

Nietzsche's Neurosis and the Dramaturgy of Godlessness in the Nigerian Theatre

A. A. Adeoye

Department of the Performing Arts
University of Ilorin
Kwara State, Nigeria

Abstract

The socio-political elegance and inelegance of Oedipus complex, the eponymous character in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Hamlet self-inflicted madness in Shakespeare's Hamlet, Freud's inescapable Electra complex of infamy articulated in Totem and Taboo, Dadaism and Nietzsche's neurosis are clear (mistranslation, deconstruction and misrepresentation) of the ethics and ethos of existence. They served as wild attempt at deconstructing God which graduated into a paradox and dialectical error of deconstructing self, trite cliché of thinking with-the-box. Consequently, this research work, through Gilbert Murray's revisionism of religion-ritual-drama's theoretical framework examines the dramaturgy of godlessness in the Nigerian theatre. Subsequently, Wole Soyinka's The trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis and Ahmed Yerima's The Bishop and the Soul and The Liman will be used as reference texts for this study. While concluding, we are of the opinion that the dramaturgy of godlessness is a satire for godliness in the dramatists' search for the essence of religion in our contemporary society. We also recommend the aesthetics of de-herotization in religious performance articulation.

Introduction

The logic behind religiosity is an investment in the celebration of godliness. Paradoxically, the contention between conventional morality and

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immorality in the contemporary society is an attempt at re-inventing God's injunctions, instructions and directions to humanity through various religions. Religion, "the act of holding on to God" (Okponaviobo, 2002:17) and education, a status leveler, stand out as key instruments that can make anybody a total man. This, among several reasons, makes a discourse on religion extremely volatile, subjective, speculative, emotive and controversial.

Interestingly, culture, "essentially, a whole way of life" (Williams, 1963:311) and "the chord of the society which binds man and the materials under him together" (Musa, 2004a:65) housed religion. Culture, in a blissful manner celebrates religious ethics and ethos especially in a multi-religious society such as Nigeria where there is supremacy war between Islam, Christianity and traditional religions.

Theatre is thus a gift of aesthetics created by man in the celebration of culture through various performative mediums such as music, dance, pantomimic dramatisation, puppetry and so on. The dramaturgy of religion is not an escape from religious issues. It helps to hone and dramatised the avoidable and unavoidable conflicts and crises within the religious worshippers and institutions while re-inventing same for moral and ethical sanctity of the society.

It is important, therefore, to recall that religion grew out of ritual. The theatre takes its root from religion and both religion and the theatre are historically related to culture and its dynamics. This position has been given theoretical leverage by the Cambridge performance thesis that traced the evolution of theatre to the Greek ritual and rituals all over the world. The Cambridge performance ritual hypothesis has been critically documented by Schechner (1988:2). The ritual/theatre relationship is also the main concern of Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Thus, religion has always been a critical issue in the theatre. In fact, the theatre:

has been used for the propagation of religion in Nigeria especially the Christian religion. Islam has not enjoyed the wider theatrical coverage given to Christianity and this is as a result of the apathy emanating from the followers and practitioners of the Islamic faith (Musa, 1999:37).

Critically speaking, however, the socio-political elegance and inelegance of Oedipus complex, the eponymous character in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Hamlet's self-inflicted madness in *Hamlet*, the murderous disaster in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, Freud's inescapable Electra complex of infamy articulated in *Totem and Taboo*, Dadaism and Nietzsche's neurosis are clear (mistranslation, deconstruction and misrepresentation) of the ethics and ethos of existence. They served as wild attempt at deconstructing God which graduated into a paradox and dialectical error of deconstructing self, trite cliché of thinking within-the-box.

Consequently, this research work, through Gilbert Murray's revisionism of religion-ritual-drama's theoretical framework examines the dramaturgy of godlessness in the Nigerian theatre. Gilbert Murray's revisionism is an extension of the ritual theory of drama. Murray (1961:9) submits that:

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that when we look back to the beginnings of European literature, we find everywhere drama and always drama derived from a religious ritual designed to ensure the rebirth of a dead world.

Subsequently, Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* and Ahmed Yerima's *The Bishop and the Soul* and *The Limam* will be used as our reference texts for this study. Our argument is that religious theatre strives to revive a dying world.

Literature review

The structure of our Literature Review will be divided into three sub-headings. This is with a view to grappling with the subject of discourse vis-à-vis other scholarly opinions on the core issues of Dadaism, Nietzsche's neurosis in relation to Islamic and Christian theatre in Nigeria.

Dadaism: An anti-god and anti-art movement

No matter the contention from scholars on the evolution of Dadaism, what is certain is that Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco played significant role in the formative period of Dadaism. In fact, the now famous *Dada Manifesto* was presented by Tristan Tzara on the 23rd of March, 1918. In

the manifesto, Tzara hits hard at Jesus Christ, the Bible and Christianity in general when he noxiously submits that: "The principle; 'Love thy neighbour' is hypocrisy. 'Know thyself' is utopian, but more acceptable because it includes malice. No pity"¹.

