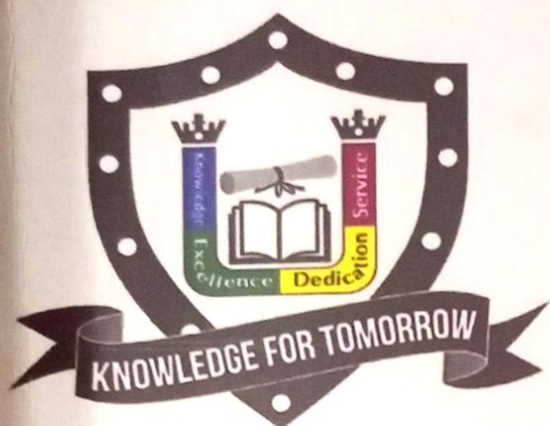




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## Sublimating Recounted History and Tradition in Selected Nigerian Dramas

**Femi Yinka ATTEH**

Department of Performing and Film Arts,  
Faculty of Arts,  
University of Ilorin, Nigeria.  
atteh.fy@unilorin.edu.ng\_+2348138379211

### Abstract

The study examines the documentary power of dramatic literature in recounting advancing human development, with a focus on selected Nigerian dramas. Through a descriptive research design and content analysis of selected play texts: Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Yerima's *Attahiru*, and Salami-Agunloye's *Idia, The Warrior Queen of Benin*, it assesses how drama presents history and tradition. Employing Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism as a theoretical framework, the research reveals that historical drama serves as an alternative source of history, offering valuable insights into the past and its relevance to societal growth. The study highlights exemplary characters from Nigerian plays, such as Iyaloja and Olunde from *Death and the King's Horseman*, Yakubu and Abbas from *Attahiru*, and Idia and Esigie from *Idia, The Warrior Queen of Benin*, who embody cultural heritage and resilience. Conversely, it critiques characters like Elesin, Ahmed, and Ihama in the selected texts, who exhibit lecherous tendencies and disregard for the history and traditions of the people. The paper recommends promoting authentic historical narratives through drama and avoiding negative role models, underscoring the significance of historical drama in shaping societal values and understanding human experiences. Ultimately, this research demonstrates the importance of integrating dramatic texts into the study of history and cultural heritage in Nigerian theatre practice.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, drama, history, Nigerian drama, tradition

### Introduction

History and tradition within any given society play important roles in aiding the development of the people. History describes past events as a pathway to the historical realities of the people, as they are ably documented in literature, drama, oral traditions, and many other media of recounting memory. Documented historical happenings dictate the changes expressed and experienced by the people in their dynamics of social change. Historical drama helps to document different cultural traits of the people across the various genres of dramatic literature. According to Julius-Adeoye (2013, pp.190-191)



Historical drama as a dramatic genre occupies a veritable position in dramatic literature, and its importance cannot be overemphasized. The place of history in the construction of drama is largely dependent on the dramatic genre. Many instances the dramatist may decide to use the contemporary socio-political situation as the material for his play without overtly fictionalising the plot and the characters.

Dramatic literature occupies a sensitive position within the intellectual approach of Nigerian scholarship today simply because it is one of the safest ways of documenting past events. Within any traditional system, the people's history helps them identify the good, bad, and ugly transitional processes they evolved as their dynamics of social change. Through the cultural and traditional system associated with Nigerian societies, Nigerian drama has evolved as an approach that helps people make better decisions in current and future expeditions about nation-building, tradition, and the representation of their authentic history. Hence, as Ejelonu and Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2025) observe, the dramatist's ability to create necessary awareness in his environment for positive change and re-direction, cannot be overemphasized.

Culture reflects evolving human experiences, while tradition includes inherited practices and values that define a society's identity. Both are guided by principles that influence individuals and communities, with psychological inheritance passed down through observation and participation in established norms. Scholars such as W. S. Haney and those discussing Soyinka's Ritual Drama recognise historical drama as a vital medium for conveying the aesthetics of historical phenomena, thereby serving to enlighten society. No wonder Haney (1990, p.34) expresses that Nobel prize winner, Soyinka, describes Yoruba drama as "representational and visionary; it attempts to implement the traditional function of Yoruba myth by actualising the ritual transition of a metaphysical gulf". Dimitriu (2020, p.650) confirms that "throughout modern history, a narrow policy-oriented interpretation has dominated strategic thinking". Dimitriu's (2020) perspective insists that documentation must evolve along with the growing contemporarilising realities of the people as it renders policy-oriented ideologies. Scholars such as Wole Soyinka, Ahmed Yerima, and Irene Salami-Agunloye remains a pathway to interacting with the people's authentic history, culture, and traditional theatre forms and practice, as "a major agent of social change as it's generally acknowledged and should be studied to obtain an adequate and complete understanding of how it ignites social change itself" (Adeoye and Atteh, 2024, p.350). Nigerian drama creatively incorporates theatrical elements like rituals, festivals, music, and dance, reflecting socio-historic realities. Plays such as *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Attahiru*, and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, exemplify this fascinating documentation.



### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the theoretical predisposition of Stephen Greenblatt's "New Historicism" as captured by Mikics (2007), who expresses that New Historicism is a form of literary theory to understand intellectual history through literature, and literature through the people's cultural context. This theory follows the 1950s field of history (Historicism) and captures the eco-cultural realities of the people within the scope of New Historicism, and "on forms of oppressive power relationships (Foucauldian 'panopticism'), and cultural materialism by contrast concentrating on the possibilities for opposition against dominant ideologies (a Williams-like 'resource of hope')" (Kavanagh, 1997, p.7). Greenblatt emphasises that this interrelationship can reconnect individuals to their surrounding histories. It can also enhance their understanding of cultural meanings by creating a "conventional containment of the playhouse where audiences are kept at a safe distance both from the action on stage and from the world beyond the walls" (Greenblatt, 1982, p.4). The conventional playhouse also represents any performance space capable of replicating the cultural affinities of the people. It generally reflects a form of literary theory that views history through the lenses of literature and literature through the canons of materialism and the people's cultural predisposition. Mikics (2007, p.205), in an appraisal of the meaning and essence of New Historicism, presents the movement of the 1980s and the following decades as one "emphasizing the intersection of literature with historical anecdote, and with the cultural practices of ordinary people". In another view, Kavanagh (1997, p.5) believes that, "the 'materialist' aspects of historical materialism are 'shared out' between cultural materialism and new historicism, so that neither of them can claim to incorporate a Marxist historical perspective". New Historicism is independent of indigenous cultural practices, but it relies on them as they are organic to the understanding of human existence. The foregrounding of New Historicism, according to Veenstra (1995, p.174), was made by Stephen Greenblatt, who "deals extensively with New Historicism he developed and for which he had coined the name 'Cultural Poetics'".

New Historicism evolved in 1982, gaining worldwide recognition through literature's interaction with art, culture, history, and traditional practices of the people. Interestingly, Prafulia (1995), cited in Magner (2007, p.32), asserts that "literary critics are increasingly employing 'thick description' borrowed from history", likewise "professional historians are using techniques of literary interpretation in their study of society and culture". However, in interrogating the history and cultural realities of a given society, some key assumptions continually recur in the use of New Historicism, as identified by Veaser (1989), as cited in Xiaotang (2021, p.1077), which outlines key assumptions that help guide the understanding of New Historicism. These are:

1. Every expressive act (including literature) is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. Every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. Literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably;



4. No discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature; and
5. A critical method and language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

Nigerian drama emphasises the people's social realities and how the dynamics of social change, influenced by socio-historical, economic, political, cultural, and religious factors, shape the structural growth of the people. Bressler (2003), cited in Salihu (2017, p.88), "highlights the interrelatedness of all human activities, admits its prejudices and gives a more complete understanding of a text". Nigerian drama heavily emphasises history and traditional theatre. Playwrights like Ahmed Yerima, Wole Soyinka, and Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye document Nigerian histories and traditions, using historical events to address societal issues as "unconducive situations or conditions that may occur through struggles and imbalances in the sociocultural, economic and political realities of the moment" (Adeoye and Atteh, 2024, p.351). This study also investigates how *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), Attahiru (1999), and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* (2008) serve as authentic representations of historical and traditional narratives. The Abobaku tradition in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Sultan Attahiru's refusal of friendship for a holy war against colonial forces in Yerima's *Attahiru*, and *Idia's* defence of the Benin Kingdom in Salami-Agunloye's *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, reflect some of Nigeria's critical historical experiences.

