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Text as an Agent and Agency of Dislocation: An Intertextual Inspection of Select Nigerian Dramas

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Abstract

In the world of literary creation, several texts have been created to express discontent and resentment arising from the meanings generated by earlier texts. These after texts are merely on the lane and mission of dislocating the dislocation of the primal texts. Although intertextuality in the world of literary creation and criticism has been deployed by several scholars and for a long time now, the point remains that the idea of interrogating a secondary text as an agency of dislocation of the claims of the primal text has as always remained within the domain and identity of intertextual discourse. This paper moved further by taxonomizing such counter-discourse narratives as protest drama and art. Thus, using the critical analysis and

literary methods of investigation, the paper argues that intertextual shows are not only identified as protest arts but also considered as secondary texts that dislocate dislocating prototypical texts.

Key Words: Text, agency, dislocation, intertextuality, Nigerian dramas

Introduction

Intertextuality is an artistic, literary tradition used by modern African Writers. This is very strong particularly in the field of drama. It is a system of dramaturgy in which the creation of new plays is based on existing plays. The intention is to protest or contest some ideas or creative idioms in the old play. It is a semiotic concept given origination and popularised by Julia Kristeva. She states:

This creative conception is associated mainly with the theory and theorists of post-structuralism. Kristeva refers to texts “regarding two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text, and a vertical axis, which connects the text to other texts. Uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it (69).

This position of Kristeva is very frightening to writers. The reason is that it takes originality away from every creative work because it is based on prior codes. An intertextuality is a form of artistic creation that establishes the continuity of artistic creation. Umukoro states:

It is a method of artistic production in which a writer processes or manipulates the materials of an existing or original literary text to produce a further text. The original version is the prototext while the new version is the metatext. In a nutshell, the metatext is about the protest or a model of it (64).

The fundamental essence of intertextual drama is to contest some conceptions in the prototypical text which may not have agreed with the writer of the metatext. Consequently, the metatext is a semiotic reproduction of the proto-text. The Nigerian literary landscape has produced some Intertextual dramas. These include *Another Raft* by Femi Osofisan which responds to *the Raft* by J. P. Clark. *No more the wasted breed* by Femi Osofisan is derived from *The Strong Breed* by Wole Soyinka, *Wetting the Hard Ground* Atakpo Uwemedimo reacts to *Hard Ground* by Ahmed Yerima. Ahmed Yerima’s *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* is a reply to the position enunciated in Ola Rotimi Ovonramwen Nogbaise, *Isaac Boro* by Simon Ambakederemo revisited in *Drums of the Delta* by Ben Binebai. In this textual interaction between the metatext and the proto-text, something new is always produced. Most importantly a unique position in the further text which is not found in the proto-text. The implication is that the creation of the proto-text is inadequate or incomplete because it does not contain the new idea(s) the writer of the further text highlights in his work.

In J. P. Clark’s *The Raft*, the playwright presents an absurd-existential condition of humanity on the fatal tide of the Niger Delta using the compressionist form. The characters with different values that populate the raft all die despite their struggle for existence. *The Raft* is a symbolic representation of the Nigerian nation. Critics consider the death of all the characters on the raft as the total annihilation of the Nigerian society even though Clark in *the Raft* attempts to reflect on the psychological collapse of the Nigerian Nation. Critics of the Marxian breed who believe strappingly on social realism brand him as a critical realist dramatist who does not provide a

way forward for the troubled Nigerian nation. This is the deficient point in *the raft* that Femi Osofisan intertextually responds to in his metatext, *Another Raft*. And this is done with the consciousness to create a new Nigerian which is not in Clark's *The Raft*. *The Raft* is a tragedy, the characters are doomed through the manipulation of supernatural antagonism. A world of metaphysical animism is created in the play, but Osofisan's universe in *Another Raft* acknowledges these supernatural characters in *the Raft*, the Yemosas- sea spirits whom he demystifies and destroys leaving the human characters like Reore, Oge and Orousi to take their destinies into their hands without the intervention of supernatural forces.

