

A NEW HISTORICIST READING OF WOLE
SOYINKA'S *THE STRONG BREED* AND FEMI
OSOFISAN'S *NO MORE THE WASTED BREED*

UMA NOVA LEITURA HISTORICISTA DE WOLE
SOYINKA A RAÇA FORTE E FEMI OSOFISAN NÃO
É MAIS A RAÇA DESPERDIÇADA

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Abstract: Scapegoatism as a metaphor for selfless or altruistic leadership and patriotism is a prominent motif in Wole Soyinka's dramatic oeuvre. Based on ritualisation of theatre through martyrdom syndrome adapted from the mystic cultural worldview of the Yoruba, human sacrifice is emphasised as a transformational apparatus for cleansing and for social redemption in his plays. Besides *Death and the King's Horseman*, his *The Strong Breed* is premised on human sacrifice as a means for averting social disruption or communal tragedy. However, critics and scholars have advanced that Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* parodies Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* on the basis of the needlessness to waste an icon before restoration of order and peace in society materialises. Against this backdrop, this paper attempted a comparative study of the two texts deploying the new historicist literary theory for analysis with concentration on the popular scholarly opinion of the latter text's critique on the former play. The researchers found out that the latter (Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*) is still an atavistic echo of the former (the text it criticises) because it is not an outright condemnation of human sacrifice, it only succeeds in questioning the class from which the prey is chosen. The paper then concluded that the so-called superior argument or antithesis of *No More the Wasted Breed* is not impeccable as regards the logical formula for social re-ordering and regeneration.

Keywords: Historicism. Sacrifice. Communal. Reordering. Society.

Resumo: O escapegoatismo como metáfora de liderança altruísta ou altruísta e patriotismo é um motivo de destaque na dramática obra de Wole Soyinka. Baseado na ritualização do teatro através da síndrome do martírio adaptada da mística visão do mundo cultural dos iorubás, o sacrifício humano é enfatizado em suas peças como um aparelho transformador para a limpeza e para a redenção social. Além da *Morte e do Cavaleiro do Rei*, sua *Raça Forte* tem como premissa o sacrifício humano como um meio de evitar perturbações sociais ou tragédias comunitárias. No entanto, críticos e estudiosos têm avançado que Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* Breed Parodies Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* com base na ausência de agulhas para desperdiçar um ícone antes que a restauração da ordem e da paz na sociedade se materialize. Contra este pano de

fundo, este trabalho tentou um estudo comparativo dos dois textos empregando a nova teoria literária historicista para análise com concentração na opinião erudita popular da crítica do último texto sobre a primeira peça. Os pesquisadores descobriram que o segundo (Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*) ainda é um eco atávico do primeiro (o texto que ele critica) porque não é uma condenação direta do sacrifício humano, apenas consegue questionar a classe da qual a presa é escolhida. O artigo concluiu então que o chamado argumento superior ou antítese do *No More the Wasted Breed* não é impecável no que diz respeito à fórmula lógica de reordenamento e regeneração social.

Palavras-chave: Historicismo. Sacrifício. Comunal. Reordenação. Sociedade.

1. Introduction

The first and the second generations of Nigerian literary dramatists/playwrights have constantly dominated the Nigerian theatre stage with robust theatrical interventions through multiplicity of themes, ideas, ideologies and varying performance strategies. Since Nigerian playwrights derive their materials from the traditional societies, there ensues telling and retelling of history, presentation and representation of cultural aesthetics, which have enhanced the corpus of dramatic literature in the country. The dramatic expertise is also imbued with the Western artistic tradition to form a cultural syncretism.

Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, as prominent representatives of the two aforementioned generations of Nigerian playwrights, are equally from the Yoruba society. Hence, they tend to project similar cultural beliefs and worldview in the interpretation of the nation's socio-economic, political trajectories but in diverse perspectives. In their reflection of the cultural values of their society, there arises alignment and realignment emphasising the subjectivity of history. The artists offer contrastive presentation of aspects of their indigenous cultural values to portray dynamic interpretations of history.

The artists may not be of the same generation, one has, in some ways, influenced the other. The evolution of Osofisan's theatre went under the classical notion or Aristotelian conception of drama which typifies the works of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi etc. This implies that the foundation of Osofisan's artistic vocation was shaped by the fatalist principle underlying the animist metaphysists. Osofisan (1998, p.12) confirms this tutelage under the pioneer dramatists:

Such is the force of history that those of us who come into the shrine of art, either as acolytes or worshippers, enter into a supremely predetermined space. The dominant and seductive tradition is of an act fully entrenched within the survival rituals of the community consciously and ideologically catalytic.

