

African Epic Tradition: Departures and Consistencies with Brecht in Soyinka's Opera *Wonyonsi*, Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want* and Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers*

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Abstract

Significant portions of what has come to be known as Brechtian style in drama no doubt features prominently in the indigenous African performance tradition. Scholars have established the affinities that exists between indigenous African performance traditions and the Brechtian performance style. Despite such affinities, critics like Crow has pointed out that the brand of Epic tradition found in Africa is “typically in complex and uneasy tension with the ‘Brechtian’ impulse.” Within the context of dire various postcolonial challenges, the continent is still grappling with, this study will be probing to what extent can these realities accommodate such “open-endedness.” Various modifications within global contexts specifically within Africa, will be rigorously engaged in select works of Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan and Ngugi wa’ Thiong’o. This study argues that though the need to be dialectical, open-ended in dramaturgy is crucial, but in the face of home-grown terrorism, blatant corruption of political elites, calculated attempt of politicians to impoverish the masses, these playwrights perhaps have not erred by taking a radical point of view. Even Brecht have influenced significant number of artists globally, the playwrights studied show how some of his aesthetics are already indigenous to the African society.

Keywords: Bertolt Brecht, Epic Tradition, Africa, Colonialism

Introduction

In his essay “Theatre in African Traditional Cultures: Survival Patterns,” Soyinka (1982) gives a panoramic view of diverse performance attributes in cultural practices of the Eastern, Western and Southern Africa out of which theatre has evolved. He attempts to establish a thriving performance culture that predates colonial experience. Acknowledging the robust performers-audience relationship that exists in these performances, Soyinka concludes his essay saying: “...The various artistes we have mentioned had, and still enjoy, instant rapport with audiences far from their national and linguistic boundaries. Their art finds a ready response in most audiences since their themes are rooted in everyday experiences, fleshed out in shared idioms of cultural adjustment” (Soyinka 1982). The kind of responses that popular African theatre audiences deliver includes actors asking the audiences what the next course of action should be as in the case of the Yoruba *Alarinjo* travelling theatre or to a more blurred performers-audience relationship found in Kenya and Uganda. Joel Adedeji (1972) gave an example of the kind of audience response that is prevalent in the Yoruba popular theatre tradition. In one the masques Adedeji illustrated with, “The masque of the *Osomaalo*,” an on-going audience commentary on the action of the performance is evident. Being a satirical sketch on the excesses of a sect of the Yoruba ethnic group (*Ijeshas*) who have been stereotyped to be shrewd traders and the irresponsibility on the part of *Baba Oloogun* who did not honour his business deal with *Osomaalo*, audience response and participation intervened when *Baba Oloogun* uses charm on *Osomaalo* and he passes out. In an English translation of the masque, Adedeji records when due to constant harassment from *Osomaalo* for his money, *Baba Oloogun* reports him to the audience: “He (Baba Oloogun) reports *Osomaalo* to the spectators who react by calling him ‘*Baba Onigbese*’ (Father, the Debtor).” (Adedeji 1972). In the same vein, when *Baba Oloogun* uses charm on *Osomaalo* and he passes out, it was the audience the chorus pleads with to intervene. Adedeji writes: “...*Baba Oloogun* is annoyed by this molestation and strikes *Osomaalo* with a poisoned waist-band. *Osomaalo* totters and falls into a swoon. When *Baba Oloogun* realizes the consequence of his action, he tries to bolt away. The chorus pleads with the spectators to prevail on *Baba Oloogun* to revive his victim. *Baba Oloogun* succeeds in restoring his victim to life” (Adedeji 1972).

Pakrouk, a performance with a more complex audience-performance relationship dynamic is found among the Luo people of Kenya and Uganda. This performance tradition is “a kind of virtue-boasting which takes place at ceremonial gatherings, usually to the accompaniment of a harp...” (Soyinka 1982). Wole Soyinka problematizes this audience-performers dynamic further when he says, “The individual performer emerges from the group, utters praise of his own person and his achievements, and is replaced or contended with by another.” (Soyinka 1982). In addition to virtue boasting and performers emerging from the audience, humour elements is also found in Pakrouk. Beatrice Owiti in adds that it is used “to ridicule unbecoming behavior in the society thus creating satire” (Owiti 2013). Soyinka further argues that similar manifestations of such blurred audience-performers dynamic is also obtainable among the Ankole tribes, while further south, among the Sotho and Zulu

