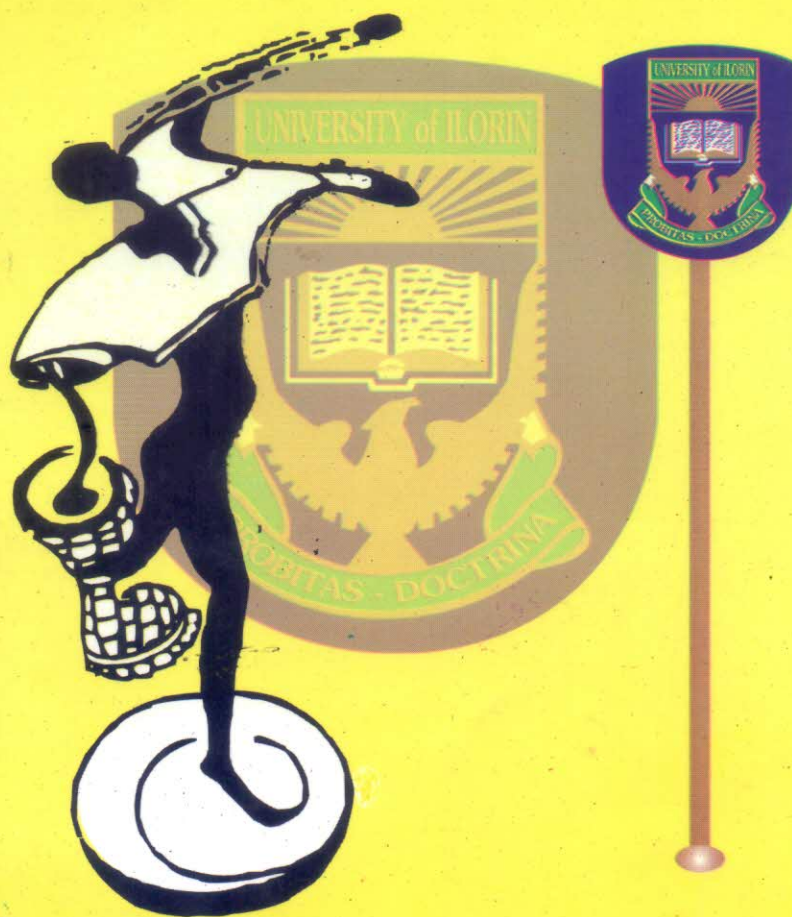


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Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* in the Historical Recreation of Anti-imperialist Drama

BY

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Abstract

History has it that, there has been an age long enmity between the Okun-Yoruba speaking people of Kogi State and the Nupe people of Kwara State; which was caused by the local imperialism imposed on the former by the latter. The purpose of this paper is to build on the obvious fact that, literature in this context drama does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it draws substantial resources from history; which is an indispensable element of society. The paper identified and discussed those historical features recreated by Olu Obafemi in *Ogidi Mandate* (2010) to validate the connection between history and literature. This paper did a critical analysis of *Ogidi Mandate* using as its weapons, the utterances of the characters in the play text matching the same with the events of war which resulted from that local imperialism. As epitomised in the playtext, the playwright envisioned a cohabitation of the Okun and Nupe folks in the contemporary society without recourse to injuries sustained by the former in the historical encounter. The findings revealed a paradox of aesthetic vision. For the Okun-Yoruba speakers, though the wounds are healed, the scars are indelible; which in a way hampers a genuine cohabitation. The paper concluded that the entire scenario created and re-created in *Ogidi Mandate* "is to develop a kind of nostalgia". Balogun, (2007, p. 206) in the Okun-Yoruba speakers about their historical past and at the best procure a dint of psychotherapy for them in the process.

Keywords:

Introduction

There is truism in the view that, the emergence and sustenance of humanity are the prerogatives of historical antecedents. Man as it were has

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been a subject of history since the creation. As a complement of the above, it is true that the 15th century Industrial Revolution, the imperative of literature in social dynamism as documented in the 14th and 15th centuries' Greek and Roman literary traditions, the different invasions of Africa, the Caribbean and the other parts of the world by Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries en-route the slave trade and colonialism and the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in the 17th century were all sources of history from which literature derived its essential thematic and creative materials.

