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Heroism, Female Political Adventure and Aesthetic Ambiguities in Irene Salami- Agunloye's Plays: *More Than Dancing* and *Emotan*

FESTUS O. IDOKO

&

'DIRAN ADEMIJU-BEPO

Abstract

According to Terry Eagleton, aesthetics is a dubious enterprise that is born as a discourse of the body'. Formulated by the German philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten, aesthetics transcends art delving into 'the whole region of human perception and sensation in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought'. In this chapter, we intend to discuss aesthetics in a particular context, though, it must be stated, in line with Kant's and Zangwill's judgements of sentiments and taste, and in line with Kelly's definition of aesthetics as critical reflection on art, culture and nature. We will look at certain artistic cum dramatic aspects of Irene Salami-Agunloye's works vis-a-viz the thematic thrust. This chapter offers a critical appreciation of aesthetics in the two select plays considering certain ambiguities that paradoxically make the plays

beautiful in their own right and make the women who she fights for in her plays more than just objects of beauty and aesthetic appeal to the men. The chapter argues that even from a philosophical point of view, her works can be appreciated as contributing to the richness in Nigeria's cultural pantheon (Benin specifically), and concludes by drawing attention to the fact that Agunloye, though writing from a feminist standpoint, does bring up arguments in her works that depict the critical place of women (working closely with cooperative male counterparts) and their achievements in nation building.

Introduction:

First of all, let us preoccupy ourselves with the issues central to our discourse. Three key words or terms in this chapter stand out: heroism, political adventure and aesthetic ambiguities. While the first two converge in the parlance of politics, the last term is purely a literary matter. By heroism, it is meant a display of tremendous courage in a political and or moral sense. Heroism in Nigeria's polity did not start today for a reading of some literary dramatic texts (depending on the playwright) does not fully suffer us to appreciate the pivotal role of some women in Nigeria's political landscape.

This is not surprising, since as Awodiya (1995) puts it, a larger majority of Nigerian authors portray women as the underdogs, weak characters without positive, progressive or even revolutionary attributes. Across the board, we must admit that until recently, male authors have painted women in bad light. In all fairness, Awodiya (1995:148) avails us examples to drive his point home:

Mama Rashida, wife of Lejoka-Brown in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, is presented as a naïve, ignorant and illiterate woman,

while Oreame is presented as a witch in J. P Clark's *Ozidi*. And Ebiere, in an act of marital infidelity, takes as her lover, Zifa (her husband's) younger brother, Tonye, also in J. P Clark's *Song of a Goat*. With a few exceptions like Segi in *Kongi's Harvest*, and Iyaloja in *Death and the King's Horseman*, most women in Wole Soyinka's plays are portrayed as weak and unprogressive. For instance, Sadiku is a woman who has neither colour nor much sense and a mere tool to be manipulated at will by the ingenuous Baroka in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. Neither is Amope, the scolding, nagging, ill-tempered woman in Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* any better than the self-centered, honour mongering prostitute like Madam Tortoise in his *A Dance of the Forests*.

In a society like Nigeria, galvanized by the ideals and practice of patriarchy and male-driven development, should this come as a surprise? Certainly no! Hitherto, male heroism has throughout history dominated the human landscape. However, when it comes to female heroism they are certainly far and in-between. They are there nonetheless but hidden by successive years of male dominance in Nigeria (and even African) literary scene. According to Chukwuma (1990:131):

The female character in African fiction hitherto, is a facile, lack lustre human being, the quiet member of a house-hold, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not... Docility and complete subsumation of will is demanded and enacted from her. This traditional image of women as indeterminate human beings, dependent, gullible and voiceless, stuck especially, in the background

of patrilineage which marked most African societies.

