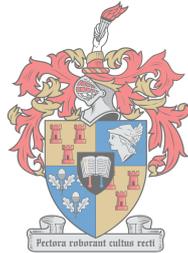


**A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO THE  
EVOLUTION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL  
PERFORMANCES IN TRADITIONAL  
NIGERIA YORUBA *ALARINJO*  
AND CONTEMPORARY ITINERANT  
THEATRE THROUGH A REVIEW OF  
SELECTED WORKS OF HUBERT OGUNDE,  
WOLE SOYINKA, OLA ROTIMI AND FEMI  
OSOFISAN**



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Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
(Drama and Theatre Studies) at the Stellenbosch University, South Africa

**Promotor: Prof. Petrus du Preez**  
December, 2018

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any University for a degree.

Signature.....  
Bakare Babatunde Allen

Date.....  
December 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performances in Nigeria. The first part consists of the introduction, theory and historical contexts, while the second part discusses the contribution of selected literary dramatists to this evolution of social-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria. The study specifically focuses on *Yoruba Traditional Alarinjo (Travelling) Theatre*, contemporary itinerant theatre and selected works of Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan. The theoretical framework of the study is based on three concepts: the *Theatrical Event* expounded by Wilmar Sauter; *Theatre and Festivals as Poly-Systems* by Temple Hauptfleisch; and Vicki Ann Cremona's concept of *Festivalising Process*.

Relevant historical developments are reviewed and analysed in the study. The developments are points of reference to various forms of Yoruba theatre and drama. In addition, the study examines social-political evolutions, especially those that relate to and are useful for the analysis of the inherent evolution of theatre and drama in the Yoruba tradition *Alarinjo*, the contemporary theatre and the selected works of Nigerian literary dramatists. It further examines Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo (Travelling) Theatrical* and dramatic performances and investigates the critical roles of the *egungun* (masquerades), masques, oral literature and other Yoruba cultural and traditional properties in the performances.

This study concludes that the types of performance modes, styles, methods and techniques which were used during the different stages of the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama in Nigeria, are rooted in the vast Yoruba cultural and traditional forms of performing arts. These include forms such as masquerading, oral poetry, folklore or folktale, music, dance, chants, incantation and acrobatic display among others. The study recognises the contribution of the Western culture of entertainment which partly influenced the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performances of the *Yoruba* contemporary itinerant theatre. Lastly, this study analyses and reveals the influence of Western education on the mentioned Nigerian Literary Dramatists' theatre and drama.

## ABSTRAK

Hierdie studie ondersoek die evolusie van sosio-politieke teater en drama in Nigerië. Die eerste deel bestaan uit 'n inleiding, teoretiese raamwerk en historiese konteks, terwyl die tweede gedeelte die bydraes tot die ontwikkeling van sosio-politieke teater van die gekose literêre dramatisse ondersoek. Die studie fokus op die tradisionele *Yoruba Alarinjo* (reisende) teater, kontemporêre reisende teater en geselekteerde werke van Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi en Femi Osofisan. Die teoretiese raamwerk van die studie berus op drie konsepte: die Teatrale Gebeurtenis, soos uiteengesit deur Wilmar Sauter; die Teater en Feeste as Poli-sisteme van Temple Hauptfleisch; en Vicky Ann Cremona se werk oor die Verfeestelikingsproses.

Die relevante historiese ontwikkelinge word in hierdie studie ondersoek en ontleed. Hierdie ontwikkelinge is verwysingspunte vir verskeie teatervorme van die Yoruba drama en teater. Die studie ondersoek die sosio-politiese ontwikkelinge, veral die aspekte wat verband hou met die evolusie van teater en drama in die tradisionele *Alarinjo*, die kontemporêre teater en die gekose Nigeriese literêre dramatisse. Die studie bespreek voorts die tradisionele Yoruba *Alarinjo* (reisende) teatrale en dramatiese *performances* en ondersoek die kritiese rol van die *egungun* (maskerades), maskerspele, orale literatuur en ander kulturele en tradisionele eienskappe van Yoruba *performance*.

Die studie kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat die tipes *performance*-modusse, style, metodes en tegnieke wat gedurende die verskillende stadiums van die evolusie van sosio-politieke teater en drama in Nigerië gevind word, in die ryke kulturele tradisionele vorme van *performance* onder die Yoruba gevind word. Dit sluit onder meer maskerades, mondelinge digkuns, folklore en volksverhale, musiek, dans, inkantering en akrobatiese tentoonstellings in. Die studie erken die bydraes en invloed wat die Westerse vermaaklikheidskultuur op die sosiopolitieke teater van die kontemporêre reisende Yoruba teater se ontwikkeling gehad het. Die studie dui ontleed en bespreek die invloed wat Westerse opleiding op die Nigeriese drama en teater van die betrokke literêre dramatisse gehad het.

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**PART 1**  
**INTRODUCTION, THEORY**  
**AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

The origin of socio-political drama and theatre in Nigeria cannot be discussed without consideration of various developments and its general historical events. Nigerian theatre and drama are closely associated with the vast number of traditional ceremonies and religious activities of the people, as well as their ways of life. The roots of contemporary theatre and drama that are situated in the culture and tradition of the people, having their roots in the culture and tradition of the people, evolved and gradually became tools through which the socio-political and economic ills of the society were displayed and addressed in the country. Ogunbiyi (2014:3) explains these roots as follows:

The specific origins of Nigerian theatre and drama are speculative. What is, however, not speculative (...) is the existence, in many Nigerian societies, of robust theatrical tradition. The primitive root of that tradition must be sought in the numerous religious rituals and festivals that exist in many Nigerian communities. For, as an expression of the relationship between man, society and nature, drama arose out of fundamental human needs in the dawn of human civilization and has continued to express those needs ever since, which is to say that Nigerian theatre and drama originated with the Nigerian himself, embodying his first preoccupations, his first struggles, successes, set-backs and all.

It is thus clear that Nigerian theatre and drama have been the consequences of religion, tradition, culture and, most importantly, of artistic expression. Nigerian theatre initially developed as a channel of appeasement by the people to communicate with and maintain relationships with their 'Creator' and other lesser gods – the entire pantheon of gods and goddesses – who they believe are in charge of their daily lives.

Western culture and faith have influenced this development as well and became important and integral elements of the country's theatrical tradition. Consequently, Nigerian theatre and drama became a platform for expression of dissatisfaction against tyranny and other forms of social, political and economic injustice perpetrated over the years; first, by the colonial masters and later, by the civilian administrators as well as the military junta.

Hubert Ogunde's theatre in particular heralded the period during which theatre and drama in Nigeria shifted its focus from being totally ritual-religious in nature. Ogunde's theatre championed the adoption of theatre and drama as a tool for confronting British colonialism and imperialism which was the critical socio-political problem confronting the country at that time. The theatres of other notable contemporaries of Ogunde, such as Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo, addressed other social vices and ills in the Nigerian society. Jeyifo's opinion (1984:117) is noteworthy:

Certain instances of the co-optation of some travelling theatre troupes by political groups and movement for their goals stood out above others. In the colonial period, the nationalist anti-colonial movement and its daily popular press actively adopted Ogunde's troupe as a cultural front for its decolonisation and protest campaigns. Ogunde obliged the movement with protest plays like **Strike and Hunger** (1945) and **Bread and Bullet** (1960) on specific features and policies of colonialism, and **The Tiger's Empire** (1946) and **Towards Liberty** (1950) on the general nature of colonisation itself.

This is not to say, however, that there were no manifestations of didactic and socio-political thematic pre-occupations in the Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* performances of the *egungun* (masquerades) which predated Ogunde and his contemporaries. Although many of the performances might have exhibited different Yoruba oral traditions and cultural aesthetics such as chants, riddles, proverbs, flowery costumes and dance, the performances by the *Alarinjo* had the remarkable capacity to criticize individuals who erred, regardless of the social status of such persons in the society. Isola's (1992:19) assertion clearly confirms this point:

There are countless examples of the way in which Yoruba oral artists have used their medium to criticize those in power. During annual festivals, they traditionally sang the songs they had composed to expose the recent moral shortcomings of any individual, for one of their responsibilities was to exploit the community's linguistic heritage to perform this cleansing functions ...

In order to understand the intricacies involved in the evolution of theatre and drama it is important to have a holistic knowledge of the socio-political and economic circumstances which triggered these transitions. Nigerian theatre and drama have been revolutionary in the process of shifting focus away from being a potent means of promoting cultural and traditional aesthetics, to becoming a tool for agitation and a means of addressing sociopolitical issues of the pre- and post-independence era in the country.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Studies relating to aspects of the present study such as Julius-Adeoye (2013) Ughwu 2011 and Ogunjobi (2011) can be found. However, no studies have examined the historical and thematical evolution of the Yoruba socio-political theatre performance in Nigeria, particularly from the era of traditional Yoruba travelling theatre, *Alarinjo*, to the contemporary or modern Yoruba travelling theatre. The same applies to the selected relevant works of Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan. From the inception of television drama, cinema, film and home video—which were all products of the contemporary and present Yoruba theatre—their impact has not been investigated. Oni (2012:6) in this regard, states that:

The cinema culture was pioneered in the 1960s and 1970s by people such as Chief Hubert Ogunde, Moses Olaiya and Ade Afolayan. Nigerian film producers around the late '80s and early '90s started a revolution. As a result of the theatre background of its primary practitioners, the Nigerian cinema in the '60s and '70s was characterized by the elements of the African Total Theatre experience.

My preliminary readings, however, particularly in Gugler (1997), indicate that Wole Soyinka had produced his first films in a cinematic format, titled *Culture in Transition* in 1964, *Kongi's Harvest* in 1973 and *Blues for a Prodigal* in 1984. Consequently, Soyinka's name is conspicuously missing in the selection of film pioneers mentioned by Oni (2012). Since it is a primary aim of this study is to identify and discuss existing gaps left by previous studies, Soyinka's name is mentioned in order to bridge the chasm in the lists of the Nigerian film and cinema pioneers.

Importantly, the interest of scholars in Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre can be attributed to its acceptance and popularity as one of the most recognised theatrical traditions in Africa. The Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre have greatly influenced and inspired many Nigerian theatre and drama practitioners.

Theatre in Nigeria and elsewhere has always been used in the past for different purposes. Ademakinwa (2011:336) states that "... post-independence Nigeria has been inundated with many social, economic and political crises and so many methods have to be employed by government, theatre practitioners and NGO's to sensitize the masses to these crises." In spite of Ademakinwa's remark, it is regrettable that minimal research was done to examine

the proffer potential solutions to many of the socio-political challenges facing the Nigerian nation. An exploration of the available theatrical traditions and performances rooted in the diverse cultures of the Nigerian people may provide better suggestions to solve some of the socio-political problems.