Literary history and in this context, dramatic history is the creation of the aesthetics of history of a society into fiction to revolutionalise the same, for the purpose of social advancement. The place of history in dramatic productions is so enormous that without history there may not be drama. This enormity is expressed in the adoption of historical antecedents as form, content and context for drama. According to Shevtsova in dramatic texts, "the problem of form-content-context can only be solved in terms of broad historical movements where the ascent and descent of social classes, and their viewpoints regarding themselves and the world, are understood to be the principal driving forces of history" (Shevtsova, 2009, p. 50). The argument here is that, if drama aims at social revolution, reformation and the likes, the only way to initiate that is by exploring history and this is why the creative craft of Olu Obafemi in *Ogidi Mandate* transcends the rhetorics of a mere narrative. This phenomenon called history is employed by him as a weapon of dramaturgy to provoke the possibility of symbiosis among two adversaries.

In the early part of the 20th century, the Nupe people in their quest for territorial aggrandisement and power-play launched a siege on the Okun people, a sub-Yoruba tribe of the present Kogi State. Initially, the latter was taken aback by the attack, they subsequently mustered courage to face the challenges. The implication of the above development is an age-long enmity which has its foot-print in the contemporary relationship among these two warring cultural entities.

Obviously, the result of such occurrence is expressed in hatred, bitterness, grudge, animosity and other anti-social and anti-personal carriages.

Olu Obafemi attempts mediation in that seemingly unpleasant development. He does that by recreating history in fiction through this playtext - this is the history of the Okun - Mokobon crisis to elicit a possibility of a harmonious existence between the two.

An Overview of Historical Drama and the Contemporary Society

Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* (2010) as a primary source of reference could be likened to the experience of Kenya as recreated in Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and Ngugi's *I will Marry When I Want* (1982) in which contexts, imperialism is an historical weapon employed by its users to jeopardise the Okun-Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Kenyans respectively. Possessed by the imperialist spirit in the play, *ZAKI and MASABA, the two sons of "MALLAM DENDO, the Flag Bearer of the Fulani Jihad in Nupeland"* (Obafemi, 2010, p. 13) mounted a terrorist- insurgency on the Okun-Yoruba people of Nigeria. As a reaction to this, the latter instituted a subtle resistance approach, though later rebranded a stronger resistance machinery against the imperialists, culminating into what became 'Mokobon' phenomenon in the history of the Okun-Yoruba people. This middle 20th Century historical experience of the Okun-Yoruba people ignited a new beginning, though negative in their polity; that of anti-imperialist struggle with the Nupe people supposed 'brothers' of the former at least by the virtue of the two being Nigerians and sharers of common geographical boundaries. The above is what Olu Obafemi has recreated as drama in *Ogidi Mandate* in anticipation of an evolution of a social frame where there would be an harmonious cohabitation of the 'crafty' and the 'careful' which in a way is a paradox of the dramaturgical essence and thematic exploration of the play. Here, reconciling this paradox of the 'fox' and the 'fowler' cohabiting harmoniously as posited by Olu Obafemi in the play, is the prerogative of the objectification of the imperialist mentality and the anti-imperialist struggle of the Nupe and the Okun people respectively.

The subsistence of love in war as envisioned by the playwright in this play becomes a complex ambition because "a significant aspect of this project is the rehabilitation of heroic figures who have suffered denigration and vilification in the hands of colonialists and imperialists" (Amuta, 1989, p. 157 Consider the Okun people's experience below as expressed by one of the characters in the play:

Our people have suffered tremendous humiliation and brutalisation from the hands of the Tapas, the Nupes. They have enslaved us and taxed us beyond bearable levels. The Ogba system imposed on us has crippled us (p. 52).

In contrast, BABA, a primordial character in the play appeases in his mediation that:

It's okay, my children. My son, Tsohaza. Come here (*He steps forward*) Seye, my own daughter. Come here too. (*She is shy but steps forward in obedience*) My children, all of you. I plead with you. It is time to sink our differences and come together as one (p. 63).