### **Sublimating History and Tradition as Subtext in Nigerian Historical Drama**

History and tradition are momentous to the process of shaping the transitional and developmental stages of society. Together, they encapsulate the fundamental meanings and essence of a community's way of life. Cultural societies possess diverse historical narratives that serve as foundational backgrounds, alongside ancient mythological representations of deified legends. Additionally, traditional theatre practices, regarded as sacred by the African people, provide essential pathways to cultural enlightenment. Historical narratives are integral to the cosmic calendar, which delineates the comprehensive journey of humans within any given society on Earth. Aduku (2018, p.2) insists that "history and myth are very important factors of African histrionics, theatre, film and literature. History and myth also provide for the artist materials for the examination and projection of a people's hopes, fears and aspirations". Aduku (2018) identifies sublimation, dictating that Nigerian drama houses the histories and myths of the people. Nigerian drama solidifies the history of the people by having it directly presenting man's interaction with the understanding of subtexts as associated with the realities of daily living. In the course of history, according to Ogunbiyi (2014, p. 2), it is stated that:

man learnt to make nature work according to his needs. Invariably, this meant learning to court nature, to coax it, and not to suppose for a moment that an arbitrary will can be imposed on it to make it render its



wealth. This unity with the rest of nature, constantly rediscovered and developed in struggle and through productive labour, is the essence of human fulfilment.

According to Ogunbiyi (2014), the inevitable dynamic of social change guides and helps man succeed in his journey towards enlightenment. All his efficacies eventually become the subtext for historical drama. Such sublimations as subtext, which can also be traced to the “diversion of indigenous cultural and traditional ways of Nigerian societies into a civilised settlement gradually influenced the disconnection of the people from their cultural ways” (Atteh, 2022, p.14). The insights gained from rediscovering the essence of human fulfilment manifest as subtexts that inspire social change. These subtexts are often woven into historical drama, reflecting the socioreligious, political, and economic contexts of the people.

Historical drama captures human dynamics like conflict, collusion, and cultural differences, acting as catalysts for societal enlightenment. It records humanity's quest for evolution as subtext documented as oral traditions and literary history, revealing the values of the people and enhancing our understanding of contemporary Nigerian society. Ogude (1991), cited in Affiah and Elekwachi (2018, p.13), states that, “what constitutes the mainstream of African writing to date derives ultimately from the definite historical event or social conditions”. The rediscovery of human fulfillment drives social change, often highlighted in historical dramas that explore the complexities of socioreligious, political, and economic systems. These stories reveal human dynamics, conflicts, and cultural differences that contribute to the pursuit of societal enlightenment. Ultimately, humanity's evolution and civilisation are captured through oral traditions and literary narratives. No wonder Ifatimehin (2017, pp.6-7) reacts that “by narrative surplus, it is meant that there are more beyond what the playwright points us to. This 'more' is the subtext. The subtext is all that the playwright does not seem to be saying, but is inadvertently communicating”. Fascinatingly, documenting events from past times requires continuous access to one historical entity or the other. Soyinka and Brutus (1974), cited in Bilkisu (2014, p.23), express that “the Declaration of African Writers conference, when they called for the full retrieval of the African past in the quest for a contemporary self-apprehension and design for the future”. The significance of authentic historical drama lies in its commitment to accurately representing history. History and tradition are interconnected; as traditional theatre reflects the dynamic socio-religious systems of the people. Bakay (2015, p.551) opines that “tradition focuses on the gulf between the deities, between man and his ancestors, between the unborn and his reality, and the essential gulf that lies between one area of existence and another”. Socio-historic and traditional theatre practices focus on the continuous linkages between the physical and spiritual realm of living as subtext. For example, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) is a Yoruba classical writing revolving around the Abobaku tradition, which subsists in some Yoruba societies. *Death and the King's Horseman* is based on a real-life cultural event that is ascribed to have



happened around 1946, but Soyinka alters some historical facts and presents a fictional version of the real incident. The aim is to examine key issues like ritual killings and the documentation of cultural history. For example, reflecting on the passing of Oba Okunade Sijuwade, former Ooni of Ife, highlights the unexpected reactions to established traditions. Facts about the passing were also captured by Ifatimehin (2017, p.47), who further explains that the

Oba, as modernity would have it, was flown to London for better medical care... would suggest that the Oba did not want to die. When modern medicine failed to keep him alive, ... the Abobaku (literally translated to mean, the one who dies with the king) disappears.

