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The aesthetic of dance in Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops*

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Abstract

In spite of being accepted as being more than mere entertainment, dance has yet to be given due recognition as a possible solution to some of the challenges faced by man especially in the works of Nigerian dramatists. The purpose of this article is to examine the role of dance in Ahmed Yerima's play, *Little Drops*. Using the descriptive methodology, the research reveals that Yerima anchors resolution of the conflict in the play on ritual performed through dance. The research shows that the dance is taken from the culture of the people of the Niger-Delta where the play is set and which has been the scene of upheavals in recent times in Nigeria resulting from oil exploration activities and perceived economic and political marginalisation of the people of the region. It is revealed in the paper that the deployment of dance allows Yerima to pick sub-texts from the culture all of which cumulatively seem to indicate that perhaps a lasting solution to the economic and political and social problems of the Niger-Delta may be found in the people's socio-cultural practices. It is concluded in the paper that with this, Yerima in *Little Drops* foregrounds the value of dance, in general, to the development of man and of his environment.

Keywords: Ahmed Yerima, dance, little drops, human development

Introduction

That dance is studied in African, particularly Nigerian universities, attests to its acceptance as being more than just for entertainment purposes. However, compared to drama and perhaps even, music, one may be correct in concluding that dance, on its own has yet to be recognised, or conceived of, as a solution to the challenges to human development by literary dramatists and critics whose role as the conscience of their societies has been well documented. This is even more so with reference to Nigeria with its myriad of developmental issues. It is thus usual to have dance being dependent on drama and music in the works of Nigerian literary artists. Scholars are divided on whether dance can or should be extricated from drama and music. Indeed, can dance exist on its own? How meaningful would it then be if it is deployed as a tool in Nigerian literary works? As will be observed in this and subsequent sections, these questions are germane to the discussion and the subsequent analysis of *Little Drops* by Ahmed Yerima (2011, pp. 64-115. Subsequent references which contain page numbers alone are to this edition).

The concept of Total Theatre to which most Nigerian dramatists incorporate in their works naturally makes the extrication of dance from drama and music difficult. Citing Femi Osofisan's *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993), Adeoti (2005) submits that the full potential of dance can only be realised as a component of other arts notably, drama and music (p. 10). Asagba (2005) insists that isolating dance from drama and music would lead to an omission of its aesthetic, emotive and spiritual values. Asagba believes that such a move is alien to Nigerian theatre sensibilities (p. 25). It would be safe to assume that this would equally be true of African theatre in general. The conclusion from these scholars, therefore is that dance is inextricable from drama and music

Dance and music are even more intertwined than dance is with drama, especially in performances. Upon experimenting a separation of dance from music, Ufford (2005) asserts that with

reference to contemporary Nigerian performances although it is possible for dance and music to exist independently, aesthetic appeal is heightened if both are featured in performances. He attributes this to the fact that both dance and music are culture specific (p. 87). However, in her study on Igbo culture, Lo-Bamijoko (2007) seems to place music over dance in terms of independence. She declares that while music can be independent of dance, dance cannot be without music (p.181-2).

On dance and drama, Ugolo (2007) prefers the term 'dance theatre' over 'dance drama' as he believes that theatre is more accommodating of dance than drama is. However, he agrees that both dance and drama help to enrich each other. Thus, to him, drama and dance are of equal status (p.40).

Akinsipe (20014) cites the approach deployed by foremost Nigerian dramatist Zulu Sofola who was charged with the articulation of the philosophy of the Department of The Performing Arts of the University of Ilorin in Ilorin, in Kwara State of Nigeria. Akinsipe declares that the philosophy ensures a meaningful balance of drama, dance and music in the performances by the department of three plays of Sofola which the playwright could not publish before her death in 1995. While not attempting to digress from the focus in this paper, it must be stated, however, that it would be interesting to know whether this philosophy is still being articulated in the performances of the department. In any case, it may be deduced that Akinsipe sees the three components as equal in the performances of the three plays of Zulu Sofola that he examined (p.225).