Not done yet, 'Dadaism Disgust' necessarily summarises the main intention of Dadaism (a socio-cultural, anti-religion and anti-politics' movement). Here is the Disgust which is the 'mark of abstraction' in a world saturated with controversies and contradictions.

Every product that is capable of becoming a negation of the family is dada; DADA, acquaintance with all the means hitherto rejected by the sexual prudishness of easy compromise and good manners: DADA; abolition of logic, dance of those who are incapable of creation: DADA; every hierarchy and socio equation established for objects, feelings and obscurities, every apparition and the precise shock of parallel lines, are means for the battle of: DADA; the abolition of memory: DADA; the abolition of archaeology: DADA the abolition of prophets; DADA; the abolition of the future...²

Dadaism basically condemns all existing issues or concepts in religion, poetry, music and the performing arts. This movement started as an anti-art dirge and ended as "anarcho-political" within the expanse of abstractionism and extreme avant-gardism.

Just like Samuel Beckett whose two plays: *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* closely condemn the wanton destruction of man and material resources as a result of the unmitigated disaster caused by the First World War, Dadaism clinically moved beyond the fantasy of the stage to open rally where Dadaists, working on people's psyche, called on them to destroy everything on their ways as a result of the First world War.

For calling for the abolition of all religions, the killing of all men of God, the burning of all churches and mosques and the destruction of all existing work of arts, Dadaism is, to us, just like others scholars; Lowenthal (2007) and Picabia (2007) an anti-art and anti-God movement that should be

condemned by rational thinkers.

Nietzsche's neurosis

Reviewing the works of Charles Darwin through the effusive Darwinian theory of evolution, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Karl Barth, Rudolt Bultmann, Bertrand Russel and importantly; Fredrich Nietzsche, Ade P. Dopamu's critical work: "God: The Contemporary Discussion" has set a clear tone for man's frequent search to construct and deconstruct God. Scholars such as Heidegger (1943), Vahanian (1961), Altizer (1966), Altizer and Hamilton (1996), Murchland (1967), Friedman (1995), Roberts (1998), Young and Haynas (2002), Robbins (2007) and so on have also dwell extensively on Fredrich Nietzsche and his works.

Nietzsche's headache is clear: God is dead. God has been buried. Any attempt to say that God is living is tantamount to madness. In his intellectual rebellion and tactless restlessness which has been dubbed 'Nietzsche's Fabulla'; Nietzsche, while celebrating the tragic vapour in the entire world fumes that:

Without God, society could enjoy true freedom as determined by one's will to power. Do we not hear the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? – for even God putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourself, the most murderous of all murderers? ... Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it³?

Nietzsche's "Zarathustra" was later expanded not only to accommodate the dead of God but all other Gods. Thomas Common translated this as: DEAD ARE ALL THE GODS: NOW DO WE DESIRE THE SUPERMAN TO LIVE⁴.

Curiously, Nietzsche has a friend while growing up in his teaching profession as a scholar. Nietzsche's friend was Richard Wagner who built a castle into Nietzsche's initial works by singing Nietzsche's praises to high heaven. Wagner, a composer and music director has been confirmed to

be the most autocratic theatre director that has ever lived! However, the two subversive artists and philosophers fell apart. This is because Nietzsche "attacked the influence of Wagner's music on contemporary German culture"⁵. Again, Nietzsche attacked the works of Arthus Schopenhauer by renouncing Schopenhauerian ideal. So, Nietzsche finally becomes his own friend – any predictably too, enemy to many.

Nietzsche's madness, pneumonia and stroke were repercussions for blasphemy. He thus ended his life by deconstructing himself. He failed Sigmund Freud's ego and supergo dialectical will within the pedagogy of consciousness and unconsciousness.

A leading voice in Comparative Religion Studies in Nigeria (Ade P. Dopamu) also sings a seemingly rhetorical funeral song for Nietzsche's effusions:

Looking back into history, one who says that it was Nietzsche's obituary rather than God's that would have been announced by Nietzsche. God never dies and he has not died, but Nietzsche had died. God, today, still remains a living Reality Whose Reality is real in His own Reality. Mankind has faith in Him... He cannot die because He is Immortal (Dopamu, 2005:12).

Whether through the pre-Socratic and neo-Platonist philosophers, the existence of God is not in doubt. In fact, Omoregbe (2006:56) submits that "God, in other words, does not change and does not move. Plato's description of the form of Good in the *Republic* was seen later by Christian scholars as a description of God". God is, God will and God can never die. However, it is the God in us that has died and our fate is at the point of burial. The dead of God in us will be clearly discussed under the dramaturgy of godlessness in the Nigerian theatre.

Islamic and Christian theatre in Nigeria

Nigeria, a multi-religious society is mostly populated by Muslims and Christians. Islam and Christianity thus shared one common universal concept: love. This point has been argued by Onimhawo, Izibili and Igboin

(2006:114) when they reflect that "the logic of religion of humanity is love, which the society requires to maintain order. Conversely, hatred can bring about lack of progress. This will in turn result in stunted development". The love for religion marks the critical effort towards the love for humanity which the theatre has been celebrating from the earliest Dionysus festival in Greece to the Egyptian Pyramid plays in Egypt.