Ifatimehin's (2017) perspective is unique in representing the evolving realities around the thriving indigenous cultural and traditional practices of the people. Recollections of events surrounding the person of Abobaku, who goes missing when a Yoruba king passes, remain recurrent in Nigeria's historical drama. Furthermore, Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* (1999) is a historical play representing the sensitive religio-cultural situation of the Northern Caliphate system during the colonial intrusion. No wonder Liman (2019, p.161) captures that "the early rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate i.e Dan Fodio and Muhammad Bello however, abolished this hereditary system, replacing it with the process whereby leaders were appointed by their Islamic scholarship and moral standing" and/or, as also reflected in the personality of a Idia, the Queen mother in *Idia, the warrior Queen of Benin* (2008), as she fights to protect the Benin kingdom but risk falling target to the traditions of the land she defends. In fact, her personality is that of a:

powerful priestess, for she utilized her knowledge of prayer and medicines to sustain her son on the throne and to ensure that a peaceful and successful reign... by putting away his mother; rather, in order to honour her, created the title of *Iyoba* for her, translated as "(biological) mother of the Oba. (Aneni 2016, p.24)

Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye's play exemplifies the nature of historical and traditional Nigerian drama, integrating nuanced subtexts that reflect the dynamics of social change. Notably, there exists a strong connection between oral and written forms of Nigerian literature. Historical dramas such as *Kurunmi* (1971), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), *Kiriji War* (1976), and *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* (2007) document critical historical realities. Playwrights strategically employ elements like myth, ritual, festivals, and folklore to enrich their narratives, establishing a benchmark for creative writing in the realm of historical drama. This will seem to suggest that Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* (1999), and Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye's *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* (2008) fall into the category of historical drama.



**Sublimating Recounted History and Tradition in *Death and the King's Horseman***  
*Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka is based on real-life cultural and traditional events that took place in ancient Oyo, a Yoruba city in Nigeria, around 1946. Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* tell how Simon Pilkings, District Officer, intervenes and prevents the untimely ritual suicide of a Yoruba chief, Elesin Oba. Elesin is to embark on a sacrificial suicide demanded by the customs and traditions of the land. Jeyifo (1977), cited in Gargati (2015, p.14), expresses that "Soyinka's mythopoeic attitude to history, his constant penchant for transforming experience into metaphysical trans-historical mythic dimensions". Relating to the mythopoeic attitude to history, Elesin expresses that:

Who does not seek to be remembered? Memory is the Master of Death, the chink in his armour of conceit. I shall leave that which makes my going the sheerest Dream of an afternoon. Should voyagers not travel light? Let the considerate traveller Shed, of his excessive load, all that may benefit the living. (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p.20)

The hesitation proves disastrous as local colonial officer Simon Pilkings intervenes in what he views as a barbaric ritual. Elesin, aware of the implications, tries to assert his legacy, but the timing is wrong; he was meant to transition untainted. The clash between African traditions and Western ideologies is highlighted, regardless of Soyinka's critique of Nigerian society for neglecting its traditions and sense of duty to them. According to Yakuba and Podu (1995), cited in Gnanasekaran (2018, p.814), "In Soyinka's drama, the son pursues Western education but ultimately is himself fiercely determined to uphold tradition". Looking at the play text, Soyinka challenges tradition and welcomes change, as Jane Pilkings argues that "one should try to understand all cultures" (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p.54). When Olunde hears that the Pilkings are going to a party wearing an ancestral mask and show no respect for Yoruba customs, he observes: "And that is the good cause for which you desecrate an ancestral mask?" while Jane's response is "Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing!" (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p.50). Olunde is aware that white people cannot understand the customs of black people. And then, he opens up his view to Jane on the importance of Yoruba traditions with the following words: "No, I am not shocked, Mrs. Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand." (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p.192). The understanding derived from this statement is that Olunde welcomes change into his life by going to the white man's land to study for four years, but he doesn't forget the history behind the traditional essence he subsumed over time.

Elesin's unborn child, conceived under irregular circumstances, is viewed as a source of malevolence for the community. This situation arises from a break in tradition, as the notion of 'travelling light' is undermined by Elesin Oba's actions. A new history is



made through Elesin's weakness disrupts the social order. No wonder Msiska (2007, p.69) observes that;

In Elesin's failure, Soyinka is suggesting that true political agency must be a matter of choice rather than duty, and... focuses on its general transgressive value, an aspect which also has the potential to undermine the very ideological ground on which it is predicated.