The plays of Soyinka and his contemporaries react to the imperial incursions of colonialism and the disillusionment engineered by the post-independence as they bemoan wars, exploitation, mismanagement and general squalor, but fail to proffer alternatives or resolve the plethora of social problems and civil unrests heralded by the post-independence period. On this premise, Bhadmus (2006, pp. 236-237) observes that “such plays had become grossly inadequate and ineffective in the post-independence era, and its attendant crisis.” This development, a new crop of avant-garde playwrights perceives, cultivates a philosophy of despair which, Bhadmus notes, “could not help a developing nation or continent”. Osofisan’s evaluation of the ideological standpoint of the earlier literary dramatists is “So they see the world running and turning in circles”. To this effect, the second generation of playwrights took a shift, devoting their creative works to proffering solutions to human problems. Their point of departure from their predecessors is more visible along the ideological construct advocated in the inclination to subversion of tradition against mystification.

To Osofisan, the climate of tragic pessimism and defeatism/fatalism dominating Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed*, Clark’s *The Raft* and Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is vulnerable to revolutionary struggle. Osofisan travesties Clark’s *The Raft* and Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed* with his *Another Raft* and *No More the Wasted Breed* respectively. Particularly, he dispraises in Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed* the symbolism of the ritual of sacrificing a single soul for saving the community. He rejects this pattern of Soyinka’s redemption formula of scapegoatism and opts for a materialist approach through the collectivist vehicle to ensure social change.

However, no matter unorthodox Osofisan may sound, there is a tendency of subtle recognition or an echo of the established tradition of superstition he claims he is subverting in his dramatic repertoire. This ambivalence in ideological exhibition, as demonstrated in *No More the Wasted Breed*, deserves a critique. That is, against the popular notion of readers about the play in terms of theme and ideology, an attempt

should be made to expose a new understanding of the play. Such effort is relative to the position of the New Historicists. This notion is pictured in Dobie's (2009, p. 180) submission below:

... reading literature from a new historicist perspective involves accepting a new understanding of what a text is. Instead of assuming that it is static, reflective of a definable culture, this approach treats literature as a participant in a dynamic, changeable culture. The potential for change becomes important, because it means that literature has a role to play in the reformation of the society. With its help, power bases can be restructured and the marginalized recognized.

In respect of the aforesaid, the researchers deploys New Historicism to analyse Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*. The paper, using the theory, examines the differing contentions of the playwrights to bring out the unpopular perspective in the counter-play (*No More the Wasted Breed*) in the process of social rejuvenation.

2. Literature Review

Both Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan are renowned and prolific playwrights, though of different generations. Obafemi (1996), for example, categorises the two artists along ideology, dramaturgy and vision. Soyinka, along with the other dramatists like Ola Rotimi, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Zulu Sofola and others, belong to the first generation of Nigerian playwrights, while dramatists like Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Olu Obafemi, Kole Omotosho etc. make the list of the second generation of playwriting in Nigeria. Gbilekaa (1997, p. 1) hints on the point of departure of the leftists (the second generation) from the first generation's dramatic foresight:

...the gloomy and bleak picture of the future characterized by the plays of Soyinka and Clark, the single history-making individual in the plays of Rotimi gave way to the masses' hero in the drama of the new generation of playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotosho, Bode Osanyin and many others.

The above excerpt defines the playwrights on a general note across the two identified generations. However, peculiarities abound as regards the individual writer, these particular artistic traits and visions, shaped by personal principles and social realities,

inform the basis by which scholars and critics appraise their works. This section, therefore, presents an appraisal of scholars' views on both Soyinka and Osofisan.

Soyinka, as an African writer, is versatile at deploying metaphysical materials for aesthetic transposition. He has, for example, profoundly ridden on the horse of Ogun myth and the ritual depth of the Yoruba to interpret and foresee the social, political and economic realities for the country. The artist sees in these mystic materials inspirational forces and cryptic social foresight that can thrive with the literary tool for exploration of and envisioning for the nation.

