

From NUTAF to Nollywood: Prospects for Nigeria's Identity and Image Question

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Abstract

In this age of heightened globalization, a critical discourse of the current status of an industry which grew out of sheer ingenuity, creativity and resilience on the part of the practitioners, and its perspectives on re-imaging Nigeria has become imperative. Although its emergence in the early 1990s in the ancient historic but uncelebrated sleepy community of Meiran, a suburb of Lagos, was greeted with anything close to enthusiasm, Nollywood's identity and creativity have been linked to emerging urban popular culture (Okome and Haynes). In this paper, I attempt a synoptic engagement of the literary tradition of erstwhile NUTAF playwrights I dare to declare as a bloc of the Post-Osofisan generation of writers, vis-à-vis the influence of the film technology on their aesthetics, the reality of their conceptual and negotiated or failed identity, and dramatic codification of angst in defiance of the older generation who did not want to leave the 'stage'. I shall place this against the backdrop of the history and the continued development of Nigerian Nollywood yearning for digitalization as a phenomenal symbiosis of the theatre, film and the home video and the popular clamour for rebranding the image of twenty-first century Nigeria. The question of whether film can help be a crucial weapon of imaging a nation is not however laid to rest: it takes on a newness brought about by the reality of the day.

Introduction

The years 1988 through 1992 will remain a significant signpost for the phenomenal creativity of a set of Nigerian playwrights, I dare to declare as a bloc of the *Post-Osofisan* generation, buoyed by ample inspiration to build on the literary tradition established by their older compatriots, the Soyinka and Osofisan-led generations on which I will choose not to dwell in this paper. It is pertinent to note that the objective was to re-write the history of dramatic enterprise in the country in a calculated attempt to wrest the reins of drama from the 'older' generation, whose influence remains nevertheless, discernible in the plays of the '90s and to also create a *new* identity and image.

This strong, new generation which emerged towards the end of the 1980s in the University of Ibadan as well as other University towns of Ile-Ife, Benin, Calabar, Jos, Nsukka, Zaria, Port-Harcourt, Ilorin and Maiduguri, convincingly came with the purpose of reviving the consciousness of theatre-loving Nigerians

to *their* own art, and that of bringing a re-generation of the art. Invariably, the drama which came out of the closing chapters of the '80s had in common, a revival of forms of the past, while simultaneously experimenting with the often media-based forms of the future. These dramatic pieces are less open than ever, to the clear distinctions between the 'serious' and 'popular' or the 'experimental' and the 'conventional' as exemplified in the two generations which came before.

Talent and Vision versus Venture

The formation of the Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Students Association (NUTASA) in 1981 was the catalyst for the new trend in playwriting, and for the birth of the post-Osofisan generation. This dazzling initiative of a handful of enthusiastic Theatre Arts undergraduates in Ibadan and Benin was to be the genesis and beginning signpost for the drama and theatre of the '90s. As an umbrella association of students of Theatre, Dramatic, Performing, Creative Arts and other allied arts, NUTASA emerged as a conglomerate of University-trained future theatre practitioners, providing a forum for them to confront their realities and articulate their aspirations. It was a novel conception to which one of the founding fathers, Akinwale attests as follows: "We knew we were heading for a novel cause when we were starting it all... we figured it would result in a thing or two with impact, but what we didn't reckon with was its attendant success at such initial stage" (14). This idea was to blossom with time, through the dual phenomenon of the NUTASA, and the Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Festival, NUTAF.

The decision of the National Universities Theatre Arts Students Association, NUTASA in 1987 to initiate a playwriting venture could be seen as the ground-breaking, catalytic element for the development and ascension to prominence, of a new generation of talented playwrights seeking to make an impact on the present and future of Nigeria and beyond. As far as their themes are concerned, it was a new vision for drama in the country, a vision which by now, should have waxed stronger and assumed a pre-eminent place in the critical tradition of recent drama, were it not for the challenging, rival tendency of *survivalism* as ideological perspective, and economic pressures which forced them to abandon their commitment to the laudable vision. That phenomenal plunge by NUTASA to encourage budding playwrights to record their own profound responses to socio-political and economic realities of their time was a pertinent leverage to checkmate the colossal influence and image of the Osofisan-led generation, some of whose works had featured at the NUTAF between 1981 and 1987.