To a peace-maker, the issue of the Nupe local imperialism in Okunland as recreated in *Ogidi Mandate* could be perceived and treated peripherally using the trivial philosophy of the Nupe and Okun people being children from a common source. The danger in this populist perspective symbolised in peace-making, is the loss of the core of the psychopathic effect of imperialism contained in the quantum of all sorts, impoverishment and denigration suffered by Okunland. Thus, it could be safe from the eyes of the Okun people and perhaps a moralist-socialist that the creative and recreative explorations in Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* must be understood as "a dramatisation of this process of historical reconstruction and rehabilitation" (Amuta, 1989, p. 157). A major podium of the play is the heroic presentation of the Okun people who were initially demobilised by that local imperialist siege; but who in the course of the anti-imperialist struggle gathered momentum and boldness to institute a historical antithesis that is ideologically symbolised in 'Mokobon' syndrome.

A Literary Discourse on *Ogidi Mandate*

Based on the reality of the Mokobon crisis of 1934, Olu Obafemi's *Ogidi Mandate* is a dramatic document with historical facts through which the two cultural entities directly involved could initiate and theorise an evolution of a post-imperialist social phenomenon. Unfortunately, this vision appears illusive because of the quantum of psychological and physical wounds inflicted on the Okun people as the imperialised. Such historical reflections featuring biases and prejudices inhibiting drama for contemporary social reconstruction as exemplified in *Ogidi Mandate* is denominated by one of the famished characters in the play. Consider the excerpt below:

SEYE: (*Cynical*) Yes, you are proud of it. You should, shouldn't you? (*Angry*) You are from that monstrous, savage tribe that killed and sold our people into slavery. Yes, your ancestors decimated our people and left our race depleted, fragmented

and ravaged. You ought to be proud of your decent from among the vandals (p. 22).

Beyond the populist-sentimentalist sympathy in support of the oppressed against the oppressor, biases have their values in exposing the shortcomings responsible for the downturn of the contemporary society. In the case of the Okun people showcased in *Ogidi Mandate*, their inability to adequately galvanise their internal mobilisation to an advantage was a major factor responsible for their predicaments. The interiorised ineptitude of the Okun people leading to their failure to forstall the colonisation and the apparent enslavement of their being by the imperialist forces from Nupeland are critical biases in their history.

One would want to ask the questions that why didn't Okun people appeal to the interventionist creed of the Royal Niger Company at Lokoja early enough; or why didn't they resort to the derogatory 'Mokobon' slogan and action early enough; or why did they allow themselves to be caught in this web of imperialism for so long before they mustered those forces that eventually brought them out of their dilemma? Again this bothers on their apathy to those historical contradictions found in historical biases as recreated in *Ogidi Mandate*.

'Mokobon' syndrome itself sometimes referred to as "Mokobon" Revolt (Idrees, 1992, p. 219) and the Makobon Movement (Ijagbemi, 1984, p. 61) is an historical coinage by the Okun people to lambast and lampoon that local imperialism. For instance:

LEKAN: What do you mean is it true? Of course, it is not true. Yes, the story about the place is that the Ibon people, that is what our people call the Nupe, had more sophisticated weapons and they were said to possess more diabolical powers, witchcraft, medicine and all that, than our people (pp. 25-26).

The above is a reaction to a dialogue between SEYE and LEKAN, both descendants of the Okun people. The initial thesis presented in the dialogue by SEYE still reveals the failure of the Okun people to explore history as a spine for contemporary social vibrancy in retrieving their destiny truncated by the Nupe local imperialism. If the Okun people would create a national literature for themselves, there was the need to conceive of

national heroes, national bards or griots, epitomising the heroic qualities of the nation; heroes and heroines who

stand for national ideals and conscience in the scheme of historic periodisation (Layiwola, 2008, p. 175.)

In the light of the above citation, though the people of Okun in the play pursue that aura of heroism initially with docility and timidity, they eventually restructured leading to their breakthrough formalised in 'Mokobon' crisis. Their cowardly resistance of the Nupe imperialist incursions is a historical bias that accounts for their molestation being reflected in *Ogidi Mandate*.

Perhaps, a more conspicuous attitude emanating from a historical bias that downplayed the Okun people's anti-imperialist struggle was their lack of unity symbolised in interiorised violence. The libertarian violence that eventually became institutionalised as the 'Mokobon' syndrome could have survived earlier than it did. Statements in the play like "we lack unity. We have no united force. We could not even agree among ourselves on a war commander"; "It is because we could not agree among ourselves to fight together..." (p. 53) "This is no time for fault-finding or apportioning blames. It is time to make up for lost time and to correct the flaws and errors of the past" (p. 52) are sufficient grounds for the people's destiny to be ruined. In contrast, is the united front of the imperialists. A confirmation of that is reflected in:

Yet, we carry our little, individual strengths to confront a people who are united in their determined goal to oppress us... They spat on their traditions and defiled their ancestry (p. 53).