Bowman (1983) locates in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* an inscrutable ambience. According to him, the play is complex, mysterious and enigmatic. Bowman notes that the play embodies religious mystery woven around the tripartite cycle of the African mystical essence. He sees a conception of cosmology fundamental, as the cosmic relation among the dead, the living and the unborn. Bowman contends that the play's mystery is not a product of the author's imagination but a phenomenon of volition to select an anecdote for literary experimentation. His words are "The enigma of the play is not one of Soyinka's making, though it is of his choosing. At the heart of this play is a religious mystery...one has something of the cosmology fundamental to the play." He maintains that in "The Fourth Stage" and later in *Myth, Literature and the African World* Soyinka explores "what he understands to be the relation in Yoruba cosmology between man, the gods, and the ancestors...". He also advances the view that the play relays a salvation mission; but, on one hand, identifies such salvation as anti-Christian and anti-European because Olunde sacrifices himself to preclude the disruption of social or communal continuity while the emphasis in Christian and European salvation is the individual. He, however, agrees that Elesin Oba's role corresponds with an aspect of Christian ideology, as he is "both the mediator between the dead and the living as well as mediation in self. He is both act and actor, which brings him paradoxically close to the Christian theology of the relationship between the Father and the Son..."

In his view, Bishop (1983) asserts that Soyinka premises his creative construction on Ogun, who is a member of the Yoruba pantheon and who he (Soyinka) chooses as his hero model and patron deity. It is against this Ogunian philosophy that Soyinka utilises the Yoruba tradition to favour his artistic wishes. Bishop adds that Soyinka hides under

obscurantism and implicitness in his Ogunian deployment. He then justifies Soyinka's adaptation of the Greek play, Euripides's *Bacchae*, to make it applicable to the African world. In the play, Bishop argues that Soyinka equates Ogun with the Greek god, Dionysus, even makes Ogun as a blend of the attributes of Dionysus and Apollo. Ogun is "one who merges both Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics."

Obafemi (1996, p. 123) situates Soyinka's works within the mytho-ritual approach, defending that the approach facilitates Soyinka's embrace of the past, the present, and the future. He adds that it is through this formula that the writer presents a vision of continuity, which is central to African metaphysics. The method, Obafemi observes, equally helps the playwright to address social doldrums and challenges historically. Ritual, for Soyinka, is a celebration of the rite of passage, of transition, which could be aptly employed to deal with a society in the process of change. Joel in Adegbija credits Soyinka's buoyancy in dramatic production to African religion and folk materials. He asserts that the composition of Soyinka's major plays is built on the framework of the religious observances and the folklores and mores of the Yoruba, coupled with the principle of Yoruba art. Joel concludes that Soyinka's theatre is characterised by tripodal aesthetics of folklorism, structuralism and theatricalism (105). Similarly, articulation of the Yorubanness and its attendant ritual and myths appears in the critique of Quayson (2001) on Soyinka. The dramatist, in the words of Quayson, places his indigenous elements on the centre of theorising and theatricalisation. He evaluates that since Soyinka speaks using the trumpet of his own culture, "the assumption is that his theorizing coalesces the essence of the culture with a highly sophisticated mode of articulation." (66)

Like Obafemi and Quayson above, Crow (2005, p. 159) concentrates on the ritual action inextricably linked with Soyinka's plays. Citing *A Dance of the Forests*, he reveals the structure of Soyinka's plays typified by elements of poetic consciousness at the centre of a ritual action, associated with traditional wisdom and its customary practices offering the redemption prospect of revelation and renovation. What appeals to Brockbank's (2001, p. 78) interest is what Soyinka's plays deliver to the people, stating that those plays sensitise the audience on how theatre can reach into the heart of a community and provide essential, amusing and distressing revelations about its ordeals and its capacities for life. Brockbank stresses that the plays, therefore, elicit new reactions and reawaken the

hypnosis of the dramatic works of ancient Athens and of the English Renaissance. He crystallises his appraisal, affirming that though Soyinka is a 20th Century playwright, he distils “paradigms of tragic art” spanning a hundred generations.

Major attack on Soyinka is strongly stirred by obscurity. But commenting on Soyinka’s theatre, Osofisan posits that the issue with the theatre “was, and is, not so much” obscurity. He says that the concern about Soyinka’s theatre is rather ‘ambiguity’. It is, according to Osofisan, “its refusal, after many scenes of candid exposure, to proclaim a formal stand in the conflict it ceaselessly enacts between the forces of evil and of good, of death and life.” Osofisan confesses that the theatre leaves no definite direction behind to distinguish between the author’s ‘serious’ and ‘lighter’ plays, because the plays are connected with the primordial bridge of ideological ambiguity.