tribes. Soyinka's panoramic delineation of performance traditions in Africa reveals that elements of what is now understood as Brechtian Epic tradition, have been present in performance traditions on the continent. Specifically, from the audience perspective, the kind of audience engagement that Brecht advocates in his Epic tradition have been part of various pre-colonial African performance traditions. Bode Sowande corroborates some of these elements of Brecht's Epic theatre that has been part of indigenous African popular performance traditions. Brian Crow (2009) reveals how Bode Sowande – a prominent Nigerian dramatist – hails Brecht as his brother who could have put on agbada in the Yoruba story-telling tradition. By referring to the German as his brother, Crow concludes that Sowande is “merely articulating the widespread creative and critical perception in Africa of the close affinities between Brechtian Epic” (Crow 2009). Despite such affinities, critics like Crow himself still thinks Epic tradition found in Africa eschews Brecht's dialectical relationship and open-endedness. Through the works of select African playwrights, I shall be investigating points of departures and convergence of African Epic tradition and Brecht's Epic tradition. Also, through the works of these playwrights, I shall be arguing that although the need to be dialectic and open-ended in dramaturgy is crucial however, considering the severity of harsh postcolonial realities these playwrights are dramatizing, those acclaimed to have veered from Brecht's ideal have not erred by taking a radical standpoint. My use of postcolonialism will not just be merely as an historical marker but derives from Ato Quayson's thought who frames postcolonialism as a process that is, “of coming-into-being and of struggle against colonialism and its after-effects.” (Quayson 2000)

These affinities in terms of widespread creativity and critical perception between indigenous popular African performance and Brechtian Epic is also consistent with Karin Barber's thought. Speaking specifically about the audience of Yoruba popular theatre in “West African Popular Theatre”, Barber (1997) argues:

...Yoruba popular theatre audiences are frequently so rowdily responsive that they have to be quelled with microphones attached to a powerful sound system. Their participation in the creation of the play – intervening to make suggestions, complete proverbs, pass comments, shout comments is hard to miss.

No doubt, with the arguments of scholars that have been presented, indigenous African popular performances have their own brand of epic traditions which, considerably overlaps with Brecht's Epic. Since this study will be examining departures and consistencies with Brecht Epic through modern literary drama, it will be crucial to point out the influence of popular tradition on contemporary African drama. This is important because, even for prolific playwrights that has not identified as writing after the Brechtian tradition, strategies to cultivate objective audience response – which arguably is a legacy of the popular tradition – is present in their works. Also, one of the aims of Brechtian dramaturgy is to cultivate objective audience response and not make them “merely consume” the play according to Crow. Defining the ‘modern’ in African drama and theatre, Biodun Jeyifo (2002) in the preface to the Norton Critical Edition of Modern African Drama, says:

“The modern in African drama and theatre is the product of the complex articulation of the local with the foreign, the indigenous with the alien within the historic context of the modern migrations of peoples and cultures within the continent...” (Jeyifo 2002). Jeyifo's scope and genealogy of modern African drama also illustrates legacies of indigenous African performances on what has come to stay as modern Africa drama. From that standpoint, such relics of legacies will include but not limited to the brand of African epic tradition. For example, in the plays of Ngugi wa Thiong'o that have not identified as Brechtian, at least in terms of dramaturgy, still features indigenous popular Kenyan performance tradition such as the Mucung wa war dance in *I will Marry When I want I Want*. The point being made here is that due to the influence of indigenous traditions on modern traditions, arguably, plays in modern traditions feature epic elements that were associated with indigenous traditions. For playwrights like Femi Osofisan whose works embrace Brechtian dramaturgy and ideology fully, scholars like Crow has question the fidelity of such works to Brechtian ideal.

After an extensive research into audience perception of performed plays that claims to embrace Brechtian tradition and African adaptation of Brecht plays, Crows argues that these productions and plays “seem quite un-Brechtian”. Crow thinks: “...Many African theatre goers are sustained by the conviction that morality is a matter of permanent truths of fixed essences, rather than, as in Brecht's Marxist formulation, of dialectical relationships” (Crow 2009).