Though, "the transposition of folk and historic heroes into art is not always an easy one" (Layiwola, 2008, p. 175) in the context of *Ogidi Mandate*, Okun people jettisoned the vision of their collective will for their national identity by not pulling together their resources of war under the of aegis of the collective 'we' (Layiwola, 2008, p. 176) as against their individualisation symbolised in the interiorised violence culminating into all kinds of disagreement among themselves.

It is not out of place to conclude this aspect of the evaluation of *Ogidi Mandate*, that undermining historical antecedents in the use of drama for the evolution of a revolutionised social frame is very consequential. To the people of Okun as exemplified in the playtext, their attitude is a factor responsible for the demeaning of their being by the Nupe imperialists.

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Social Rebirth in Drama

The imperative of drama as a weapon for social rebirth is based on the assumption that the latter is a metaphor for existence on stage. The dramaturgical formation upon which *Ogidi Mandate* is constructed is a justification of the philosophy that approaches to social reconstruction is multi-faceted. As history deploys its method using literary genres, each of the literary genres operates in collaboration with the other components of Arts resulting in social rebirth.

Operatic and pantomimic elements dominate the dramaturgical pivot of *Ogidi Mandate*. In addition, is the heavy deployment of traditional literary devices such as metaphor, satire, flashbacking, etc. to situate drama in history and vice-versa with the two collaborating to evolve a symbiotic rather than a sinister social frame.

The rich operatic and pantomimic structure upon which the play derives its strong artistry and dramaturgy is quite instructive. The "heavy accent on music which is" (Amuta, 1989, p. 165) spiced with a cocoon of cultural artifacts attest to the desirability of the anti-imperialist struggle exemplified in the play.

The plausibility of this arrangement is that, the songs with the music are not used for the sake of sensuality, but rendered to reclaim the destiny of the people. This is because the songs "are constantly amplifying and reinforcing the central ideological contention of the play and its thematic elaborations" (Amuta, 1989, p.165)

Right from its very beginning, the play demonstrates this ambition as it opens with:

The orchestra raises the Theme song of the play (Okele kele African mo jabi!) Start it on a low tempo. The two songs of MALLAM DENDO, the Flag Bearer of the Fulani Jihad in Nupeland, ZAKI and MASABA, come on stage from different directions, stage right and left, depending on what type of stage is being used..... The song stops abruptly in synchrony with that encounter (p. 13).

The above song is the very first action ever performed in the play. There and then and without mixing words is a manifestation of the theme of imperialism producing oppression. With this, the stage is set for a display of power tussle between the imperialist powers and the anti-imperialist forces.

As music and dance are used as operatic form in the play, at the very beginning, their deployment all through the play is unmistakable. For each appearance, these elements are deployed as aesthetic weapons of thematic emphasis and preoccupation. Besides, they serve as a means of cultural revivification of a people on a cause. The scene in which SEYE:

rises, moves towards centre stage, takes the posture of a mermaid as she softly and slowly narrates her story to the rhythm of Ogun song: On Ko Ridi Omi (p. 40).

Is quite apt in reaffirming the belief of the anti-imperialist forces in the weapon of their resistance. It may be interesting to remark that the above operatic rendition happened at the latter middle of the play; and the same spirit of thematic elaboration of a people wanting liberation is still the emphasis.

Even at the early part of the end of the play, a risen hope for the anti-imperialists is expressed again in a pantomimic rendition; making a submission on the victory is eminently imminent; hence:

OBA 1 :Great gentlemen. Today is a day of history – for us and our people. Our children will read the decision of today in their history books and watch it acted out on their school stages. They will be proud that they had forefathers with strong strong manhood within their thighs and grey matter on their heads...(The royal persons rise in joy, with a sense of fulfillment singing and dancing as light fades. Eme de' Biti peja (p. 56).