Another matter that needs further scrutiny focuses on the suitability of available Western literature to the numerous plays written by Nigerian playwrights and their other African contemporaries. Existing Western literature may provide inadequate insight into the various epochs and traditions that have taken place in the evolution of theatre and drama in Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general. The adoption of Western theories and content by Nigerian scholars and practitioners is a reality considering that we have embraced and used them as readily available theories. Marginal research has been done about Ogunba (1978), Ogunbiyi (1981) and Osofisan (2001) amongst others, but much more investigation is needed with respect to the analysis and evaluation of many Nigerian theatre practitioners' works.

A substantial volume of literature and documentation on notable Nigerian theatre and drama maker, Wole Soyinka, is in existence. Contrarywise, less documentation exists on the work of Nigerian theatre and drama practitioners such as John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Hammed Yerima, Rasheed Gbadamosi and others who emerged later on the theatrical and dramatic scene of the country after Nigerian independence. After independence, the bulk of Nigerian performances appeared to be purely 'academic' in nature, signifying the beginning of flourishing periods of theatrical and dramatic productions by theatre and drama practitioners who were also scholars. Their productions mainly took place in the Nigerian university environment—aspects that I will later expand on.

This does not imply that these Nigerian theatre and drama scholars and practitioners are new breeds entirely; some of them, such as Soyinka and JP Clark, have indeed been practicing before Nigerian independence occurred on 1 October 1960. They became more active in their artistic activities and output and became even more conspicuous in post-independence Nigeria. Their productions and performances were mainly used as teaching materials for university students in Theatre and Drama courses, or students in associated departments in the Humanities who were required to take such courses as pre-requisite for obtaining a degree in their particular areas of discipline such as theatre, drama, performing

arts and creative arts. In addition, these performances were past-time events to rouse the consciousness of university intellectual enthusiasts amidst military dictatorship, and socioeconomic and political catastrophe in the country. Recording and documenting the productions or even analysing these were of little interest.

The above background establishes the non-availability of recorded archival research on post-independence drama and theatre performances and justifies the concern and focus of this study. The research aims to examine the theatre and drama of the above-mentioned Nigerian literary dramatists in conjunction with Yoruba traditional and contemporary theatre.

Traditional Yoruba theatre, according to Adedeji (1978:62), is a masque theatre popularly known as the *Alarinjo*. It "... is the traditional travelling theatre of the Yoruba people." Adedeji adds that "... [t]he first accounts of the Yoruba masque theatre are contained in the journals of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander. To mark their seven week's stay in Old Oyo (Katunga), the capital of the Oyo (Yoruba) empire, the Alafin (King) of Oyo invited his guests to see a performance provided by one of the travelling troupes which at that time was waiting on the king's pleasure." He explains the beginning of the Yoruba theatre, "The Agbegijo", which means 'one who dances with a wooden face-mask', another name by which the professional troupes are called in certain areas of Yoruba rural areas even today.

A crucial emphasis at this juncture is that the traditional *Alarinjo*, for many years, has remained a prototype from which other forms of theatres and dramas draw inspiration in Nigeria. According to Echeruo (1977:15), "... [t]he contemporary Nigerian drama and theatre has undergone various changes in recent times; this ranges from its traditional mode of the *Alarinjo* Theatre to the Western style performances which started in the late 19th Century with the concerts, cantatas and native air operas."

Adedeji's authentic claim is corroborated by the fact that the Ogunde concert parties, cantatas and native air operas are some of the most familiar artistic fusions of biblical themes with the traditions of Yoruba dance-drama, which were performed at the famous Glover Memorial Hall on Lagos Island in the 1940s. This event marked the beginning of the flourishing moment of theatre and drama in the country. Oni (2012:01) supports this statement and writes:

The theatre developed professionally with the emergence of Hubert Ogunde on the theatre scene in 1945. From that period until the early 1990's the theatre survived with performances mainly amongst the major ethnic groups, particularly, the Yoruba Travelling Theatres. Other organizations and establishments including universities in Nigeria, cultural centres of Art Councils and private production organizations followed their involvement in theatrical productions (Oni, 1985: 2002).

Nigeria is a country endowed with an abundant and dynamic theatre/drama, cultural and traditional heritage across the length and breadth of the country. The "Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre" stands out in the country's vast theatre and cultural tradition. It eventually gave birth to "The Contemporary-Modern Yoruba *Alarinjo* Theatre". Across all six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, offspring of this theatre could be found. A few of the theatrical manifestations from different ethnic groups across the country are:

- The *Alarinjo* Traditional Theatre of the South-West and
- 'The Kwagh-hir Puppet Shows' from Benue; the North Central;
- The Bornu Puppet Shows' in the North East;
- 'The Igbo Masks Performances' in the Eastern part of the country;
- The Annang drama of the Ibibio People' in the Niger-Delta Area; and
- 'The Hausa comical art of Yankamanci', in North-Central Nigeria.

Because "theatre is a reflection of life" (Inegbe, 2003:1), the theatrical and dramatic performances in Nigeria today still strongly reflect noticeable sentiments of the people in relation to their ancestors or origins. Theatre and drama, specifically among the Yoruba people, have not only metamorphosed to the level of conversations about pertinent sociopolitical issues; it has also helped to preserve some of the important historical and cultural values which have been eroded by Western culture.

### **1.3 Research questions**

This study is set to trace the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performances in Nigeria, with a primary focus on *Alarinjo* (the traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre), the contemporary or modern Yoruba Travelling Theatre, and relevant selected works of Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan. The subsequent research questions are pertinent to the study:

- 1) What makes the Yoruba theatre a readily available source of socio-political drama in contemporary Nigeria, and who are the agents of this type of theatre?
- 2) What are the distinguishing characteristics of Yoruba *Alarinjo*, its contemporary modern and literary theatre and drama?
- 3) How were Yoruba traditional theatre and drama by the four selected playwrights (Ogunde, Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan) used as potent sources for creating sociopolitical drama?
- 4) How did the particular socio-political and economic contexts in Nigeria influence the specific theoretical, practical and methodological approaches employed by these four theatre practitioners to write their plays?
- 5) How does theatre and drama still address socio-political and economic struggle and agitation in contemporary Nigeria?

#### **1.4 Research aim and objectives**

The primary aim and objectives of this study are:

- To examine, trace and document the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performance in Nigeria;
- To decipher and reveal the types of performance modes, styles, methods and techniques used during the different stages of the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama in Nigeria, concentrating on Traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre originated by Egungun (The masquerades), the Contemporary *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre (which was championed by Hubert Ogunde and many of his contemporaries) and the Nigerian Literary Dramatists, who emerged shortly after the independence of the country on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960; and
- To identify, examine and document the theatre and drama practitioners who participated in the developmental stages of the Nigerian theatre and drama—from the ritual-religious and festivalised era to the colonial and post-colonial era—by reviewing and analysing selected works of Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan.

Preliminary findings of this study revealed that the theatrical and dramatic works of the selected theatre practitioners and authors are the most appropriate to provide answers to the above research questions which this study is set to investigate.

## 1.4 Methodology

The historical research methodology was adopted for this study since the basic aim of the study comprises evaluation of past events and a synthesis of evidence in order to establish useful conclusions. This method is fitting for the study because it provides historical developments that are related to the different epochs in Nigerian theatre and drama, especially Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatrical and dramatic performances and contemporary modern Yoruba travelling theatre and drama.

This research will also utilise existing documents and records such as manifestoes, biographies, histories, interviews and texts on selected agit-prop practitioners and their products in the country. Interviews with playwrights, directors and other important practitioners in the field were conducted as well. The collected data will be carefully analysed to find appropriate facts, trends or patterns from the various sources in order to trace the development of theatre in Yoruba theatre. The addition of the interviews and other sources (including unpublished material) are vital to create a more detailed picture of the epochs and works discussed in the study.

The primary focus of the study will be on theatrical events and thematic concerns evident in the performances. The impact and reception of such works will be equally assessed through the analysis of relevant, available literature. The historical survey and thematic analysis in the study is theoretically built on the essence of theatrical events and festivalisation. These theoretical departures emphasize the fact that theatrical and dramatic events function within a complex system and framework of society. The various aspects of society influence the aesthetics of these performances, as well as the thematic preoccupation of the events.

## 1.6 Limitation of the study

During the initial exploration into this study, it has been observed that there are a useful number of published works on the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre by many scholars. However, its offshoot— ‘The Yoruba Popular travelling Theatre of Nigeria’, otherwise known as ‘The Contemporary *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre’— significantly produced no sufficient existing literature which the study can cite.

However, there are few published works which concentrate more on the life and times of some theatre practitioners, such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and a few others. Not a single published work could be traced that examines and analyses this movement as a whole. Jeyifo (1984:1-2) also states as follows:

But in contrast, with the contemporary English Language literary theatre of Nigeria which it far transcends in the number, energy and regularity of productions as well as in the observable social impact of its output, the Yoruba Travelling Theatre has not received the kind of comprehensive critical attention it deserves. There is only one full length published work dealing with this theatre tradition and while this is very well-researched, highly informative and readable, it deals with only one of the troupes of the movement (the seminal troupe of Hubert Ogunde). There is no published work to date which has attempted to take in the movement as a whole—its troupes and individual performers; the forces and conditions which shaped their emergence, diffusion and continuing development; the unique forms and practices the movement has engendered as an African popular theatrical art; and the social impact and functions of the theatrical art of these companies.

Jeyifo's above observation is still valid today, because only a few studies have been done on the Yoruba contemporary theatrical tradition in recent times. This issue magnifies the problem statement of the study, but elapsed time contributed to an absent 'memory' of the performances that I want to study. The lack of information is certainly a limitation in this study, but equally accentuate the necessity of the research.

There undoubtedly exists a considerable volume of available items of literature on theories of dramatic criticism, frequently by foreign authors., These can be applied by 'adaptation' and 'improvisation' to explain the many peculiarities associated with the concerns of African literature. What is clearly lacking, is the potential application and equation of some of the Western relevant theories to African theatrical and dramatical traditions.

Conversely, if we are to look at performance theories too, the theatre and drama performances of all kinds and various periods in Nigeria have, on their own, received little or no attention from the local performance critics. Nigerian institutions' lack of culture and traditions contribute to a deficiency of documentation of theatre and drama performances in the country. Performance analysis and documentation of the Nigerian theatre and drama

practices, from all indications, have never received adequate attention or been taken seriously in the country.

## 1.7 The outline of this study

This study stands as a two-part structured work. The first part consists of the introduction, theory and the historical context of the forms of theatre and practitioners under discussion. The second part comprises the analysis of selected authors' work to illustrate the social engagement of the authors and their contribution to social commentary in Nigeria.