The Osofisan’s generation addresses the much criticised obscurity of the preceding generation through simpler and people-oriented drama. The language of their plays though steeped in poetic ambience is easily understandable and the message decipherable. Hence, the generation makes a clear departure from the Soyinka’s generation.

In the plays of Osofisan, poverty, social inequality, and political issues are addressed with clear focus on condemnation of the oppressive instinct of the bourgeoisie and advocacy of equity and equality in the society. Adeyemi (6) observes revolutionary instinct in Osofisan theatre and submits that:

Fémi Osofisan has clearly emerged as a revolutionary ideologue and the most consciously intertextual Nigerian playwright in its use of myths. He has often ‘adopted a free wheeling iconoclastic attitude to antecedent texts and authors from which/whom he constantly borrows materials.

Osakwe (2018, p.13) and Uji (1) align with the position of Adeyemi on the revolutionary impetus of Osofisan theatre and on account of members of his generation’s clear departure from the preceding generation, Osofisan’s generation as Moore observes “...are winning a new audience for theatre and giving it a new role in the struggle to change the consciousness of Nigerians...”. The topicality, language and ideology of Osofisan’s generation emphasise their departure from the preceding generation and chart a new path for the Nigerian theatre.

3. New Historicism and Literature: Theoretical Framework

The publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare* in 1980 brought New Historicism to limelight. However, relatively similar tendencies were earlier expressed in publications by J. W. Lever, Michel Foucault and Clifford Geertz which influenced Greenblatt's epoch-making book. New historicism is premised on the production of ideologies and political systems, considering the economic and historical contexts of cultures. It explains how cultural, political, and social discourses act as vehicles of power. To the new historicists, reading of texts should not be done outside their cultural, economic, social and political contexts.

New Historicism offers a new approach to literary criticism by dwelling on a combined interest on the refusal to 'privilege' or 'foreground' the text at the expense of the historical data leading to the construction of "historical background". The theory is based on parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same period. The word 'parallel' encapsulates the essential difference between this and earlier approaches to literature, which had made some use of historical data. Barry (1995, p. 9) identifies this element as "equal weighting". But Montrose (1989) had earlier described it as "the textuality of history, the historicity of texts". New historicism presents a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given weight and constantly inform and interrogate each other.

New Historicist criticism works in two directions which are to understand text through examination of its cultural context (the anxieties, issues, struggles, politics etc.) of the era in which it was created and seeks to understand the culture by looking at its literature. In relation to this submission, Bressler (2003) recalls that Greenblatt and his followers adopt the expression "cultural poetics" as a synonym to describe new historicism because the approach accentuates culture, history, literature and other factors for the determination of a text's meaning.

The postulation of the New Historicists is that it is almost impossible to read a text in isolation. A text may be read in terms of the concerns of the period in which it was written. This suggests that there exists an intricacy of society, as critics can never be separated from texts; and that all creative productions, documents interact to form or

echo particular ideologies of a time. New Historicist critics offer to change the culture, and use the stories as tools for modifying it. Like the Marxists, New Historicist critics assume that literature addresses cultural concerns and can affect society's attitudes and values. Lyu examines the relationship between text and culture and avers that

From the perspective of the new historicists, history is not merely the background of literature any more. Literary texts not only represent the conclusion of a cultural conversation in one historical period but also participate in that conversation. Literary texts are agents as well as effects of cultural change and are parts of the documents which compose the history.

Adopting New Historicist approach entails acceptance of a new understanding of what a text is. Instead of assuming that culture is static, reflective artifact of a definable culture, the theory treats literature as a participant in a dynamic, changeable culture. For New Historicism, potential for change becomes important due to implication that literature has a role to play in the reformation of the society. Through the application of New Historicism, there is admittance of interrelatedness of all human activities making it necessary to examine how all discourses affect the interpretation of literature.

Scholars have examined the basic concerns of New Historicism, which distinguish it from other literary theories. Williams looks into the distinctive feature of the theory and submits that:

New historicists were able to demonstrate how a text could be dismantled and the hidden hegemonic discourses lying buried within it exposed. The new historicists acquired this new understanding by directing the methodologies and procedures of deconstruction, feminism and post-structuralism to literature and literary texts. The political and cultural slant that this method gave to the interpretation of literature once again energized departments of English and encouraged literary studies to reestablish a link with the political and social world that gave rise to it.