Sadly enough, in traditional African life, women are no better. In fact it can be argued (and with justifiable reasons too) that what most authors simply did, was to replicate what they saw and witnessed in their own organic materiality, what with writers writing society into their works. Art is strategically placed to (re) negotiate our patterns of reality (characterised mainly by the tint of (under) development) in which the artist is often caught up. As Illah (2009:5) puts it:

Inevitably, Arts is called upon to negotiate this warped reality. On a daily basis we traverse from one pocket of rurality, into another bubble of internet driven corridors, only to be forced back by the pool of beggars at a bank, or pupils sitting on forked sticks while the sirens wail past. For art, which is the moral conscience of a nation, the ideological compass of an epoch, trading in dreams, nightmares and other forms of consciousness, the gaping wounds of underdevelopment will not heal and will be caught in its digital portraits and narratives.

We absolutely agree with Eagleton (1998:13) when he writes that aesthetic is born as a discourse of the body. Furthermore, he argues that:

In its original formulations by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, the term refers not in the first place to art, but, as the Greek *aisthesis* would suggest, to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought.

This whole region of human perception and sensation is what is of interest to us as we discuss the aesthetic ambiguities in Irene Salami-Agunloye's plays. As sentient beings we cannot, even if at times we delude ourselves, deny the fact that we are often times coerced by the challenges of living to want to elevate ourselves outside the realm of life. By aesthetic ambiguities, therefore, we mean any attempt by the artist to becloud the inherent beauty of his/her artistic creation with superfluous elements. This however, is not to say that artist should be deprived of their creative ingenuity or rights to delve into some form of avant-gardism, so long as that in itself is not bound up in some form of absolutism or irreducible notions.

Our theoretical approach is hinged partly on the radical/conservative line of thinking, especially Chinweizu's contribution which Ityavyar and Obiajunwa (1992:14) paraphrasing Chinweizu, state that women have more political powers than men, because "women have the womb, kitchen and cradle. Furthermore, Chinweizu (1990:17) asserts that:

Everyday of a man's life, he is subject to the dictates of womb, kitchen and cradle. The first set to rule him belongs to his mother, the second belongs to his wife. The first rules him in his vulnerable infancy, the second in his ambitious adulthood. His bride exploits his nostalgia for his mother's set and manipulates his craving for his future wife's. Thus - mother, bride and wife control a man everyday of his life by playing on his changing needs for womb, kitchen and cradle. The power of the womb is great. It holds the mightiest of men in a thrall.

What this translates into is the fact that the influence of women largely determines national policies since men rule the world but

women rule men .Ityavyar and Obiajunwa (1992:15). However, our point of departure is the sad fact that we do not think that men are oppressed by women, at least not in the sense that Chinweizu asserts. Besides, even if women oppress men in Nigeria, it is far-fetched, and the worst case scenario is that the man often has the upper hand and the woman is once again at the receiving end of the harsh and bitter reality of life in patriarchal mode. In addition, the men have dominated the political space for so long that the women now have to struggle (or re-negotiate?) to gain equal access to the space of politics. It is actually here that much power is wielded to affect life and society.

Our theoretical approach is also partly hinged on the critical feminist line of thinking. According to Ityavyar and Obiajunwa (1992:20):

Critical feminism as a theory of change holds that the long established myths and even jokes that misrepresent or downgrade women should be abolished to allow room for a new and a better socialization process in society which will not deny women their rightful position in society.

At this juncture, the point must be made that a chapter such as this by two males should be suspect. As Ngozi Udengwu in Akinyemi (2009:199) puts it, we are only sympathetic to the female cause. Nevertheless, we agree very well with the assertion of Chukwuma (1990:131) that feminism must be seen in the obvious handicaps of being female in a male-dominated society and the second class status this bestows.

At any rate and until recently nobody chooses his or her sex. This is not to say that genetic engineering allows us to do so in a strict sense. Spouses can choose which sex to allow and which not to, while the child in the womb is oblivious of all these permutations.

In another breath, we must not lose sight of the position of Ezeigbo (1990:144) that there is a sense in which a writer can be proclaimed as a feminist if s/he:

...commits his or her energies, actively to exposing the sexist tragedy of women's history, protesting the ongoing degradation of women, celebrating their physical and intellectual capabilities and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of (their) role.

