

Chapter 7 examines sacred texts practices, with a focus on performance of the *Rāmcārīmānas* attributed to Tulsidas. DeNapoli describes how uneducated female sadhus who never learned to read and write perform literacy and thus construct themselves as “scriptural.” She also outlines several motifs through which female sadhus define renunciation as relational and emplaced in community. In chapter 8, the author returns to the metaphor of “singing *bhajans*” to perform a view of asceticism that models celebratory and interpersonal religiosity of *bhakti* saints and widens the domain of *sannyās* beyond classical, masculine Brahmanical formulations. Chapters 7 and 8 outline the practices by which these sadhus create a legitimate female space in vernacular asceticism.

A very short Conclusion reviews the main arguments, highlights some of the conceptual distinctions that are an obstacle to understanding religious expression, and outlines the differences between Brahmanical *sannyās* and female sadhus’ asceticism, which are sometimes competing and sometimes complementary. DeNapoli underlines her hope that the model of vernacular asceticism that she has proposed will open new directions for research on *sannyās*.

DeNapoli offers a fresh perspective on *sannyās* that will be of interest to researchers and students of Indian religions. The prose is accessible and lively, though the length (310 pages and 9 substantial chapters) and lack of glossary will be an obstacle for classroom use. The flip side of this issue is that the main arguments are supported by ample evidence based on substantial field research and the presence of women’s own voices.

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**Diala, Isidore:** *Esiaba Irobi’s Drama and the Postcolony. Theory and Practice of Postcolonial Performance.* Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2014. 316 pp. ISBN 978-978-918-113-1. Price: £ 22.95

Isidore Diala’s “Esiaba Irobi’s Drama and the Postcolony. Theory and Practice of Postcolonial Performance” has come to blaze scholarly trail of what Diala himself described as “the Irobi canon”; a critical framing and exploration of Esiaba Irobi’s contribution to the drama and discourse of postcoloniality. Recounting Irobi’s embittered disappointment with the Western publishing establishment which denied and rejected his combative, anticolonial monograph, Michael J. C. Echeruo, in the “Foreword,” captures the necessity of the book as capable of drawing “serious attention to the plays and poems of this gifted man” (13). The book can further be seen to have come as a critical intervention to the increasingly polemical evaluations of postcolonial theory in which Irobi’s plays and cultural articulations are enmeshed. Thus, the book is a gratifying attempt at unraveling these aesthetic and theoretical entanglements through far-reaching arguments that locate Irobi’s work at the intersection of his Igbo worldview and the political trajectories of the Nigerian postcolony. In a truly canonical sense, the book provides an exegetic meeting point for the textualities of Irobi plays and performances.

In chapter one, appropriately titled “Esiaba Irobi. The Igbo Worldview and Performative Heritage,” Diala lays the foundation of Irobi’s oeuvre in the Igbo festival and masquerade culture and argues that his restless and audacious search for new artistic models are anchored “in the oral tradition of his Igbo ethnic group, its rituals of self-renewal, myths and legends of enigmatic and daring deity heroes” (32). Acknowledging the theoretical influence of Amankulor about whom it was said “after Amankulor, no more Aristotle” (30), Diala reinforces the source of Irobi’s fascination with indigenous, homegrown theoretical paradigm that marks his early drama. The remaining six chapters of the book take analytical perspectives, consolidated in the opening chapter in a manner that foregrounds the interconnectedness between Irobi’s Igbo cosmology, his restless life in Nigeria which drove him into exile, and the tensions of exilic experience in England and the United States. The strength of this study draws bountifully from the autochthonous performativity of Irobi’s life and career as performer, playwright, and poet represented in the interface of these tripartite experiences.

The subtitle enunciates the sense in which Irobi’s drama solicit self-conceived critical approaches within postcolonial performance theory, and suggests the tenacity with which the author navigates trajectories of the dramatist’s body of works and the poetics of his critical enterprises. Beginning with the first play “Froned Circle” through “Nwokedi,” “Cemetery Road,” “The Other Side of the Mask,” “Hangmen Also Die,” and the posthumously published “Sycorax,” the study locates a recurring motif of masquerade idiom, music, and dance as dominant trope in Irobi’s drama and poetry.

Negotiating the textualities of Irobi’s plays and performances with such penetrating insight of Igbo ethnic background, Diala historicizes the knowledge system of Igbo religious practices and ethnocultures as embodying vital materials for the tragic art. In soliciting the Igbo deities in support of this argument, Diala conceives of Irobi’s drama as a semiology of Igbo mythologies within the context of contemporary and transformative agency. The submission on Agwu, one of the many deities of the Igbo people, suffices creditably as Diala’s incisive exploration of Igbo deities as hermeneutics of counter-discourse: “The kinship between genius and madness is an ancient one in Igbo thought and both are in the domain of the same deity, Agwu ... As the repository of all arcane and esoteric knowledge, Agwu is associated with divinations and inspiration; but as Agwu is equally linked with lunacy and behavior, lunatics, deviants, heretics are considered to be under the influence of this deity. Regarded also as a primary cause of misfortunes, Agwu clearly is central in the Igbo conception of tragedy” (130).