Scholars such as Omotoso (1977 and 1979), Ajayi (1998), Agoro (1998, 1999 and 2004), Oshionebo (1999), Musa (1999), Oseni (2002), Ahmed (2006), Oloso (2006) and so on have written extensively on the essence of the theatre in the propagation of religion. In the Medieval period, the theatre aided the propagation of Christian religion and with the exception of the banality of nudist theatre. The Islamic religion has been using the theatre (especially music) to propagate Islam and preach its ethics. While opinions are divided from scholars about the role that the theatre should play in Islam, K. K. Oloso in his recent work; "Music, Drumming and Dancing: The Islamic Perspectives" submits that:

Both the Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah orders resort to the use of music and indeed dancing (in the case of the former) to bring about spiritual elevation. Apart from these, many religious organizations such as Ansar-Ud-Deen, Nawarudeen, Anwarul Islam, NASFAT, Alasalatul Group, etc satisfy especially their female and young folk by providing opportunities for music and its adjuncts on special occasions (Oloso, 2006:460).

K. K. Oloso also examines the critical role(s) of the theatre in the past historical evolution and the present reality of the religion of Islam in Jihad or Battle Songs, Ids Al-Adha and Al-Fitr, Wedding Feast, the Arrival of Respected Personality and Occupational Music. He concludes by calling on "Muslim educators, media practitioners and opinion moulders to Islamise their thought and arts" (484).

Islamising the Islamic thoughts will certainly not allow for Richard Schechner nude theatre when he directed *Dionysus in 69*. In this 1969 production on the American stage, performers were nude from the

beginning of the production to the end. This has been adequately reported by Waldman (1972:97) who concludes that the production "is an assault on traditional theatre". Afolabi (1999) and Musa (2004) have also condemned the anti-people concept of nude theatre. Islam and Christianity will not allow such obscenity called theatre. The triumph of the theatricalism of nudism should be seen as "the gradual fall and socio-cultural degeneration of most of our cherished cultures in Nigeria" (Musa, 2004b:188) and elsewhere in Africa.

With the exception of polytheistic ideas which is against the tenets of Islam and that which slowed down the development of the Arabic Drama (Oseni, 2002:34), Islam as a religion and through African playwrights such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, Abu Khalil, Salim al-Naqqash, Ya'qub Sanu, Marun al-Naqqash, Al-Bakhil as clearly reported by Ahmed (2006:391-415) has had a fair share of script writing, especially in North Africa. The vacuum is that Islamic theatre in Nigeria, at least through the literary tradition has not have a fair share of prodigious theatricality in productions and script writing unlike the Christian drama, whose playwright, actor and director Mike Bamiloje clearly made a Ministry out of. Most Christian churches in Nigeria are now re-living the Medieval period by using the theatre to propagate the Christian religion. It is now unthinkable for a church to exist in Nigeria without a theatre wing which is now used as 'attention catcher' and symbol of message interpretation. Better still, some famous Nigerian pastors and prophets are also theatrically while preaching the word of God. Names such as Okotie, Oyakilome, Obadare, Adeboye, Oyedepo, Adegboye, Aremu and so on eminently fit into this category.

The dramaturgy of godlessness in the Nigerian theatre

Imams and Pastors, Ullamas, Church Workers and Members of the Congregation are common denominators of characterization in dramatic communication through religious theatre. The main paradox of these fictional but in actuality, real characters is their degeneration to the mundane, to materialism which is a contrast to piety or holiness, the hallmark of spirituality. So, most of the characters that we will discuss in

our representative plays think within-the-box of manipulation, exploitation, impersonation, subjugation, intimidation and a grand desire for the systemic destruction of Islamic and Christian ethics in Nigeria.

i Wole Soyinka's dirge for Pentecostalism in *The trials of brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

Ogunba (1975), Adelugba (1987), Ebewo (1988), Oyewo (2006), Musa (2006 and 2007) and so on have written on Wole Soyinka's jibes against fake Christians, especially fake prophets and pastors. Soyinka's anger towards 'Pentecostalism and revivalism' should not be misconstrued. It is all for the sanitisation and survival of the African society that is permanently hemmed down by fake spiritualists.

The protagonist in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964) who personifies evils, deceptions and treachery; Brother Jero keeps no one in doubt about his tongue of flame (the common trend for pastors who normally sweet-talk their unsuspecting customers) in the beginning of the play:

Jero: I am a prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination. You have probably seen many of us on the street, many with their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, many curing the deaf, many raising the dead. In fact, there are eggs and there are eggs. Same thing with prophets, (Soyinka, 1988:3)

After setting the pace for "accustomed loftiness with the audience", Brother Jero makes us to realize that majority of the modern day pastors that are in his group:

- (a) Get women to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy.
- (b) Fight for space in the Beach because of money thus commercialized churches.
- (c) Fight dirty for processions to lead.
- (d) Betray or stab old master or the supposed pastors who train them.