It is interesting to note that in her own study of women participation in politics, Nigeria to be specific, Irene Salami-Agunloye herself has noted that cultural inhibitions perpetuated and reinforced by patriarchal norms relegate women to the margin and require them to be seen and not be heard, while cultural views about the woman continue to devalue her dignity and worth and the society see women as unequal to men. This chapter therefore is an encounter with the relationship between politics, women, and their participation in governance, in order to substantiate the level of ambiguities in Agunloye's plays in her quest to ultimately enthrone gender equality by denouncing women marginalisation and advancing their role and status as complementary partners in progress.

Back grounding Heroism and Female Political Venture in Nigeria

In a philosophical sense, how can we know where we are going without reckoning with where we are coming from? Women issues have been treated with some sort of reckless abandon. The background to women issues dates back to pre-colonial era that has not fully been erased even with today's post-colonial reality in Africa. We subscribe to the opinion of Mandela(1991:199) that the major challenge facing women of Africa, as part of the Third World, is to restructure their lives in their own cultural context, to modernise yet remain intrinsically African, to develop their economies without

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becoming beholden to the first world. How very right she was and still is, given the contributions of women in the past and present time.

Moreover, the contributions of women (from pre-colonial to post colonial period) to the political and economic development of Africa and indeed Nigeria are trapped here and there in some nondescript documentation only now unearthed by zealous writers trying to right the wrongs. Awe (1992:13) made the point that women have been quite active, socially and politically, in the affairs of their communities in Nigeria. The Northern part of the country is full of many examples. A mention of some of them from across the length and breadth of Nigeria will serve to illustrate the point. In a similar vein Onyekachi (2000:1) writes that:

Women's struggle for development in Nigeria dates back to several decades before the country's independence. Women in pre-independent Nigeria were in the forefront of the fight for rights, justice and equality. The likes of Queen Amina of Zauzzau, Moremi of Ife, Iyalode Efunsetan of Ibadan, Madams Emotan of Benin, and Tinubu of Lagos wielded power and made indelible marks on the sands of time.

Writing along similar lines, Iorapuu (2006:108) makes the point that:

The quest for political visibility by Nigerian women has increased systematically since the early struggles in 1929, when women in the southern part of Nigeria stepped out against the injustices of the colonial administration and their impact on women's status and quality of life. Both the "Egba Women's Riot" and the "Aba Women's Boycott"

in the south and east respectively were significant statements about the roles of women in the society.

A significant point to note is the strategic roles of the much respected Mrs Ransome Kuti who greatly influenced the politics of the Western Region and even rose to become the President-General of the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU) in 1956. And there was also Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, a member of the Eastern House of Assembly. Onyekachi (2000:3). No doubt women have displayed some good measure of courage to add value to Nigeria's politics and economy by venturing out where the males have dared.

Even though Nigeria is signatory to most of United Nation's instruments on the rights of women especially the 1975-1985 declaration as the Decade for Women which mandated all members to implement by establishing national machineries to integrate women into the mainstream of their country's development. Iorapuu (2006: 109), it is sad to note that it was only in 1989 (fourteen years after) that Nigeria established the National Commission for Women. This is the level of ignominy that women issues are treated in Nigeria. As Iorapuu (2006:108) writes:

The political happenings and manipulations of women between 1999 and 2003 infuriated many women of the political class. Strong female civil activists that ventured into politics were methodically played out of the race. Those that were successfully elected and held key positions were impeached. Several instances abound where women were shamefully diminished out of politics.

All these point to the fact that it is not yet *uhuru* for women's quest for equal participation in Nigeria's political space. It does appear that the road to achieving success is laden with thorns.

Female Political Venture and Aesthetic Ambiguities in Agunloye's Plays.

The first play in focus in this chapter, *More Than Dancing* first published in 2003, is propagandist in intent, firstly, to encourage the discarding of the poor impression people have about women politicians carried forward from generation to generation. Secondly, it also seeks to mobilize and liberate women into taking active role in politics at the centre of governance in Nigeria. Inasmuch as a play or rather, a creative work must have a locality before going global, *More than Dancing* fails to go beyond the local political space of Nigeria, although it can be said to have been influenced by the global affirmative action of the Beijing Conference.