Four schools of thought played prominent roles in shaping the outlook of New Historicism. First, it is influenced by Althusserian concept of ideology, the Derridian Deconstructionist idea that a text is at war with itself, Bhaktinian dialogism which offers that a text contains a multiplicity of conflicting voices; and most importantly by Foucauldian Power/Knowledge and discourse. Foucault observes that history is characterised by gaps and fissures contemporary historicists emphasize the discontinuities and conflicts of history, Foucault does not write history as a unified, continuous story.

New historicism argues that the metric of literary production and criticism involves a plethora of actors and potentials. Illustrating the foregoing, Bressler (2002, p. 289) reveals the consciousness that it is not a single voice but multiple voices are heard which interpret texts and our culture. He further lists "our own, the voices of others, the voices of the past, the voices of the present, and the voices that will be in the future".

In essence, Harold Veaser (1989) highlighted the key assumptions of new historicism as thus:

- i, That any process of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns; thereby risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
- ii, That the circulation of literary and non-literary texts is inseparable!
- iii, That no discourse, method or opinion (imaginative or archival) contains eternal or unchanging truths, nor expresses inalterable human nature;
- iv, And that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

The task involved in this paper is to critique the interaction between Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*, letting through the two pieces the new Historicist's voice. With this dissection, the researchers hope to expose the dialectics of ideologies as shaped by the two playwrights, as questions of ambivalence and contradiction in Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* will be analysed side-by-side Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. This discourse dwells on the two plays to illustrate the New Historicist's assumption that any act of unmasking, criticism and opposition uses the method it condemns, as it risks falling prey to the practice it exposes.

4. Martyrdom and the Metaphor of Patriotism in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*

Martyrdom syndrome is a recurring element in Soyinka's plays. Embroidering his theatrical principles with the paraphernalia of tradition, the playwright is committed to exploring the strength of ritual in the African context to experiment the relevance of art to the social vision postulated by the dramatist. He deploys the ingredients of the past (as reflected, especially, in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*) to expose the

subtle interface between them and the contemporary socio-political milieu. What immensely appeals to Soyinka about these traditional resources is the symbolic commitment, the vigour of selflessness, the spirit of steadfastness to communal existence or sheer embrace of altruism for national progress.

This is the fundamental concern Gibbs (1983) raises about Soyinka's artistic productions to socio-political commitment. *The Strong Breed* is an example of the author's masterpieces bordering on such self-commitment to take up the role or mission to expedite the revitalisation of society. By implication, Gibbs's admittance that Soyinka's artistic devotion is a struggle to refurbish Nigerian public life is depicted through the consciousness of scapegoatism in *The Strong Breed*. In the play, Soyinka speaks via the symbol of ritual to identify the object of martyrdom for negotiating social redemption. Though this method belongs to the primordial time, its symbolic effect is a useful device for driving the nation to ebullience.

In the play, Eman is Soyinka's sacrificial icon. He is the chosen for the atonement of the sins of hundreds, playing a messianic role. His ancestry is unique and fated for being sacrificed for the failing or error of thousand sinners. His responsibility as a carrier is his destiny and it accompanies him anywhere he goes like the shadow. In Soyinka's recall of the past of Eman through a flashback, the reader is exposed to the magnitude of the ineludible task before the lineage of "strong breed". Eman's father (Old Man) enlightens and emboldens him on this messianic duty when he says "...Ours is a strong breed my son. It is only a strong breed that can take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger." (133) He further comments on the hereditary urge for the task "Your own blood will betray you son, because you cannot hold it back." (134)

Eman's obstinacy, apart from hailing from the strong breed lineage, turns him prey, because Ifada, a stranger like him, was formerly the choice for atonement. It is his (Eman's) stubbornness, inquisitiveness, human feeling and inordinate probing that make Jaguna and Oroge discover a better candidacy in Eman. This is where Soyinka exercises the philosophy of fatalism characteristic of the generation of the reactionary dramatists. Eman runs away from home only to come and meet his destiny in a foreign land.

But the question of being “the chosen” has a dictatorial tendency. Eman has earlier chastised this tyrannical attitude when the pendulum of selection was on Ifada, an idiot. He believes in the principle of willingness not imposition.

EMAN: Yes. But why did you pick on a helpless boy? Obviously he is not willing.