Since 1964 that this play was published, it is clear that most of these ungodly habits have been growing in leaps and bounds to confirm Jero's hypothesis of: "There are eggs and there are eggs. This is the same thing

with prophets".

Coasting along, the Old Prophet who shows Jeroboam the way of the Lord enters the stage and in anger rains curses on Jeroboam:

Old Prophet: ... To drive me, your old Tutor, off my piece of land...telling me I have lived beyond my time. Ha! May you be rewarded in the same manner. May the wheel come right round and find you just as helpless as you make me now... I curse you with the curse of the Daughters of Discord. May they be your downfall. May the Daughters of Eve bring ruin down on your head, (4-5).

Whether the action of the Old Prophet in cursing Jeroboam is right or wrong, is not particularly interesting to us, the dividing line is that the Old Prophet felt shortchanged and using the law of Moses; an eye for an eye - he rains curses on Jeroboam in his attempt at setting the pace for the gospel of godlessness.

This particular scenario narrated above has been discussed by Oyin Ogunba and he calls the Old Prophet curses "ineffectual curses" and he sees "The Beach Divine" and Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* as a play:

making fun of revivalism in a contemporary African community, in this case Lagos, Nigeria. His purpose is to ridicule the abuse of Christian teachings and practice by a number of Christian sects which have spring up in the present transitional period in Nigeria. To do this, Soyinka chooses one of the sect leaders, Brother Jeroboam, and gives us a few incidents in his experience on a particular day (Ogunba, 1975:55).

Jeroboam's innate weakness with the flesh is also captured in the play. His rod is just too hot to stay within. This, he externally demonstrates by calling on Chume to pray with him. Chume joins Jeroboam to pray without knowing the direction of the prayer. This Oyin Ogunba calls "a machine set to work" (59). The machine is Chume whose sense of thinking has

been taken away through Jero's sagacity. Jero is not Jero - he, in the Chume's rationalization, a living "Jesus Christ". Still, Jero's 'charlatanism' under the guise of Pentecostalism can never be rationalized for he is an impersonator only fit for hell fire as can be seen in his tango with Chume, Old Prophet, Amope and (a member of the Federal House) who Jero says is "a back-bencher but with one eye on a ministerial post" (Soyinka, 1988:33).

The Trials of Brother Jero celebrates the failure of a fake prophet who is looking for what to eat but *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1988) shows Jero's metamorphosis to doom through fake affluence, deception and worldly enjoyment. Adeoti (1999), Jeyifo (2004) and Oyewo (2006) have commented on Jero's seemingly transition to affluence. In fact, Oyewo (2006:168) affirms that:

In the second Jero play, *Jero's Metamorphosis*, the character of Brother Jeroboam is more developed. Soyinka also introduces more of the Beach prophets: Shadrach, Caleb, Isaac, Mathew and Ananias. We also have an overzealous convert, Rebecca, the Secretary to the Chief Executive Officer of the Tourist Board and his male clerk.

This 'serpent' is Jero, a representative of fake prophets who spread the gospel of endtime. He has no place in the committee of true Christians. The number of fake prophets in this category also increases everyday in Nigeria.

In the first stage instruction in *Jero's Metamorphosis*, Soyinka never leaves anybody in doubt on the new found abode of Jeroboam in his dangerous abode of Godlessness:

BROTHER JERO'S Office. It is no longer his rent-troubled shack of The Trials but a modest white-washed room, quite comfortable. A 'surplus-store' steel cabinet is tucked in a corner... A vase of flowers, the usual assortment of professional paraphernalia-bible, prayer-book, chasuble, etc. (Soyinka, 1988:41).

Jeroboam is no longer a wretched prophet. He has arrived and this new found status of his, is captured above by Soyinka.

This play also shows that most prophets in the Nigerian nation are master strategists. They change and use many tricks to retain and most essentially, dupe their unsuspecting followers. In the name of your brother's keeper, they also hold tenaciously to the military mentality of esprit de corps:

JERO: Even the tin of kerosene was stolen from a near-by shop... that was robbery. Did you also use violence, Ananias?

ANANAIAS: I swear to God, Brother Jero...

JERO: You are known to be a violent man. The Prosecutor can make it robbery with violence. And you know what that means.

ANANAIAS: I mean to say, Brother Jero, you are pretty hard on a man. You know yourself business is slow... A man must eat...

JERO: Tonight at the meeting, I shall put forward certain plans (48).

There is also a palace coup in *Jero's Metamorphosis*. Though comical and ludicrously witty, *Jero's Metamorphosis* is a historical dramatisation of happenings during the past military regime of General Yakubu Gowon in Nigeria. It has been reported that:

Soyinka does not satirise only the Beach Divine but also the military government of Nigeria under General Yakubu Gowon. The government wants to eject all the Beach prophets to create room for the development of the beach as a tourist attraction. Jero now lures all other fellow beach prophets into forming an alliance, so as to be able to put up a strong resistance against government ejection plans. His trick works like magic and a formidable alliance of all beach prophets is formed in the name of "Church of the Apostolic Salvation Army" (CASA). Jero

makes himself General and gives army ranks to others...
(Oyewo, 2006:69).