Msiska (2007) argues that the social disorder in the drama stems from Elesin's conflict with tradition and colonial interference. The Pilkings family tries to understand Yoruba practices but ultimately falters after Olunde's unexpected death. Olunde, becoming the late King's horseman, takes on his father's duties while his father is still alive. His death reinforces tradition, countering the expectation that his time in Europe would lead him to abandon customs. Soyinka's drama presents Olunde's decision to commit traditional suicide as profoundly shocking.

#### **Sublimating Recounted History and Tradition in Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru***

*Attahiru* by Ahmed Yerima is concerned mainly with a specific moment in the history of Northern Nigeria in general, and the Sokoto Caliphate in particular. In the Author's Note, Yerima explains that the play owes its provenance to two significant considerations; one is the need to reconstruct the past and subject it to a process of self-criticism, while the other is a response to the challenge by Alhaji Shehu Suleiman, his good friend who after watching Trials of Oba Ovonramwen on stage, dares him to turn the history of the Sokoto Caliphate into drama.

Most times, history as told by great historians evokes sympathy, especially colonial history, as one sees one domineering force bully the minor one. But fate constantly intervenes and interrupts the lives of the people the history emerges from... while empowering even the sometimes-historical contradictions presented with illusion, immediacy and theatrical magic. (*Attahiru*, 1999, p.7)

*Attahiru* is a historical drama that depicts a significant period in the Sokoto Caliphate and Northern Nigeria during colonial times. British incursions into Northern Nigeria began around 1886 under Frederick Lord Lugard, who aimed to reshape local governance. Emirs were incorporated into British rule through indirect administration. The Sokoto emirate, led by the benevolent Caliph Abdul-Rahman, was the last to fall, with the conquest occurring in 1903 after his negotiations with the British ended with his death in 1901. In 1902, his son, Muhammad Attahiru, became the new caliph who took on the title of Sultan. In his assumption of office, he states that

I am becoming the Caliph at a time when the history of our lives is at a delicate balance. At a time when the Whiteman is determined to upset



the peace of our lives. But it is too early to dare enemies, or look for one... Let us pray for peace. Let us pray for our children. Let us pray for the growth of our lives and position in the Islamic world. Thank you all. (Attahiru, 1999, p.21)

The Caliph recognises that foreigners are disrupting the cosmological balance. Just three months into his reign, Sultan Attahiru faced a challenging situation as the British, having conquered Yola, Zaria, Kano, Kontagora, Ilorin, and Katsina, advanced on Sokoto, the final stronghold of the Northern kingdoms. The British sent two letters offering friendship to the Caliph, but he chose not to respond. On the third occasion, he sends his reply rejecting the offer of friendship. He lost his life alongside over ninety-nine of his soldiers after bravely defending his religion and the honour of the Sokoto caliphate. As is expected, the major player in the last moments of the war is the Caliph himself. The scenario is captured by Yakubu, a member of Attahiru 's warriors:

YAKUBU: Yet, the greatest moment was when the Caliph fell. As the bullet struck him, he raised up his sword and screamed Allahu-akbar! Allahu-akbar! He was a great man indeed. With the bullet, he still cut down two more soldiers, then his Rawani loosened, and his cap fell. He twisted in pain. Holding on to nothing but his guts... But the Caliph had fallen, and with his last breath, he screamed again. (Attahiru, 1999, p.63)

Yakubu presents a positive account of the Caliph's downfall. The people accept their defeat as Attahiru chooses to uphold the Sokoto Caliphate's integrity by confronting colonial forces. This is because their socioreligious identity is deeply tied to Islam, which governs much of their lives. This is expressed in the conversation between Ahmed and Abbas:

ABBAS: Let them come. Let them come. The Caliph will cut them down, one by one. Let them come.  
AHMED: The Caliph? Did you not hear that he lost the battle at the city gates?  
ABBAS: I hear, but Allah is with the Caliph. I hear that he only left in order to prepare for the bigger war. (p.48)

It is possible to dismiss Abbas's statement as the ranting of a poor, helpless beggar, but the fact is that it speaks volumes about the popular perception and idealisation of the Caliph as a saint and a great soldier, capable of defending the Islamic faith and the integrity of the Sokoto Caliphate. History continues to present Attahiru as the true custodian of a people's tradition. The fall of the Sokoto Caliphate is a symbolic description of the final takeover, which initiated Western intrusion into Northern Nigeria



and over a hundred years after such an unfortunate conquest, Attahiru is still remembered as one of the bastions of the Islamic religion and Northern culture.