Chapter One introduces the study, specifically in terms of its background discussion. Also, it presents the statement of the problem, posits research questions, and states the aim and objectives of the study, its methodology and limitation, as well as the outlines of its chapters.

A discussion of the concepts for the theoretical framework for the study appears in Chapter Two. The concepts are the theories of The *Theatrical Event* expounded by Willmar Sauter (2006), *Theatre and Festivals as (Poly)-Systems* by Temple Hauptfleisch (2007), and Vicki Ann Cremona's (2007) concept of *Festivalising Process*. These theories are suitable for an investigation of specific epochs and developments of theatrical and dramatic performances in Nigeria in order to trace the forms through which social commentary was delivered.

In Chapter Three, a review and analysis of relevant historical developments that specify the bases for various forms of Yoruba theatre and drama, are discussed. This chapter also examines socio-political evolutions, especially those that relate to and are useful for the analysis of the inherent evolution of theatre and drama in the traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo*, contemporary theatre and the selected works of Nigerian literary dramatists. The chapter furthermore examines Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatrical and Dramatic performances. It additionally investigates the critical roles of the *egungun* (masquerades), masques, oral literature and other Yoruba cultural and traditional properties in the mentioned performances.

Chapter Four examines contemporary modern Yoruba Travelling Theatre and Drama, and investigates the influence of the earlier movement (the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre) and its relevance to the growth of the Nigerian theatre and drama. The

chapter also explores the influence of Western culture (including the British and American education systems) on the Yoruba theatre; it additionally assesses the impact of the church on and the contributions of Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola to the sociopolitical evolution of theatre and drama in Nigeria.

In Chapter Five, the premise for the examination of the emergence of selected literary dramatists and their contribution to socio-political theatre and drama is offered. Nigerian theatre practitioners and scholars such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan are the focal points of research in the chapter, while other identified literary dramatists are also deliberated.

The emergence of Wole Soyinka and his contribution to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria are being discussed in Chapter Six. It examines some of his plays, his theatrical philosophy, theories and influence, in order to identify how such philosophies, theories and influences are portrayed in his socio-political works.

Chapter Seven explores the rise of Ola Rotimi and his contribution to the evolution of sociopolitical theatre and drama performance in Nigeria. His selected plays, theatrical philosophy, theories and influence are analysed, so as to identify how the philosophy, theories and influence are reflected in his socio-political works.

Chapter Eight scrutinises the contribution of Femi Osofisan to the evolution of sociopolitical theatre and drama performance in Nigeria by means of his selected plays, theatrical philosophy, theories and influence. The examination reveals how such philosophy, theories and influence impacted his socio-political theatrical and dramatic works.

Finally, Chapter Nine encapsulates the final findings of the study, draws conclusions and offers recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework for this study. Hauptfleisch's (2007) concept of *Festivals as Eventifying Systems*, the theory of the *Theatrical Event* as proposed by Sauter (2006) and Cremona's (2007) concept of *Festivalising Process* are used to construct a framework for the discussion. These three concepts will be applied in this study to examine certain developments and epochs of theatrical and dramatic performances in Nigeria.

The justification for these three concepts is their suitability for the analysis in the study and their applicability in analysing theatrical and dramatic works. Secondly, they can all be adopted to describe and explain the formation of some sections of Nigerian theatre and drama, especially the Yoruba theatre and drama, in terms of content and mode of presentation, and with regard to ritualistic celebration and festivalisation.

It is the view in this study that the Yoruba theatre is *poly-systemic* and can be described as a *theatrical event*. For example, many of the characteristics and elements of the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre—as theatre which is a product and an offshoot of the *traditional Yoruba Egungun performances*—have close relationship with festivalisation, and can thus be described as theatrical events. The association between Yoruba theatre and drama has been examined by renowned scholars in Nigeria. (Compare Ogunba (1966), Adedeji (1966, 1971, 1972, and 1978), Owomoyela (1971), Banham and Wake, (1976), Clark (1979), Ogunbiyi (1981), Gumucio-Dragon (1994) and Jeyifo (1984), in relation to ritual ceremonies, religious beliefs and various festivals of the Yoruba people.

Many performances by some of the Nigerian theatre icons who belong to the period described as the “The Contemporary Yoruba Travelling Theatre Movement” encompassed themes that had to do with the prevalent socio-political and economic issues that were affecting Nigeria negatively during that period (1940s to 1980s). The stars include Clark (1979), Adedeji (1980), Jeyifo (1984, 1985), Gumucio-Dagron (1994) and Obafemi (1996), all of whom were very versatile, active and daring in their commentary against the colonial

rule in Nigeria. These plays from the indicated periods are all post-colonial works. They, like other older theatrical traditions, tapped into various dramatic elements which are rooted in the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre. Theatre-makers and dramatists such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola also demonstrated the same trend in the performances of some of their Yoruba Operatic plays.

The performances of works by some prominent Nigerian literary dramatists—such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan—can be examined and analysed through the application of Hauptfleisch’s concept or idea of *Festivals as Eventifying Systems*, alongside its two branches (*Festivals as Eventifications* and *Festivals as Poly-Systems*), Sauter’s concept of the *Theatrical Event* and Cremona’s concept of *The Festivalising Process*.

However, the application of these three concepts to the works of the Nigerian literary dramatists mentioned above must be done cautiously, because of the nature of many of their plays that are scripted and usually staged on a conventional stage and in conventional, Western ways. Unless these plays break away from some of the well-known theatrical conventions associated with performances by the director, they may be present a challenging analysis on the basis of Hauptfleisch’s, Sauter’s and Cremona’s concept. The reason for this view will be examined later in this study.

## **2.2. The concept of festivals as eventifying systems and eventifications**

According to Hauptfleisch (2007), eventification implies everyday life activities of events that are programmed to specific occasions, such as festivals, carnivals and performing arts. However, all the events must be a chain featured in a programme.

The concept of eventification cannot be activated outside of a sequence of linked festivals. Hauptfleisch (2006:186) simplifies the concept by using South Africa as an example: “Certainly in this respect the sequence of linked Afrikaans festivals has now become a major factor in the process of creating, displaying, and eventifying Afrikaans plays and the creation of a new expanded canon of Afrikaans writing.”

In order to work, this concept thus relies on attracting other creative productions. The concept needs chains of artistic activities to succeed as a single event. Eventifying processes or systems require active human interactions at various festivals with a series of events, with active participation of the people during festivals. Specific cultural features such as dance, masquerading and chants must exist as annual or periodical events during a festival.

In practical terms, various festivals all over the world have over many years become arena events during which various activities such as artistic expressions or displays and sporting events are showcased to audiences. Hauptfleisch (2007:39) contends that “[t]he arguments for the festivalisation of culture in the world today (Kaptein 1996) seem to argue that the arts festival circuit may actually in some cases have come to represent the theatrical ‘season’ in certain countries.” While Hauptfleisch’s submission is made specifically in respect to South Africa and Iran, it is pertinent to note that it is also applicable to the Nigerian situation.

Modern festivals and carnivals in Nigeria have replaced the dwindling culture of traditional theatrical and dramatic activities in spite of the fact that theatre and drama brought unforgettable creative and artistic success during its blossom years. Muller (2005:175) posits that “[t]he golden age of Yoruba travelling theatre, and Yoruba theatre is over and the brightly coloured trucks carrying the companies that cruised the Nigerian Federation up to the middle of the 1980s have certainly long since been dismantled.” Nigerian audiences who are art enthusiasts and patrons can afford watching shows in the country, nowadays prefer attending and participating in some of these festivals. Before this latest development, many other audiences have shown remarkable interest in the fast-growing Nigerian film industry that produces various genres of drama, ranging from comedy to tragedy.

Historically, the festival is a major human activity with all its peculiarities and characteristics. It can be compared to Athenian festivals which featured theatrical and other artistic activities during the classical period of the Greeks (and later the Romans in Rome in 240 BCE) when theatrical and dramatic culture flourished in 500 BCE. During the flourishing period of Greek theatre and drama, the Dionysians in the city of Dionysia celebrated their festival in honour of Dionysus, a god of fertility and wine. Hauptfleisch (2006: 182) states “[t]he festival has always been a distinctive phenomenon in the history of humankind and has long has been closely related to the religious, artistic, and cultural life of particular communities. Certainly, it has played a distinctive role in the history of dance, drama, and music, in such varied instances as the classic Greek theatre festival of Dionysus.” The festive celebrations during the classical period took the form of a ritual, artistic display with various dancing styles apparently led the worshippers to a state of spiritual frenzy, all in an effort to appease their god.

Worthen (2004:11) aptly points out that:

Dramatic performances took place under a variety of circumstances in all Greek cities, but drama as we know it developed in Athens. Dramatic performances in Athens was part of citywide religious festival honouring the god Dionysus, the most important being the CITY DIONYSIA. Plays were produced for contents in which playwrights, actors, and choruses competed for prizes and for distinction among their fellow citizens. These contests, held in an outdoor amphitheatre adjoining the sacred temple of the god, followed several days of religious parades and sacrifices. This connection between early drama and religion suggests that the essential nature of Greek drama lies in its supposed 'origins' in religious ritual.

During ancient times, Roman theatre and drama later became popular. The Romans learned from the Greek theatre and drama traditions. Worthen (2004: 18) comments that "[a]lthough many of their traditions were absorbed from Greece, the Romans developed a distinctive theatre, quite different from the Athenian stage. From its beginnings, Roman theatre was more varied than the Greek stage, acrobatics, juggling, athletic events, gladiatorial combats, and skits." Even though Worthen has specifically highlighted some of the innovations brought about during the Roman period, both theatre and drama still share various similarities and resemblances. Thus, the origin and the developmental stages of their theatre and drama cannot be discussed separately from festival celebration and spiritual worships.

Consequently, the key variables that eventified both the Greeks' and Romans' theatre and drama were the spiritual worships and the artistic activities: acting, masking, dance and costumes were the important elements during the classical period.

The above example of Greek and Roman drama in this section of this study is to emphasize that festivals, either in its traditional or modern form, may consist of various events and activities. These can include theatre, drama, music, dance, acrobatic display, magic, drumming, costume parade, regatta, masquerading and other creative events. The Yoruba Theatre and Drama cannot be extricated from this concept, because historically, it has connections with festivals, rituals, religious beliefs and other social activities of the people.