More Than Dancing begins with an open challenge by the Women Leader of the ruling United People's Liberation Party, UPLP, Madam Bisi Adigun, against the tradition of seeing women merely as dancers at political rallies and party functions while the men occupy every position of relevance in the party hierarchy. She puts it bluntly:

BISI: Is dancing all we can do? Is that all we are meant for? ... (*Points at the top row where the dignitaries are seated*). Look at the high table. How many women do you see up there? The seats are filled with men. Where are the women? Where are the women, I ask? ... (p.1)

She however does not find this challenge easy as the men she is out to fight are up to the game, having been there for ages. Sani retorts:

SANI: You are not ripe enough to lead. Your time has not come. Wait for your time. Don't jump the gun (p.3).

Interestingly, the thrust of the play has dominated the front burner of intellectual discourse for as long as feminism has become a field of study. It is partly a war of the sexes and partly a struggle for the emancipation of a perceived marginalised section of the society. Anchored on contemporary mentality, the playwright who has done some intellectual work in that area argues that proper representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective into the decision-making process will bring about radical change in power structures, rather than remain contented with the hand-outs of -bags of rice, salt, maggi cubes and wrappers- to be shared among thirty-five women.

More Than Dancing is an attempt at focusing attention on the need for the much-needed synergy between female and male politicians beyond the confines of the home front against the backdrop of society's widely accepted unwritten law of male superiority and dominance. Irene Salami-Agunloye in this play strives to shake off the stupor of an age-long dominance of the man over the woman as our society increasingly is presently witnessing a vibrancy inspired by the ultimate strive for the attainment of the Beijing Platform of Action resolution on 30% women representation in government for national development and equity. The women are mobilised by Madam Bisi, as we encounter in succeeding scenes to reveal their level of readiness. Madu anxiously affirms:

MADU: ... In their caucus group there are a lot of professional women. Omozele is a medical doctor; Boma is a judge, Ebele is a reputable market woman. Azira is a petroleum engineer; Alero is a chartered accountant; Garos is a top computer engineer; Aisha is a diplomat; they have many lawyers, university lecturers...market women, women in purdah...They've mobilized women from

all works of life...That is dangerous, really dangerous (Pp.31-32).

Eventually they shortlist Hajiya Aisha Gambo and Prof. Nona Odaro as their possible presidential candidates after the suggestion by Alero that they should present a candidate and form an all-female party and dump UPLP is rejected. Aisha who is chosen declines, citing personal reasons, and offers to step down for the professor in what can be seen as a glaring departure from the norm, a smooth, rancour-free selection process, as against the tendency among the menfolk.

As expected, Madam Bisi Adigun is invited by the UPLP power brokers alright, in their attempt to buy them over with the juicy offer of the vice presidential slot to their candidate, ministerial appointments, deputy speaker and a few seats on the boards of some government parastatals, apart from the sum of thirty million naira meant for mobilisation. But in a clever move, Bisi responds in the affirmative to the shock of her companions to the meeting, giving the impression that the women will accept the offers except the money. After the attempts by the men to infiltrate the women's camp fail, the women convince the electorate and announce their candidature of Nona. Hardly had Nona's husband, Ambassador Uyi Odaro thrown his weight behind his wife's aspiration, as he affirms in his response to the delegation of men that come to persuade him to join their cause:

UYI: Funny isn't it? My wife is vying for presidency; then I her husband will condescend to come up as the running mate of Alhaji Bawa. What an insult? Is that a strategy for you to destabilize my home or to force my wife out of the race? Go back, tell the others that I am determined to stand by my wife. I will support her as she has always

supported me. I will not disappoint her under any circumstances. (pp.55-56).