In the pioneering eight years of activity, some eighty (80) new plays were presented at NUTAF by the post-Osofisan generation to hoist the flag of the

'new' in the face of their preceding mentor-compatriots. However, laudable and significant as this initiative was, it has faded unfortunately, twenty-two years afterwards, into oblivion. Although the political crisis in which the country was enmeshed by 1993 could not allow the hosting of NUTAF in 1994 and 1997; and Jos in 1998 for the 10th anniversary, the fact remains that the revolutionary vehicle in which our dramatic culture could have entered the new millennium experienced a jolt and suffered a setback in 1996. By 1998, when the drums should have been rolled out to celebrate a decade of the vision, extemporaneous dramatization was already the order of the day on the one hand and the video plunge on the other. Inasmuch as the signals were not favourable, that was unfortunately the end of the generational revolution. The good side however is that the shots, locations, appropriate costumes and make-up and artistic set designs all add to the aesthetic beauty of the films from this generation.

Emergence of the New

The 'new drama' exploring the spirit of the age, without, of course, denouncing traditional resources of the theatre such as ritual and magic, etc. literally took a retreat like the proverbial ram, and re-emerged invigorated in *visual* literature. Most of the players in Nollywood today are products of this initiative, who yielded to the gradual transition from the stage to the home video, which had come to supplant the former in the early part of the new decade, and whose seminal awakening could be seen as the closing invisible chapters of the 1980s was however imminent. The themes on which these playwrights have brought to bear, their own art, the contemporaneity of their attitudes – which tends towards a spiritual re-birth and re-awakening – and temperament which takes mysticism as one of the ways to bring about change, now found outlets in the new medium. Their 'new drama' exploring the spirit of the age, without, of course, denouncing traditional resources of the theatre such as ritual and magic, etc. was to prepare the workforce or manpower for the emerging video industry. *IGODO...Land of the Living Dead*, one of the early video films by Pedro Agbonifo-Obaseki, a prominent member of the post-Osofisan generation is a ready example.

Abati's contention on the dominant temperament of recent Nigerian drama, in terms of dissatisfaction with prevalent traditional and contemporary circumstances (Abati 18) aptly captures the thematic thrust of the post-Osofisan dramatists. The trend which emerged was however two-fold, viz: the "experimental-avantgardist" on the one hand, and the "celebrative-folklorist" on the other, with a variety of stories narrated with remarkable freshness in style, technique and attitude of purpose. Although the originality of their various contributions is not in doubt, these plays – some of which we have already listed –

tend to revolve within the context of existing discernible trends in Nigerian dramatic antecedents, however, with expected tones and shades of difference (Osofisan ix).

For the succeeding generation of NUTASAites who came after 1992, the social milieu, engendered by the political impasse of 1993 had been cited as the factor responsible for the failure of the new scripts initiative and the future of NUTAF gradually became hazy. Added to this was the obvious disinterestedness on the part of the playwrights to face up to the challenges of the millennium development goals, perhaps occasioned by the level of poverty and declining standard of living and rising insecurity of lives and crime wave. The rise of the home video, therefore, as a medium of entertainment, came simultaneously with the declining popularity of the live theatre at the turn of the 1990s. On this trend, Oyesoro in a personal interview notes that,

...inasmuch as the new breed generation playwrights want to make their impact felt on the dramatic terrain, they have been handicapped by the diversion of the home video phenomenon which has lured many of them because of the instant financial gain it offers. Rather than wait for the live stage or the publishers to get their plays to the public, many of these playwrights simply choose to sell off their scripts to home video producers.