Some forms of modern theatre and drama, including that of the Yoruba people, have retained the concept of festivals as eventifying systems and eventifications. Hauptfleisch (2007:39) postulates that:

Though appearing to be a splintered and diverse season made up of a series of cultural 'mini-bytes', festivals are where plays, performances and other arts events are effectively launched and displayed for the public today. Slogans like 'As seen at the Melbourne Festival', 'Newly formed Edinburgh Festival' or 'The hit show of the Grahamstown Festival' have become a standard and an effective part of marketing. In other words, festivals are not only where the work is; it is where the artistic output of the actor, director, choreographer, etc. is *eventified*. It is where the *everyday life event* (performing a play, a concerto, a dance, exhibiting a painting, a sculpture, an installation) is turned into a significant *Cultural Event*, framed and made meaningful by the presence of an audience and reviewers who will respond to the celebrated event. Festivals thus become a means of retaining the event in the cultural memory of the particular society.

Nigerian examples that match Hauptfleisch's description in this study are the traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre and the contemporary Yoruba Travelling Theatre, both of which belong to the older classification of Nigerian festivals. Calabar Carnival, Abuja Carnival, Eyo Festival in Lagos, Osun Osogbo festival and others represent the modern-day festival and carnival in Nigeria. For example, the Calabar Carnival was inaugurated in 2004 by the CrossRiver State Government and supported by the Federal Government and many private investors who were willing to invest heavily in resources for the festival. Agba (2013:5) explains:

In 2004, the former Governor of Cross River State in Nigeria, Mr. Donald Duke initiated the Cross River State Christmas Festival. This festival has become a most anticipated and talked about event attracting thousands of people from within Nigeria and beyond. It is a spectacular occasion, with thirty-one (31) days filled with celebration, culture, music, art, and endless activities. The Cross River State of Nigeria uses the occasion to showcase the rich culture, history and natural beauty of the State and celebrate her African heritage. The Festival begins at the end of November with the Christmas tree lighting ceremony dotted around the many interesting venues within the region. At the carnival, visitors can attend fashion shows, food demonstrations, cultural exhibits, talent shows, music concerts, funfairs, carol services, parades and picnics. The annual Boat Regatta is a colourful display of flamboyantly decorated boats, pitting local coastal teams against each other. The Calabar Carnival, which has become the highlight of the festival, is a showcase of performing arts replete with cultural heritage.

The Calabar festival, apart from its potential ability to generate substantial revenue for the government, can be said to have served—and still serves—the country as “a means of retaining the event in the cultural memory” in relation to Hauptfleisch’s views. The Calabar festival, which takes place every December, is a melting pot for all cultures and traditions in Nigeria.

Apart from the aforementioned artistic activities, the Calabar Festival and Carnival showcases various other genres of arts such as films, drama, street theatre, musical theatre, screening of latest movies, stage performance by popular and upcoming musicians in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Because of the elaborate nature of the festival, the audience or spectators have access to different varieties of shows that interest them.

Importantly, there are other festivals organized by other state governments in Nigeria. These festivals and carnivals include the Nigerian National Carnival (formerly known as Abuja Carnival) and Lagos Black Heritage Festival.

Festival presentations, apart from having the potential to generate revenue and a means of retaining events in the cultural memory of the particular audience or spectators, have served as a bridge for cultural exchange among people as well. The cultural exchange could be within a country with diverse cultures such as Nigeria, and also between two or more countries whose citizens may be attracted to attend such festivals.

A good example of how festival and carnival can provide a platform for cultural exchange is shown in Adedeji’s (1972) submission that the first record of the Yoruba Masque Theatre appeared in the journals of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander in 1826. Both Clapperton and Lander were British explorers who came as guests on a visit after being invited by the Alafin (King) of Oyo to see the performance of the *Alarinjo (Egungun)* Masquerades. After witnessing the performance of *Alarinjo* and other parts of the festival, their encounters initiated cultural exchange and transmitted a chronicle of artistic events of the Yoruba people to the outside world.

The traditional Yoruba theatre and its contemporaries consist of various activities such as spiritual appeasement of supernatural powers and deities, masquerading, dance, drama, chants, acrobatic display, singing and exhibition of different artistic skills and works. The experience gained by the audience who witness each of these artistic events during the festival is what eventifies the occasion in their minds. The theatrical and dramatic events, or the performing arts event within the festivals, often make the concept of “festivals as

eventifying systems and eventifications”, as propounded by Hauptfleisch (2007), last longer in the memory of the attending audience members. As observed by Agba (2013:8), “a carnival is a socio-cultural event that reflects the culture of the people. However, it is most strongly driven by the performing arts.”

### **2.3 The concept of festivals as poly-systems**

In his efforts to examine festivals as poly-systems, Hauptfleisch (2007:42) observes: “Should we consider this notion with reference to our focus on festivals, it is clear there is also a sense in which any given festival may, in actual fact not clearly and unambiguously constitute a single entity, one systemic whole, but something much more complex.” In essence, a festival requires other events or sub-festivals before it can be referred to as a poly-system. Hauptfleisch (2007:42) states further that:

while there may be a conceptual unity to the event as a whole (it has a specific name, taking place in one place, at a specific time, having one programme, and a very general marketing focus on a particular issue, culture, form of expression, etc.), yet within that frame it is more likely to be a poly-system of linked sub-festivals, each with its own aims, objectives, supporters, processes and impact; in other words, an uneasy composite of potentially competing activities.

With references to the participants, Hauptfleisch (2007: 42) says that the “individuals involved in it have distinctive and at times even widely different enthusiasms and interest for being involved since they too come from distinctive sub-systems and systems within the larger poly-system of the particular society.” The festival may be what brings people together; however, these individuals obviously have different missions to fulfil during their participation in the festival as well.

As observed across the world, no culture can exist anymore without the confluence of the sub-elements that form the totality of such culture in any society. Therefore, various festivals that emerge from a particular culture that is formed by such ‘confluence of a chain of cultural activities in nature’ become a poly-systemized festival. Hauptfleisch (2007:42) elaborates: “The fact is no culture is a single system of processes and events, but really a complexity of sub-systems. More accurately, perhaps, it should be referred to as a *poly-system*.”

The concept as festival as a poly-system would apply to the various festivals of the Yoruba people, which are created and participated in diaspora or as descendants in the

South American countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and the United States of America. The carnivals, street parties and pageantry display in all the mentioned locations consist of a series of Africanised culture with a mixture of European and other cultural elements of the world. Mullen (2004: 28) says that “[t]he rich cultural heritage of the Yoruba slaves and their descendants has influenced and contribute a great deal to the Americas. Much of their traditional culture is still preserved in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and United States of America”. The Yoruba cultural heritage of these groups of people has over the years interacted with others, accordingly producing a new hybrid culture which they and all their people know and embrace today. In addition, their mother tongue of the Yoruba dialect, too, has over the years changed to a combination of various adapted dialects.

Hauptfleisch attributes the concept of poly-system to Zohar (1979) with some examples, and refers to a mix of inter-linked but distinctive sub-systems. He argues that “one can confidently observe that the culture of the Scots in Great Britain may differ markedly from those of other sub-systems; the English or Welsh for instance.” A distinctive observation that can be applied to other countries in the world is the South African one.

In his introduction to the concept of *Festivals as Poly-Systems*, Hauptfleisch (2007:41) explains: “There are a number of ‘myths’ that appear to govern so much of our idealism for arts and culture in South Africa ... a key one is the myth of *one culture for all* (not the rather antiquated idea that there is some kind of ‘universal’ norm of what constitutes art and culture across the globe, but the notion that there can be a single cultural system in a country)”. Hauptfleisch’s explanation embraces humanity’s diverse cultures as a nucleus of cultural processes, traditions and ways of life. He argues that festivals are the melting point of all these elements, where people with their diverse backgrounds still see South Africa as a country where different cultures and traditions meet to become one in diversity. He adds that “a derivative of this would be a belief in the possibility of *one festival for all*.” He concludes that “this myth has been very pervasive over the years and occurs in many countries and regions. But it is, however, either a perceived truth, or an aspired-for ideal.” Against this background, it is appropriate to describe ‘festivalisation’ as a means of artistic and spiritual expressions of the people.

Hauptfleisch (2006:182) is firm: “Not always perceived as respectable, the festival has nevertheless always been an extremely important element in the processes of making theatre, as well as a distinctive cultural event in society at large.” The point emphasized

here by Hauptfleisch is the case of many African countries. In Nigeria, scholars like Rotimi (1981 & 2014), Echeruo (1981 & 2014), Horn (1981 & 2014), Adelugba (1981 & 2014), Enekwe (1981 & 2014), Kofoworola (1981 & 2014), Amankulor (1981 & 2014) and Horton (1981 & 2014) have all corroborated Hauptfleisch's standpoint: that festivals have in many cases formed and shaped people's theatre. There are nonetheless numerous debates on the extent to which a festival can develop and nurture theatre in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Another study will be vital in future—as the focus of this section of the study is to briefly provide reference to those scholars who have consistently debated the relationship between festival and theatre.

There have been claims about the close connection between the arts and belief systems. Enthusiasts of the African and specifically Nigerian literature have identified instances of cross-contamination between Nigerian popular myths and arts, especially in theatre and drama. Even more remarkable is the evident resemblance between the arts and culture of the Yoruba people in the South-West of Nigeria, and the people in South Africa. There is even clear evidence of inter-relationships between myths, legends, folklores (all embedded in African oral literature), festival performances and evolution of theatre in these two countries. This view is extensively discussed by Hauptfleisch (1997) in his book, *The theatre & society in South Africa: Reflections in a fractured mirror*. Ogunbiyi (1981) expresses the same views.

## **2.4. The concept of the festivalisation process**

The following section discussed the concept of the festivalisation process in connection to the course of this study. Cremona introduces the focus (2007:5):

The foregrounding principle of any festival is the wide range of aesthetic and artistic possibilities it offers. It is this possibility of selection that makes attendance at a festival different from going to a single performative experience, because even if persons decide to attend simply one event, they are aware of the variety of other possibilities that they deliberately choose to ignore ...

The offering of many traditional festivals in Africa reveals diverse performances which are often related to people's spiritual and social beliefs, their ways of communing with their spiritual benefactors, and a means of entertaining themselves. What the audiences witness

during many of these festivals, are the consequences and confluence of these different unique artistic ingenuities that have been known to the people for many years.

When the Traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* was still at its festival stage<sup>1</sup>, its display and performances were a combination of many different artistic products of the various lineages and kinsmen among the Yoruba populace. The individual who supplies the masque of the masquerade, popularly known as “Ere”, and whose designation for his workmanship is *Agbegi-lere* or *Gbena-gbena*, is different from the person whose responsibility it is to produce the masquerade’s costume, which is commonly referred to as *Eku-egungun* or *Eku-eegun*. The Yoruba masquerade’s costume is colourful, woven with some ‘voodoo’ items which are meant to aid the masquerade’s ability to proclaim blessings and fulfil other prayer demands requested by the people of the community. Oke (2007: 87) describes what happens then:

However, once the *Egungun* has emerged from the grove (*igbo-igbale*), it ceases to be regarded as an ordinary human being; and it has from that moment taken on the spirit of an ancestor, and in its acquired spiritual personality, each *Egungun* is regarded as deserving of the respect, support and maintenance of the entire community.