Crow is criticizing African audience for not seeing actions “complexly”, and characters as product of socio-economic determinants. Rather according to Crow, audiences filter what they see within a fundamentally conservative framework thereby falling short of Brechtian ideal of an active, enquiring and commenting audience. Crow's critique of two of the three adaptations of Brecht's plays that he analyzes is that they “largely eschew Brecht's dialectical, open-ended dramaturgical perspective for something more affirmatively homiletic, explicitly in ben Abdallah's case, more subtly and implicitly in Soyinka's” (Crow 2009). Wole Soyinka's play that Crow is referring to is *Opera Wonyosi*, an adaptation Brecht's Three Penny Opera, and also one of the plays that this study shall also be analyzing. As insightful as Crow's study is, an important question he fails to answer is that, why would majority of African dramatists, according to him, favor homiletic impulse over open-ended critical interrogations of embedded perceptions and habitual moral assumptions? Why would Wole Soyinka, in

response to Positive Review criticism of Opera Wonyosi 1977 performance, that the play lacks a ‘solid class perspective’, argue that “what did the class conflict have to say about the epidemic of ritual murder for the magical attainment of wealth? Ironically, the starting place to answer these questions will be from Crow himself. Citing Loren Kruger, Crow writes in his essay against the prevalent Western critical habit of treating Brecht’s method as a “timeless set of tools” (Crow 2009). Crow writes that Kruger argues for the necessity of understanding the institutional and more broadly, the socio-historical settings within which Brecht’s ideas and practices were originally forged and later developed, as well as their subsequent modification in a variety of global contexts. Kruger’s investigation of Brecht’s impact on variety of South African theatre practices substantiate her assertion that Brecht’s influence on Africa “is not just a peripheral supplement to his European after-life but is a genuine point of intersection between North-South and East-West political and cultural axes” (Crow 2009). From Kruger’s argument, Crow’s claims that texts and performances of African dramatists working within Epic tradition that are regarded as “quite un-Brechtian” can be defended thus; within an African context, being rigidly Brechtian, might be counterproductive. Unarguably, Brecht’s ideology is rooted in Marxist ideology. As part of his response to Positive Review in the foreword of the 1981 publication of Opera Wonyosi, Soyinka argues that “Even Marxism recognizes that revolutionary theory is incomplete in itself; the praxis, the operation of that theory when power is seized by a revolutionary party that professes the theory is what constitutes the infallible test of that theory.” Although, speaking strictly in terms of class perspectives that Marxism espouses, which Positive Review criticized is lacking in Soyinka’s version of Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera*, same logic can be applied to the argument of to what extent can African plays under study be deemed “Brechtian”? One of Soyinka’s argument while responding to Positive Review is that rigidly adapting theoretical models can deplete artistic imagination and truthfulness depending on the context. Asking for ‘solid class perspective’ in a pervasive corrupt Nigerian state during the wake of oil boom will be blurring the harsh realities. Perhaps, what Crow should have equally paid attention to is the realities of the political and socio-economic contexts of the works his study investigates and deduce whether adhering rigidly to Brechtian ideals might be counterproductive or not. This study shall be examining various modifications within African contexts in select works of Femi Osofisan’s *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Wole Soyinka’s *Opera Wonyosi* and Ngugi Wa Miiri and Ngugi Wa Thiong’s *I will Marry When I Want*.

POST-COLONIAL REALITIES

The euphoria and optimism that accompanied the independence of African nations have evaporated, often in the most brutal manner, leaving the continent not only in a situation of unprecedented poverty but also [in] a frightening level of socio-economic decay.

Millennium Commission report, 2001

Millennium Commission report was launched by United Nations under its former secretary-general, Kofi Annan. The commission, headed by Professor Albert Tedjevore, was another form of interventionist effort by African leaders on African situation. The Millennium commission was aware of various interventionist efforts that have preceded its current effort when the reports says:

The commission has taken note of other efforts such as the Lagos Plan of Action, the Arusha Declaration, UNESCO’s Audience Africa, MAP, OMEGA plus a number of other encounters, some of which have crystallized into The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), whose principles were adopted by Africa Heads of State at Lusaka. (Soyinka 2012).