It is the contention in this paper that dance cannot and should not be separated from drama and music, most especially in literary works. Also, depending on the aim and focus of the performance, any of drama, dance and music may be superior or of equal status. Dance may be used either as a supportive element (i.e., inferior mostly to drama and sometimes music) or as an

inextricable part of the plot structure of a dramatic work. However, in most literary works by Nigerian dramatists, it seems that dance is usually conceived, presented and perceived of as an appendage, inferior in value to drama and sometimes music. One would be correct in concluding that making dance an inextricable part of the plot structure would give value to dance in literary works and lead to the exploration of more of its usefulness to man.

It must be noted that the deployment of traditional aesthetics such as songs and dance is common to all generations of Nigerian literary dramatists. Thus, the first generation of Nigeria dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi and Zulu Sofola borrow much from the Nigerian culture. However, the relevant aspect of culture under reference here, namely dance, is not foregrounded in their works as more attention is given to myths, mythic symbolisms, songs (sometimes with or without dance), etc. Thus, Nigerian drama texts of this generation where dance is an inextricable part of the plot structure are few and far in between. An exception to this is Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) where Elesin partakes in the ritual that is expected to lead to his death. Even then, it may be argued that Soyinka places emphasis more on the verbal interchange between Elesin-Oba on the one hand and Iyaloja and Praise-singer on the other, rather than on the dance. Therefore, in spite of being an aspect of the ritual and thus significant to the plot structure, dance seems to be put in the background in *Death and the King's Horseman*.

The Nigerian plays described as revolutionary and belonging to the second generation of Nigerian literary dramatists such as Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Bode Sowande and Tunde Fatunde are next in focus. Compared to the first generation of dramatists, the second generation of Nigerian dramatists present a radical approach not only in the solutions to societal challenges but also in theatrical style. The works of Osofisan and Obafemi, the most prolific in this group will serve as examples here. The

second generation advocates a revolutionary alternative to the ills in the society using tools such as myths, history, songs and other such aesthetics that are familiar to the people because they believe, asserts Obafemi (2020), that “a theatre that will be popular must not be obscure and dense” (p. 265). To these Leftists, therefore, literature becomes an ideological weapon to be used to raise awareness in the people about their challenges, those responsible for them and the alternatives to their condition (which is usually a collective action, a revolution).

According to Obafemi (2008, p.106 and 2020, pp. 280-282), music and dance are prominent features of Osofisan’s drama such as *The Chattering and the Song* (1976) and *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), *Many Colours Make the Thunder King* (2015). The role of these songs and dances are used to communicate Osofisan’s political ideology; to entertain; to satirise the leadership class; and to aid audience participation. Thus, unlike the first generation of Nigerian dramatists, dance is more of an accompaniment in Osofisan’s drama. As will be analysed in the course of this paper, dance plays a more strategic role in Yerima’s *Little Drops*. In an analysis of three of Obafemi’s own plays as contained in his *Collected Plays of Olu Obafemi* (1993), Akinsipe (2000) concludes that dance is supplementary and subordinate to drama in Obafemi’s plays. Perhaps the message of such drama that involves mass education, of conscientisation for a revolution aimed at correcting the ills of the society maybe lost if dance were given prominence over drama or even placed on the same status as drama. Again, our analysis of *Little Drops* by Yerima which is placed in the third generation of Nigerian literary dramatists will show a marked difference from this role of dance in the works of not only Osofisan and Obafemi and others of the second generation but also those of the first generation of Nigerian dramatists.

Scholars have researched into the spiritual ingredient of dance and the few available to this researcher is hereby discussed.