JAGUNA: What is the man talking about? Ifada is a godsend. Does he have to be willing?
(128)

Deeper meaning can be discerned from the presentation of the symbolic carrier in the figure of the effigy owned by the sick girl. The girl reveals the metaphysical value of the effigy: “Do you mean my carrier? I am not unwell you know. My mother says it will take away my sickness with the old year.” (118) Her purgation is a sort of foreshadowing to the sacrifice ahead for Eman because his soul will later be the price to be paid for the transition to the new year, new life, new spring. Light is also shed on the significance of the festival-cum-ritual as the time of the festival is for renewal and recovery from sickness. The girl’s carrier is a subject of symbolic identification. As a compact design, Soyinka technically and succinctly edifies the audience about the fundamental thrust of the play through the effigy and the girl’s conversation.

Like Saluga, who sensitises Biokun against volunteering himself for appeasement on behalf of the entire community in Osofisan’s *No More the Wasted Breed*, Sunma warns Eman tremendously to avert the tragedy awaiting Eman, asking him to leave the town where he is a stranger. So that he will escape the evil or the “so much cruelty” of the “last night of the old year”. It is here revealed that Eman is not an indigene just like Biokun is a stranger in the town he lives in. To prevent him from being a scapegoat where he is a stranger, Sunma vehemently persuades Eman to leave for another place. The conversation below is explicit:

SUNMA: I had hoped we will watch the new year together - in some other place.

EMAN: Why do you continue to distress yourself?

SUNMA: Because you will not listen to me. Why do you continue to stay where nobody wants

you?

EMAN: That is not true.

SUNMA: It is. You are wasting your life on people who really want you out of their way.

EMAN: You don't know what you are saying.

SUNMA: You think they love you? Do you think they care at all for what you- or-I- do for them?

...

EMAN: You are wrong Sunma. I have no sense of mission. But I have found peace here and I

am content with that.

SUNMAN: I haven't. For a while I thought that too, but I found there could be no peace in the

midst of so much cruelty. Eman, tonight at least, the last night of the old year...

(Soyinka, 1973, pp.120-121)

The value of the hero's commitment is extended beyond his life. *No More the Wasted Breed*'s example brings succor to the unborn and rejuvenates the living for the stability of social order. The transition of the victim expedites communal transformation. Revolution is connoted in this chain of ritual action. Wright (1992) observes that salvation through the mechanism of messianism is created around the protagonist's role because Eman has to carry, alone, the burden of the entire community for redemption cause. Such is an archetypal concept in Christendom. This idea of equation is noted by Jones (1973) cited in Obafemi (1996). Jones finds in *The Strong Breed* Christ-like religious martyrdom. He compares Eman with the figure of Jesus Christ. He notes that the character is a teacher as well as healer; the two epithets intonate humanitarianism and

messianism. Similarly, Jones's observation is reverberated in Eman's request after he has been chosen as a carrier, or in some moments to his martyrdom. In both cases of Eman and Christ, water is demanded by the martyrs as their executions approach.

EMAN: They are even guarding my house...as if I would go there, but I need water...they could

at least grant me that...I can be thirsty too (he pricks his ears.)...there must be a stream

nearby... (Soyinka, 1973, p.132)

Wright (1992) concedes to the foregoing while commenting on the ritual pattern in congruity with Soyinka's theatre. Differentiating between African and Western tragic forms, he espouses that the gain in the redemption process of the former on the community is more pervasive than the latter's single tragic convention. He avows that "The ritual action does not end with the life of the hero but entails a beneficial follow-on effect for the community more pervasive than the Western individualist tragic tradition."

Gibbs's (1983) explication of the modern pertinence and social relevance of the atavistic stuff contained in Soyinka's literary pieces is to be revisited because the expression shows the writer's adaptation at the primary level while at the metaphorical height, the contemporary society or a modern model. Ogunbesan (1975) brings up this applicability on *The Strong Breed* describing its mood as 'perceptibly darker' portraying the 'contemporary mood of the crisis in Nigeria, and Africa as a whole, in the early sixties.'

Soyinka in *The Strong Breed* experiments with the substance of ritual premised on martyrdom for social renewal and recovery from unsoundness and indisposition. For Soyinka, a country rife with abeyance, doldrums, malfeasance, corruption and injustice requires from the leadership a sacrifice in form of selflessness or sheer patriotism for renewal.

5. Parodic Engagement and New Historicist Paradigm in Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*

Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* is a critical recreation of Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. Woven with the tread of disapproval content-wise, the play responds with demystification strategy. It is incontrovertible that Osofisan, like Soyinka, embodies the Yoruba oral tradition. To this effect, Awodiya (1993) declares that Osofisan expropriates the "common art of the people, and their traditional materials." Likewise, Bhadmus (2006, p.244) contends that Osofisan's "return to tradition in a way is a return to the ritual aesthetics, and spiritual invocation of primordial presence and essence" However, Obafemi (1996) argues that the playwright's approach to traditional forms and beliefs considerably differs from "Soyinka's metaphysical approach to myths and ritual." Obafemi's contention points out subversion in Osofisan's method. This forms the basis of demystification aesthetics inherent in Osofisan's plays.