Bemoaning the futility of the exercise, Soyinka says “The participants were under no illusion that a magical transformation would result from their labors – if anything, they were prey to the discouraging legacy of repetitiousness and to a niggling warning of futility” (Soyinka 2012). Despite close to four decades of many African nations independence, the political and socio-economic decay that Millennium commission report attests to is particularly disturbing. Since 2001, after Millennium Commission’s report, the condition of African state is far from changing. Speaking over a decade later, Soyinka’s position is that the continent has plunged into “deep malaise that continues to eviscerate the African continent – and from within” (Soyinka 2012). It should be noted there has been a pattern of political and socio-economic decay in African nations since the wake of independence in early 60’s. And since then, artists (visual and performing) have saddled themselves with the responsibilities of addressing these various challenges in their works. Jeyifo (2002) argues that “the wide-ranging legacies of the encounter of Africa with Europe in the modern period as the object of imperialist ambition and colonial domination remains a central dimension...” in the works of modern African dramatists. Although, Soyinka argues that the problem of Africa is largely emanating from within the continent, equally troubling is that problems rooted in colonial legacies and imperialist ambitions are undeniable. As the plays under study reveal, colonial legacies and imperialist ambitions remains monster African nations have been dealing with since independence. Despite the independent status of the countries these plays are set in, pervasive corruption, imperial domination, poverty, and injustice are among the themes dramatized in these plays. One the aims of this paper is to read these plays considering the postcolonial conditions of its nations. In considering these

postcolonial conditions, I shall be arguing that the need for dialectic and open-ended dramaturgy is crucial as Brecht espoused yet, works that have not followed Brecht's ideal rigidly by taking a radical perspective in their works have not erred.

For a working definition of postcolonialism, I shall be pitching my tent with Ato Quayson (2000) who says postcolonialism:

...involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies as well as the level of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire...The term is as much about conditions under imperialism and colonialism proper as about conditions coming after the historical end of colonialism .

Quayson's definition does not designate postcolonialism as merely an historical marker of but more of a process of "postcolonizing". Since I shall be looking into how colonial legacies and imperialist ambitions is still eviscerating the continent till date, my adoption of Quayson's definition is valid.

Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers

Of all the plays under study, it is deemed the most Brechtian in style and dramaturgy. First produced in 1978, the play was written against the menace of armed robbery and oil boom in Nigeria under the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon. Yakubu Gowon promulgated a decree that anyone convicted of armed robbery, is punishable by public execution. These firing squads became a spectacle in Nigeria in late 70's that Osofisan questions the efficacy of such public executions on the populace. In the introduction to the play text Gilberts (2001) documents how Osofisan states unequivocally in the "Program Notes" of the play's premiere that, "the phenomenon of armed robbery seems to be an apt metaphor for our age." Helen argues that Osofisan cites the gross material inequalities characteristic of post-independence Nigerian society as the fundamental root of this kind of crime, suggesting that the rich are themselves robbers of the country's oil wealth. Gilbert quotes Osofisan's extensively:

Take a look at our salary structures, at the minimum wage level, count the sparse number of lucky ones who even earn it...and then take a look at the squalid spending habits of our egregious 'contractors,' land speculators, middle men of all sorts, importers, exporters, etc. Or take a look at our sprawling slums and ghettos, our congested hospitals and crowded schools, our impossible markets...and then take a look another look at the fast proliferation of motorcars, insurance agencies, supermarkets, chemist shops, boutiques, discotheques etc. The callous contradictions of our oil-doomed fantasies of rapid modernization. It is obvious that as long as a single, daring nocturnal trip with a gun or machete can yield the equivalent of one man's annual income, we shall continue to manufacture our own assassins.

Osofisan (1982) manufactures those assassins as it were in the characters of four robbers namely: Alhaja, Hassan, Angola and Major. The play centers around these robbers and their underworld activities. Alani, the leader of the band has just been publicly executed. Debating whether it is the end of the road, the robbers met Aafa (Islamic cleric) who gave them a powerful charm that will only be potent for three robberies. However, if they will abide it conditions, using it once is enough to give them decent lifestyle. In unison, they agreed to play by the rules. On their second attempt, Major's attempt to swindle the band of their loot went south and he was arrested by the soldiers. Alhaja pleaded with others to use the remaining opportunity they have with their charm to release Major but Angola refused saying denouncing Major as a traitor and unworthy of such privilege. At the last scene of the play, when Major is about to be executed, Alhaja, runs towards the stake and held on tightly to Major. The bystanders, mostly market women who the gang have previously robbed recognized her. She was arrested and about to be executed with Major when Angola invoked his own portion of the charm Aafa gave them. Others raised their own portion of the charm and instead of firing the robbers, the soldiers start dancing. At this point, Aafa, who also doubles as The Storyteller that opens the play, now comes on stage and declares a stalemate. He says he cannot ends the play with a stalemate. From the Epilogue of the play, Aafa says:

Aafa: (*walking round the auditorium*) A stalemate? How can I end my story on a stalemate? If we sit on the fence, life is bound to pass by, on both sides. No, I need your help. One side is bound to win in the end. The robbers, or the soldiers, who are acting on your behalf. So, you've got to decide and resolve the issue. Which shall it be?...

By actively enlisting the help of the audience to decide how the play ends, Osofisan identifies his work with Brechtian style of open-endedness. Also, by presenting these robbers as victims of political and socio-economic decay of the Nigerian state, Osofisan's aligns his work with Brechtian ideological perspective. Gilbert (2001) argues that "Such open-ended and ultimately anti-illusionist dramaturgy forwards, in the most literal manner, the Brechtian aim to provoke critical thinking and debate." Imperial activities of the West in Nigeria and their elite cronies are part of the postcolonial problems Osofisan dramatizes in the play. Commenting on the complicity of the military elites in impoverishing Nigeria, the Soldiers reveals:

SOLDIER 1: ...With these Oyinbos and Koras, the only decent thing to do is to form company with them. Import and Export Enterprises. Shipping Lines. Engineering Consultants (Nigeria) Limited, etc. For all contracts above five million naira.

SOLDIER 3: Why that one?

SOLDIER 1: How many times I must tell you our people are too useless? Look around you. Which black man get initiative? No, my friend, anything big you must give to expatriate...

The colonial narrative that anything black or African is inferior to that of the West is still a significant mentality of many post-colonial African nation. All hands have been on deck in fighting this mentality and Osofisan, contributing his part, reflects how this mentality is robbing Nigeria of its material wealth. In the same vein, Osofisan identifies with the African Epic tradition of storytelling. In the play's prologue, the STORY-TELLER opens the play in the call and response style of indigenous African storytelling tradition. The stage direction of the prologue reads "...Commanding this spotlight is the STORY-TELLER, with a set of castanets or a *sekere*. He shouts out the traditional introductory formula ALO O! As usual everybody replies: AAALO! ...starts the 'Song of the Story-teller'. The audience picks up the simple refrain – ALUGBINRIN GBINRIN! – after each line. No doubt, Osofisan borrowed extensively from the Brecht-Marxist tradition however, equally undeniable is the fact that *Once Upon Four Robbers* also draws from African Epic tradition. Gilbert (2001) also agrees that through Aafa's tale, Osofisan "crystallize important issues in the narrative while simultaneously tapping into local performance traditions." Clearly, from a Marxian perspective, Osofisan shows how humans are products of socio-economic conditioning although the pervasive corruption that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian nation renders his dialectical approach clumsy. It is not only the rich that are oppressing the poor. Among the poor, they are also oppressing themselves. Class consciousness that Marxist ideology espouses is not so neat within the Nigerian political and socio-economic context that Osofisan dramatizes.