Aesthetically, as much as the playwright tries to deconstruct the notion of money politics in Nigeria and the myth of money bags having hijacked the adventure, her ambiguity comes to the fore as the women also mobilise a lot of money for their campaign in order to contend with the male counterpart. Rather than liberate women from the stereotypes and age-long antagonism and put them on the path of proud and purposeful participation in politics, *More Than Dancing* succeeds in sacrificing the women on the altar of political expediency and adventure. Irene Salami-Agunloye merely brings up issues of gender equality and the struggle for women to mount the soap box and not the gendered strategy to pull the carpet from under the masculine feet. Here, Femi Osofisan's *Restless Run of Locusts* (1975) comes to mind as one recalls the Iyabo Kuti who had to stand against her own father in an electoral contest as a response to his way and manner of employing political violence which almost claims the life of her fiancé, Sanda. Osofisan's handling of the subject shows an aesthetic maturity perhaps unexpected of someone just starting out as a playwright at the time the play was written. Could it be interpreted that he was more grounded in the art and craft of playwriting, or the fact that he is a male-feminist writer?

On another front, one does not understand whether her attempt is to justify the choice of Nona and convince her 'beyond reasonable doubt' that she is the messiah, or another attempt at committing a suicidal aesthetic ambiguity. The playwright chooses to wake up some national heroines such as Queen Amina, Idia, Moremi, Queen Kambassa, Madam Tinubu, Funmilayo Kuti, Emotan, Inikpi, Gambo Sawaba, and the women of Calabar, Aba and Ogoni who appear to her in series of dreams or trances. While she is calling for a censure to dancing by women, she employs dance as an element of propaganda in the array of mythical and real heroines who are roused from their

peaceful respite to recount their heroic deeds and strengthen her resolve to contest the presidency. Could she be excused because the whole thing is about theatre and spectacle? The heroines come with a retinue of dancers each and treat Nona to a rich display of their culture, art, wisdom, candour and valour, to celebrate the best in our cultural and tourism heritage, unlike the political rallies. Perhaps the playwright feels she can get away with this since there are few men on hand to watch (and get titillated by?) the dancers - a development she abhors.

The first generation of African and Nigerian women had a robust romance with the culture and tradition because they had strong ties with the society. They were obviously ready and willing to do anything that would ensure peace and harmony in their communities. As Kafewo (2008:15, 16) notes, the ambience of culture, religion through language... had conditioned the woman to accept that she is a symbol defined by cultural beliefs. In line with this, the woman always is willing to give herself to preserve humanity. More than Dancing would have succeeded in the area of social engineering – rousing the consciousness of a particular segment of the society to the desirability and practicability of a more active participation of women in governance but it is clearly deficient in aesthetic verisimilitude.

The second play in focus in this chapter is *Emotan*. The play was first published in May 2001, and has enjoyed several stage productions in the Open Air Theatre of the University of Jos in central Nigeria. It is interesting to note that in the prefatory statement the playwright does not hesitate to state that it is an historical play and she lets us in on her motive for writing the play. As she puts it, writing *Emotan* is her contribution to the effort to celebrate women's achievement in history books...(and) help initiate the process of deconstructing the patriarchal ideology which restricts women in nearly all endeavours (pp.iii & iv). Equally interesting is the Foreward,

written by no less a personality than the erudite Dapo Adelugba, where he showers encomiums on both the playwright and the play as well:

...Salami's *Emotan* is the most recent breakthrough in the line of dramatic works which celebrate our national history... Emotan has come at an auspicious time in Nigeria's (indeed in Africa's) development; at a time when we are celebrating the strength of women as equal partners in building a new Nigeria and a new Africa. There have been dramatic works celebrating the valiant Female before now. What marks Emotan, the historical personage and Emotan the heroine of this dramatic narrative out for special recognition, is the very ordinariness and affability of the character. Unlike other historical figures remarkable on account of their sternness or their authoritativeness or notable for their seductive charms, or for their masochistic or militaristic attributes: Emotan is the eternal pleasant feminine, loved by the rich and poor, kind to the old and the young, gentle even when ... she is being oppressed and maltreated. Emotan is the playwright's celebration of Reason and Reasonableness (p. i) (*emphasis ours*).