Another Raft is a play that is based on an artistic protest against the artistic production of the raft through the viaduct of ideological bias. Clark's fatalism, Tragedy, metaphysical animism, class society and critical realist approach to the construction of *The Raft* is contested and protested against by Osofisan who negotiates the destruction of tragedy, invents optimism, demystifies the gods, creates a classless society and relocates the Nigerian society for national development in *Another Raft*. Simply put, Osofisan's protest in his metatext is primarily an ideological protest. He considers society dislocated in a drama which does not point the way forward.

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, Femi Osofisan contests Soyinka's Ogunian concept of individual heroism, the inviolability of the gods, the irrevocability of destiny and the unpardonable fact that only persons of honour are destroyed and wasted in the carrier tradition which as a matter of fact, is thematically interrogated in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. Osofisan finds this retrogressive and oppressive. He considers this tradition unacceptable and suggests in his metatext that only people who are condemned by law should be made to serve as the carriers, they should be the type of people to die for the cleansing of the land. The growth and the purging of the society should be seen as a collective task of all and sundry and not the repressive responsibility of a small number of breeds fated for murder by the gods or animist universe. This is another literary battle of ideological protest in a drama against cultural values and imperatives.

No more the Wasted breed is an essential inter-textual and pungent ideological drama on the sacredness of the gods and the inevitability of destiny. The play is written as a protest against the strong traditional belief which is promoted in Soyinka's *Strong Breed*. Osofisan conceives of the carrier theme represented in *The Strong Breed* as sterile and repressive. He argues that man should be the master of his destiny. There is an apparent Marxist presence in Osofisan's Metatext as he advocates collective responsibility in the task of development and the cleansing of the society and condemns a situation in which the salvation of the society is placed in the hands of an individual. Osofisan's drama is a drama of collective protest against collective villainy.

Wetting the Hard Ground by Atakpo Uwemedimo, on the other hand, is an artistic response to dispossessing tone of Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground*. *Hard Ground*, the LNG literary prize winner in the drama Category in 2006, is set in Lagos. The play captures the violence that engulfs the Niger Delta and its psychological effect on the individual and the family. The Niger Delta experience of the armed insurgency is dramatised and reported from Lagos, a setting in the western fringes of Nigeria. *Hard Ground* is a product of creative imagination that has a fictional and factual rendering. It is a psychologically poignant dramatic narrative punctuated by great suspense and irony in which a son, Nimi kills his father before realising that the terror

teasing leader of the militant camp is his weak father at home. The play which bristles with the critical realist temper leaves the problems of the Niger Delta unresolved. The killing of the militant leader is not an end to the violence in the region. By implication, *Hard Ground* advocates a situation in which Niger Delta militants should kill their leaders for peace to reign in the region.

A great worry, the play presents, is that the Niger Delta is captured as hard ground and ends as hard ground. Applying the principles of natural justice that constitute the triangle of truth known in social thermodynamic discourse as protection, freedom and balance, the play begins on a flow of imbalance which is conventional in drama and ended up in inequality. This implies strongly that the play did not develop progressively. For this reason, freedom, protection and balance of the Niger Delta people are not provided or advocated for by the play. The creative edge of the play is blunted and emasculated in such a way that it has no solution to the weight of torment hanging in the air of the region. The people are left hopeless, doomed to failure, in the face of continued violence. The ordering of the play flies in the face of established dreadful wisdom. This is a dramatisation of pessimism, stagnation and helplessness in the Niger Delta. It is a play in which the expensive undertaking of a writer in speaking for the oppressed is abandoned in preference for recurrent dislocation. The ethical relationship between a privileged representative of society as a writer and the oppressed people is left without attention. It is, therefore, a baleful satire on the Niger Delta and its people. Best Ugala notes concretely that “the role of literature... is to arouse the consciousness of the people to uphold their humanity and culture, reshape their society and reform all abuses, spread the gospel of the future and seek genuine reconciliation” (70) Kenule Saro Wiwa holds a similar position; he pontificates that

Literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, by intervention, and writers must not merely write to amuse or take a bemused, critical look at society. They must play an interventionist role... therefore, the writer must be l’homme engage: the intellectual man of action. He must take part in mass organisations. He must establish direct contact with the people and resort to the strength of African literature- oratory in the tongue. For the word is power and more powerful is it when expressed in a common currency (81)

Ken Saro Wiwa’s idea of literature is very pragmatic. It presents the creative writer as an inevitable participant in the production of a progressive and virile society. And this is central a concern for the ideological direction of protest drama. In times like this that the Niger Delta is put under the massive trouncing of exploitation and brutality, any dramatic or theatrical intervention ought to have been guided by the utilitarian creative quintessence conditioned to seek a solution to the crisis in the region. But surprisingly, *Hard Ground*, a play written at such a roaring age of emergency in the Niger Delta runs contrary to this serviceable creative spirit. Osundare in *The Writer as Righter* (2007) expresses the qualities of commitment in writing, particularly the committed, creative writer:

Commitment is not mere abstract aesthetics, but a single-minded dedication to the battle for change. And only when a writer is positively committed, only when he is prepared to back up the theory of commitment with its practical and often harrowing demands, only then can the writer be on the way to being a righter (38).

Furthermore, Odi Ofeimung cited in *Writer as Righter*, in a similar position expressed the fact that “African Writers, who are confident of the place of art as a weapon in the revolutionary

struggle, have been confronting social issues with single-mindedness. They denounce and indict without prevarication, their vision enriched by a kind of articulateness and ideological consciousness not easily encountered in other African writers'' (26) this position of Odia Ofeimum is strengthened by Saint Gbilekaa who notes in his *Radical Theatre in Nigeria* (1997) that "the revolutionary writer should be patient and devote time in educating the people on how to dispense with their burdens and how to overcome their own mistakes so that they can advance with great momentum. The task of the revolutionary writer is the unification of the masses, enhancing their progress in terms of adopting a revolutionary posture" (171). The Niger Delta has for long engaged with a treacherous and traumatic history of endo-colonialism, brutality, exploitation and oppression. Playwrights both of the region and outside the region have webbed this into narrative and dramatic structures in a positive light for the reconstruction of the region.

Hard Ground stands diametrically and transversely opposed to the expected nature of hard-headed art in postcolonial Africa. At such a crucial period in Nigerian where crisis after crisis emerge, the literature of the region in question, ideally, ought to have participated in portrayal, an indictment of the oppressor and social reconstruction- literature that will point the way forward for Nigeria and the Niger Delta. But the Niger Delta is left at the level of dislocation in the dramatic universe of *Hard Ground*. It is a play with the authorial decree, a close-ended play. The gross weight of pain in the air of the region arising from the flotsam and jetsam of disintegrating dreams and the bleeding ages of the troubled region is captured in this work of lyrical suspense, but unfortunately, it does not project the author as a righter of the wrongs in the Niger Delta.

Hard Ground as a metaphorical linguistic coinage came into literary limelight in 2006 in Nigeria. Before this time the title *Hard Ground* first appeared as a book of poetry written by Tom Waits which grew out of O'Brien's work among homeless people in Miami in the 70s. The poetry of Tom Waits' which goes by the title *Hard Ground* gives voice to the poor and homeless. The Nigerian title of *Hard Ground* is located in the drama written about the Niger Delta where hope is denied the poor, the subjugated and the homeless. What this implies strongly is that not all writers write to rebuild society. It is their choice. But a writer in critical times like this that the people and government within the democratic space seek a lasting solution to the crisis who write without preferring solution is one who has no concern for the problems of the suffering people. Such writings embark on a journey of further dislocation with their literary apparatus. This is the point of protest. The dramas that are written as a reaction to such hope dimming works pro-test ideologically and also the dislocations caused by the prototext.