As a seer, Wole Soyinka's reflection in *Jero's Metamorphosis* becomes a reality because General Gowon was overthrown in a palace coup – a coup that Soyinka had already staged while making caricature of tricksters who wear white garments.

We will like to submit in this work that Wole Soyinka has never (both in writings and political activism) denounced the existence of God as erroneously believed. What Soyinka is preaching is secularism – a constitutional provision (section 38, sub sections 1 and 2 of 1999, Nigerian Constitution) that guarantee freedom of religion. Soyinka is not a ritual hawker and where he makes use of ritual aesthetics in his work, this is "viewed from the spatial perspective aims to reflect through physical and symbolic means the archetypal struggle of the mortal being against exterior forces" (Soyinka, 1976:43).

In *The Credo of Being and Nothingness*, Soyinka warns religious fanatics, preaches the power of choice in religion matter, eulogises Ògún, his patron god and cautions us against fighting war between "believers" and "non-believers", for he believes that this type of war can lead to unexpected disaster. While concluding, Soyinka pleads passionately that:

Anyone is free to engage in the mother, grandfather and great ancestor of all wars, but the world must not be set on fire through cheap recourse to the most primitive of all human instincts - that of religion... For the rest, I wish only to exhort you: study the spirituality of this continent. As in all things, selectiveness is the key. To limit myself to that with which I am on familiar ground, I say to you: go to the *Orisa*, learn from them and be wise (Soyinka, 1991:32).

Soyinka's theory of selectivism is a wise dictum for freedom of choice and the promotion of secularism in a multi-religious society such as Nigeria. Soyinka detests a mid-way religious person. If you want to be a Christian, be and if Islam is your choice, do. This, among others is some of the

reasons why he hits hard at fake prophets and pastors in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Jero's Metamorphosis*.

These two plays in the Soyinka's comico-satirical repertory discussed in this study have enjoyed constant stage productions. The timeless messages and aesthetics adopted by Soyinka in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* will make these two plays to be more relevant in the African nay universal theatre for a long time to come. *The Trials of Brother Jero* was first "Produced in the Dining Hall at Mellanby Hall, University College, Ibadan in 1960". Other productions include that of:

Mbari Club, Ibadan during 1962... Greenwich Mews Theatre, New York, 31.10.67... Kano (1963), Ibadan (1964), Cleveland (1964), San Francisco (1965); Ibadan (Theatre Express, 1965); Ibadan (Orisun, 1965); Columba University (1966); Limbe (Malawi, 1967); Ikole-Ekiti (1967); Cape Coast (1967); Port Moresby (P. N. G, 1968), Copenhagen (by Yulisa Maddy, 1969); Keffi (1968); Legon (Ghana, 1969); Accra (1970); Navrongo (Ghana, 1969); Kampala (1970); Mzuzu (Malawi, 1971); London (British Council, 1973); UK Tour by Dark and Light (November, 1973), Leeds University Workshop Theatre (1973); Bristol (Drama Department, 1974); Abidjan (in French, 1975); U. C. L. A. (1977)... (Gibbs, 1993:53-4).

The Trials of Brother Jero has always been dramatists' delight. It is being produced almost annually in the Theatre/Performing/Creative and Dramatic Arts' Departments spread across the Niger. It was produced by Performing Arts Department, University of Ilorin, Nigeria in the 1980s and early 1990s while the Department of English of University of Ilorin produced this play in year 2008. *Jero's Metamorphosis* was also first produced by "Glynn Wickham with students of the Bristol University Drama Department, February 1974, Leeds University Workshop Theatre (1978) and the National Theatre, Lagos, 1981" (57) productions were also remarkable.

ii. **Ahmed Yerima's soulless modern world: Hybridism as banality for godlessness**

Ahmed Yerima, the current General Manager of National Theatre of Nigeria and the Artistic Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria has distinguished himself as a good student of Wole Soyinka and the current rave of the movement in playwriting and theatre directing in Nigeria. Having published numerous plays, Yerima has re-invented the Nigerian theatre for cultural and social responsibilities within the dialectics of what has been described as Federal Theatre (Musa, 2007:223). Two recent edited books: *Making Images, Re-making Life: Art and Life in Ahmed Yerima* (2007) and *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspective on Ahmed Yerima's Drama* (2007) set the tone for the intellectual scrutinisation of Yerima's myths, ethos and styles in the Nigerian theatre.

