
THE HISTORIC, HISTRIONIC AND REVOLUTIONARY IDEALS AS CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES IN SALAMI-AGUNLOYE'S *IDIA, THE WARRIOR QUEEN OF BENIN*

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Abstract

*This paper sets out to expose three conflicting ideologies in Salami-Agunloye's play *Idia the Warrior Queen of Benin*. There is no doubt that the recourse to history and the deployment of the historical material have been a major source of aesthetic and ideological strategy aimed at reconstructing contemporary in-equilibrium that affects the woman in all African society and by a token of extension, to all societies of the world. In her attempt to demystify patriarchal constructs within the Benin culture, Salami-Agunloye falls back to a historical incident to make a case for "power sharing" with the women in a "constitutional" sense. However, while trying to find justification in a historic material, the historic character in the personality of *Idia* is transposed to a "Promethean" quality, hence the histrionic misadventure in the ideo-aesthetic vitality of the play. This paper, therefore, argues that in spite of the playwright's attempt to infuse a revolutionary ideology and praxis in this play, the historic, the histrionic and the revolutionary ideals, form an aporia that explains the conflicting ideologies. This paper, thus, aims at a critical analysis of the play *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* to unravel the aesthetic, the historic and the ideological dimensions, which represent these areas of conflict in the play text. The methodology employed is qualitative and the research design is content analysis. In this process, the textual content of the play combined with the historical incidents around the story portrayed, form part of the primary source. The secondary source draws from other literatures and research sources that provide additional information to the issues under discourse. The paper uses New historicism as its theoretical framework. In this theorizing, history is used to validate the assumption of the literary or artistic material. This paper concludes in the final analysis that there are areas of conflict that are identified given the historic, aesthetic and the ideological mix in the play.*

Key Words: *Historic, Histrionics, Revolutionary Ideal, Conflicting Ideologies*

Introduction

History no doubt plays an undisputed role in providing material for the creative arts generally. The literary arts in particular and dramatic literature especially has benefitted from historical material to make comments in the present. Contemporary history too has been used to reinforce the place of not only naturalism in artistic portrayal but also that, concrete historical events and incidents served to comment directly and in a most authorized manner, issues that demand urgent dissection without recourse to poetic inhibitions of language and aesthetic temperaments. However, history as we know and that has to do with narrative that is quaint and distant from the present setting throws challenges of relevance and authenticity in terms of ideals and some ideologies that the ever evolving contemporary society would have to contend with.

There is no doubt that history has been formulated into an advocacy tool for the service of feminism in the dramaturgy of Irene Salami-Agunloye. To a large extent, one aesthetic value that remains consistent in the works of Salami-Agunloye, no doubt, is the foregrounding of women in history. Through her dramatic tropes, history is rewritten to confront gender imbalance and also by ideological means, deconstruct gender codes and constructs encrypted on culture and tradition. This is done with the understanding that all these reactionary constructs that tend to perpetuate male dominance and women's marginalization derive their legitimacy from historical reference points. Patriarchy and all its offshoots in all spheres of life are believed to be products of tradition and by implication, history. This, the feminists believe has sustained the lopsided representation of women by male and some female writers. So, by the same historical token, the feminist playwright hopes to reshape meaning in certain historical experiences. Salami-Agunloye (2007, p.95) posits that:

In an attempt to situate myself within the male-dominated literary space, I have resolved to rewrite the negative stereotypical portrayal of women in texts written by men. In doing so I am constructing new identities for the female characters or heroines whom I use as mouth piece to buttress my feminist view points and engaged in criticism of the social order.