Wole Soyinka's Opera Wonyosi

In the foreword to the play, Soyinka (1981) reveals that "the Nigerian society which is portrayed, without one redeeming feature, is that oil-boom society of the seventies which every child knows only too well". Set in Nigerian quarters of the West African Empire of Emperor Boky (Bokassa), Soyinka satirizes the decadence that accompanied oil wealth in Nigeria under military dictatorship. In a review of the play, Abdul R Yesufu, argues that by transposing the Nigerian socio-historical setting to Bokassa's Central African 'Empire,' "he effectively links together the corruption and self-aggrandizement of the regimes of the two countries." By extending his satirical jab to two other African nations, Soyinka reveals that decadence and leadership failure is not limited to Nigeria alone but pervasive on the continent. Emperor Boky in the play represents 'Emperor-for-Life' Jean-Bedel Bokassa of Central African Empire. Emperor Boky seeks aid from his Ugandan counter-part Idi-Amin. Nigeria loans to the newly-declared empire the corrupt officer Brown. Also, Nigerians in Boky's country were exiled during the almost three-year Nigerian civil war. A recurrent phrase in the play is "he who begs bags" and it shows how the post-civil war Nigeria with other African nations have jettisoned merit at the expense of "connections." Anikura who assumes the leadership of Nigerian expatriates in Bokassa's Empire unequivocally reiterates that "he who begs bags" is the first commandment for survival as it were. The level of squalor the masses are subjected to and the ostentatious lifestyles of the elites is deftly dramatized by Soyinka in *Opera Wonyosi*. Yesufu (1982) agrees that Soyinka is at the forefront in portraying the corruption and criminality of military regimes.

Like Osofisan, Soyinka's indictment on the level of decadence in Nigeria, is an all-inclusive one. The academics, civil servants, law enforcement agencies, government parastatals, public corporation and even individuals are all accomplice to the political and socio-political rot of the Nigerian state. In the foreword to the play, Soyinka (1982) believes "art should expose, reflect, indeed magnify the decadent, rotted underbelly of a society that has lost its direction jettisoned all sense of values and is careering down a precipice as fast as the latest artificial boom can take it." Unarguably, the military is at the forefront of corruption and criminality in the post-civil war Nigeria nevertheless, Soyinka dramatizes how the cankerworm of corruption and criminality has eaten deep into every fiber on the nation resulting into an ostentatious drive for wealth accumulation. Femi Euba (1988) comments on how Wonyosi, a type of lace fabric "symbolizes the harsh realities of the decadence of post-civil war Nigeria." Condemned as a "costume for lunatics", due to its rag-like texture and costing a whopping sum of \$500 dollars a yard, Euba reflects on how "Macheath becomes part of the decadence and corruption of traditional values of taste" because of his "condescension to wear Wonyosi, especially with all the exploitative possibilities it offers." Also, just like Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Soyinka also sets his work within the context of public execution of convicted armed robbers in Nigeria. These public executions, which has turned to a kind of picnic for families, forms part of the rotted underbelly of the society that Soyinka captures. A "nauseating spectacle" as Soyinka calls it, implicates both the masses and leaders alike. Schools declare holidays,

so kids can watch the execution. Patient discharges themselves against medical advice, so they can witness the execution. Perhaps, the most ridiculous of the scenarios is the housewife that divorced her husband when he insists the family should watch the executions on television. She says:

NEIGHBOUR: ...I've divorced that foolish man that's all. He had the nerve to say we would stay at home and watch the shooting on television. The children said they wanted to see it live and I agreed with them. Television is not the same thing... (Soyinka 1982).

Unarguably, Soyinka borrowed Brechtian structure for his work however, he parted ways with him ideologically. Responding to his critics that *Opera Wonyosi* lacked "solid class perspective," Soyinka response reveals he is more committed to magnifying the "dominant temper of the age" than being rigidly confined to a political theory (Soyinka 1982). With the dominant temper of the post-civil war Nigeria that Soyinka is magnifying, how feasible will Marxist class perspective be when sensibilities of the populace and kids especially continues to be assaulted through continuous exposure to public executions? When guardians of the law have sacrificed sense of justice on the altar material wealth? When Jeru, the holy prophet, is aiding and abetting Anikura's crime, When Bamgbapo's professorship was "bagged" by "begging" and not merit-based? Answering his Neo-Marxist critics, Soyinka says.

The crimes committed by a power-drunk soldiery against a cowed and defenceless people, resulting in a further mutual, brutalization down the scale of power – these are the hard realities that hit every man, woman and child, irrespective of class as they stepped out into the street for work, school or other acts daily amnesia (Soyinka 1982).

Soyinka use of songs is consistent with Brecht's Epic theatre although visibly lacking the open-ended nature. Just like in Brecht's original, through the character of DEE-JAY and use of songs, the "illusion of real action" is constantly disrupted confronting audience with narrative, montage and direct exhortation to produce an effect of alienation. Although, as Bernth Lindfors (1981) argues that "Soyinka managed to turn the flavor of the farce into something characteristically African," *Opera Wonyosi* is arguably lacking in indigenous African performance traditions.