From the available literature available during the course of this research, most scholars seem to focus on ritual dance of the real, actual world. Examples include Rueppel's 'Healing power of dance' (2002); Uberoi's 'Dance your sorrow away' (2016); most of the contributions in the journal *Dance Journal of Nigeria*; the book *Critical Perspectives on Dance in Nigeria* (2005) edited by Ahmed Yerima, Bakare Ojo Rasaki and Arnold Udoka; and also those in *Perspectives on Nigerian Dance Studies* (2007) edited by Chirs E. Ugolo. The treatment of these scholars treatment of dance as therapeutic is similar to the analysis of dance in this research. And this cuts across cultures and religions. This present research shares a similarity with these previous studies in that the dance being analysed is perceived as ritual. However, for most of the analyses contained in these articles cited above (especially the articles in *Dance Journal of Nigeria* and *Perspectives on Nigerian Dance Studies*), dance is hardly isolated from its counterparts in the performing arts, namely drama and music. In addition, all the analyses of the articles were on dance in the real and actual world. This present study differs from the earlier ones above in its consideration of dance from fictive material and its examination of dance to reveal its significance and its inextricability from meaning of the drama text. The fact that earlier studies focused on real, actual dances may be excused on the conclusion arrived at by Christensen and Calvo-Merino (2013) that dance as a discipline is only beginning to receive attention (p. 3). This is especially so in Africa when dance is compared to drama and music. According to the editors of *Critical Perspectives on Dance in Nigeria* (2005) in the Preface, the book aims at giving dance the academic attention it deserves as "it has been neglected as an area of study" (p. 11). Only two articles on dance in literary texts were available to the present researcher. The first article, Akinsipe (2014), has been discussed above. Iyeh (2007) is about the methodology of adapting a drama text to dance. Apart from using a different text, this is not the focus of this present research. It is therefore hoped

that this study will contribute to the body of knowledge about the philosophy and aesthetics of the performing arts with emphasis on dance and its significance in literary/ fictive texts.

Dance as Ritual

A simple definition of dance would be rhythmic movement of the body with measured steps, sometimes to music. However, this definition leaves out some of other distinctive features and functions of dance. For instance, dance may be impulsive or intended and dance also sometimes expresses and, therefore, is a form of language, demonstrating emotions and experiences or, indeed, telling stories (Yerima, 2005: p.21 and Olomu, 2007: p. 28). Asagba (2005) says dance is “an expression of time honoured social and cultural experiences, occupational attitudes and cultural practices, whose ritual mode, social context and aesthetic meanings are embedded in the culture of the people” (p. 27). Obafemi (2020) sees dance as both a practice and a culture (p.169). He further affirms that dance “as a kinetic, non-verbal aspect of communication, has the ability to communicate what words might fail to pass across to a large number of people at a given time” (p.171). These definitions will enable the classification and contextualisation of the dance in Ahmed Yerima’s *Little Drops* so that meaning in relation to the text and to the relevance of dance in its entirety can be adequately evinced.

Concentration in this paper is on dance as ritual and then as an activity that can be enjoyed by the reader which can be achieved from the analysis of its crucial role to the plot of the drama text. In Yerima’s *Little Drops*, dance manifests as ritual. Ritual dance in Nigeria is a religious expression and experience that serves as a tool of communication between man and the gods, ancestors and other beings of the spiritual realm. In African Traditional Religion, the spiritual realm consisting of the worlds of the dead and the unborn may be invisible, but it is real, is inhabited by beings and has some

measure of control over the physical world. Beings that inhabit the spiritual world include spirits (for good and evil), deceased ancestors, the unborn and gods. The Creator or the Supreme Being who is also believed to exist in this world cannot be approached directly but through smaller gods and ancestors. There is constant intermingling of the spiritual and physical worlds, sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently and for good or for bad. Dance is a medium for deliberate and positive engagement with the beings of the spiritual realm to placate or to appease them. Thus, ritual dance in African traditional religion is a form of worship.

The engagement with the spiritual realm during dance could be achieved through spirit possession or trance whereby insight is gained into a (sometimes contentious) issue or answers provided through a vision. Thus, ritual dance is also therapeutic psychologically and physically as the body is also invigorated in spite of the strain from the dance. Echoing Henrich Heine, Ijomah (2005) affirms thus that “dancing is the fastest method of releasing the energies required to excite our dormant subconscious nature, and quicken the mortification of the flesh and allow the spiritual energy to be released” (p. 225). It must be stated that most times, song and music are accompaniments to dance in these ritual dances.