Furthermore, in the introduction of the play, the playwright states that what is contained in the play text is not the actual history, yet something in the way the story is related (creativity) could have downplayed Queen Idia. What is the implication of this? Macherey (1990, p. 215) posits that “explicit is to implicit as explication is to implication”, in the bid to make a story more dramatic, a playwright or a director may be more explicit in their expressions. This creative imagination is welcome; nevertheless, it should not be interminable. What happened here may be similar to what Macherey observed in the text from Nietzsche, that:

Therefore, everything happened as though the accent had been shifted. The work is revealed to itself and to others on two different levels. It makes visible and it makes invisible, not because something has to be hidden in order to show something else; but because attention is diverted from the very thing which is shown. This is the superposition of utterance and statement (1990, p. 219).

That is why the present analysis intends to subject the intention of the playwright against what the referrals of the play, couched from historic fact and fiction might represent in contemporary world of possibilities.

It is established in the analyses of Salami-Agunloye's oeuvres that there is the sustained argument that women in politics are capable of projecting themselves to reckoning. They are not only to be seen as “King makers” but that they have the potential to wrestle power from men by asserting their importance as a formidable power bloc. This is done through her

historic plays, *Emotan*, (2001), *The Queen Sisters* (2002), the culmination in the play *More than Dancing* (2003). Yet, one may want to ask, what further propositions lie beyond the specifications in this revolutionary ideals highlighted in her earlier historical plays?

In the play *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* (2008) (henceforth *Idia...*), Salami-Agunloye steps further her propositions of power shift/sharing from a hypothetical trope in *More than Dancing*, (2003) to the historic plain. In *Idia...*, she dramatizes the quest for power shift/sharing with some degree of historical empiricism. Like her earlier plays, she continues with the vision of revolt, collective struggle and female “heroism”. However, unlike the other plays, “heroism” in the present play is almost “Promethean” in Salami-Agunloye’s radical handling of the subject matter of war, hence the histrionic import of the play. Historical narratives by their nature are known to possess histrionic dimensions. Epic qualities and legendary submissions have sometimes encumbered the diffusion of ideological intentions of the creative artists. This of course is the conflict created by the level of poetic assertiveness, which the playwright proposes for the achievement of her overall goal.

Furthermore, as it will be illustrated in this paper, that the struggle for power and the maintenance of power in the play, as well as the personality of Idia could have pushed forward an idealists’ ideology rather than the communitarian manifesto, which the playwright attempts to project in her plays. This forms part of the contestation in the present analysis as it is thought to demonstrate the conflicting ideologies in the play. Thus we contextualize the discourse in Salami-Agunloye’s preoccupation in the present play within complexities of history, histrionics and revolutionary politics as conflicting ideologies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework under guarding this analysis is New Historicism. The sum total of the New Historicists’ proposition is that the text and historical events are mutually parts of the same process of unfolding history. The reading of the text therefore, takes into account in equal weighing, the context of history just as history too is read as a dynamic process, acquiring other interpretations like the text. This relationship is what Louis Monstrose describes as the “the textuality of history and the historicity of the texts” (quoted in Barry, 1995, p.172).

A further espousal of this theory presupposes the fact that renewed meaning and interpretation of historical texts or creative works based on historical fact would need revalidation in the constant reengagement with the evolving social context and realities of our present time. This paper tries to argue therefore, that just like the historical process itself, drama overtures ought to mutate with the history that produces it. Ideas and propositions of a creative work need not be locked up in fixed historiographies. This resonates with M.H. Abrams’ view of New historicism that in practice:

New Historicism rejects the fallacy of mainstream criticism which views literary texts as autonomous body of fixed meanings that cohere to form. But on the contrary they see literary texts as consisting of diversity, of dissonance voices, and these voices express not only orthodox but also subordinate and subversive voices of the era in which the text is produced (2005, p. 192).

The proposition of this theory to this work is that history is not homogeneous and stable pattern of facts. The events, which serve as the “background” to the literature of an era and which literature can simply reflect, or which can be adverted to are very much related. As such, the changes that occur in history should affect the aesthetics and ideological focus of a playwright and his works. This theory thus, advances the fact that dramatic literature is a

form of culture production that is shaped and reshaped by the wind of historical change. The cultural artifact therefore, in this context, the dramatic text needs to be re-examined along the major concerns of societal change. The methodology applied in this analysis is content analysis. The aesthetics and ideological perspectives to subject of discourse are examined.