Cremona’s *Concept of Festivalising Process* can be used as a tool to explain the formation of the these two very important Nigerian theatrical movements; not only in terms of styles, modes and techniques of presentation, but also providing clues to the understanding of the original philosophical attachment and sentiments which specific Nigerians have with and for some Yoruba gods and deities. The Nigerian author and playwright, Soyinka, for example, conceptualised the attributes of tragedy in many of his tragic plays to Ogun (the Yoruba God of Iron and Creativity). This is once again proof of an artistic influence which is evident in many creative works of African and, even more particularly, Nigerian playwrights.

This concept is further discussed by Cremona (2007). She believes that “a festival is a public event that is inserted into a particular cultural context which bestows upon it the qualities by which it is perceived and identified. In cultural contexts, such as South Africa or Iran, festivals play a dominant role in the theatre culture of the country.” She concludes that the “relationship between the types of cultural context into which it is inserted is fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> The *Alarinjo*’s structure will be discussed later in the thesis.

to the festivalising process itself.” This assertion of Cremona gives credence to the aspect of festivalisation in Nigeria, especially in the many areas where only some festivals still retain some of their cultural and traditional traits in the South-West territories, and which are dominated by the Yoruba people.

Cremona’s practical illustration of the connection between the German socialism, the creation of *Volksbuhne*, leading to the beginning of historical and radical theatrical performances against the government in Germany, is crucial. It proves that a cultural and artistic product can be developed and adapted by society to expose various socio-political and economic challenges used by the ruling classes and the political elite in many societies. The *Volksbuhne*, according to Cremona (2007:6), “gave rise to an interest in theatre performance among the workers” brought about the culture of participatory theatre among the labour forces in Germany. The comparable experiences in Nigeria (which will be properly examined in subsequent chapters) are the Masquerades Theatre of *Alarinjo* and the contemporary theatre which became famous in the 1940s and ended around the 1980s.

The aforementioned theatrical cultures among the Yoruba people in Nigeria can be described as a kind of performance which belongs to the general populace. It includes the labour-force workers who predominantly lived, worked and participated in various socio-political and economic activities in their distinct communities. Most of the Yoruba working force were traditionally farmers, hunters, fishermen/women, wood-carvers, to mention but a few. These farmers, hunters, fishermen/women, wood-carvers and other workers who participated in the series of *Alarinjo* performances through dramatic enactment in contemporary theatre and drama in many Yoruba communities—apart from fulfilling their spiritual obligations— typically received information on matters such as laws, decree, prohibitions and proclamations that threatened their individual rights and human dignity. Adedeji (1972:299) argues alike:

The substance of what the masque-dramatist wishes to communicate or share with his audience is revealed in the material of his creation which also underlines his main preoccupations, namely religion and human situation. His themes depict first his faith in the ancestor and the deities and this may qualify the reason why he operates within the realm of allegory and symbolism, and secondly, his humanistic interests are not without some reference to his general concern for the continuity and survival of society.

Consequently, festivalising processes among the Yoruba people cannot be limited to specific perspectives such as religious celebrations and artistic events, but rather, it should be understood to describe the general concern for the socio-political and economic development of the people.

In conclusion, festivalising should be seen as the process that provides chains of events, together with a variety of shows, even within the same types of performance genre. Some of these shows and events—such as socio-political commentaries on important issues, public mobilization and mass conscientization against authoritarianism—are presented as social and political engagement. Its success is determined by diversity; what Cremona (2007:8) describes as a process which is very “heavily determined by its dimensions (national, regional or local), the type of productions to be shown, and the type of audience (s) it sets out to attract.”

## **2.5. Traditional Yoruba-Egungun performance as example of festivalisation and poly-systems**

Human culture is dynamic, as illustrated by the nature of the vast indigenous festivals in many communities in different parts of Africa and other parts of the world. However, for dynamism to occur or be active in our culture, certain elements of traditional-cultural practice, referred to in this study as indigenous performative arts, must be activated and active. Theoretically, this means that there can be no indigenous festival without various cultural and traditional elements. Consider the example of the indigenous *Yoruba Egungun* festival, which in English means “masquerade”. From the *Yoruba* cultural point of view, *Egungun*, who is also referred to as *Ara-orun kinkin* (the heavenly being), is defined by Ogunba (1978:16): “*Egungun* masqueraders are spirits of the dead who come from heaven annually to visit the human community. Especially, their children and grandchildren (...)” are the physical manifestation into the world of the living; the spirits whose abodes are in the spirit worlds that include heaven and earth. These spirit beings include the ancestors, believed to live in the heavens, who were once human beings but then transformed into spirits at their deaths, and the unseen therianthrope creatures, believed to inhabit the natural environments such as mountains, forests, rivers, rocks and others.

Cultural and traditional elements such as *ijuba* (obeisance to the gods and goddesses of the land, prior to the commencement of a festival) must be observed or performed during the

opening ceremony: not just by anybody, but by an initiate or a person who is of the masquerade's lineage, known as Oje. Another important element of the *Egungun* Festival in all parts of the Yoruba land is Oriki-Idile (lineage or ancestry praise-singing), which usually encompasses the braveries and heroic achievements of the ancestors by means of Bata dance, Bata drums, masque and masquerade, 'eku' or 'aso-egungun' (masquerade costume), acrobatic displays, songs and others acts.<sup>2</sup>

It is the required various poly-system approach of sub-celebrations such as Bata dance, acrobatic display and the spiritual rituals of offering sacrificial animals that makes the celebration of *Egungun* (masquerades) an example of festivalism.

An integral component of the Yoruba festival is ritual and rites. Ritual was the collective requisite for socio-political and economic well-being, social harmony and stability in all Yoruba lands in time past. Adelowo (1990:163) puts this into perspective:

Rituals and rites are a means of bringing into the limelight the religious experience of a group of people. Rituals and rites thus constitute some kind of religious expression. They are a means of concretising one's belief systems. They are a means of expressing one's experience of the supersensible world and the supernatural beings.

Yoruba people all over the world worship different kinds of deities, and these worships and celebrations could occur daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly. Adelowo (1990:164) explains what he describes as "ritual sanctity"—in other words, taboos. This practice often has dire consequences if practiced in Yoruba land:

This has to do with the various taboos in connection with the administration of the various rituals and rites that constitute Yoruba traditional religion. This can also be called ritual holiness. The taboos are what the Yoruba call *eewo*, *a kii see*, *ohun*. Each ritual has its taboo that should be avoided by the priest-king, *Olori awon Iworo*, other priests, *Iworo* or *Abore*, and the worshippers. For examples the priests and devotees of the god called *Esu* should avoid having any contact with palmtree oil (Yoruba: *adi*) in order not to incur the wrath of *Esu*. Moreover, the priests and devotees of the arch-divinity of Yoruba pantheon, *Obatala*, should avoid palmwine completely in order to maintain ritual sanctity with regard to the worship of *Obatala*. They should also promote anything white and avoid black items in order to keep the ritual sanctity in connection with the worship of the divinity. White is a

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<sup>2</sup> Bata dance is a popular traditional dance in Yoruba land. It is an entertaining and energetic dance usually executed by professional dancers. It is commonly accompanied with Bata drums which primarily provide percussion for other musical instruments, chants and songs. The choice of songs and chants depends on the occasion which Bata dancers are invited. The Yoruba deity named Sango is said to have been a lover of Bata dance during his life time in Yoruba history.

symbol of purity, holiness and peace. So, priests and devotees of Obatala should, during ritual activities, present themselves as pure and holy.

Yoruba deities such as Ogun, Sango, Orunmila, Ifa, Obatala, Esu, Yemoja, Osun etc., are highly esteemed by the worshippers. They were all celebrated according to the rules and regulations stipulated by their spokesperson and agents. Some of these deities require varieties of food items for their rituals and rites celebration which are to be fulfilled before the offerings are judged acceptable. For instance, Ogun, the God of War, Machineries and Anger, only accepts dog meat for appeasement; an attempt to substitute dog meat with another animal such as goat, antelope, sheep or any other will only incur the wrath of Ogun upon the individual or lineage concerned.

Conversely, Sango, the God of Thunder and Fire can only be placated with a ram; providing other kinds of meat to appease Sango is considered a taboo among the Yoruba people. Each deity only accepts well-classified items of choice and wrong presentation of these items to a

Some of the earlier mentioned issues were parts of what formed various Yoruba tales and stories (folklore, folksongs and legends), and which provide vital artistic materials for the Yoruba theatre and drama such as the theatre of *Alarinjo*, its contemporary and the drama of literary dramatists such as Soyinka, Rotimi, J.P Clark, Sofola, and Osofisan.

Stage performances such as *Oba Koso* by Duro Ladipo, *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, and *Kunrunmi* by Ola Rotimi, are all plays which draw heavily on the historical record of the activities of Yoruba deities and their world view. It should be understood that it is the sub-celebrations and performances such as Bata dance, acrobatic display, the spiritual rituals of offering sacrificial animals for ritual and rites for socio-political and economic well-being, social harmony and stability that turns traditional Yoruba-Egungun performance into examples of festivalism and poly-systems in all historical Yoruba land.

## **2.6. The connection between festivals and theatre as poly-systems**

The Yoruba theatre and drama is traditionally a chain of artistic events that is often situated in a festival. The performances come in phases, each segment in relationship to the main theme of a festival. The religious and spiritual aspects of it are as crucial as its

entertainment value: spiritual atonement must start off the festival to pave the way for ancestral blessing and successful celebration.

Adedeji (1980:6) gives account of the totality of typical artistic events during most African festivals which are poly-systemic in nature. He comments that the spiritual aspect of such festival could become part of social reality. In his explanation, he emphasizes that “[t]he theatre in traditional African society is a ritual celebration which, in spite of its framework, is designed to bring man into a relationship where he experiences a transformation of reality in order to appreciate his own place within life circumstances. The theatre is therefore a cultural phenomenon.” This implies that even though it has been established that African theatre and drama may have developed from region and festival, the socio-political order and cultural ethics of African people cannot be overlooked or separated from their artistic performance. The masquerades and other performers of African theatre and drama particularly will always comment on socio-political and economic issues as it involves the people in the society.