Diala’s exploration of the counter-hegemonic function of music and song in Irobi’s drama in chapter six “Music, Dance and (Political) Transformation in Irobi’s Drama,” highlights the dramatic conceptualization of cultural resistance and ideology framed on the traditional rendering of masquerade conflicts. He draws attention to Irobi’s fascination with Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tomkins’s postcolonial imaginings of dance as a focal agent

that functions as signifiers of embodiment, political ideology and also capable of producing the Brechtian alienation effect. It is into this cultural frame and ideological paradigm that Irobi inserted his revolutionary masquerade aesthetics. Enunciating Irobi's penchant for music as a reflection of "the polymusicality of the postcolony as a metaphor of divergent and competing ideologies" (274), Diala contends that it is the dramaturgical and metaphysical sense in which Irobi's protagonists attain a state of mystical possession and cathartic freedom through performance.

Reviewing Irobi's adaptation of William Shakespeare's "The Tempest," "Sycorax," Diala interrogates the assumption that "Greek tragedy holds a fascination for postcolonial African playwrights, given that it is considered free of colonial taint" (195). Picking on Kelvin Whatmour's seminal study of preponderant adaptation of Greek drama by African dramatists, "The African Sun in an Athenian Sky," Diala contends that such argumentation does not accommodate instances of "works by English playwrights, especially Shakespeare, for all their alleged imbrications in British imperialism."

This study, therefore, provides a truly credible monographic survey of Irobi's vision of performance theory framed on African and African Diasporic oral culture. Christopher Balme, in the pretext, while drawing attention to the anachronism of Irobi's continual reference to himself as a citizen of Biafra, reinforces Diala's central argumentation in the submission that "Irobi does for the Igbo performance culture what Soyinka did for the Yoruba ..." (18). Given the close attention paid to Irobi's early career in the southeast of Nigeria, the book's unusual privilege of having a "foreword" and "pretext" significantly marks Irobi's transition from Nigeria to Germany where he died while still a fellow of the International Research Centre "Interweaving Performance Cultures" in Berlin. In a symbolic sense, between the book's foreword and pretext, Echeruo and Balme seem to represent signposts of the dramatist's transition rather than the traditional expository function that Gayatri Spivak, in the preface to Derrida's "Of Grammatology," described as "prae-fatio" or "before the text" ("Translator's Preface." In: J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore 1976: xi).

Identifying Irobi's aesthetic pattern as paralleling Soyinka's paradigm, much of the book's arguments reads like a comparative study with Soyinka's dramaturgy. This analytical position subjects the study to the problematic of what Harold Bloom referred to as "anxiety of influence" (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*. New York 1973) – in this case implying a certain kind of illogic in a project purportedly driven by the archeology of aesthetic investigation rather than exploration of intertextual interfaces of Irobi's dramaturgy. Indeed Diala's arguments seem to hang in the balance between the two modes of discourse; sometimes archeological, revealing and x-raying, and other times Bakhtinian and overtly comparativist.

Admittedly, some of the essays collected in this book have been published previously. Though quoting copiously, and almost rehashing, common polemics on Igbo ritu-

al and theatre, Diala's study undoubtedly generated fresh theoretical insights through sustained ethnographical and literary criticism. The study, therefore, creditably advances on the much earlier, seminal study, "Drama and Theatre in Nigeria" (Yemi Ogunbiyi [ed.], *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria. A Critical Source Book*. Lagos 1981), from which tapestry Diala discursively engages the epistemic foundation of Igbo cultural universe. Given the polemics that attended "Drama and Theatre in Nigeria," this study will ostensibly continue the debate on the subjectivities of Igbo ritual in modern/postcolonial drama while inaugurating a strong impetus for the study of Esiaba Irobi's dramaturgy. Henry Obi Ajumeze

**Domenig, Gaudenz:** *Religion and Architecture in Premodern Indonesia. Studies in Spatial Anthropology*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. 576 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-27400-6. (Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 294) Price: € 149.00

Billions of people, the vast majority of humankind, live in houses. They spend most of their lifetimes in houses. Millions of people plan and build houses. Next to clothes houses are humans' second material cover. But in most introductions to cultural anthropology one will look in vain for a chapter on houses. Browsing through the index of an anthropological handbook you will rather come across the entry "household" than the lemma "house." Even Lewis H. Morgan's famous "Houses and House-Life of the American Aborigenes" (1881), often considered the first publication on houses in a specific area, reports in detail on the social and political life of many North American and Mexican Indian societies and their relations to houses, but the latter are rarely taken notice of by Morgan.

The same holds true of houses in what is now Indonesia. In spite of the fact, that Indonesian societies feature extraordinary, in some areas spectacular houses, it seems that only a few people had more to present than just some cursory remarks on houses and "house-life" in the said societies before World War II., e.g., Schröder (1917) for Nias, Kruyt and Adriani (1912) and Kaudern (1925) for Central Sulawesi. Of these authors Schröder was a colonial officer, Adriani and Kruyt were missionaries, and Kaudern was a biologist. It may well be that it took people trained in modern anthropological fieldwork or devoted researchers on vernacular architecture, who stayed with the local population for some longer time, to come up with deeper insights into what houses are and what they "mean" to their inhabitants. Or: what houses were and what they "meant" to their inhabitants; for houses are decaying and so is knowledge about them.

To some anthropologists Cunningham's article on "Order in the Atoni House" (1964) is the first of a series of articles and books displaying this new concern about Indonesian houses. In these studies the respective authors combined the sheer material side of a house, i.e., its construction in the wide sense of the word, with elements like choosing the right place and time and considering other conditions for building a house. They were concerned