In a prophetic lucidity, the above rendition summarises the aspiration of the people, though expressed in an operatic manner, the import of the message – that of freedom is not in any way lost or deemphasised. As tensed as the scenario in which the imperialised operate, they still strongly articulate their desire through pantomime and opera in order to get out of the shackles of the imperialist enclave. Olu Obafemi's adoption of the operatic form, no doubt places him and his work in the Brechtian theatrical tradition whose emphasis is on "theatre for learning" (Weiss, 1968, p. 677).

The dialectics of a people attempting to objectify their cause through various aesthetic media give credence to Olu Obafemi's favourable disposition to the unique segmentalisation of *Ogidi Mandate*. In that unique artistic craft, the play is constructed on a **Ten-Movement**

Sequence in which events are created to embody those diverse prevailing social contradictions.

The first **Movement** introduces us to the subject-matter of the play—that of local imperialism. ZAKI one of the agents of imperialistic mission in the play, with arrogance legitimatises, that inhuman engagement as, he says:

(Muscles flexed with violent display of anger. His eyes roam wide.) The royal blood flows in my veins. My mother is Fulfulde and I am destined to rule since our father will not (p. 14).

In contrast with the above is an earlier statement by MALLAM DENDO, the father of the two imperialists that:

When I took the flag of the Jihad, after the Islamic faith, from the reverent hands of the Sultan ..., it was not to seek political power. I came to this land, in the service of Allah to spread his faith and save the soul of people (p. 14).

It is obvious from the two statements above, that the irony in the use of religion (Islam in this context) for oppressive purposes is revealed. Religion as it were, was essentially instituted to 'save the souls of people' and is here perverted to enslave the souls of the same. Olu Obafemi has lucidly devised the presentation of these two eminent characters in the play as a metaphor for oppression.

In the second **Movement**, the play opens with an opera as:

(A popular Okun folk-theme – Omo Okun Ekun O³ to drum, castanet, flute and agidigbo rhythms rouses the AUDIENCE to the Okun Day celebration mood. The students dance around as they set the stage trying also to put the AUDIENCE in an expansive mood (p. 19).

The above is satirical. The Okun students' Union; on whose platform the play is set, initiate the event of celebrating Okun Day from which the historical recreation that brings the play to fore emerges.

The encounter between SEYE and TSOBAZA; the offsprings of the Okun and Nupe people respectively climaxes the satirical manifestation in the play. Consider this:

TSOBAZA: *(Propositioning through cheap songs – Sweet potato, Omo Elemei dara⁶ – Tries to pull her to himself.*

SEYE: *(Jerks away angrily.)* What nonsense is this? is this a joke or afternoon madness?

TSOBAZA: (*Braces himself to it*) Em, well, I am Tsobaza and I know our name is Seye, a 200 – level microbiology student. And, em, if I may add, you are Okun, from Kogi State.

SEYE: (*Feigning amusement.*) Thorough research. Come on, give yourself a round of applause. So, anyway, how can I help you? What is behind all these extra-curricular investigation? (pp. 20-21).

Both characters allude to the satirical device of the playwright. While Tsobaza represents the satirised bloc in which the Nupe imperialists mock the Okun people by capitalising on the former's incursion, Seye satirises the audacity of imperialism itself by punning on every move by Tsobaza to her. Beyond this, Seye's satirical allusion is a demonstration of the revolutionary vanguard embedded in the anti-imperialist struggle and also reaffirms the thematic essence of the play. To her and by extension, the Okun people, the playwright by this singular aesthetic device has recreated history to charge them (the Okun people) to demystify oppression.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth **Movements** reveal the height of communal mobilisation of people by the playwright to build up further dialectical essence and thematic elaboration of the play. Here, Olu Obafemi authenticates the potency of the cause of the Okun people as he engages them in the use of folk materials notably proverbs and vernacular as weapons of warfare. The dominance of 'Ibon', 'Mokobon' and 'Tapas' as Okun dialectal coinages in the play is didactic. Figuratively, the three coinages illicit and inflict some kind of psychological maladjustment on the Nupe in cursors. 'Ibon' and 'Tapa' in Okun dialect by literal interpretation presuppose a people with low Intelligence Quotient (IQ) resulting in imbecility while 'Mokobon' literally means the rejection of 'Ibon' – the people with low IQ. Indeed, till today and perhaps till eternity, the three terms are derogatory appellations meant to uphold some kind of inferiority and superiority complexes emanating from that unfortunate historical experience of the Okun people. Consider these:

LOLA: We are fetching forth a bird from the pocket, you are demanding for its colour and its size, DAPO. (pp. 32-33).