Several scholars of the many factors responsible for the emergence of the video phenomenon, (Osha 1998, Haynes 34, and Muller 22 among others, have cited the enviable track record of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre professionals who made the transition from the stage to the smaller screen, particularly because a majority of them had enjoyed the patronage and popularity of the ubiquitous television stations hitherto. This is in agreement with Jeyifo's citation in Haynes that

The popular not only means that the audiences are large and enthusiastic but more specifically that they the audiences are large and enthusiastic but more specifically that they embrace the entire range of occupational and socio-economic groups and classes... (22)

It is towards this nouveau attraction that the post-Osofisan playwrights have gravitated and become spellbound in their search for contemporary relevance and dramatic prominence. Empirical evidence shows that the choice has neither been ill-inspired nor motivated. We are however persuaded to stress that their identity over the years of their emergence has been that of a generation of artists whose bitterness and impoverishment have created a new aesthetic of hunger and rage, expressed most eloquently by their poets (Haynes 34) in this context, in videography.

Nollywood, Creative Vision and the Image Expedition

The emergence of a new set of talents at the turn of the '90s, seeking to establish new creative patterns and a new perspective of meaning by contributing something significantly new to the Nigerian dramatic literary tradition (and live theatre), as we have stated earlier, can be viewed against the vast backdrop of the contention that it was an instrument in the struggle for self-determination. As we have noted elsewhere (Ademiju-Bepo 46), these "new" plays also sought to re-write the history of dramatic enterprise in the country in an attempt to wrest the reins of dramatic mode from the 'older' generation, whose influence is however still sparingly discernible in the plays of the '90s.

These playwrights have projected their own creative vision; their pre-occupation is with the way and manner the opportunities available for their individual and collective development as citizens have been eroded by a system that does not believe in the youth or their empowerment. The first two decades of the home video phenomenon in Nigeria has invariably produced filmmakers who stand as paradigms of the enervating symbiosis between literature and visual technology. From among these, we have selected a few exemplars, particularly influenced by their NUTAF antecedents, either as playwrights or guardians of that 'golden' initiative. The dramatic visual exploration of Charles Novia, and Pedro Agbonifo-Obaseki among other NUTAF proponents, will serve as analogies of what has come to represent the voice of the new generation. The strength of their thematic idiom and dramatic form is played out in the commitment to the survival of the art of visual literature which they pioneered in the country. The following sections attempt critical analyses of the emergent paradigms.

Visual Aesthetics and Dramatic Form in Novia

Charles Novia's foray into the art and business of video films came as a response to the urge to utilize the wider scope offered by the television and video technology over the stage, rather than a fluke. As a former National President of the Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Students Association, NUTASA, during the political impasse of 1992/1993, Novia contends that the stage and television are different ball games. Although he neither wrote nor presented a play for NUTAF, he was once a guardian, who, with the benefit of hindsight, can declare that the Students Festival is comatose today, in his assessment, due to the lack of government support for the students to keep this lofty dream alive. But with the advent of the home video, he like others embraced the new fad (Novia, 2003).

Choosing the romantic, human interest, and family angle as his thematic canvas, Novia has carved a niche for himself as a love creator/writer. In his words: "I see the family as a component part of the society. In view of so much

strife in the society, I choose not to follow the bandwagon, hence, my love stories. With love, we can overcome a lot of stress. I run away from banal themes, and once you are consistent, you become known and accepted and appreciated, if you are good. The viewers would scold you if you are otherwise. It's been tough, but very rewarding."

His works to date, some of which have embraced other thematic concerns as well, include *Deep Secrets* (2000), *Easy To Kill* (2000), *Spiritual Husband* (2000), *Lovers Day* (2001), *For Your Love* (2001), *The Assassin* (2001), *Afro* (2001), *Judas* (2002), *The Pastor and The Harlot* (2002), *Love of My Life* (2002), *Love For Sale* (2002), *When Love Dies* (2002), *Real Love* (2003), *I Will Die For You* (2003), *You Broke My Heart 1&2* (2003), *Adam and Eve* (2003), *Husband & Wife* (2003), *Missing Angel* (2004), among others. These he has produced under the inspiration of Charles Novia Think, from the stable of November Productions based in Lagos.