We have quoted this at length to draw attention to issues raised. We shall return to this later. Suffice to say that the play treats the subject matter of patriarchy, generational transfer and good leadership. Patterned along Aristotelian aesthetics but with a tint of Arthur Miller's common man kind of tragedy, the play is set in deep-rooted ancient Benin-styled patriarchy. The play tells the story of Emotan who dares (where nobody else offers) to help Prince Ogun back to power as the Oba of Benin, the latter having lost out of the power struggle and

intrigues masterminded by his younger brother, Prince Irughe with the support of the kingmakers.

The highlight is the pivotal role Emotan plays in enthroning Prince Ogun and how she goes about it with audacity. From the first scene, we are introduced to the manoeuvrings of the kingmakers with snippets of male chauvinism which eventually sends Prince Ogun into exile while aiding and abetting Prince Irughe to usurp the throne (as Oba Uwaifiokun). In Scene Three this is been achieved. But the rejoicing is cut short with news that Prince Ogun is still alive and is planning to stage a come back. This leads to a serious argument between the Chiefs, daggers are drawn and Oba Uwaifiokun steps in:

Uwaifiokun: *(Rises from his throne)* Enough. Enough, my chiefs. This is very disgraceful. Why do you fight and quarrel like women? (p.14)

Interestingly at the Igue festival – a ceremony in honour of Oba Uwaifiokun, all the women present are happy to be part of it and pour blessings on the Oba by presenting ewere leaves to him except Emotan. According to the stage directions; “As all say Ise ee in-between the prayers, Emotan is quiet. She is withdrawn and sad. Iriowen collects the ewere leaves from all the women and present them to Chief Ihama. Emotan refuses to give up her leave”(p.30). Emotan’s audacious refusal is a display of immense courage and doggedness. This act of refusing to be part of a sham does not go down well with the Oba. It worries the Oba so much that following the advice of his chiefs he hatches a plan to ba i egban Emotan. Ba i egban, as the glossary reveals is an “act of isolating a woman whom the Oba desires to marry. By this act, she becomes the Oba’s ‘property’, irrespective of the family” (p.96). The purpose is

unequivocal and the argument specious. As Chief Ihama advises the Oba :

Ihama: Your majesty, I can't see any reason why Emotan, sluggish Emotan, a widow without the support of any man should be a source of concern to you. She is a very pretty woman; she has never had any child... I think you should 'ba e igban' and put her in your harem. Let her become one of your numerous wives under the care of your Eson (p. 22) •

Subsequent scenes reveal that this plan fails to yield the much desired result as Emotan refuses to capitulate. Meanwhile, Emotan in her characteristic manner encourages the women to come take up shops at the Oba's market. This is well-intentioned as she sees it as a way of liberating the women from the shackles of their husbands by making them earn some money of their own which can go a long way to ease tension (in the home front) and enable the women meet other needs. At first, the women resist but later bow to Emotan's convincing arguments. As the play progresses, it becomes obvious that Emotan is in league with Prince Ogun in an attempt to help him regain his throne. The king's agitation is doused by the chiefs' persuasions that "Emotan is just a woman. She can do you no harm. She is at Ekioba selling her wares from morning till evening. What time does she have to plot against your life or throne?"(p.43).

By leaps and bounds, Emotan's quest to aid and abet Prince Ogun is declared openly in an attempt to win the support of the market women. In a fiery speech, she declares:

Emotan: ... my fellow sisters of Oba market. I greet you all... Have no fear for my life. I am ready to lay it down for the sake of this cause. Put

yourself in Prince Ogun's situation, a prince and heir apparent to the throne of Benin, wondering about in the forest, living on wild fruits, lizards and rats. I am not just fighting for Ogun. I am fighting for the good of Benin. This injustice must not be allowed to take a bed and lie down in our land. No. Never (p. 47).

This sparks off discussion among the women who come to the knowledge that Prince Irughe's ascension to the throne is on a false claim, bordering on deception he concocts and which the kingmakers totally believe since Prince Irughe will be easy to manipulate for selfish gains. Even more revealing is the fact that Prince Ogun is alive and not dead as earlier on claimed by his brother, Prince Irughe. Eventually, women resolve to march naked to the Oba's palace and express their dissatisfaction about the injustice in the land.