The focus in this paper is to analyse the presentation of ritual dance as an inextricable part of the plot structure of Yerima’s *Little Drops*. The aim is to consider how Yerima uses dance as an important tool to convey his message and thus, placing dance on the same status as drama. This aim aligns with our working definition of the word ‘aesthetic’ as contained in the title and as will be analysed in the body. For our purpose, aesthetic refers to the theme or idea underlying dance in the drama text. The word also implies an appreciation of the beauty of dance as an art. Thus the analysis involves an exploration of the theme/idea or meaning that dance portrays in the text and also an assessment of the value of dance to the play text which in itself is an art. This agrees with

the basic concept of African art as both entertaining and edifying. The analysis is based on a drama text and from the perspective of the centrality or otherwise of dance as against the other units of the performing arts, notably, drama. As such, a discussion of the theory/ theories of the dance in *Little Drops* and other areas like the particulars of the dance style such as kinaesthetics and other body movements, costume, stage arrangement, props, etc are not relevant and are thus omitted. The emphasis on the ritual constituent of dance does not diminish or take away from its beauty as an art. By focusing on dance as ritual, it is expected that this article will add to studies on the psychological properties of dance. The constituents of dance as presented by Christensen and Calvo-Merino (2013) are relevant for this study. The two scholars concluded that their definitions of dance which are similar to those presented in this research above, reveal that body, movement and emotion are the intrinsic elements in the aesthetic study of dance (p. 4 of Christensen and Calvo-Merino's copy of the article). Here, Christensen and Calvo-Merino seem to re-echo Nzewi who in 1999 had stated that dance is a marriage of body aesthetics with the social-psychological text and manifests as "metaphors for community life and staging of emotions" (Nzewi, 2022). However, this particular research will concentrate only on emotion. Body and movement are fertile areas for future research.

Emotion in this present study refers to what is communicated by the dance in *Little Drops*, the theme, that is, the underlying principle behind the dance in the text. This refers to the language that the dance in the text communicates; in other words, the meanings embedded in the dance. Also, in exploring this, the beauty of dance as an art will be revealed. This will be done through an assessment of the perceived role that dance plays in the plot of the drama text. This analysis of the dance in *Little Drops* is hinged on the perspective that dance plays a pivotal role in the text. This does not imply that a director/choreographer, or indeed another reader may necessarily

see the dance in the same manner. A text is open to different interpretations.

Synopsis of *Little Drops*

Little Drops a runner-up in the 2010 Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) Prize for Literature brings into focus the reality of the unrest in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria on women. The Niger Delta region has been challenged by violent unrests and protests by the people of the area who feel marginalised by the oil exploration activities of the (usually foreign) companies and by the Nigerian government who are believed to be giving support to these companies. The circumstances of the life and death of the Nigerian author and activist, Ken Saro Wiwa, concerning that region are well known and aptly serve as background to the affairs of that region. While nothing has changed, Nigerian literary artists continue to put world attention on the region in various ways, notably through their works. Women and their perspectives are rarely the focus of such works.

In *Little Drops*, the government is in a violent confrontation with the militants. Thus, the sounds of gunshots permeate the night as action takes place. From the perspectives of three women – Mukume, Bonuwo and Azue – and a mother-figure Memekize, the effect of the violence in the region on women is provided. Through dance, Yerima suggests a solution to the crisis. Indeed, with the character of Memekize who is a victim of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, the effect of war generally on women is also demonstrated. It is indeed a horrifying experience for the three younger women as they do not know which of the two sides they are fleeing from – the government or the militants – or which is responsible for their traumatic experience.