Analysis of *Love for Sale*

Love for Sale is the story of a poor young couple, James and Joan struggling to survive. One day, James gets to the office only to be fired by his boss. He returns home, tells his wife who breaks down and laments:

JOAN: Why are we so unlucky? Is it a crime to be married? Why are so many bad things happening to me? (*Love for Sale*, Scene 2)

Not willing to give in to frustration, both of them begin the search for jobs. Joan secures a N4, 000 (four thousand Naira) a month job as an office cleaner while her husband becomes a mobile refuse collector with a push-cart. Joan escapes being seduced by her boss and runs away from her job as James is hit by a car in the course of his daily rounds and rushed to the hospital by the driver, Chief Agwoturumbe, who later traces his wife.

On his discharge, the couple pays a 'Thank you' visit to the Chief, who offers twenty million Naira for a one-night stand with Joan and asks them to return with the answer in five days, after giving James a cheque for the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand Naira. After a series of fights and squabbles, James tries in vain to convince his wife. Acting on his friend's advice, Benny, to force her, James returns home drunk and beats up his wife, who leaves home the following morning only to be traced and convinced to do it: "Alright, I will do it for you." James takes her to Chief's house and becomes ten million Naira richer instantly, unknown to him that he has sown the seed of discord, divorce and death for his marriage.

About one year later, he has opened a boutique for her and also started a business for himself. Although now comfortable, their love takes a flight as Joan

complains of his impotence, only for James to declare that he has not been able to bring himself to sleep with her again since her 'sacrifice' for him. Benny urges him to try another woman, whom he arranges for him with his (Benny's) active complicity. The new 'flame', Desire fleeces him until he sends Joan out after catching them in a hotel. She goes back to Chief twice again, (including his friends) but is thrown out like a dog after their rendezvous with her. James eventually becomes a 'houseboy' for Desire, who, not satisfied with her control, approaches a medicine man to help her put him under her spell forever. She is asked to bring the head of a prostitute for ritual purposes.

Joan, now a prostitute, is kidnapped by Desire but the medicine man rejects her. She is returned unconscious to the frontage of a hospital where she is treated and later diagnosed as being HIV positive. She escapes with the intent to kill Chief but fails. She seeks out James, kills him and Desire and returns to the street. Action stops as she puts the pistol to her head leaving the audience with the question: whether taking her life would end her misery or not.

The overriding theme of love, played alongside poverty, unemployment, inordinate quest for wealth, sacrifice, betrayal, immorality, and greed form the central focus of this film. Chief Agwoturumbe exploits poor and willing women like Joan as a ritual prescription for his stupendous wealth to increase. It is obvious that Joan's choice to sacrifice her chastity for her husband's happiness is a temptation which many faced with similar situation are wont to yield to, because of love. It calls to public scrutiny the sincerity and faithfulness of a husband not to betray a wife who goes to that length for him. The audience is asked at the end of the film to feel compassion for Joan, although one is tempted to call her greedy. She only returns to Chief simply for survival in the face of rejection by all those who knew her when the going was good.

If characters such as Chief in our society are not stopped by a collective resolve by couples groaning under the throes of poverty and deprivation, due to the country's economic quagmire, then they will continue to have a field day and immorality and broken homes will multiply. The filmmaker has woven a complex message in this simple plot and storyline. Visually, the picture and sound quality is commendable, with camera angles and shots well- arranged. The continuity must have gone to sleep in Scene 15, (where she agrees to succumb to Chief) as we have James running out of the house in search of his wife in a pair of sandals only to arrive at her side in bathroom slippers.

Individual image responsibility, marital infidelity, senselessness of war, revenge, power, betrayal and sacrifice, apart from love, are some of the others themes treated in his films such as in *When Love Dies*.