On Salami Agunloye's *Idia, The Warrior Queen*

In history, Queen Idia was known to be a noble warrior in Benin history. Her fame even goes beyond the walls of Benin, she is seen as a national heroine, so much so that her image has become an icon that represents Nigeria internationally. Thus during the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977 (FESTAC '77), an ivory mask of her head was used as the emblem of the global festival (Salami-Agunloye, 2008, p. x).

Be that as it may, the glamour and glory attached to queen Idia's name tend to wane, as soon as one sees the cause for which she fights in Salami-Agunloye's play, which has its title after her name *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*. It is sad to see that she is made to look like the typical trouble maker. An African woman is usually portrayed as a peace maker and a home maker. Rather than a woman trying to prevent injustice and put a stop to a barbaric culture, Idia in this play represents the opposite. That King Esigie, her son, vehemently opposes the killing of the queen Mother/s during his era was credible and a welcome change, but that is not what brings about the war queen Idia engages in and which inadvertently results in her "fame". Her son is able to at least, run roughshod over his ruling council members to have his way for his mother not to be eliminated simply because he becomes the king of the Benin kingdom. The reason the queen Mother went to war is the unpalatable outcome of king Esigie's nosiness into another man's privacy out of envy of his "marital bliss", which he; the king obviously does not have. As a result, he plans to poison the mind of the beautiful bride of Chief Oliha.

The story has it in Scene 6, that it is more or less a game of betting between the King and Chief Oliha about how faithful Imaguero, the Chief's wife was. This immaterial argument takes over the initial discussion about how to tackle the disloyal Attahof Igala who is becoming a threat to Benin kingdom in spite of Chief Esogban's warning.

Esogban: Your majesty, this is not a subject before us, it is too trivial for us to deliberate on in the royal court...(pg)

Yet, King Esigie went ahead with his idle project; he sends a messenger (Uke), with a gift, not just to lure Oliha's wife into an affair with himself but to also poison her mind against her husband by lying to her that her husband has publicly boasted about his love to his other wife Amighen who is Imaguero's rival and happens to be king Esigie's daughter. These malicious lies that Esigie tells the favourite wife of Oliha obviously backfires when her husband finds out that King Esigie has been making advances towards his wife. In rage, chief Oliha kills Imaguero 'his beloved' accidentally. He then goes ahead and murdered the rest of his five wives, which included King Esigie's daughter, Amighen. It is based on this that Queen Idia goes to war with Oliha because Amighen was her granddaughter.

Shifting Ideologies in Salami-Agunloye's *Idia*...

Works of Salami-Agunloye like most female authors and playwrights are assessed as reflecting feminists' ideology, also as joining a line of efforts as achieving global reform through fighting for women's right in a society thought to be divided by injustice instituted by lopsided social relations and administered by patriarchy. Salami-Agunloye (2007:196) notes of her plays thus:

Protest Theatre or Theatre of Revolt has become popular in Nigeria as an avenue to express the struggles and aspiration of the oppressed masses. I see the idea of revolt as a radical aspect of theatre which can be used in the service of feminist change. In most of my plays I have used elements of the theatre of revolt as a weapon to ‘dismantle the master’s house’, seen in the women’s move to overthrow men politically.

The revolutionary consciousness expressed in the above quotation has been expressed in the corpus of Salami-Agunloye's plays. However, in the play *Idia...* Salami-Agunloye’s social vision tends to shift from her commitment to revolt through collective struggle to individual heroism. There appears to be an ambiguity in the playwright’s penchant for what she sees as ideal model of the feminist struggle in *Idia...* One of her motivations as a playwright is the fact that she is convinced that history has not been fair to women. As such, Salami-Agunloye (2007:195) says as a playwright, she has taken the challenge to revisit the women in history, “to foreground women in history by rewriting history using dramatic texts”. By this she has equally taken the challenge to engage in a radical step to project a vision of change in contemporary time.