Many African theatrical traditions which originate from festivals, rituals, cultural practices and other social orientations of life are capable of being a self-reflection or a mirror of the people that own it; more importantly, it is also ‘fortified with abilities to speak the truth’ to the society where it takes place and even beyond.

This assertion is based on the fact that the larger aspect of the African theatre, especially *Yoruba* theatre, have been confirmed to be rooted in festivals, rituals and other cultural practices and social orientation of the people, with some vital elements which is the formula to maintain social order, harmony and peace, and instil discipline in the society (Dopamu and Alana, 2004: 155).

A fitting example is the various roles played by *Egungun* among the *Yoruba* people. Oke (2007:89) provides clarification on one such role:

Hence, the *Egungun* proverbs of interest in this context are those directed at *Egungun* and are intended to provide guidance and standards of acceptable conduct for them in the discharge of their duties and the corresponding enjoyment of their social status. In other words, the proverbs of our interest here are those that pertain to the setting of standards for social interaction and ethics, and for which *Egungun* are used as a medium of public education as people watch them perform at their festivals.

Masquerade or *Eugen* are believed to be role models among the Yoruba populace. Their good conduct serves as points of discussion in the society and are thus recommended to all the people. This positive attribute makes them extremely popular during their festivals and in extension earns respect in the society.

Adedeji (1969) further believes that theatre and drama have a “religio-genic root”: that implies that theatre and drama have a common umbilical cord which ties them to religion and festival celebrations in Africa, and specifically in Nigeria. Consequently, most of the Yoruba religions, rituals, festivals, traditions and cultural practices have always advocated the demand for peaceful co-existence among people. Different lessons, moral values and teachings about good social well-being, respect and protection for human dignity in general are passed across to the spectators during performances. In this respect, Dopamu and Alana (2004:155) assert the following:

Idowu has contended that with the Yoruba, morality is certainly the fruit of religion’, and that ‘they [Yoruba people] do not make any attempt to separate the two.’ Although some scholars may question the validity of this assertion, the fact is that among the Yoruba, ‘what have been named taboo took their origin from the fact that people discerned that there were certain things which were morally approved or disapproved by the Deity.’ In other words, morality derives from the fact that people believe that there are certain actions or behaviours or things which are ethically approved or disapproved by Olodumare, the supreme God among the Yoruba. Thus, the demands laid upon humankind by Olodumare are purely ethical. Morality therefore is of vital importance in the life of the Yoruba.

Ogundeji (2000:2) upholds that the media through which Yoruba traditional or “religious or secular events employ theatrical arts to articulate the beliefs” comprise mythologies, tales, legends, folklores, proverbs, songs and riddles. This content is passed down generational lines through the oral literature practice of story-telling or songs to propagate moral values, unity and, in some cases, to teach lessons. Sadly, these channels of the Yoruba cultural practiced are gradually fading away. Obafemi (1996:14) states as follows:

But in this theatre, more than in the Nigerian drama in English, the dominant influence is the traditional festival, and other verbal and performed arts of the Yoruba. It is important here to identify and briefly describe the elements of oral traditional performance which supply the main ingredients for the contemporary theatre in Nigeria, and are directly the ‘folk opera’ which maintains a close relationship with traditional drama. The three main constituents of oral performance are oral literature (poetry and folktales), music and

dance. The important point to note is that these elements are interrelated and they are all realized, basically, in performance. For instance, poetry is actualized in performance via songs, chants, music and recitative forms.

More often than not, all of these vital cultural elements of the Yoruba traditional performance are overtly and inevitably bound to manifest during the performances or presentation of the works of many writers and practitioners in Nigeria. The Yoruba artistes in Nigeria have over time borrowed from traditional folklore and folktale to propagate and achieve their artistic visions of social harmony and revolutionary aesthetics. It is important to take the 'cultural material' from the society and give it back or release it to the same society for social-economic and political advancement via the arts.

The media of communication in traditional Yoruba performance mentioned above (mythologies, tales, legends, folklores, proverbs, songs and riddles and others) have prominent characteristics of and resemblances to the traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre and the contemporary traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre. Noticeably, some of the works of the Nigerian modern playwrights and theatre practitioners—also known as the “Nigerian Literary Dramatists”—emerged in the late 1950s prior to Nigeria’s independence in 1960 from British colonialism and imperialism. Such works include those of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan (who joined their league much later in the 1970s). These works, interestingly, possess some resemblance to the traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre, as well as the contemporary traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre.

Adedeji (1980:16) describes that time as follows:

The theatre in English has since independence produced a number of Nigerian playwrights and dramatists, of whom the most distinguished is also the most politically conscious. He is Wole Soyinka, African’s leading creative artist. Since the production of his play *A Dance of the Forest*, written especially for and premiered to mark Nigeria’s political independence in 1960, he has become a Colossus that bestrides the African theatre world. *A Dance of the Forest* will go down in the history of Nigerian dramatic literature as a play that embodies not only the paradigm of African theatre but also one that uses folklore to communicate a political statement in which the visionary artist shows his consciousness and nationalistic sensitivity.

Obviously, playwrights research and study their own cultures and traditions, as well as the socio-political and economic realities of their time, because they affected the lives and survival of the people in general around them, and even more particularly the lives of the less privileged in the society. Consequently, the craftsmanship and in extension, the performance of their plays, embrace poly-systemic style and features of festivities.

What makes Yoruba theatre, drama and festivals irrefutably poly-systemic in nature is the chain of events which constitute the totality of celebration and performance.

## **2.7 Yoruba Theatre as poly-systems**

Cremona (2007:5) provides the bridge or link between Hauptfleisch's concept of *Festivals as Poly-Systems* and *Theatre as Poly-Systems*:

The festivals discussed, though representing only a tiny microcosm of all those organized around the planet, constitute an 'ensemble' that is fairly representative of the infinite variety of celebrations that make up what Hauptfleisch calls the 'poly-systemic' nature of this type of theatrical event.

In referring to Hauptfleisch's 'poly-systemic' concept, Cremona has confirmed that there can be a connection between festival, celebration and theatre or performance. Both festival and theatre are ensembled in nature; they both require a certain percentage of collaboration.

Naturally, the next research question arises: 'How is this concept practically applicable to the Nigerian experience?' Ogunbiyi (1981:3) states that "(...) the specific origins of Nigerian theatre and drama are speculative. What is, however, not speculative (...) is the existence, in many Nigerian societies, of robust theatrical tradition. The primitive root of that tradition must be sought in the numerous religious rituals and festivals that exist in many Nigerian communities." This insight provides an answer to the likely origin of the metamorphosis to what we now know as the Nigerian theatre, including the theatre associated with the Yoruba people of the South-West of Nigeria, amongst many other well-recognised variants of other theatre and drama that emanated from other ethnic groups in the country. Also, it can be safely deduced that the development or growth of theatre in Nigeria and arguably in many parts of Africa too can be linked to the diverse religious rituals and festivals that existed in many communities and societies in the continent.

The present study recognizes the inadequacy that characterizes a definition or concept of what Nigerian and Yoruba is, and what is not. This view is based on the fact that many factors have, over the years, influenced and become an integral part of the existing indigenous culture and tradition of the Nigerian people, especially the Yoruba people. This is why the theoretical construct of festivalisation as a poly-systemic structure is so valuable for the study.

From a wider perspective, considering the history of the African continent and its cultural diversity, cultural integration and emulation as well as appropriation from many years, through many channels such as trade, intermarriage, slavery, and war, to mention but a few, has opened up African ways of life to foreign cultural and traditional values such as arts. Therefore, there have been marriages and intermarriages between many traditions, cultures, as well as civilizations that has influenced the current aesthetic nature of Yoruba (protest) theatre.

The layers of internal and external cultures and traditions of various kinds are fundamental in the definition towards a poly-systemic nature. The urge of the individual artist to politically engage through their political work, may have been their individual contact and interaction with the outside world, particularly in Europe and Asia. (I will expand on this issue when I discuss the individual dramatist and theatre-makers' work later in the thesis.) Their knowledge about their culture and tradition, indigenous festivals and other sources of Yoruba art may have influenced their various works to become poly-systemic in nature.

As long as imported culture and tradition keeps being imbibed, and as long as Chinese and Indian movies from the Asian continent keep being watched, Africans will continue to dress like the Americans, Europeans and the Asians. There will be no end to Nigerian culture being poly-systemic. African and particularly Nigerian culture will continue to remain polysystemic in nature, because both theatre and drama possess the natural capacity to absorb borrowed forms of entertainment as argued above. In conclusion, the poly-systemic nature of traditional and contemporary Nigerian theatre indicates that the form is culturally and artistically a hybrid form of theatres or events.

## **2.8. Definition of theatrical event**

Sauter (2006:3-4) condenses it: "In general terms, a theatrical event can be described as the interaction between performer(s) and spectator (s), during a given time, in a specific place, and under certain circumstances." Sauter further elucidates the concept of theatrical events

by giving an illustration or story of a colleague, named Jamil, who arrived on his first visit to Stockholm in August 2004 from South Asia.

The story of Jamil as narrated by Sauter, and how he was swindled in a foreign country, did not occur in a conventional theatre, with spectators sitting in front of or around the stage. Rather, all that happened to him ensued in an open space. This view is strengthened by Sauter (2006:4) when he posits that “theatrical events can happen outside conventional theatre buildings.”

Sauter’s submission is clear: not all theatrical experiences take place in the theatre (defining theatre as a structure, with a stage and prearranged chairs for an audience). An example of this is the *Yoruba Alarming Traditional Travelling Theatre*, which first commenced at the King’s palace, and later became people’s theatre for all to see, around social spaces such as market squares, city centres and water fronts. Also, not all theatrical experiences are pleasurable. Records have it that some of the theatrical experiences in many countries, especially the performances which address the activities of leaders, governments and individuals in power, do not always please the people whom the performance was created to satire or ridicule or satirize. An instance of this is found in Akinwunmi Isola’s (1992) *The African writer’s tongue*.

Sauter (2009:472) believes that a “theatrical event can be described as a way of playing and, more exactly, as theatrical playing”. Semantically speaking, theatrical playing consists of an element of playing and an element of theatricality, and both of these elements need to be described as separate entities.