Two objectives are to be achieved in this section. One, the researchers analyse Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* as a pasquinade of Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. The paper will also expose the play as a contradiction of self and a criticism that has fallen victim of its object of condemnation. Our exposition would be accessed via the new historicist periscope.

Griffiths (2000, p. 179) admits that Osofisan's plays sound critical of the traditional institutions, "especially when they are employed as a device by the ruling elite to maintain power..." Justification of Griffiths's comment is acknowledged in the playwright's text of our focus here. On a definite note, *No More the Wasted Breed* parodies Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. The bone of contention in the former text dwells on the antithetical construction, molded by principle, foresight and instinctual peculiarities, deploring the rationale behind martyrdom practice for restoration of social order. Interpreting the big question Osofisan raises in the play, one will align with the author on a humanitarian cause. Biokun, the chosen, is already prepared for a voyage "across troubled waters". And his lineage's responsibility as regards saving the land through self-sacrifice is affirmed and expressed by Elusu and Togunin in this dialogue:

ELUSU: It's the sign given to your family down the generations.

TOGUN: It is the sign of the chosen.

SALUGA: Yes, but chosen for what?

TOGUN: Chosen to save the land. To carry it across troubled waters and set it down
again on the
safe side. (98)

Osofisan's radical voice in this plays is projected in the character of Saluga, Biokun's friend. The playwright engages this liberal character, a "heretic", Saluga, in an articulation of rhetoric to head off in *No More the Wasted Breed* the similar scapegoatism formula prescribed and executed in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. Saluga's role is exclusively for demystification. That is why he is close to "the chosen". He is to resonate Osofisan's take to the hearing of Biokun by sensitising and liberating him. A non-conformist, Saluga even pursues his revolutionary agenda with violence (Remember how he brandishes a knife to threaten Togun). This element of violence in the revolutionary programme is traditional of Fanonian postcolonial principle of violence as the means by the oppressed choose to tame oppression. When Biokun accepts his fate as a "carrier" and resolves to taking up the redemption task, Saluga's belligerent instinct is understood as agitation and conscientisation. He is to remove 'the cobweb' on Biokun's face.

BIOKUN: I have no choice but to take the risk. Look at so much suffering in the land. If
I could

do so little to end-

SALUGA: You will not end anything, don't believe that. You will not end anything but
your life.

Look at the waters-

TOGUN: The goddess will guide him. The goddess and that thing in his blood. They will
take

him safely to the meeting-place.

SALUGA: Then why don't you go yourself? (103)

Propitiation or appeasement is necessary to pacify goddess Elusu, who is Olokun's wife, with a soul that has what "made the chosen", that can "hold dialogue with the sea, and tame it along the passage". Osofisan's ideological disposition is unequivocally

disinclined to this practice. This, in other words, is antithetic to the tradition of superstition. Deployment of tradition in literary creativity is a meeting point for both Soyinka and Osofisan. What then separates them is each writer's distinct approach to such materials. The two drama pieces under study, therefore, explicitly reveal to critics and scholars the different perceptions of the two playwrights on the usage of tradition.

Osofisan, with the play, avouches his stance on Soyinka's ritual conceptualisation in the artistic domain. This is why he, Osofisan, responds with rejection or prevention of what Raji (2006, p.223) calls "the backward slip to which Elusu intends to restore the people". Raji further describes it as "the old ways characteristics of which include fear and superstition". Critiquing *No More the Wasted Breed* as a write-back to Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, he states that Osofisan is angry that "Soyinka could sacrifice such a brilliant young man as Emma (sic) on the altar of an anachronistic practice" (224)

Above, the thesis of Soyinka in *The Strong Breed* and the antithesis of Osofisan in *No More the Wasted Breed* have been explored. At this juncture, our discussion will take a critical look at the dialectics of the two plays through the new historicist survey. In essence, how similarity, whether infinitesimal or prodigious and whether implicit or explicit, plays out across the two pieces irrespective of the divergence and disapproval critics have discerned exist between the plays. That is, the two works interact with a voice of likeness in some ways despite the obvious dissimilitude transpiring between the two.