Agbonifo-Obaseki's Visual Aesthetics and Dramatic Form

With four published and twelve yet-to-be-published plays, two anthology of poems, a non-fiction novel, numerous home video movies, teledramas and documentary to his credit, Pedro Osa Agbonifo-Obaseki (otherwise known as Don Pedro) may yet be described as the 'rising icon of the post-Osofisan generation' of Nigerian playwrights. The man who won the Director-of-the-Year Award in 1999 for his epic video film, *IGODO*, has also either written or produced *Obaseki*, *Azagidi*, "Nights of Erinmwin", *Idia*, "Sunset in the Lagoon", "Soldiers O'Fortune", "Rendezvous At Hell's Gate", "Goodbye My Redeemer", "Ikpoleki", "Ritual of Rebirth"(dance-drama), "Hallowed Screams" (for the stage); and *Evil Thing*(1998), *Eziza* (2000), *Days of Rage*, *Four's Kompany*, *Images*, *Akwa: Tales of the African Woman*, *Tara* (2000), *The Brave Soldier* (2001), *Spell Binders*, *Grip of Fate*, and *Shades* (for the screen) as part of his own contribution to the body of writing from the post-Osofisan generation.

Analysis of *IGODO... Land of the Living Dead and the Redeemer*

IGODO...Land of the Living Dead is an epic adventure recalling a heroic deed of the past for the sake of achieving societal equilibrium. In a flashback (a narrative technique amply used with dexterity) to a period of hundred years ago (1898), the film starts with the story of a new-born baby born with cowries on its ankles, denoting a sonship to *Amadioha*, the "thunderous god of the lightning skies", and "decreed by the gods to rule over lands and people of the Hills of Amadioha ("Igodu", 1). At the age of ten, the child, Ihekwe, is dedicated at Amadioha's shrine as villagers bow in supplication before him.

As we return to the present, the unfolding scenario is that of deaths, commotion and grief, of multiple ambulances, burials and sadness which brings the Igwe to send for the Dibia. All the Dibia could counsel is patience because the gods are silent. The Igwe orders some young men to get the old survivor, who then takes them to a little shrine within the forest where the knife that was used to cut Ihekwe's umbilical cord was kept at his birth, only to discover that the knife is missing! Old Igodu recounts the tale of pain of how, fifty seasons ago, the gods visited Umuoka, the Land of the Living Dead, with a harvest of deaths, because seven people in envy, conspired to kill Ihekwe, the son of thunder, destined to become the next Igwe. They plant the Igwe's staff of authority in his house and implicate him, earning a death sentence from the Igwe in the end: to be buried alive. The epic journey made by Egbuna the hunter, Agu the warrior, Okonta the climber, Nwoke the drummer, Ikenna the wrestler, Izu the farmer and Igodu the flutist, the chosen seven, in search of the knife which lies in the shrine of Amadioha, to fell the mysterious giant tree housing Amadioha's son whose soul now seeks vengeful retribution, is at the core of the story.

The brave adventurers encounter a lot of difficulties in the course of the journey of salvation. At the water of sacrifice, the surviving three have to make a choice. At last, only Igodo the flutist returns, bearing the knife. In appreciation, the Igwe names all the quarters of Umuoka after the six dead heroes while the village is named after Igodo for saving the land from extinction. As soon as the knife is placed against the tree, it shrieks and evaporates, making the whole community go agog in wild celebration.

IGODO is actually a moral parable for the times we live in. Inspired by the socio-political and economic dilemma facing the present, the author has focused on such themes as betrayal, envy, solidarity, retribution and sacrifice to propose a solution. Envious of his destiny of becoming the next *Igwe*, the conspiracy against Ihekweume leads to his betrayal by the same people who must have benefited from his wealth one way or the other. By the time the wind of death has blown over the entire land, because of an innocent soul killed in cold blood, the people come together to seek the gods' intervention in the tragedy that has befallen them. The saying that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the coming generations rings true in this film. It is only after they agree to sacrifice that succour returns to the land. The release of *IGODO* in 1999 actually signalled a thematic trend in the home video films in Nigeria as many producers went in search of similar stories and themes that married tradition and contemporary realities. Such titles as *Ijele* (1999), *Igbudu* (2000), *Ekulu*, and *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1993 & 1995) were released for the entertainment and enlightenment of the audience from the conflict of paying dearly for a deed done in the past.