Jamil was not aware that what had just happened to him was a theatrical event when the two blond men accosted him and later took some valuable possessions from him, including money; even worse, that the blonde men were police. Sauter (2007:4) clarifies the scenario and action as follows: “I also claim that the spectator does not need to be fully aware of the circumstances, nor do the performers necessarily expose their ‘act’ as a theatrical one.” This experience may appear strange to the regular audience, who attend a playhouse to see performance and enjoy traditional theatre experiences. Traditionally, the audiences are used to what Sauter (2007: 4) describes as follows:

When a performer acts, he or she is carrying out real actions— ‘real’ in the meaning of visible or audible doings that an observer can see and hear. In other words, the performed actions are not pretended or concealed, but can

be observed by the spectator. In a regular theatrical situation, the performers employ certain artistic codes, normally familiar to most audience members, to indicate that they are performing actions open for symbolic interpretation. When such artistic codes are not obvious for a spectator—let us say in avantgarde or a foreign performance the symbolic meaning of the action is more difficult to decipher, sometimes even impossible. Outside a playhouse, in public places, the spectator usually needs some signs, which identify performed action as being different from everyday behaviour. Otherwise the observer may not register an event as being theatrical.

This is exactly the difficulty that Jamil faced in his encounter with the fake policemen. Essentially, Jamil and his Italian friend who collaborated with others to trick and set him up are not regular actors, neither are the two blond men who impersonated or disguised as Swedish police officers. These two men in the scenario only pretends to be who they are not and appeared to their target (Jamil) as police, because, in the actual sense, Swedish Police do not encourage extortion of money or other valuables from the people, especially visitors. Nevertheless, a theatrical event took place, even though, the reality of the theatrical event did not occur to Jamil until he realized that his money had been taken and, in addition, when he eventually realised that his Italian ‘friend’ was part of the plot that robbed him of his valuables.

## **2.9. Theatrical event as a concept**

Sauter (2007:8) states that “a theatrical event can be described as a way of playing and, more importantly, as theatrical playing. He adds that in “many languages, everyday expression indicate that theatre is ‘played’—Theatre spien, le jeu du theatre, ludi romani, etc. —and thus belongs to a playing culture.”

He further explains that “playing is distinguishable from everyday activities and follows specified rules, which all participants need to observe.” Playing culture “is distinctly different from written culture”, and “playing emphasizes the here-and-now character, its presence in time and space, whereas writing aims at the future, at what will be important to remember tomorrow.” Sauter asserts that not “all playing is theatrical playing, but it is necessary to relate theatrical playing both to playing in general and to specify what makes it theatrical.” According to Saro (2014:7), “Playing is a characteristic of performers, participants and spectators during a theatrical event, though the agents involved use different strategies of playing or play different games.” The foregoing explanation can be linked to the *Alarinjo* performance, because its performances structure needs the active and

full participation of the performers (the masquerades) and spectators (who are the town's people) to function.

The theatrical event in this study as discussed by Sauter has, so far, been described as a form of theatrical playing, which is related to a playing culture and to the dynamic concept of theatricality. In his conclusion, Sauter (2007:8) emphasizes that "all of these elements [that is elements of the theatrical event] are at the same time embedded in and functioning through a wider cultural concept. 'Culture' is here understood as a broad concept, almost in the anthropological sense of all human activities."

Sauter's (2007:8) concept of theatrical event states that "first of all, theatrical events might happen anywhere." He also states that, usually, they occur in predetermined environments, where it is obvious for both the performance and spectators that a theatrical event takes place. Consequently, Sauter (2007:8) asserts that "outside conventional theatre spaces, theatrical events also happen: in the streets, in galleries, in parks and other public places, even in private places. In his conclusion, Sauter (2007:8) states that, "according to the artistic codes, theatrical events can be either recognizable as such or concealed from the observer."

## **2.10 Suitability and limitation of theatrical event**

Sauter (2007:7) explains that his concept or idea of a "theatrical event" is not aiming at another definition of theatre, another attempt to establish another theatre formula, nor is it an ontological enterprise. There "have been numerous attempts to reduce the term 'theatre' to its essential or necessary elements", believes Sauter (2007:7). Based on this explanation, a theatrical event should not necessarily be scripted, pre-determined for staging, or exhibited in conventional locations such as a stage, or acted out by trained actors or actresses.

In a further clarification, Sauter (2007: 7) also believes that "a theatrical event is not limited to the duration of a performance. Both the preparations of the performative act and the effects after the curtain falls can, and sometimes need, to be included in the analysis."

The concept of theatrical event, according to Sauter (2007:8), "does not describe exactly when and where something happens that we may call 'theatre' or 'performance'. The concept, rather, aims at emphasizing the 'eventness' of the theatrical event. Eventness

stands for the here-and now for mutual interaction, for the uniqueness of the experience.” This view means that the theatrical event does not leave the audience with the feelings of a timed and staged play or performance within a particular time and location. Instead, the concept is based on the ‘eventness’ of the theatrical event. In conclusion, the concept of theatrical event shifts away from the popular conventions of traditional theatre; if it is to have meaning, it must comply with the aforementioned characteristics summarized below.

### **Characteristics of Sauter’s concept of theatrical events (2007:8)**

- In terms of time, it may “first of all, theatrical events ... happen anywhere”.
- These usually occur in predetermined environments, where it is obvious for both performance and spectators that a theatrical event can take place.
- In addition to conventional spaces, events may happen in the streets, in galleries, in parks and other public places, or even in private places.
- With reference to the artistic codes, “theatrical events can be either recognizable as such or concealed from the observer.”
- Theatrical event must not necessarily be scripted, pre-determined for staging, or exhibited in conventional locations, such as a stage, or acted out by trained actors or actresses.

### **2.11 Summary and conclusion**

This chapter examines the theoretical foundation for this study, using Temple Hauptfleisch’s concept of *Theatre and Festivals as Poly-Systems*, the concept of *Theatrical Event*, as evolved by Willmar Sauter; and Vicki Ann Cremona’s concept of the *Festivalising Process*. These three studies are intimately interconnected in their application. The connection is situated in the fact that they are all requisite to producing the traditional Yoruba performance and its contemporary offshoot.

In conclusion, Yoruba theatre and drama can be analysed and examined as theatrical events, and as a way of playing and theatrical playing. It shares various characteristics of Sauter’s description, such as interaction between performers and spectators, it plays out during a given time, in a specific place, and under certain circumstances. In contrast, the *Alarinjo*—its modern *contemporary* performances, the guerrilla theatre of Soyinka and some of his literary dramatists’ compatriots such as Rotimi and Osofisan—primarily only required active interaction between performers and spectators, during a given time

(unconventional periods of time), in a specific place (an open space), and under certain circumstances, usually during the festive period. A conventional western theatre building is not required.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of festivalisation and the festival as a poly-system is suitable for the analysis and discussion of the earlier forms of Yoruba theatre (applicable to the first section of the study). Various elements have influenced the theatre of the Yoruba, and the political protest theatre and forms that we see in the works of Rotimi, Soyinka and Osofisan can be discussed as theatrical events where the traditional 'western' style of performance is in operation, as well as the alternative forms such as guerrilla theatre. The theoretical frame of the theatrical event is therefore more applicable to the second section of the study, although singular events of the festival (that will be discussed in the first section) can also be approached through this frame.

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<sup>3</sup> This study will engage in an in-depth analysis on the suitability and application of Sauter's (2007) concept of theatrical events, and will also be used to analyse the concept of *Alarinjo*, its offshoot, modern-contemporary performances, the guerrilla theatre of Soyinka, and other theatrical philosophy of some of his literary dramatist's compatriots such as Rotimi and Osofisan in the subsequent chapters.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **YORUBA THEATRE AND DRAMA**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will analyse Yoruba theatre and drama alongside some of its important inherent components. An attempt to establish attributes will aid an understanding of the general experience and key developments that have shaped the Yoruba theatre and drama over decades.

Theatre and drama have, over the course of many years, played significant roles in the lives of the Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria. Art is a vehicle by which the people express their various moods and this is reflected in their way of life. In almost all the facets of life of the Yoruba people of the South-West, indications of the way in which theatre and drama is embraced, is found. Ajayi (2004:613) comments: "The theatre is easily one of, if not the most popular and most vibrant artistic expressions of Yoruba people in contemporary times, it has always been rich and dynamic. Yoruba theatre remains a formidable force even within larger Nigerian entity. Yoruba theatre artists themselves occupy a dominant position in the nation's theatre arena."

Theatre and drama among the Yoruba people have always served philosophical purposes in the understanding of various questions that surround creation and the essence of man's existence. For example, Yoruba people value the essence of being good to other people and in general, to mankind while alive, because to them there is always an ultimate reward for good and bad behaviour, here on earth and in heaven. To this end, there is a reward or punishment for good and bad behaviour.

In many Yoruba societies, transition or passage of the dead to the realm of their ancestors is another important aspect of life; so also, the arrival of the new-born baby into the world (representing the future). The unborn, the living and dead in Yoruba settings represent the complete cycle of life. In the Yoruba philosophical view, life is often symbolically referred to as a stage, or sometimes, even as a marketplace, where individuals must play his or her own role(s).

'Destiny' and its fulfilment or non-fulfilment have always been part of what provides thematic preoccupation or subject matters in all variants of Yoruba theatre and drama. This insight is explained as Ibitokun (1995:21-22) states that "[t]he Yoruba world-view is multidimensional. It is not restrained to the physical, tangible plane of existence. Besides the earth which is the measure of the present, and the locus of mortals and where you and I, in the form of existence, dramatize our distinctive destinies, there are the realms of ancestors (the past), gods (the eternal) and the unborn (the future)."

### 3.2 Delineation of Yoruba Theatre as a complex system

In the previous chapter of this study, the nature of Yoruba theatre and drama alongside some of its important inherent components and attributes were established, so as to understand the general perception and some key developments that have shaped the Yoruba theatre and drama in history, using Temple Hauptfleisch's (2007) concept or idea of *Theatre and Festivals as Poly-Systems*, as well as the concept of *Theatrical Event* (Sauter, 2006) and Vicki Ann Cremona's (2007) concept of the *Festivalising Process*. The multi-layered and complex phenomenon that is Yoruba theatre will not be examined.

Most Yoruba festivals and theatrical performances can be studied through the concept of eventifying and/or eventification. Any analyses would, however, be incomplete without a consideration of the sequence of artistic ceremonies associated with it. This concept of eventification relies on a combination with other creative works. The eventifying process or system requires active human interaction at various festivals, and certain cultural features such as dance, masquerading, chants, etc.—all of which take place during periodic festivals.

Ogunba (1978:5) elaborates on the nature of African festival:

In traditional Africa, the great artistic institution is the festival. Contrary to popular understanding, the festival is not just a religious occasion; if it were, it would hardly command more than a tiny fraction of the interest it generates among the people. Besides, it is always difficult to determine what a religious occasion is in a traditional African context. Such strict categorization into religious and secular or religious and political seems alien to the spirit and nature of the traditional African. In fact, things which in other civilizations are regarded as merely secular are treated with a certain degree of awe and sacredness and things which would otherwise be regarded as sacred do accommodate "surprising profanities". It is true that every traditional festival is attached to a supernatural being or deified ancestor and

to that extent may be said to be religious at base and inspiration. But in its realization a festival's religious origin or foundation is too often and too easily superseded, the festival thereby becoming a veritable carnival, dance drama or ritual drama.