### **Sublimating Recounted History and Tradition in Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye's *Idia, the Warrior Queen***

Irene Salami-Agunloye's historical conception of *Idia, the Warrior Queen* of Benin, presents Queen Idia, Esigie, the Oba of Benin's mother, who jealously guards the interest of protecting her legacy and impact. Oba Ozolua, her husband, dies, leaving behind two powerful sons to dispute over who will become the next Oba. Esigie controls Benin City, while Arhuanran is based in the equally important city of Udo, about twenty miles away. She receives much credit for these victories as her political counsel, together with her magical powers and medicinal knowledge, are viewed as critical elements for Esigie's success on the battlefield. Idia became the first Iyoba (Queen Mother) of Benin when Esigie conferred upon her the title 'Eguae-Iyoba' (Palace of the Queen Mother) in 1507 A.D, and in honour of her success, an ivory mask was carved in 1520A.D.

Salami-Agunloye's text characterises Idia, the queen's mother, letting her lament about her intended death as she becomes the mother to the great king of the great Benin kingdom. The conversation between her and Iyesogie, between pages 1-5 of the play script, recounts a prosperous alignment with the notion that nobody goes through all, making Benin successful and yet just dies. Fascinatingly, the king chooses to adjust tradition as he expresses in a conversation between him and the chief. He expresses that:

It's time to continue with the review of some of our traditional laws. As I said yesterday, I have reviewed and come up with some changes; the most important on the list is the creation of the palace of the Iyaoba, the queen mother of the Benin kingdom.

IHAMA: Does that mean that the Oba has not changed his mind about the plans to spare the life of his mother?

IYASE: If that is the case, your highness, we say no to the review and change of our tradition. Tradition is tradition, it cannot be changed midways... Oba is not mature enough to rule the great Benin.  
(*Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, 2008, pp.9-10)

The conversation reveals that traditional laws are rigid and shouldn't be altered by any one individual, even if they are the tradition's custodian. The chief's reaction illustrates a cultural language applicable to traditional practices within governance, highlighting the conflict between the theme of change as depicted in Nigerian drama and its eloquent delivery of historical accuracy.



Conflict and resolution are sensitive realities of the people's culture and tradition, being susceptible to change by necessary persuasion. Looking at the conversation in the royal court;

- UKE: Your majesty, a group of protesting market women is demanding they want to have audience with you  
bring in their leaders [Exits Uke]  
ESIGIE: What? Bring women into the royal court? Is this part of  
EZOMO: the reform?  
ESIGIE: Chief Ezomo, give me a break, would you? I am the Oba of Benin... I demand to have an audience with the market women. Is that clear, Chief Ezomo?  
ESOGBAN: Your majesty, it is clear, it is just that these things are happening so fast. (*Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, 2008, p.24)

Women have been invited to the royal court, breaking the tradition of male-only discussions about town affairs. This unprecedented inclusion is aimed at saving the queen mother's life, a gesture supported by the king to ensure a peaceful reign. The chiefs agree to the protest, recognising it as a means to protect the queen mother and the Benin people from threats posed by the king's brother and the Igalas. The documentation and full retrieval of the African past glories are self-apprehension and strategic designs of documenting history for the future. Not knowing the place of history and tradition can mislead society. But literary and oral documentation in historical drama continues to be another access point to the people's history.

### Conclusion

History and tradition are constantly recounted as they constitute a vital part of historical drama. Nigerians are encouraged to preserve their rich history and traditional theatre forms and practices through proper documentation. *Deaths and the King's Horseman* (1975), *Attahiru* (1999), and *Idia, the Warrior Queen* (2008) remain a response to Wole Soyinka and Dennis Brutus' need to challenge African writers. Interestingly, early playwrights such as Ogunde Hubert, Duro Lapido, Ola Balogun, and many others use the intricate cultures of the Yoruba people to produce historical and mythological dramas. These playwrights explore the relationship between history, tradition, and Nigerian drama. Therefore, this study recommends that playwrights, theatre scholars, practitioners, and artists should utilise different historical accounts as subtexts in the documentation of authentic history. More efforts should be geared towards documenting historical happenings not only as play texts, but as true representations of Nigerian history, drama and theatre.



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