On the play *Idia...* in particular, she writes that “in *Warrior Queen* (That is *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*) I present another strong female character in the person of Idia, a historical figure who confronts Portuguese traders...Idia is displayed as a woman of valour who single-handedly wages war against an enemy nation when the men were reluctant to go to war”. This proposition by the playwright conflicts with many analyses, which her critics apply to this play with regards to her revolutionary vision. Adeyongo, for instance, maintains that the intention of the playwright is to present a revolutionary masterpiece. The theme of revolt therefore, dominates the play and this can be easily deciphered from protest motif and revolt in the actions of first, the Oba Esigie and second, Queen mother Idia. The King’s move for a constitutional review, repealing the law that sentences all queen mothers to death at the enthronement of their sons as Obas of Benin marks the first act of revolt against the customs and traditions of the kingdom. Second, the Oba has also instituted a law enthrone his mother and henceforth, all Queen mothers as Iye Oba, with a palace in Uselu. All these are not without the prompting of the Queen mother and her team of market women who promise to speak out against the obnoxious tradition of killing Queen mothers in the kingdom.

Adeyongo’s analysis suggests that with the opposition from the council of the Oba Esigie on one side as custodians of tradition (the patriarchal regime) and Oba Esigie with his supporting chiefs and the protesting women on the other, the stage is set for the revolution. Adeyongo (2008, p. 169) writes that:

This decision by the Oba does not go down well with some chiefs who believe that Oba Esigie is not only mature (sic) enough to rule the great Benin Kingdom but is also transgressing and trivializing the tradition of the people...Oba Esigie, Chief Oliha and Ologbosere however believe that the law on Queen mothers is obsolete, obnoxious and counterproductive. It is a tradition that is no longer beneficial to the people and denigrating. They believe that no tradition is static and that: ‘laws are made for man and not man for the law. When the snail discovers splinters in its shell it changes its abode’.

This supposedly marks the play as radical and revolutionary in the opinion of this critic.

Going by the unfolding of the plot of the play, the resolution of the whole conflict seems to depend on the lone character of Idia, the Queen mother. The collective character of a typical revolutionary play is downplayed by the playwright. Furthermore, the aristocratic vitality of the conflicts betrays the collective benefit in any revolution. This is the contestation in this paper, to show the ambiguities in the playwright's representation in this play and therefore, interpret it as elitist and bourgeois in ideology. To further show that there are conflicting ideologies in the playwright's radical and revolutionary commitment to a liberal humanist concern despite her claim for ideals of collective struggle.

Ellisson Domkap's analysis of *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* is from a directorial point of view, which he experienced in the process of staging the play and one other, *Sweet Revenge* by the same playwright. This means that the critic is approaching the analysis of the play in performance rather than from a literary analysis. In this analysis, the director as a critic in this context acknowledges that the social vision of Salami-Agunloye in this play is nothing other than social change.

As a director therefore, Domkap asserts that his task is to project the ideological and philosophical postulation of the plays he is putting on stage vis-a-vis their social implication. Thus, he comes to the conclusion that the primary objective of the feminists, whose ideology runs through the play, is the drive for "the struggle for equal participation, equal opportunities, empowerment and social justice for women" (2009, p. 273). This means that his directorial approach to the plays just like the playwright's intention is to project the motif of revolt that will lead to the overall revolutionary intent of the playwright in the two plays.

Domkap believes that the highpoint of the conflict in the play *Idia...is Queen mother Idia's* rise against the tradition of the Benin Kingdom. The act of revolt is consummated in the series of plots that show that:

In alliance with her son the Oba Esigie, Idia fights for life. Instead of answering the call to death, Idia answers a soldier's call to duty. While most men are afraid to face the enemies and run into hiding, Idia, in an extraordinary act of heroism confronts the Idah warriors and saves Benin Kingdom (2009, p. 273).