The essential assertion here is predicated on Osofisan's idiosyncratic attitude of ambivalence in his dramatic ideological statement. This contradiction creates confusion and raises uncertainty as to the true ideological stance of the writer among the critical minds. And, for this, his fundamental creed might face criticism. This trait of ambivalence, though considered to be token, is a take-home of ambiguity or distraction for readers. In congruity with this contention, Bhadmus (2006) states that Osofisan's theatrical aesthetics cannot be read as an outright contradiction of "the superstitious traits typifying magic of tradition which other artists are using in the process of mystification." To Bhadmus, as much as Osofisan uses tradition, he cannot escape accentuating the glory of the tradition he claims to subvert because, inadvertently, both the magic of superstition and the magic of theatre reinforce each other, thereby multiplying mystification. Succinctly, Bhadmus's argument is that Osofisan's deployment

of metaphysical resources is another, in some ways, form of mystification or superstitious energisation.

A critical reading of the text disproves Osofisan's total abhorrence for scapegoatism as a means for appeasement and a method for reordering. His endorsement of this may be subtle or token as asseverated above. With the new historicist periscope, the minute line of understated support for martyrdom invalidates the popular perception of critics/readers on *No More the Wasted Breed*. He is not opposed to martyrdom; his disputation is the section of society from which the prey is chosen. He criticises Soyinka for choosing the victim of martyrdom from the poor folk. He is, on a contrary note, subtly vying for the less-privileged or he questions why selection of the scapegoat eludes the aristocratic class.

Merits can be accessed from the speech of Saluga, who champions the resistance cause or the revolutionary projection represented in the author. He symbolises reformation, which Osofisan advocates. Seeing the status quo as brutalising and inhuman to his fellow wretched people who are considered preys to scapegoatism, Saluga berates eligibility for martyrdom recommending selection from the bourgeoisie. He interrogates the formula for where the choice is made. To him, the system is doom and misery for the impoverished but prestige and royalty for the noble.

SALUGA: Yes, except that you have mesmerised him with your fairy tale. Tell me, why is it

always us who give our lives? Why is it always the poor who are called to sacrifice?

Why is it always the wretched, never a wealthy man, never the son of a king, who is

suddenly discovered to bear the mark of destiny at difficult moments, and pushed on

to fulfill himself in suicidal tasks? Why? (105)

There is one fundamental lesson readers need to give a critical assessment to in Saluga's speech (as the voice of the author). Condemning an unfair treatment to a class of people and recommending same for another section of society makes the author guilty of the object of his criticism. This, in other words, even with a token or trifling evidence, this speech should not be considered negligible. Such, therefore, makes Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* another advocacy for martyrdom. What plays out in this play is the dramatist's voice of 1998 (p.83) that "For if we must change our societies, if the theatre must fulfill its vocation as an agent of progress, the dramatists who create it have no option but to pitch their camp on the side of the common people."

Also, demystification quest in Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* is questionable at a point. The reader will develop a different impression at the end when it is found out that a play set to subvert the tradition of superstition then credits to the gods the principal duty of justice. Olokun, a member of the pantheon whose presence one will think Osofisan intends to unriddle, emerges an icon of justice. When Elusu strikes Saluga, it is Olokun that intervenes to save the latter at the expense of the former. Olokun affirms this "But Olokun is a god of justice" (110). Watching his wife (Elusu) die as a result of his defence for Saluga, the reader recognises Olokun as a true agent of justice. He solves the crisis and promises appearance in the future generation, "Goodbye my love till the next generation." (110) Osofisan's position here could be read as an undercurrent of mystification, which he claims to criticise.

This paper argues that though Osofisan in *No More the Wasted Breed* explicitly counters Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, there is, however, an undertone of martyrdom in the former. This makes the play another example of what the playwright condemns.

Conclusion

The popular opinion of readers/critics about Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* is that the play is a write-back to Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. In other words, the view of scholars is that the former is averse to martyrdom or scapegoatism as a means for or process of social regeneration, the formula on which the latter is premised. In this paper, the researchers re-interpret the two plays and argue, using the new historicist

method, that the dramatic statement of *No More the Wasted Breed* also keys to martyrdom but only deplores the selection bias. It is the contention of this study that ritual reference in Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* may be token, it subtly builds support for the tradition of scapegoatism underscored in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. Osofisan's position here exemplifies the argument of New Historicism that any process of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns, thereby risks falling prey to the practice it exposes.

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