Akwang (2007) and Adeoti (2007) have, however, examined the religious factionalism in the theatre and drama of Yerima. Providing a general pervading environment to Yerima's "Religion and the Drama of Life", G. R. Adeoti reflects that:

Besides contemporary politics, religion constantly engages the attention of Yerima. The challenges posted by foreign religions to indigenous ones and vice versa sometimes generate conflicts that are explored in his drama. However, whether reflecting its abuses or exploitation for social, economic and political ends, or as therapeutic means for man to cope with psychological pressure exerted by the vagaries of existence... Yerima attempts to negotiate personal and universal experience of man as a social and spiritual being... (Adeoti, 2007:25-6).

Etop Akwang on the other hand sees Yerima's religious plays as "exteriorised presentations of interiorized altercations between piety and the realities of our shared humanity, and therefore, archetypal" (Akwang, 2007:56).

The Bishop and the Soul is an examination of man's inequities which most often can lead to his soullessness and corrupt his religion and

spiritualism. A letter, obviously of complaints, written by Father Paul, Secretary to the Bishop and signed by ten Revered Fathers to their Bishop and the Cardinal signals the beginning of dramatic conflict in *The Bishop and the Soul*.

BISHOP: Did you write me this letter? Did you?... Did you send me this piece of blasphemy?

PAUL: I had my reasons.

BISHOP: What reasons could possibly allow you to stab a fellow Priest in the back? What reasons can make my son Priest write such a letter against the Bishop of his Diocese? Ambition? You think Bishops are made through such caustic letters?

PAUL: I had my reason your Grace... We are ten signatories to the letter. We had decided such last Christmas to write to you. If you remember your Grace, we had all come to you... Your Christmas speech. We had felt it was too political.

BISHOP: There was an uprising against member of my Diocese. So to conform with your desires, the desires of the ten wise men, was I to keep mute and let them kill them all? The Holy Spirit did not guide me to keep mute. I had to speak, and I did.

PAUL: Indeed you did, your Grace. And what happened? More crimes against the Diocese. Churches were burnt, Christian brothers killed. And for the first time in the history of the church in this country, a Bishop was arrested and taken away in handcuffs from his Diocese (Yerima, 1998:10-11).

Conspiracy against men of God in the house of God is an extension of the poetics of Godlessness in our contemporary society. The conversation above has again shown that religion is politics through other means. Most worshippers in Nigerian (be it Muslims or Christians) often condemn their spiritual leaders especially when they speak against them or the

institutions that they represent. Is politics not a hindrance to the development of religion in our contemporary society? Just like the case in Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* between Jeroboam and Old Prophet in the play, tutelage-ship is destroyed through the inordinate ambition of young prophets/bishops in training. The crossfire between Paul and Bishop in the narration above is also a testimony to this fact.

The danger of envy, jealousy and hatred in the churches between men of God are also treated in *The Bishop and the Soul*. The first case here is between Bishop and Father Tiku who disliked the Bishop because he has the power to heal and cast away demons, a deep 'charismatic spirit' that Father Tiku lacks. The second and the most important issue in this play is the crisis of love haunting Vero, a Prayer Warrior in the Bishop's Church and consequently, this is the crisis of temptation most pastors are often confronted with especially from dare-devil licentious ladies. Let us hear Vero's predicaments:

VERO: It is revealed onto me that you shall have a child and that I shall be your vessel for the child. He shall be a great child.

BISHOP: At my age? In my spiritual depth? Anyway, the Lord works in mysterious ways, but thank you. I shall pray that the spirit finds you a better blessed and more willing victim. For now my spirit appears too weak for all this. Now, tell me, why did you want to kill me?...

VERO: ... Many Christian brothers had told me that the spirit had spoken to them, and I believed them, only to be used by such brothers. I even lived with one for a year, and when it was time for us to get married, he threw my things out. I became desolate, sad and a figure of pity. Until one day, I heard you preach. And as you placed the sacrament in my mouth, I looked up and there you were, my little voice told me that you were the chosen one

BISHOP: Ave Maria! Disillusionment! Blasphemy! (23-5).

Vero initially suffers alone – lusting after a man of God and yet finding it

difficult to get the man after many men had crossed her bridge and throw out, from her heart, the meaning of sincere love. Vero stands tall to fight her fight alone. He stabs the Bishop: for her, it is better to destroy what one cannot get. Vero's case is the case of young ladies who see "spiritual vision" and most often ended up in the mouth of shacks (the Christian Brothers) whose 'spiritual vision' always comes weekly to beautiful ladies. Vero's recapitulation is seen in *The Bishop and the Soul* in the words of Adeoti (2007:28) as "symbolic. The woman as a re-creation of the Biblical Eve and as the sources of the original sin is perceivable; she is also like the tempter (devil) in the wilderness".

The later part of *The Bishop and the Soul* is the war between traditionalism and modernism, extends further to mean the war between traditional religions and Christianity. Bishop is Èsùbíyí, the son of Èsùgbayì and he had been 'ordained' to be the priest of Èsù (the Yoruba god of crossroads and confirmed trickster) but fate made him a Bishop. Iyagana, the Bishop's Mother tries as much as possible to bring the Bishop back to Èsù shrine and the confusion continues. The Bishop cannot find peace in the church, he cannot find peace with his soul and he searches on to unravel the mystery between the soul and the spirit.