The act of revolting against her death sentence and the heroism exhibited by Idia in becoming the saving grace for the Benin Kingdom as a woman is supposedly, the emphasis of this director/critic. This presupposition in itself is in conflict with revolutionary action, which does not rule out the possibility of death. Like Kinjeketile in the play with the same title by Ebrahim N. Hussein, Kimathi in the play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugiwa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo Githae, both revolutionary heroes laid down their lives for the triumph of the revolution. Again, the lone heroism of Idia in battle portrays her character as of legendry and of mythical quality rather than a revolutionary heroine. This also challenges the tenets of a socialist realism. These arguments form part of the contestation in the present study, suggesting a shift in Salami-Agunloye's ideological focus beyond the ideals of socialist revolution.

History and the Histrionic Ingression in Salami-Agunloye's *Idia...*

Political consciousness dominates the preoccupations of Salami-Agunloye in this play. The intention of the drama as crafted from the historic deeds of Queen Idia is to project a sensitivity that African women from history have been able to penetrate the realm of politics by dismantling barriers set against them by tradition and other social constructs. Thus, Queen Idia serves as the playwright's ideal model. However, in an attempt to register this point, the playwright's over reliance on historic details towards impressing on the ascendancy of

women comes into conflict with her ideology of collective struggle. This no doubt translates into ideo-aesthetic variation, which the pursuit of political gains has engendered in the artistic productivity of Salami-Agunloye. Raymond Williams (1977, p. 95) argues that the arts, reifies history and in this process, much of historical details are mediated upon, of course, not at the expense of aesthetic and ideological commitment. He writes:

Thus the arts can be said to ‘reflect the real world, holding ‘the mirror up to nature’, but every term of such a definition has been in protracted and necessary dispute. Art can be seen as reflecting not ‘mere appearances’ but the ‘reality’ behind these: the ‘inner nature’ of the world, or its ‘constitutive forms’. Or art is seen as reflecting not the ‘lifeless world’ but the world as seen in the mind of the artist.

The imminent contradiction in the present play therefore, which by now one can sufficiently address as a political propaganda is the interface between politics, legendary and theatre. The idea that women’s cause and politics should not mix is extremely ancient. Part of these old views is what makes politics among women to be frequently regarded as a trespass on the public domain of power. On the contrary, Salami-Agunloye (2011, p. 86) argues that both the educated and uneducated women from history have proven that women have exerted political power. Her reference is to legendary figures of the past that have influenced the political lives of their kingdoms and led war campaigns. She posits further that “in the situation of war, conflict, and oppression, even humble women have risen to deliver their lands”. Unfortunately, this seems to be the threshold of the point of contradiction.

When one considers the relationship between the aesthetics of heroism in African literature both oral and written, it seems not to favour the ideology of collective struggle. Lar (2011, p. 76), for instance, posits that heroism in literature generally comes with some physical, moral and intellectual qualities:

These virtues include personal charm and charisma, nobility of character and action, and unusual display of gallantry and valour in warfare. Some heroes are of noble birth. The hero is often an embodiment of certain cherished societal values and ideals (no matter how reactionary). His superiority over other men is something marked by supernatural circumstance of birth and breeding (Emphasis mine).

It thus becomes a little weird that such heroism could be configured into the aesthetic of collective struggle. Ebrahim N. Hussein’s experiment in *Kinjeketile* and Ngugiwa Thiong’o’s and Micere Mugo Githae’s own radical play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* have not proven sufficiently, that such legends sit well in the construct of revolutionary aesthetics. The overbearing influence of a legendary figure naturally dims the supposed glamour of collective struggle. Thus, the success of the struggle implies the success of the hero just like his or her fall becomes the end of the struggle. This is part of the problem that Salami-Agunloye’s *Idia...* seems to pose in her attempt to collectivise her political advocacy for access to power for women in her dramatic oeuvres.