In *The Redeemer* (2000), Agbonifo-Obaseki weaves the revelation of the Anti-Christ and such themes as prostitution, materialism, unemployment, greed and the inordinate quest for miracles rather than salvation by a majority of today's church goers to tell a very enervating story of contemporary reality. Three Fingerlings-turned-men rape a pretty harlot, Maryann, while easing herself in the course of plying her trade one evening, after a quarrel with Zico, her regular 'boyfriend'. About a year later, she is delivered of a baby boy on her way to the hospital. A blind beggar at the scene immediately regains his sight as soon as the baby is raised up for the crowd before the ambulance arrives to whisk mother and baby away. As soon as the stretcher bearing both of them is wheeled into the ward, dead and sick babies variously experience revival and resurrection.

Before Maryann is discharged, a visibly elated Zico, a graduate-turned 'common mechanic' secures her hand in marriage witnessed by those present in the ward. The baby is christened Jessy, a psychedelic version of Jesus, amidst his mother's protest. As a child, Jessy performs a series of minor miracles unacknowledged by the parents, until he helps Zico with winning numbers in a pools betting, and one day, heals a deaf man during a deliverance session in their

church.

Soon, Jessy becomes the attraction of his ministry, healing, delivering and performing other miracles while his church continues to grow and the mega-bucks increase, until the president gets to know about it. The parents' lifestyle and fortune change for the better and Zico decides to quit his mechanic job but Maryann accuses him of exploiting her son:

MARYANN: ... You've turned Jessy into a money-spinning one-man kiddie wonder show (P.35)

Unknown to many, Jessy secretly begins to groom an 'army' from amongst his schoolmates for his eventual diabolical assignment in this world. His first disciple is Agatha, the baby girl pronounced dead before Maryann was wheeled into the ward after having Jessy and who "woke up from the dead."

By the fullness of his time, Jessy reveals his identity and takes over the church from Pastor James after he fails to get his own share of the proceeds from his miracles-generated booty from him and his father, who dies soon after while the pastor also runs mad. He brings his 'soldiers' into the church, changes its name and goes about with a battalion of bodyguards and a fleet of luxury cars. For the commissioning of the new church headquarters, the President donates two Lexus jeeps and a Mercedes SLK 230.

Maryann rescues Pastor James and rehabilitates him in time for the epic encounter between the forces of darkness - led by Jessy and the Lord's army of parents whose children Jessy has under his evil spell behind James - which takes place on a prayer mount as the kids are about "going on a short journey of a thousand years". With police help, the children are all rescued except Jessy who is really not a human being and is taken away by the Fingerling who impregnated Maryann, for the scripture to be fulfilled.

From a critical reading, the film is a timely statement to the multitude of church-goers who are merely miracle seekers today in the heat of Pentecostal revolution gripping the nation and indeed, most part of the world. The derailment into materialism and prosperity preaching by many of the new day founder-pastors of these so-called psychedelic churches has assumed an alarming proportion, hence, Agbonifo-Obaseki's thematic treatment of this trend to warn believers that the end time is at hand. While condemning the religious trend, the film also moralizes on the ignominy and stigma that go with prostitution as we find Zico until his death castigating Maryann because of her scarlet past. She herself is ashamed to narrate the experience to Pastor James. Another habit it calls attention to is pools betting, which has actually rendered so many men who ought to be breadwinners of their respective families useless and poor.

In the two films we have chosen from the repertory of Agbonifo-Obaseki, the contemporaneity with which the themes are treated is refreshing. For instance,

introducing the space ship into the Anti-Christ saga in *The Redeemer* is a well-handled novelty. Despite the numerous churches, crime rate in Nigeria has continued to confound every right thinking citizen. The gospel of prosperity being championed by these 21st century pastors seems not to have done anybody much good, except to confirm the growing belief that church is now a business. Many analysts are of the opinion that that is the only thriving industry in Nigeria today. Yet life must surely go on, even in the face of brazen deceit from the pulpit.