The dramatist's response to oppression and exploitation in the Niger Delta is abysmally absent in *Hard Ground*. It is only when oppression and exploitation are flushed out by the conflagration of the writers' Promethean fire that salvation stands to be gained. In *Hard Ground*, the dramatist fails to steal the Prometheus fire from the forges of the gods of fire to present to humanity. While the creative artist left the hard ground as hard ground, some politicians with messianic sensitivity put policies and programmes in place to wet the hard ground. The Amnesty programme of former president Shehu Musa YarAdua humanised the face of the region. Peace and economic prosperity in the region were again restored with many of the militants. The praiseworthy Amnesty programme was intended to, among other things, assist in disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and integration of repentant militants. The Amnesty programme registered about 30,000 youths of the Niger Delta. Thousands of youths

are undergoing vocational training in various centres within and outside the country for the acquisition of skills in relevant fields. Some were enrolled in formal schools. Many youths have benefitted, many have not profited, and many are awaiting gainful employment after training.

The beauty of *Hard Ground* is hard ground, and the title graphically captures the Niger Delta terrain. Its plotting mechanics laced though with structural devices of point of attack, surprise, and suspense does not achieve a liberating effect at the dramatic penumbra of denouncement. A real modern African drama must create humanity no matter the depth of inhumanity it points to. The misery of the Niger Delta people does not stem from their being people of that region but from the circumstances forced on them by the political gods of the country. In this business of writing good and functional literature in Africa, the postulation of Kenya's seminal dramatic icon Ngugi Wa Thiongo must be heeded. His comment on his preface to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, written together with Micere Mugo, reflects strongly on the protest function of literature:

We believe that Kenyan Literature - indeed all African Literature and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with the people or aiding imperialism and the class enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people. That which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation

In *Hard Ground*, we are confronted with a sad situation in which literature fails to speak for the progress of a people. This is in itself textual dislocation. The Promethean literary flames of liberation are perpendicularly and horizontally switched off keeping the region in darkness and violence. It is a dramatic type in which the literary streams of survival are denied the people who struggle for a better deal. It is a play which celebrates a doomed people abandoned with crammed passion.

Furthermore, the playwright shies away from his true essence of embracing the Promethean guilt. This is a very depressing condition in which the people who are being oppressed and who kill themselves for the peace of the oppressor, is celebrated. The mask of terrorism the people encounter, which the characters execute, is further invigorated by the play's absence of ideological power to dislocate it. In the play, the heart of terrorism pulsates with no ability to put an end to it. Yerima's *Hard Ground* neither points to who caused the hard ground nor how the hard ground can be transmuted into a habitable ground of peace and progress. It is very obvious that the artistry of Ahmed Yerima in *Hard Ground* points to the dictum of art for art's sake. A school of thought that argued that a work of art should not have reference to any social message.

This gory condition in which creative work functions as an epithet of literary travesty and further dislocation is what Atakpo Uwemedimo metaphorically disapproves of in *Watering the Hard Ground of the Niger Delta*. *Watering the Hard Ground* as a social realism drama provides solutions to mitigate the Hard Ground of the Niger Delta. *Watering the Hard Ground* has a political concern designed to find solution to the problems of the region in question. Which is conspicuously absent in Yerima's *Hard Ground*. The population of the play at the very beginning with ancestral characters like late Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Rex

Jim Lawson, Adiaha Edem, Margaret Ekpo, and Sir Udo Udoma is a deliberate dramatic strategy to recall these ancestral heroes to fight the cause of Delta. (Binebai 149)