Ritual Dance in *Little Drops*

The female characters represent women from different backgrounds

and classes. Mukume, a commoner, is a recently married woman who was raped by three men (militants) who had invaded the hotel in which she and her husband had lodged for their honeymoon. Mukume laments the loss of her husband whose condition - whether dead or alive - she is uncertain of. Thus, she is plagued by her experience of rape (pp. 81-82), the violation of her body and through it, of the sacredness of marriage.

Azue is a queen, young wife of the deceitful King who “spoke from both sides of his mouth” (p. 81). She is forced to run away to save herself when the palace is attacked and the king killed. Apart from the bad image of Azue from rumours of her as the woman responsible for the king’s divorce of his other older wives and his lust for money (p. 80), Azue’s son and heir to the throne dies. Indeed, she carries him on her back dying because he was shot in the back while they flee the palace. Azue is devastated by her loss and laments, “Now I am naked...naked for the common man to jeer at” (p. 86).

Bonuwo is a school teacher who arrives on stage hungry and panting as she has been running through the bush from the fight between the militants and the government and the parents of her pupils. Bonuwo had convinced parents of the children in her school to allow their children attend school in spite of the conflict between the government and the militants. After teaching for several hours, she asks the children to put their heads on the table and sleep as a form of rest while she goes to use the toilet. Then the school is bombed and all “forty-one children who call me mother perished in that class, all because I asked them to sleep instead of telling them to go home” (p. 93).

The three women, therefore, are presented as undergoing both physical and psychological trauma. In fact, the arrival of the last woman, Bonuwo, and her ignorance in wishing the heir (i.e., Azue’s son) a peaceful reign recalls Azue’s grief. Azue leaves for the back of the hut where her son is buried. Note that Azue returns

to the stage in a manner that indicates preparation for the ritual dance as she *"emerges slowly as in a trance. Her face and hands painted in mud. She holds a leaf in one hand. She stops and stands very still"* (p. 95). Memekize uses an old black wrapper to cover Azue who is the chief mourner. Bonuwo who may be seen as the chief priestess takes a swig from the bottle of gin and passes it round to the other women (except Azue). The dance commences with a dirge by Bonuwo who dances as she sings. The other women join in the rhythmic dance except for Azue who merely sways. As the women sing and dance, four other female characters dressed as water spirits join in. The author directs thus: *"The tempo of the music and dance change. The women dance wildly, faster and faster, until a loud sound of explosion is heard"* (p. 96).

Mukume, who may be described as the chief priestess is privileged with a vision, a reassuring peep into the spiritual realm. She sees her pupils whom she says are happy in that world. She also sees Memekize's husband and two sons who have died years before in the Civil War. One of Memkize's sons carries Azue's child in the vision. Another man that she sees is Mukume's husband. Transiting between the two worlds when the body is not dead as Bonuwo does, is physically exhausting and so she passes out after relating her vision to the other women.

Another dance occurs in the play text. This is where Kuru, the militant is forced to sing as the women dance. This is, however, more of a social dance as it is meant to entertain the characters and the audience. Focus is on the ritual dance in the play text.

Discussion

The sound of the explosion during the dance brings the dance to an end by transporting the characters back to the physical world. Paradoxically, it recalls the reason for the dance itself and foregrounds the setting of the play. The dance 'heals' the three troubled characters. For example, Azue the chief mourner says "I

enjoyed it. It was like being in the palace for the first time. I thank you, my mothers" (p. 96). It is worthy of note that Azue states this feeling of wellbeing before Bonuwo relates her vision which shows that Azue's child is happy in the spirit world. The fact that her pupils are happy in the next world is also reassuring to Bonuwo. She says "I was happy again...as my children's heart overflowed with happiness again" (p. 96). Thus, two of the women are given a satisfying, comforting closure and are at peace. It is instructive that Mukume's closure also occurs after the dance as her husband, Ovievie, visits her, but as a ghost. Bonuwo has seen him in the vision and insists that "he was of their world" (p. 97).