SEYE: *Ye, egbami Mogbe, idan pa,.....* (p. 42).

LEKAN: Yes, the story about the place is that the Ibon people, that is what our people call the Nupe,..... (p. 25).

The degree of derogation in the above Okun proverbial and dialectal coinages on the Nupe people can not be over-emphasised. Nonetheless, the aesthetic value in them, rests on their pedigree to set a kind of confusion in the latter, essentially for their inability to decode the same. The above is further enthroned as there is no occasion throughout in the play that the Nupe language ever featured. Indeed, those literary devices in the above **Movements** "constitute the vital alliance between the peasantry" (Amuta, 1989, p. 166) and the proletariat in the anti-imperialist struggle.

In the seventh to tenth **Movements**, the playwright showcases the peak of the failure of the imperialised to harness the resources at their disposal to end imperialism. The features of this ruse among the Okun people in the play are disunity, lack of coordination, and the use of fowl language against one another. These interiorised violence, no doubt, some how reduces the impact of revolutionary aesthetics that would have emerged from the libertarian violence embedded in the people's anti-imperialist struggle.

For instance the utterance by WARRIOR 4 is uncalled for in the circumstances that the people find themselves in the play. He says:

You don't even have any respect for elders. Hm. It is not your fault at all at all. *Na condition bend crayfish (Clasping his hand in nostalgia.)* Imagine. Do you think both of you would be in the same camp if we were not cut pants down like these by these vandals? (p. 49).

Or

OBA 3: We lack unity. We have no united force. We could not even agree among ourselves on a war commander. Our efforts are not co-ordinated (p. 53).

Though, the intervention of a mother archetype was sought to minimise the extent of the damage that would have emerged from the above intra conflictual encounter; that is a pontification of the thematic revolutionary essence of the play.

IYEMI-O-BANI-AU, the mother archetype herself says:

By tomorrow evening, the Ibons will be here and (*Every-one is shocked*) they will come

in through the eastern gate. I propose that you take the people into the holes of the udi n'Uwu hills and put smear palm oil on the entrance.

WARLORD: Thank you, Iyemi. Thank you mother of our ancestors. Thank you. Mother is in the marketplace. How can the child's head wobble? (pp. 50-51).

From the above excerpts, it is clear that the people in their anti-imperialist struggle believe in the galvanisation of different forces, but this has been marred by their inability to speak with the same voice.

As part of the aesthetic masterpiece of the play, the playwright features the peak of the imperialistic exploits of the Nupe people. Though, this serves as "the negative pole of the dialectical balance of the play", (Amuta, 1989, p. 66) it re-establishes the thematic desirability of the same. The introduction of the "Ogba taxation" (p. 58), and the sudden emergence of "The Royal Niger Company (p. 61) are all allies of oppression built in imperialism and colonialism.

Conclusion

The findings of the paper revealed an abstruseness in the possibility of the Okun-Yoruba speakers cohabiting with the Nupe people. Apart from the physical annihilation brought by the local imperialism of the Nupe, the Okun people perceived the extinction of their being in that historical antecedent if it did not eventually summersault. Besides, the Okun people believe that, part of their contemporary underdevelopment is a product of that bad history. As far as they are concerned, history has not been fair to them, particularly with reference to their experience in the hands of the Nupe people; their supposed folk at least by way of boundary landscaping. Though, the playwright has a plausible ambition as revealed in *Ogidi Mandate*, the truth is that such has been impaired by the inordinate ambition of the imperialists.

In concluding this discussion on *Ogidi Mandate*, it is obvious that Olu Obafemi's aesthetic and thematic explorations in the play take after the Brechtian tradition with strict emphasis on "theatre for learning" (Weiss, 1968, p. 677). Theatre for learning expresses its tenets in didacticism, instruction from the stage, belief in myth-making, an espouse of mythology by the contemporary, the crudity of imperialism and the demystification of the same. Indeed, Bertolt Brecht's theatre for learning

is a literary platform upon which revolutionary aesthetics in contemporary drama flourishes.

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