Watering the Hard Ground shrewdly fronts African fabled philosophy, which sees the dead until the end of times as part of the material cosmos of the living. The return of these departed heroes in Atakpo's drama is therefore strikingly parallel to what Mazizi Kunene calls "Feast of Return" in Zulu literature, in South Africa. In such a feast or ceremony, the spirit of the diseased person is invited to join the ancestral guardian of the community". (xxix) *Watering the Hard Ground*... encapsulates the problems of the region and the struggle and points to issues of environmentalism, security and self-determination. It protests the static and cynical ideological position in *Hard Ground* and opts for the dislocation of the forces dislocating the Niger Delta. *Hard Ground* is a bitter literary piece of no protection, freedom and balance as the Niger Delta is not protected, not given freedom and balance in the play. It is in an attempt to dislocate the rancorous condition painted about the Niger Delta in Yerima's *Hard Ground* that most writers of the region have written plays to reflect the real situation of the region. Such plays include: *Drums of the Delta*, *My Life in the Burning Creeks*, *Agadagba Warriors*, *Watering the Hard Ground of the Niger Delta*.

In this Intertextual discourse, we note strongly that Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen* and Ahmed Yerima's *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* also fall in line. Yerima's *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen* is a drama that belongs to the writing back tradition. Hence, it responds to the position expressed about the Benin monarch in Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. In the dramatic narration of the history of the fall of the Benin kingdom, Yerima's *The Trials*... gives an account that is acceptable to Benin house of monarchy and the Benin ethnic nationality. In the words of Akoh:

The play, by extension, becomes the Benin people's own version of the story in the hands of the dramatist he gives Chief Obakhavbaye an ample opportunity to exonerate the Oba in the trial. The chief owns up as being responsible for the frame-up to kill the emissaries against the Oba's earlier warning and willingness to meet with them against the dictate of the tradition during the season (120).

Yerima's *Trials*... is an approved drama of protest against the historical reconstruction of the fall of Benin in the version created by Ola Rotimi by the Benins.

Isaac Boro by Simon Ambakederemo and *Drums of the Delta* is another Intertextual pair that comes into the investigative focus of this discourse. Isaac Boro is a historical realism drama, but it belongs to the critical realism current of artistic construction. *Drum of the Delta*, on the other hand, is an authentic, symbolic, and social realist drama. It is more of a faction. Both plays treat the subject of socio-cultural, economic and political dislocation of the Niger Delta. In Isaac Boro, the eponymous hero dies fighting for the self-determination of the Niger Delta Ijaws. In *Drums of the Delta*, history is recreated with dramatic veracity. But the point of addition to Isaac Boro and the marked departure is the psychological, philosophical and ideological reinvention of Isaac Boro to continue the struggle and the attainment of political and economic self-determination in the Niger Delta. The late Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro is resurrected many years to complete the unfinished battle in *Isaac Boro* by Ambakederemo. *Drums of the Delta* appropriates the Marxist creative temperament to fight to relocate the lost fortunes of the Niger Delta. This falls in line with Terry Eagleton's view of Marxism:

as a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them, and what that means somewhat more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression (vii)

Drums of the Delta is a play that radicalises Isaac Boro. Isaac Boro's revolutionary philosophy, ideology and psychology which is known as Boroism is placed against the dislocating forces by the collective strength of militants, men and women of the Delta. The prophetic power of the play became manifest with the emergence of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the Niger Delta as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The revolutionary vision of Isaac Boro in Simon Ambakederemo's Isaac Boro which was truncated sequel to the untimely demise of the eponymous hero was reinvented and strengthened in *Drums of the Delta* to bring joy, progress and identity to the Niger Delta people.

Conclusion

This paper examined the subject of protest drama and the concept of dislocation from the perspective of intertextuality. It argues that a literary text is also an agency of social dislocation, mainly when it is written to suppress the voice of the oppressed further. The paper furthermore holds that most intertextual plays are taxonomized as protest plays that calculatedly written to dislocate the dislocation caused by the previous or primary text. They contest and destroy the dislocating positions articulated by the first text. This qualifies a text, written or oral, in so far as it communicates messages and ideas, as an agent and agency of dislocation. The fundamental contribution of this paper is that it adds intertextual drama to literary discourse as a radical variety of drama that responds strongly to textually triggered social dislocation.

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