It is equally interesting that a birth occurs after the dance (pp 98-99) and that it is only Mukume who witnesses it. The dance and the birth both seem to have spiritual implications for the visit of Ovievie, a ghost. The dance signifies healing of the emotional and physical trauma in the three women while the birth signifies hope, a new beginning. The dance seems to have 'cleansed' the immediate environment, purges it of negative aura and makes it safe enough for a birth to occur there. In spite of the fact that outside the 'world' of Memekize's shed, the war continues, the ritual dance has nonetheless created a community of individuals who are united and are at peace with themselves and with one another. With the positive outlook of the three women, the author seems to be saying that if each person can be cleansed of their fears and worries and other dark emotions, a new beginning may commence; the wellbeing that was attained in Memekize's hut, therefore, can be replicated elsewhere in the Niger Delta and beyond. The dance and the birth strengthen Mukume who is able to refuse the invitation of Ovievie to join him in death: "Let me be. We both can't go. I must stay. I want to live, Ovievie. I shall follow Azue to Lagos" (p. 102). Memekize assures her that "Death is not the only answer to our problem" (p. 102). Thus, Mukume is also healed and looks forward to another and hopefully better, life in Port-Harcourt.

Importantly also, the dance unites the three women who are from different classes and backgrounds. Essentially, the dance proves that the three women share similar experiences of the crisis of the Niger Delta region. With this interpersonal relationship, Yerima may be implying that the people of the region such as the leaders like Azue's husband, the king, and the youth who are the militants and who are fighting one another even as they fight the government and the oil companies (pp 110-111) can be brought together more so as they share the same cultural belief.

The dance is thus highly significant and is an important inherent part of the plot structure and herein lies the artistic beauty of the plot. First, the dance makes for plot progression. Before the dance, the women have just met, they harbour feelings of fear and apprehension. They have no sense of what to do. But all these disappear after the dance as they become confident so much so that they are able to sleep while one of them stays awake to keep watch (p. 98). The dance seems to come at the right time, mentally preparing the women for the entrance of Kuru onto the stage who, after being persuaded to take steps to end the conflict, takes them away to Lagos and the play comes to an end.

It is instructive that before this dance, Azue tries to sing but as the stage direction instructs *"she is stopped by a loud sound of shells and explosions"* and Mukume tells her *"Shiii. This is not the time to sing. The men are at it tonight. Clawing at the heart of each other"* (p. 89). Interestingly, the sounds of explosions are not heard when the dance occurs until when the tempo of the dance reaches its climax when the sound of explosion is heard again. Also, it is noteworthy that it is only after the dance occurs that the women are able to sing. These indicate that the dance purges the women of their dark emotions first so that they can be mentally strong enough to treat Kuru of his wounds (p. 106) and then with clear heads properly articulate the need for the men to cease fighting one another (pp 110 - 113).

Consequently, we are able to arrive at the second artistic impact of the dance. The play presents three women's harrowing experience of the Niger Delta crisis. The release of the apprehension, worry, guilt and despair that the women experience may therefore be seen as the climax of the play. With the cleansing or purging of these emotions, the step to better circumstances is taken as seen in Mukume's negative response to Ovievie's invitation to dying. She and the other women decide to go to Port Harcourt. As Ijomah (2005) states, "dancing as a collective behaviour is a compressed way of attacking problems created by strain. As an episode of collective behaviour it occurs when people are mobilised on the basis of a belief system" (p. 222). Immediately after the climax, the action begins to wind down, even with the arrival of Kuru. The location of the climax in the dance supplies the desired aesthetic pleasure for the reader/audience.

