and entertain visitors to the palace, sing the royal eulogy, and keep record of royal oral performance traditions. As the scenic place and play text suggests, this latter state of celebration is within the palace and surrounding courtyard. Elsewhere and in related context, the entire community music mechanism is mobilized to mark such an uncommon war prowess.
The use of Music in Women of Owu

Foregrounding the commencement of the drama is a note on the play by the Playwright thus:

In 1821 or thereabouts, the combined forces of the army of Ijebu and Ife, two Yoruba kingdoms in the south of what is known as Nigeria, along with mercenaries recruited from Oyo refugees flying down wards from the Nigerian savannah, sacked the city of Owu after a seven-year siege.

Owu was a model city-state, one of the most prosperous and best organized of those times. The Allied Forces had attacked it with the pretext of liberating the flourishing market of Akpomu from Owu’s control. Owu closed the gates of its formidable city walls, but it soon had to face the problem of drought when the rain stopped in the third year of the siege. This was a boon to the Allied Forces of course, and finally, in the seventh year they entered the city, and it was all over.

These Allied Forces, determined that the city must never rise again, reduced the place to complete rubble, and set fire to it. They slaughtered all the males, adult and children, and carried away the female into slavery. Owu was never rebuilt.

So, it was quite logical therefore that, as I pondered over this adaptation of Euripides’ play in the season of the Iraqi war, the memories that were awakened in me should be those of the tragic Owu war… F.O. (vii).

In retelling the story, the playwright thoughtfully navigates the deep recess of the emotional fabrics of the Yoruba cultural poetics reminiscent of a society in utter distress. Here, the playwright presents a well-structured musical substance that is to drive the play. Not leaving the desired element of despair that surrounds the play to become a mere flash in the pan, he carefully cloth the play with choice music emblematic of the play, however, not without some leverage and liberty to the player.

As part of the appendix, the author presents notes on songs and dirges used in the play thus:

The songs in the play consists largely of dirges, bride chants (ekun iyawo) and (oriiki) praise poems) and are heavily based on the corresponding generic structure of traditional Yoruba music. This means that their essences to be distilled more from the mood and atmosphere they create- through the songs’ rhythmic patterns and metaphorical richness, the chanters, voice manipulation, emotional evolvement and evocative power, as well as the audience’s willingness to collaborate- than from the actual, literal meaning of the lines. Like all music, therefore, their full effect cannot be fully grasped from a mere understanding of the words. The following ‘translation’ is therefore merely a guide, and will help the musician who understands Yoruba, probably not all it’s dialectical inflections. It is better to just listen to the inner ear, and then sing them like that, in effective response (p.68).

While the thematic preoccupation of the play is patterned to bring to fore the banal despicable resolve by an unforgiving force to exterminate the people of Owu, the ingrained strong will of the female presents resilience amidst despondency. It is amidst this chaotic atmosphere that the drama unfolds. The share force of the incredulous sacking of Owu and the despair that hangs over it gives the imprisoned women very little hope of redemption than to seek solace in songs of lament and possible intervention of the gods. The latent melancholy in the dirge Atupa gbepo nle felepo provokes the appearance and possible intervention of the god ANLUGBUA who appears to the women as an old man.

The women beclouded in a foreboding gloom that their incarceration portend laments further as they cry for help from any where possible as they sing a dirge Lesi ma gbawao. Excerpts as follow:

Who will save us?
Refrain: Tere jina
Who will save us?
Owu,’s bridge has collapsed
Who shall we hang on to?
The war of fire has broken out
What a calamity, my husband
What a disaster my wife
Run away my child
The war fire is everywhere (p.70).
The song as the lyrics show is wrapped in despondency and despair. The song is performed in call and response technique common to most African cultures. The emotive element which issues forth from the solemnity of the performance, is further amplified by a sense of lament from the conflagration that envelopes Owu and its precinct. The woman of Owu by their incarceration, are not subdued and are unrelenting in presenting themselves as perhaps the last bastion of what remains of their ancestral pride and position. With disparaging emotional outburst, they seek to eulogize the passing on of a beloved one Aerogun in Omo mi Aderogun thus:

My son Aderogun
Yon become my farther today
When you get home, give them my greetings
Aderogun, brave one
Farewell till we meet again
Son of the warrior Jagumolu
Offspring of Owu’s ancestors
Son of <+fight on don’t steal
Shake men shake earth but not your in-laws
For in-laws dignify us
Son of <+ I was felled (fighting) in Apomu
Collector of heads except the newborn’s
Sleep on but you will rise again
You will not eat millipedes or worms:
When you get home there say my greetings:
And tell them I am on my way

Here, Aderogun’s oriki takes on a typical Greek burial oratory, reserved for royalty and brave warriors cut down in war. While Aderogun is sent forth to the great beyond amidst song of praise, Erelu recounts his enviable past and filial progeny. The turn of events sustains an unrelenting anguish that even the spirit of the ancestors is not capable of any positive intervention. In what appears to be a futile attempt to placate themselves, they sing; Ojo ayo kan si mi lara (showers of joy fell on me (p.77). However, the unrelenting agony and torture takes toil on the women even as their cheer leader, Erelu screams, collapses to the floor and dies.

CONCLUSION
Far into the annals of human history and civilization, man’s quest for a comfortable space among their neighbors has invariably given rise to various forms of contestations. The instinct and crave to dominate and succeed over others often coming to fore, revealing the frailty of the human spirit and existence. The two plays examined in this work, reveals a placid drive towards self immolation which in the long run, results in turmoil at both individual and community levels. War could be avoided if the people pause to subscribe to the philosophy of love. To some, it is the exposition of the spirit of friendship, tolerance and conviviality that manifest in the sparkle and flint called music. If we were to have recourse to sing always, dance always, drum always, or clap always, the incidents of crises will eclipse significantly. It is no surprise therefore that at instances of turmoil and happiness, the community sort comfort and embraces music.

To the historian therefore, especially the dramatist, any historical review and play that is bereft of the necessary musical nativity, ceases to capture the true perspective and spirit of that recall. Even as music forms part of the cultural space as exhibited in the story, dramatists and aestheticians had sort to impress on the viewers certain perspective to a play. The wish to subject the viewers to an array of the playwright’s ‘horizon of expectation’ in terms of driving and enhancing the levels of empathy has increasingly given rise to the infusion of music in performance external to the story in context. Such additional condiments of music possess entertainment, information, education and aesthetics substance and may add value to a performance.
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