Hybridism as banality for Godlessness in a soulless modern world is further extended in Yerima's *The Liman*. This is a play that shows that "the lust for power knows no bound as it transcends political and spiritual barriers". Liman is simply a victim of power – a faithful Imam who tries to insulate himself from the world of godless characters around him. He preaches pure Islam but Haji, his son sees this as hard and radical Islam. He wants Islamic ethics and ethos to be followed but the conspiracy of the State and the Traditional Institution mock him and suppress him. So many bad things conspire to break the deep soul of the Imam. The Palace, through the (Head) called Bálàlè wants him to share the touch the money for the construction of the new mosque calling it "royal gratification" but Imam resists. The coup staged to depose the Imam called Liman in the play makes him to query our so called godliness which is now wearing the toga of hybridism. Here is a conversation between him and Haji, his son:

HAJI: The village will never be the same again...

LIMAN: Has it ever been? With the different religious sects fighting each other, and the dialects increasing even in our different homes each day, has it even been? Now the people even try to confuse God. In every home, there is either a Christian branch or a Muslim one. Not to mention the family shrines.

HAJI: That is the way of the modern world.

LIMAN: Then the modern world stinks. Even the God of the Christians say that He is a jealous God, Allah is a jealous one, too. How can one house kill a ram for Sallah, and a big turkey for Christmas. How?

HAJI: Tolerance.

LIMAN: Do not get me wrong. I want people to live in harmony but I do not want them to pollute the ways of God, both the Bible and the Quran are clear on this (Yerima, 2004:38).

To worsen Liman's pure Islam, Haji's wife, Amope becomes a Christian. She moves to a church to seek divine intervention and cure for Adisa, her only son after "a mysterious ailment had befallen him". Liman and Amope expand more on the theory of hybridism:

LIMAN: Just now as you prayed, I wondered why you left the sacred abode of the light of Islam, to join this new place where you sing and dance.

AMOPE: So what to do you think, Baba?

LIMAN: I think you went there to find a miracle. Islam could not give you a miracle. It is not a religion of miracles. But one of wealth of spirit and perseverance. So you left in search of a place with miracles... (49).

When Liman is informed that his only grand child (Adisa) has been converted to Christianity and preparing to marry Ruth, a Christian, he concludes that "nothing will happen without Allah's blessings". Liman triumphs at the end of the day because strange thing happens to his (rival) the usurper of the Imam stool. They beg him to accept back, his

Imamship. The paradox of the new world, the modern world and hybridism are further exposed in our Godless society. The triumph of Liman clearly shows that we must make a conscious effort not to fall into the web of hybridism under the guise of religious tolerance.

Religion in contemporary society: Godlessness as a satire for godliness

Theatre triumphs on creative assumptions. It is a fulcrum for crisis management and resolution. The conflict in the theatre (real or imagined) shows that the contradictory essence of human being is comparatively dramatised. For satire, (the poetics of pun) is a weapon of socio-political and religio-cultural conscientisation, a mask behind societal's re-engineering. Coming to the theatre to watch a performance should move beyond showing sympathy for a performer struck by misfortunes or rejected for violating societal ethos. Satire goes beyond conspiracy of the mind. It is a thinking process and a quest to know more, to ask questions about the factor(s) of existence, politics, religion, culture and the challenges of living.

Modernisation, the second face value of globalisation has reduced our devotional power to our Islam and Christianity. Our Islam and Christianity now weep under the hammer of hybridism. We search for God but we search wrongly. We want to know God but we walk on a wrong path. The playwright, a helpless voice of the voiceless, can only preach godliness through the dramaturgy of Godlessness has we have shown in this work.

Most of the plays analysed in this work creatively dramatise and condemn fake prophets, pastors, Imams and their followers and if the dramatist is condemning bad habits in the context of religious theatre, he is calling for sanitisation and conscientisation within the matrix of morality, peaceful co-existence and love.

Whether through Dadaism, Darwinism, Marxism, Atheism, 'Nietzscheism' and so on from scholars such as Tristan Tzara, J. A. T. Robinson, William Hamilton, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Bertrand Russell, Wilhelm Kaufman, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Martin Heidegger,

Sigmund Freud and so on who have (directly or indirectly) denied the existence of God under the fantasy of their theoretical submissions - spreading the gospel of godlessness in that process; God is, and will continue to be. The essence of religion in the contemporary society, therefore, is the search for proper location, identification and confirmation of God as the Author of life through critical writings and preaching from various religious perspectives. Most of these preaching also condemn the dogma of godlessness, a jibe for godliness.

The theatre is not a religion but it is a product of religion and in turn, the theatre serves as an instrument in the proper location and promotion of religious ethos and ethics. Within the abode of almost all religions (Islam, Christianity and traditional religions), singing, dancing and other forms of verbal and non-verbal theatricalities have become daily rituals in their propagation and development. Religion is life and the theatre is a mirror of life. As much as religion mirrors our spiritual life, it will continue to be relevant in providing moral, social, cultural and political directions.