Furthermore, the dance is significant for revealing the belief system of the people of the Niger Delta. One of these is the belief in the existence of the spiritual realm, a world that the physical one needs in order to overcome the challenges of its own world. It is the African belief of the cycle of life. Death is not the end of life. The birth signifying hope and renewal has been discussed above. Another example is in the character of Memekize who seems to be more than just an old woman. She can be said to be an agent of the spiritual world, indeed an ancestor. This recalls the concept of the masquerade as a visitor from the world of the ancestors, to bless, to placate, and assure beings of the physical world. Evidence that Memekize is more than an ordinary being abound in the play text. First, is the reference to her extraordinary powers of healing and raising of the dead including the healing of Mukume (p. 73). Instructive is her last action and the stage direction just before the play ends which implies that her place of abode is actually at the back of the shed where the graves are: "May the great goddess, Benikurukuru, be with them. I must sleep soundly tonight. (*She*

closes the shed with a detached door, takes a lamp and the shovel and walks behind the shed)" (p. 115). One would expect her, if she were human, to sleep in the shed, not behind it.

Memekize attempts to wave off the mystery surrounding her by using humour such as using language associated with Christianity (pp. 69, 72, 76, 77) or pretending not to hear a question directed at her (p. 88). In addition, her use of register from Christianity is symbolic of the culture of the people of the Niger Delta who are practitioners of Christianity and the African Traditional Religion at the same time.

The ritual dance in *Little Drops* which demonstrates the belief system of the people of the Niger Delta as that of the African concept of the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn intermingling positively for harmony to exist also enables the explication of the action that follows the dance. The introduction of the only living male character, Kuru, is a demonstration of the African concept of feminism which conceives of the relationship between the genders as complementary (Aliyu-Ibrahim, 2018). Usually, women more or less, have been portrayed as non-existent as far as the crisis in the Niger Delta is concerned. Indeed, when Kuru recovers from his fainting spells and wonders where he is, Bonuwo replies thus: "In heaven where little women rule" (p. 108). So, in this play text, Yerima turns the situation around and reveals the burden of the woman in the crisis. He also presents women's perspectives of the crisis and their solutions to it.

In this wise, on the blurb of the book is the question: "But could they (i.e., women) be the missing link in the jigsaw puzzle that the Niger Delta crisis has become?" The answer is in the positive. However, the women who are each traumatised by the crisis of the region cannot do this unless they are 'healed'. This was achieved by the ritual dance the women partake in. The dance cleanses their minds, frees them so that they become ready to forgive and accommodate Kuru, the militant who admits to

have partaken in each of the traumatic activities that each of the three women experiences. They are, truly, the missing link in the crisis in the region as they present to him their demand which is a reorientation of the people – a strategy which they believe would resolve the crisis. This is signified by Kuru's oath never to kill again, his acceptance to begin the change that will bring peace to the region and the fact that he, Mukume, Azue and Bonuwo leave together. All of these are enabled by the ritual dance that the three women partake in before his arrival.

Considering the role of dance as explicated in this analysis, Yerima may be advocating a much deeper look into the culture and cultural practices of the people of the Niger Delta as solution to the lingering crisis in the region. Solutions proffered by the government and the oil exploration companies in the Niger Delta have always failed. Perhaps, in this text, Yerima is suggesting that concerned parties consider the culture of the people in a search for a lasting solution.

Conclusion

Dance, from this analysis of Yerima's *Little Drops* is brought from the margin to the centre unlike what usually subsists in the works of other Nigerian dramatists, especially the older ones. The analysis has shown how ritual dance has been intertwined in the plot such that it cannot be detached and thus is as important as drama in the text. The analysis also showed how the ritual dance in the text enhanced the progress of the plot, forged interpersonal relationship within the same sex and with the men, thus further revealing the belief system of the people. The dance espouses the African philosophy of the endless cycle of life – the three worlds of the dead, the living and the unborn in a harmony that is needed for the survival and sustenance of the human species which seems to be approaching annihilation with the armed conflict between militants and the government in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria.

The African philosophy of life also includes the participation of both male and female complementing each other for the maintenance and sustenance of life. Since previous solutions to the conflict in the Niger-Delta seem to have failed, could it be that Yerima, using dance in *Little Drops*, is advising the disputing parties to look towards the African philosophy? If so, then for Yerima in *Little Drops*, dance may be said to be a literary and political agent for human development.

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