The egotistical character construct of *Idia* in this play sets the tone for the conflict of identity and ideology, which the playwright wishes to achieve. As a heroine who stands to lead her society into a new dawn, *Idia* seems engrossed more with her self-worth and personal achievements than that, which brings her into the reorientation of communal struggle. Her commitment to the change she hopes to bring to Benin Kingdom is motivated mostly by her past exploits. A bit of her thoughts as she addresses her friend and confidant *Sogie* who is also the leader of the market women, runs thus:

Idia: ...Iyesogie, look at me, am I not Queen Idia, the mother Oba Esigie? With great prowess; I assisted my son Osawe, to outsmart his brother Aruhan, the giant prince with great might but with little wisdom, to win the competition set for them by the Kingmakers in order to determine their competence for the throne. My son Osawe emerged victorious, ascended the throne and became Oba Esigie. I, Idia, assisted my husband in many ways, helped him prepare for his many battles, gave him wise counsel and support, which culminated in his many victories at the war front, both internally and externally. In the harem, I taught the *Iloi*, the Oba's numerous queens, many skills, songs, and dances so as to help them overcome boredom and strife I was neither caught in adultery nor was ever disloyal in any way to my husband, Oba Ozulua. Tell me Iyesogie, for which of these do I deserve to die? What crime have I committed where did I go wrong? (*Idia*, pg. 3).

This narcissistic portraiture of Idia contrasts with Titubi in Osofisan's *Morountodun* for instance, who after admiring her aristocratic background and physical outlook concedes to class suicide to lead the peasants' revolt. This is not the temperament that Idia takes to. Her desire to bring about change in the system she finds herself in is to come by the same individualistic feats, which she makes reference to in the foregoing passage.

The play *Idia...* celebrates individualism rather than collective action. A typical scenario that demonstrated Idia's lone heroism is after she has taken the decision to lead the battle against Chief Oliha and his ally, Attah of Igala. Idia's approach to the war is rather individualistic as she rebuffs all options that bring her plans into the mold of collective resistance. Her earlier discountenance of Chief Olobose's call for adequate preparation points to her individualism. Little wonder then, that when Olobose could not convince her further, she declares "I will leave this battle to none but myself. I will fight the battle and bring down Chief Oliha and his allies" (*Idia*, pg. 66). Idia's rejection of the market women's proposal to join her in the battle field further attests to her individualistic character. In this dialogue for instance, Iyesogie's and Runa's suggestions are instructive:

Iyesogie: Your Majesty, long may you reign. The entire market women have sent us to greet you and congratulate you on the bold steps you have taken. We are solidly behind you; and are ready to follow you to the battle front. We are strong enough to; we will fight by your side and go with you all the way.

Runa: *Iyare! Iyare!* Your Majesty, Mother of our land, *Iyare!* We will not disappoint you. Some of us will accompany you while others will stay at home and pray for you...

Yet, with this proposal, Idia's position is disappointing as she shows a deviation from her trust for collective struggle, thereby making the women feel that their role in this battle is not needed.

Idia: I have always counted on your support and would count on it. However, this time none of you will accompany me, I do not underestimate your strength in battle, but I need you at home to take care of the home front. As you have rightfully observed, the men have become self-centred. I will rely on you to be my eyes and my ears while I am away (*Idia*, pg. 83).

There is no doubt therefore, that this individualistic character of Idia finally manifests in the battle. Her exploit in the battle is rather extraordinary, which leaves much to be desired in the

playwright's portrait of a revolutionary heroine. It should be noted that as a revolutionary heroine, her role is most appreciated when she operates in tact with others. As the commander of the army notwithstanding, her Promethean quality negates the principle of collective will. Ologbose's eulogising of Idia makes us believe that Idia could have fought this war alone. He says:

Ologbose: Idia, mother of all, crafty in battle, mighty like a rock, commander of ten thousand army, the battle field (sic) is empty without you. *Iyoba* of Benin Kingdom, Master in the art of war. Your Majesty, I must commend you yet for the way you comported yourself at the battle front, I like your independence, your display of courage in the face of many discouragements, your ability to operate alone on your own. You were beholden to no man, and victim to none. I will miss your leadership role at the battle front (sic) (*Idia*, pgs. 93-4).