This plan does not come to fruition, because of Odoligie (the Oba Uwai fiokun's trusted servant and friend) who is caught eavesdropping. The Oba then sets in motion another plan by labelling Emotan a witch and Prince Ogun's lover who wants to destroy the kingdom. This time around the husbands to the women are conscripted to play along and even control their wives' contact with Emotan. However, this plot could not hold against the determination of the women to unite in the face of oppression and injustice. Emotan on the other hand, doggedly strengthens her alliance with exiled Ogun and slowly recruits a secret army into a wilful, selfless sacrifice to reinstate Prince Ogun. And after consulting the oracle for the umpteenth time, the stage is set. Camouflaging under the Igwe festival, Prince Ogun and his army attack the Oba's procession and succeed in regaining power. As he is being crowned, Emotan passes away, her mission having come to fruition.

Returning to Adelugba's Foreword to the play, it is true that the play came at an auspicious time in the history of Nigeria and the playwright should be commended for this timing. However, it is sad to note that in many respects, it seems that a larger majority are missing the point in terms of the lessons the playwright embeds in the play: that living people in our country should emulate the corrupt-free, selfless and sacrificial attitude of Emotan to transform our country Nigeria. Perhaps this is due largely to the fact that because the play suffers from accessibility problem (locked within the academia), it is very easy to treat it with a wave of the hand. Nevertheless, at an aesthetic level, it is interesting to see how Irene Salami-Agunloye has been able to fuse Aristotelian aesthetics with Miller's common man kind of tragedy hinged on the common man. What is hard to swallow is the character and characterization of Emotan. She is too perfect to fit into any real life. She has no hubris, i.e tragic flaw or weakness. Yet Agunloye is overtly Aristotelian in her form. And in this she is reasonable to a fault. Can one then see Emotan as a tragic heroine, a la Miller?

Our reading of *Emotan* is that it is a tragedy of the common (wo) man. It is however surprising to note that Agunloye does not raise any issue about the subservience of the wives to their husbands, especially in the manner the former addresses the latter. Is this an attempt not to offend delicate traditional sensibilities? Or could it be in defence of her 'negotiated' feminism that advocates a collaboration that will see men and women joining hands in a mutual effort to advance the cause of humanity? Miller (1994:6) writes that no tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable.

Conclusion

Nigeria has witnessed very remarkable and interesting positive transformation as a nation. Regrettably, our women have sufficiently been captured by the pressing needs of daily survival to concern

themselves with the heroism of the individuals and groups projected in Nona's dreams, to fuel her aspiration and Emotan's audacity and selflessness (women who had to pay the ultimate sacrifice for the achievement of these positive developments so recalled), a feat that is in short supply in today's woman. We are not persuaded to agree that the dances are meant to reinforce the quality of life, national pride and consciousness in the period in which the heroines lived with a view to motivate and stimulate the transmission and ingestion of values such as respect for humanity, justice, constituted authority, and the dignity of labour as displayed.

There is a sense in which Irene Salami-Agunloye's plays appear better when staged than when read as literature compared with Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan whose works can be enjoyed both as performance and as literary texts. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Agunloye's plays exhibit strong thematic relevance both at the immediate, national and international settings. One of such universal thematic relevance are the issues of generational transfer and good leadership which have bedevilled Africa's and indeed Nigeria's ethos and politics for some time now and may linger awhile unless we heed the dreams of Nona and rise to the challenges of Emotan, which is, for compatriots to arise, unite and not let any form of injustice take roots in our land. This is not only the path to heroism but one way to venture into the political arena and add value to the new Nigeria we have been trying to build for so long. Nona and Emotan both demonstrate the quintessential leadership style which is lacking today in Nigeria and in most parts of Africa. For instance, Emotan's commitment in seeing that Benin is rid of injustice is resolute and bereft of any epicurean and or hedonistic dreams and motives. This demonstrates that if and when given the opportunity, women can bring a great measure of change to bear on any unfolding politics.

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