We are in the age of materialism nurtured through globalization and Godlessness. This is because the "universe was conceived in materialistic terms as purposeless and godless and so there is a metaphysical base for human morality" (Oshitelu, 2002:65). Spiritual degeneration has also been identified "as the contributory factor to materialism and that materialism is the key generator to societal depravity" (Adeniji, 2006:117). Interestingly, the "arts - theatre, music, painting, dance - have all become affected by immense material and conceptual challenges due to technological changes" (Obafemi, 1997:12). It is only through genuine religious institutions, watered by education, that the unfortunate tide of materialism in our contemporary society can be stemmed. If materialism is wiped out or reduced from our society then - the relevance of religion will further be felt.

Most religions critically frown at and condemn godlessness. If the artists, therefore, celebrate godlessness within the creative - paradox of conflict articulation and dramatisation then, the artists (through the theatre) and religious institutions (through their preachers) are frantically preaching the doctrine of godliness. A godly individual will head a godly

family and a godly family will produce a godly society. If the contemporary society must insulate itself and wave off its destructive tendencies (war, corruption, tribalism, nepotism and so), religion must play its roles and the theatre must celebrate those roles. This is why those who will preach godliness (religious preachers) must be educated about the ethics and ethos of their religions. The theatre artists must also be grounded in basic religious tenets to be able to locate and dramatise misconceptions, misgivings, rebellions and betrayals in the house of God and in the socio-political space of those claiming to be serving God.

Conclusion

The essence, notion and nature of God will continue to generate positive and negative debates. The philosophy behind the existence and non-existence of God will also continue to attract criticisms. The dramaturgy of godlessness, a dirge for godliness is, however, rethought to promote the unending and expanding functions of the theatre and religion in our contemporary society. This is because "African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies" (Mbiti, 1969:29). The aesthetics of the theatre cannot be divorced from songs, stories and myths and this is universal. The writers, who are "the heart and soul of a community" (wa Thiong'o, 1986:ix) can only be more committed in writing works that will lift humanity up to his God (as he searches) to know God more and lift his soul and spirit up. Interestingly, Kole Omotoso has identified three types of religious plays:

- (a) Plays which make a religious experience the central theme;
- (b) Plays which make the religious experience the starting point for the action of the play and then go on to its effects; and
- (c) Plays which are deliberate propagation for the dogma and ethics of particular religions. Plays of this type are the most numerous, and they are the least dramatic (Omotoso, 1981:104).

These three religious plays' denominators above are inadequate. Religious plays should include such issues that are not totally inclusive in

the borderline of religious discourse but which promote religious tenets. Religious plays should include issues such as:

- (a) Globalisation, modernisation and hybridism – the hallmark of godlessness as a creative – paradox of godliness.
- (b) The ethics and ethos of religious issues. This, to us, is not a dogma for less dramatic action. The theatricality of dramatic action as constructed by Kole Omotoso, does not lie with the play but with theatre director – a theatrical author who can re-invent the play in the production process.
- (c) The activities of the worshippers and followers rather than that of the heroes of religions such as the Imams, Sheikhs, Pastors and Prophets alone should also be celebrated.

Heroes, through well-deserved or fake heroism will sell any performance. However, we are recommending the *aesthetics of de-herotisation of religious issues* in performance articulation. This will lead to sanity in the long run. After all, it is the worshippers and the followers who will one day be in the high level of spiritual elevation to lead. Their actions and inactions should be exposed through the *aesthetics of de-herotisation*. Vero's example in Yerima's *The Bishop and the Soul* is a typical example. Worshippers and followers of various religions should no longer be indulged. They should be exposed within the theatricality of religious theatre.

Written and unwritten laws guide the society. Constitutional issue of secularism is tangential for peaceful co-existence in a multi-religious society such as Nigeria and elsewhere with similar experience. It should be celebrated by a willing dramatist. Beyond the razzmatazz and glitz of numerous inventions and discoveries in the sciences, religion and the theatre will continue to be relevant in our contemporary society. As the base of all knowledge, religion is a pacesetter for inspiration. The theatre too has a critical role to play in re-inventing religious ethics and ethos.

Notes

1. Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto* has been captured in details by *wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* which can be gotten from: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dada, accessed on 13th August, 2008.

2. Dada's Disgust, a key aspect in the *Dada Manifesto* discussed by Tristan Tzara. For more details see: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dada.
3. Friedrich Nietzsche's main work "God is Dead" is clearly articulated online at www.vision.org.visionmedia/article and www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nietzsche/Biography, accessed on the 13th August, 2008.
4. Thomas Common's translation of Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Part I, Section XXII, 33" can be gotten online at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nietzsche/Biography, accessed on the 13th August, 2008.
5. William Bennett in his essay "Trust", a criticism of Nietzsche's "God is Dead" can also be gotten online at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nietzsche/Biography, accessed on the 13th August, 2008.

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