Ngugi Wa' Thiogo and Ngugi Wa' Miri's I Will Marry When I Want

Just like in Nigeria, the east African nation, Kenya still founds herself in the clutches of imperial and neo-colonial domination fourteen years after her official independence from Britain. The play is a product of a culture and literacy program spearheaded by the playwrights in Kamiriithu, a village that is some twenty miles from the Kenyan capital Nairobi. Written and first performed in 1977, the play centers around a peasant family that, owns a modest one and a half acres of land. However, with the imperial structure firmly in place to syphon Kenyan wealth to the West and their Kenyan cronies, Kiguunda under the most manipulative circumstances, lost his property to the nouveaux riche Kioi and his wife Jezebel. Exploitation under the guise of Christian proselytization, imperial and neo-colonial structure that ensures wide gap between the rich and the poor and how Kenyan cheap labour is enriching the West are among the themes dramatized in the play. Just like Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* and Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi*, *I will Marry When I Want* is rife with various harsh post-colonial realities. Speaking about how living conditions becomes more deplorable after independence, Kiguunda, speaking to his wife Wangeci, says: "I ran away from coldland only to find myself in frostland" (Ngugi 1977). Poor wages and high cost of living kept many Kenyans within poverty level even after independence.

The cronies of the West in the play are Kioi and Samuel, who, by fronting for Western investors are impoverishing their fellow Kenyans. Gicaamba, Kiguunda's friend, laments on how pay can never equal work done. He refers to Western industrialists and their African representatives as real scorpions who knows only three things: "To oppress workers, To take away their rights and to suck their blood." The Ngugis shows how two set of laws operates in Post-colonial Africa; one for the rich and one for the poor. When John, Kioi's son impregnates Kiguunda's daughter Gathoni, Kioi vouches for his son that he will never stoop so low to impregnates a lady like Kiguunda's daughter. Infuriated, Kiguunda threatens to sue Kioi. Kioi responded:

KIOI: Did you say court? Law? Run Hurry up. We shall see on whose side the law is.

Your side or our side?...

The problem of blatant double standard of the law is also evident in Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* and Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. According to Ngugi Wa' Thiogo (1988), one of the objectives of the Kamiriithu Community and Cultural Centre, is to empower Kenyan masses to write their own history and reclaim their eroding cultural heritage from imperial domination. Cultural and literacy empowerment that forms part of the agenda of *I Will Marry When I Want* makes it incorporates lot of indigenous Kenyan performance traditions but scarcely, Epic theatre in Brechtian sense. There is no conscious attempt to break theatrical illusion to create an alienation effect and neither did the play ended in an open-ended style. Ideologically, the Ngugis appear to be leaning toward Marxist-Brecht. They clearly delineate how the peasants are being exploited by the rich and calling for a worker's revolution at the end of their play. However, unlike Femi Osofisan in *Once Upon*

Four Robbers, Ngugi Wa' Thiongo and Ngugi Wa Miri eschews dialectical relationship in *I Will Marry When I Want*. They did not hone clearly how their characters are products of their political and socio-economic situations. In fact, they are silent on the political climate of Kenya in their play in sharp contrast to the way Osofisan and Soyinka vividly reveals evils of military dictatorship in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The Millennium Commission report rightfully says, "The euphoria and optimism that accompanied the independence of African nations have evaporated, often in the most brutal manner, leaving the continent not only in a situation of unprecedented poverty but also [in] a frightening level of socio-economic decay". This report was published in 2001 yet this has been the reality of many African nation since the wake of independence. As the plays reveal, similar problems that many African nations still have in common is imperialist ambition of Western powers and neo-colonialism. Critics like Crow, who thinks many African dramatists working within Brechtian tradition have not embraced Brecht's ideal fully needs to revisit those claims. Considering persistent decadence that the continent continues to face, Quayson's critique of post-colonial scholars ambivalence in taking a stand might be instructive in this context. For the sake of sanity and posterity of the continent, Quayson's standpoint that the risk of being prescriptive is worth taking should be useful for anyone whose creative impulse is situated in the continent. Also, as this study establish that some of what has come to be known as Brechtian already exists in several non-Western cultures, a useful line of inquiry will be to investigate if there is any the influence of these cultures on Brecht.

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