It is inferred then from these compliments that the playwright's vision of political leadership is totalitarian in nature. The suggestion she makes by the character disposition of Idia is part of it.

Furthermore, this authoritarian vision is revealed in more structural terms in the leadership style of Oba Esigie. Although this play is set in a feudal monarchy of the fourteenth-century Benin Kingdom, the political setting of the period nevertheless, provides for balance of power through the Oba's Council of Chiefs. Oba Esigie's unilateral decisions and reforms have come under severe criticism from his chiefs. The enforcement of these reforms nevertheless, is well acclaimed by the playwright. This is due to the fact that it signifies the actualization of power sharing and the fight for the rights to life for all oppressed groups. Yet, this move falls short of the principle of collective responsibility. Thus the action of the Oba is seen as autocratic. His pronouncements have little or no regard to the views of his council. When one considers the following speech, which he makes to his council at the heat of his clash with the chiefs, he declares:

Esigie: I am Oba Esigie, son of Oba Ozulua the ruler of this Kingdom. I am in charge here and I'm responsible for this Kingdom. I do not need any assistance. I am capable of taking decisions that will influence the entire Kingdom positively. I do not require your consent to pass a law, my word is law. The Benin kingdom runs a monarchical government. So from today on, no King ascending the throne will lose his mother again. So let it be documented. In three weeks' time, the new *Iyoba* of Benin, Queen Idia, will be duly installed (*Idia*, pg. 14).

This is the major reason for the conflict in the play. This conflict, which historically besets the Kingdom until the end of the reign of Oba Esigie, raises question about the constitutionality of the Oba's action.

In the early part of the constitutional dispute that ensued in this play, Chief Iyase has cause to disagree with Oba Esigie when the Oba asserts that "I am Oba Esigie, son of Oba Ozulua, I control the entire Benin Kingdom. Every citizen of this Kingdom is subject to me and must obey my command **whether he likes it or not**" (pg.7) (My Emphasis). On this claim, Chief Iyase who is the Prime Minister challenges the Oba saying "Your Majesty, I beg to disagree with you there. I wish to remind the Oba that our role in this Kingdom and in your court is to act as checks on any of your excesses..." (*Idia*, pg. 7). This opens the debate, which interrogates the Oba's decision and therefore, the playwright's ideo-political vision in the

play. In this situation, the conflict is turned between what is moral and ethically right and what constitutes the law hence, Chief Iyase's clampdown on the Oba's reforms, saying "I refuse to be part of this unlegislated, unilateral decision" (*Idia*, pg. 10). It can be deduced from the resolution of the play therefore, that by allowing the position of the Oba to hold sway, the playwright confirms her sympathy for dictatorship over the rule of law. Her ideology in this play, while being radical in its outlook is equally autocratic and bourgeois in praxis. This presupposes the playwright, more in the liberal humanist view rather than being socialist in character.

Conclusion

History remains a rich source of artistic material for the playwright. It is also to be taken that much of histrionics expressed in heroic literature brings it at loggerhead with revolutionary praxis. This is the posture of the conflicting ideologies present in the play text *Idia*... This paper therefore, concludes that Salami-Agunloye's penchant for access to political power through corporate struggle is compromised by this ideo-aesthetics mix. The idealistic import of this play poses a challenge to apprehending it as ideologically tied to socialists' revolutionary ideo-aesthetics. While the aesthetics of the play favours the dictates of revolutionary theatre, typical of all radical drama in Nigeria and elsewhere, the ideology in the play sets aside the significance of collective struggle and collective responsibility. The play advocates for a benevolent kind of dictatorship that is radical, yet, bourgeois in its sociological make-up. This amounts to conflicting ideologies in the playwright's dramaturgy.

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