The Failure of Identity and the identity of Failure: the Image Question

Apart from the lack of critical and publishing outlets, which has forced them into vainglory, self-publishing, another related factor which seemed to have hindered the growth of the post-Osofisan generation was the ideological temperament in their work. The quest for creative identity, since the identity question appeared to be the problem of the new generation is another. For instance, the generational conflict, the dispossession by the powers-that-be, the determination to distance themselves from the greed, graft and directionlessness of the older generation, and ultimately, the call for a new social order in which the individual is set free from the hostilities of forces inimical to his future, have been some of the thematic concerns of members of the NUTAF generation of playwrights.

The revolutionary potential of theatre as an alternative approach to shape social awareness, the obsolescence in the body politic of present day Nigeria as Obafemi (118-134) enunciates was turned into a spiritual weapon in their plays. The post-Osofisan generation nevertheless, have borrowed from Osofisan his Marxist dialectical consciousness, from Sowande his spiritual nationalism, and of course, from Soyinka his cultural revivalism or romanticism, etc. to evolve a drama which aims at a spiritual regeneration through mysticism towards the eventual emergence of an egalitarian society.

The fourth factor that constitutes a hindrance or problem for the self-determination of the post-Osofisan generation and contributed to what we call their 'stunted growth' is the lure of the labour market in such professional ventures like banking, advertising, bureaucracy, marketing, modeling, journalism, public relations, broadcasting and teaching, as the choice may be. Driven by the inclement economic circumstances and realities of the day which do not encourage lucrative and viable theatre practice, and coupled with the absence of government or official patronage of, and support for, the arts, majority of the new generation playwrights have embraced the array of allied fields in search of succour, on graduation from their *alma mater*. This generation therefore remains the most dispossessed, deprived, alienated and marginalized in the scheme of socio-political development, hence, their essential fate of not excelling as their

predecessors or even matching their quality.

Their representation of contemporary economic, social, political and cultural realities with such indelible insights like their predecessors therefore, gave way to sensationalism, and which appears to be in tune with the spirit of their age at the curve of the mid – '90s. The students began to approach their art, a proud legacy, from the point of view of 'escapist mentality', giving way to "Aruku productions," a terminology used to describe under-rehearsed, intellectually empty, shoddily directed, faddish and incoherent packages hurriedly put together (89), for shallow entertainment. In their assessment, Ofime, and the duo of Leo Adah and Sunday Aiyejina, former National President and Public Relations Officer of NUTASA respectively, in personal interviews, share the belief, while jointly expressing the hope that "the trend will change in order for creativity, our dream and future to all meet in NUTAF and the younger generation of Nigerian playwrights, because the future of Nigerian theatre lies in NUTAF."

As if in response to Ofime's charge on publishing some NUTAF entries, the English and Drama Department, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, whose "vice-chancellor, Prof. Abdullahi Mahadi, since assumption of office, has ensured that ABU was always in attendance at NUTAF meets," (Kafewo and Okwori vi) came out with a publication of *Splitting Images and other NUTAF plays from the WELL*, a collection of three ABU entries for the NUTAF. The plays, *Adanma*, *Splitting Images* and *The Trial* were creative outcomes of collective workshops by the Drama students of the English/Drama Department, which represented the university at three NUTAF editions of 1996, 1997 and 2000. In essence, the dramatic literature so produced belongs as a collective heritage of the students and their lecturers who acted as resource persons in 'midwifing the plays to birth'.

The same generation of which Osofisan has noted, with optimism that,

The main features of their work show a quasi-cinematic approach to plot; a heavy reliance on the support of Western popular music both for establishing moods and bridging successive scenes, and the exploration of the area of psychological stress... They go further still, in the manner of the radical tradition, than the mere presentation of our contemporary society, to suggest solutions, to pointing out where an outlet exists from our present enclosing cells. Catharsis is seriously out of fashion here; the call is for a violent upturning of the existing order (5 Plays, ix).

The collision with socio-economic patterns and realities in the country had left an unfavourable impact on the exciting creativity of these budding and enthusiastic

playwrights of the 'new age' towards the mid-1990s. Their august reward instead was the gradual withdrawal of the 'performance option' from these young men with "enormous talent and the all-too-obvious promise of future blossoming" (Osofisan, 5 Plays). This factor of production/performance which Jones once noted, should be the aim of the playwright, before seeking to be published, (viii) is no longer an attractive option. Oyesoro, in a personal interview however observed that the students today (as members of the post-Osofisan generation) are only encouraged to write better scripts, which unfortunately end up on the teacher's shelves, to earn grades in class. While disagreeing with Nasiru, he asserts that, in the new generation,

...We see some elements of seriousness, not laziness; intellectual seriousness with some of the materials, the in-depth nature of the themes they experiment with. But at the end of the day, may be you could then say the laziness is in not getting these plays performed (Interview, 1999)

The icon of the post-Soyinka generation himself has lamentably admitted that "... These young ones are naturally endowed but now see the arts as only a highway to penury and public derision! (Emphasis added) ("Theatre and the Rite...", Osofisan 17).

Similarly, he goes ahead to assert that the further pauperization of the population has ensured a serious shrinking of live theatre patronage. Corroborating our contention above, Osofisan adds,

At the same time, the continuously spiralling inflation has led to spectacular increase in production costs ... (while) live theatre survives nowadays only on the university campus... The costs of maintaining a company, paying actors' wages, buying costumes and props, mounting adequate publicity, paying for rented space, and so on, all those expenses which a producer must think of, add up nowadays to a sum few promoters can afford ("Reflections on Theatre Practice ..." 81-89).

This goes, therefore, to underscore the hopelessness which stare members of the post-Osofisan in the face, as far as the live theatre is concerned. Now, the only enduring option open to them, in their eagerness to redeem the nation through their drama, and hence themselves, is the home video phenomenon, which they have embraced like a gospel, with a "posturing that is perhaps characteristic of youthful optimism and self-assurance," in Abati's contention (18).

Edward Ossai, whose stage adaptation of Ferdinand Oyono's novel, *HOUSEBOY*, with the same title, was the Ahmadu Bello University, (ABU), Zaria entry for NUTAF in 1989 as a student, was once requested to pay a sum

equivalent of Sixty Thousand Naira (N60, 000) in Pounds Sterling by Heinemann, publishers of the book before his request for adaptation, performance and publication could be granted. According to him, "even at that, there was no guarantee that the work will be published." (Ossai, 2002)

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have attempted a critical study of some of the emergence of the NUTAF playwriting tradition as the creative signpost of the post-Osofisan generation of Nigerian playwrights at the twilight of the last century. Although not in any way exhaustive, since literary criticism is an exercise in the continuous stream of consciousness, this study has nonetheless opened new vistas of academic interest and set in motion, the imperative of further exposition on a crop of writers richly endowed to have responded actively to the transition from the stage to the screen in defining the dramatic trend of their 'new' age through their themes.

In this paper, we have been able to assert and establish the fecund relationship between the powerful mediums of television and home video, and the drama of the post-Osofisan generation. There is no doubt that the home video as a paradigm of entertainment has become a very popular alternative in Nigeria, already transcending the borders of urbanism to capture the rural areas which have opened up to increased viewership of video films telling their story *their* own way, from the Nigerian perspective. As a result, there is now evident in the current trend, a visible reaching for ethnic identification and responsibility in the thematic and aesthetic character of our home videos. The stories have also created a platform for the imaging of a nation space.

The strict line of demarcation we have toed was informed by our strong belief in the NUTAF initiative which we have attempted to situate within the purview of cultural renaissance, time, place, and the available styles, ideological and technological dialectics for the younger generation. This platform is in dire need of revival so that art for the individual will have growth, and for this generation to run away from the prevailing poverty, failure of identity and the task of recording images for the survival of their creative aesthetics. The NANTAP is already doing something about this and I think that SONTA should not be left out as a great percentage of members are products of NUTAF. The ideology of *Individualism* and *Survivalism* has provided the consciousness to ensure an identity and a special place for them in the history of Nigerian literary tradition.

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