The above provides a useful foundation on which Yoruba theatre—both traditional *Alarinjo* and contemporary theatre and drama—can be discussed in relation to the concept of eventifying and eventifications. Yoruba theatre and drama are a product from chains of festivals; consequently, Yoruba theatre and drama retained some of the various identities, features and characteristics of the festivals which generated it. The performances of *Alarinjo* and contemporary theatre and drama display a veritable carnival, dance and even ritualistic drama, a description that is similar to the later part of Ogunba's explanation.

Ogunba (1978:5) explains what constitute festival as eventifying and eventifications:

It is in this sense that the festival is the prime artistic institution of traditional Africa, for the festival is the only institution which has the framework which can coordinate virtually all the art forms of a community. Each important traditional festival lasts for a considerable time which may be three, seven, nine or sixteen days, a month or even three months. Each tends to have a story or myth to perform and each makes use of its own peculiar style in the dramatic realization of the story. In the process the arts of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting, dancing and several others are utilized in a manner not totally dissimilar to their usage in other dramatic traditions. Thus, each year there is a cycle of performances which evokes much of the history of the community and also brings to light all the artistic forms in the community. It is this total presentation that is proper to be regarded as traditional African festival drama.

The organiser of the festival artistically coordinates all the line-up art forms during the celebration, producing a chain of events. While the coordination becomes an eventifying process, each display such as dance, acrobatics, chants, drama, drumming and other elements featured during the festival culminate into the actual eventification process. Overall, this whole process, when analysed together, becomes eventification.

Festivals are heterogeneous in nature, consisting of different cultural and traditional celebrations with specific varieties of a unique display of artistic ingenuities (first to the immediate indigenous community, to the surrounding neighbours and visitors from different backgrounds) by the people who own the festival. Hence, the display of many traditional festivals in Africa reveals diverse performances which are also sometimes related to the people's spiritual and social beliefs of communing with their spiritual

benefactors, and, in addition, as a means of entertaining themselves. What the audiences witness during many festival performances, are the end-products and confluence of all the unique artistic forms that have been with the people for many years.

The theoretical concept of festivals as poly-systems explains that no culture can exist without the confluence of the sub-elements which form the totality of such a culture in society. Various festivals that emerge from a particular culture that is formed by the confluence of others, thus become a poly-systemized festival. Hauptfleisch (2007) suggests that no culture is ever a single system of processes and events, but really a complexity of sub-systems. A good example of festival as poly-system would apply to the various festivals which are created and participated by the Yoruba people in diaspora or descendants in the South American countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago and United States of America. Cremona (2007) elucidates the most essential characteristics of any festival as a wide range of aesthetic and artistic opportunities. It is this opportunity of selection that makes attendance of a festival different than going to a single performative experience; even if people decide to simply attend one event, they are aware of the variety of other possibilities that they purposely choose to ignore.

The various carnivals, regattas, street parties and pageantry displays entail a series of cultures and traditions that originated from West Africa with blends of European and other cultures of the world. Mullen (2004) suggests that “the rich cultural legacy of the Yoruba slaves and their descendants that come after them has influenced and contributed a great deal to the Americas”. The Yoruba cultural heritage and theatre of these people have intermingled with others, thus producing a new hybrid culture which they and all their people know and embrace today. In addition, their mother tongue of the Yoruba dialect too, has changed to a combination of various adapted dialects. *Shango De Ima*, a Cuban play written by Pepe Carril, is an outstanding example. Lima (1990:34) provides a context for this:

The body of Cuban drama contains many accretions from African sources. Among the most important of these is the presence of ancient deities from the Yoruba pantheon, a vast hierarchy of spiritual entities termed Orishas who range from the aloof Maker (variously Olofi, Olorum, Olodumare), through the hermaphroditic creative force (Obatalá) and the Mother of the gods (Yemayá), to those associated with specific aspects of Nature (Changó, for one). These are the traditional deities still worshipped in what is present day Nigeria and its environs. Many of the Orishas figure prominently in

modern Cuban life and are manifest in the drama of the Caribbean island because they have had a long history there.

Theatre seen as a poly-system fundamentally makes it clear that no single discipline of the performing arts can constitute theatrical and dramatic performance. This theory is a perfect account of African theatre and drama, because it shows the confluence of various artistic specialties. *Alarinjo* and contemporary theatre of the Yoruba theatre share the same characteristics—performances involve these various forms and other artistic specializations such as music, singing, acrobatic display, drumming, acting etc. (More analysis on Yoruba theatre of *Alarinjo* and Contemporary will be provided in the subsequent chapters of this study.)

Even though the exact roots of Nigerian theatre and drama are hypothetical, it remains the presence in many Nigerian societies of a strong theatrical tradition (Ogunbiyi, 1981). He mentions that the primitive sources of that tradition must be searched for in the abundant religious rituals and festivals that are present in many Nigerian towns and villages.

*The Concept of Theatrical Event* (Sauter, 2006) states that theatrical event can be described as the collaboration amongst performer(s) and spectator (s), during a given time, in a specific place, and under certain circumstances. The Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* of the Masquerades and the Contemporary Itinerant Theatre of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo are evidence that both theatre and drama requires collaboration between performers and spectators. These are not types of theatre and drama that can simply be watched while actors and actresses are in front of the audience acting on a proscenium or other Western stages. The Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* of the Masquerades and the Contemporary Itinerant Theatre occurred in open spaces, with active spectators participating during the performance. There was no separation between the Yoruba theatre performers and the spectators, unlike Western theatre with audiences that are usually excluded from the progression of the play.

Sauter's submission that theatrical action can take place outside conventional theatre buildings is applicable to not only to Yoruba theatre and drama but also to many other theatrical traditions in Africa. An example of this is the Yoruba *Alarinjo* Traditional Travelling Theatre, which originated at the King's palace, and later on was performed as

people's theatre for all to see, around social spaces such as market squares, the waterfront, village squares and town centers.

Typically, not all theatre is always pleasurable. Records have it that some of the theatrical experiences in many countries, especially the performances which address the activities of leaders, governments and individuals in power do not always 'please' the people whom the performance was created to satirize. The 'serious' aspect of the theatrical event, and especially the Yoruba theatre, can be found in the social commentary that the form delivers.

At this juncture, Yoruba theatre and drama will only be applied to emphasize and indicate form, content and substance in a descriptive sense in the works of selected theatre practitioners and scholars. Secondly, this research does not intend to investigate the theatre and drama written in the Yoruba language by Yoruban playwrights and practitioners.

The core concern of this chapter is an attempt to analyse the conceptual theories adopted in the second chapter in order to identify the salient developments that have contributed to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performances in the country. In the second place, the preliminary assessment conducted at the beginning of this study revealed that certain developments and conditions have long influenced or mixed with what can be described as the indigenous or the original traditional formation of Yoruba theatrical and dramatic performance which was in place long before contact with the Western world. The rest of the chapter will attempt to trace some beginnings of these hybrid forms.

### **3.3 External influence on Nigerian theatre and drama**

As confirmed before, external factors influenced the form and structure of Yoruba performances in Nigeria. These effects include the arrival of European explorers and merchants, (specifically the arrival of the Portuguese through the shore of Eco, now Lagos, in the 1470s). The British arrived in Nigeria in 1539, with notions of colonialism and imperialism. Later, the American indoctrination became influential with the returned "freelives" (popularly referred to as "the returnees"). They were captured from many parts of Africa, particularly from the West coast of the continent, and later returned to their motherland (Freetown in Sierra-Leone, and Liberia) after the slave trade was abolished and prohibited in America between 1789—1861. These factors inter had a great influence on culture, tradition and specifically on the theatrical and performance arts.

Adedeji (1980:7) further explains:

In the course of time, a new 'civilized community' had begun to emerge, set apart from the 'native' one. By using a dynamic body of emigrants—mostly repatriates from slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the West Indies, and in particular those who had been reoriented in Freetown, Sierra Leone—the missionaries were provided with a vigorous corps of emigrants strongly motivated to be used as agents in the realization of their objectives. This body of repatriates, mainly of Yoruba stock, constituted themselves into the 'elite' class, manning key positions in the church and later in commerce and in the colonial administration to help shape the course of events.

The church, with the Yoruba people in key positions, have had a profound influence on the theatre of the Yoruba people. The church was only one aspect that influenced the performance formats in Nigeria. Gumucio-Degron (1994:77) sheds light on how theatre was sponsored, patronized and promoted during this period:

But the Church was not the only active sponsor of theatre. The Brazilian community, made up of former slaves who came back from South America, had created a Brazilian Dramatic Society already active by 1882. The names of P.Z Silva, J.A Campos, L.G. Barboza or J.J. da Costa were well known as promoters of concerts and plays. They brought back their great love for song, now sophisticated with some of the refinements of European musical practice.

Consequently, borrowed cultures/traditions are evident in current Yoruba theatre and drama. It is important to note that "(...) as an expression of the relationship between man, society and nature, drama arose out of fundamental human needs in the dawn of human civilization and has continued to express those needs ever since, which is to say, that Nigerian theatre and drama originated with the Nigerian himself, embodying his first preoccupations, his first struggles, successes, set-backs and all", as Goombay (1981:3) states.

Yoruba theatre and drama are carefully divided alongside its major influences into three recognizable epochs in this study. These are the pre-colonial, the colonial, and the postcolonial timeframes. This study's adopted frame-work may not encapsulate and explain all that exists about Yoruba theatre and drama. Nonetheless, the arrangement will open up a scope for analysis.

### 3.4 Yoruba theatrical performance as products of culture and tradition

This section of the study analyses the Yoruba theatrical performance of *Alarinjo* and other similar forms of theatre. The Yoruba traditional performance, such as *Alarinjo* traditional performance with all its festivities, characteristics, and the contemporary *Alarinjo* movement of Hubert Ogunde and his contemporaries can all be classified as theatrical events. The *Alarinjo* traditional theatre of the Yoruba people is a cultural and traditional product of the people that can be found within their rich and diverse heritage. The areas occupied by the Yoruba subgroup in the South-West, Nigeria are clearly stated:

The Yoruba who inhabit the present-day Republic of Nigeria in West Africa have a very diverse culture. Their society is divided into many different subgroups, such as the Ondo, Ekiti, Akoko, Oyo, Ijebu, Egba, Awori, Igbomina, and Ookun-Yoruba, among others—each having its own peculiar dialectal and cultural traits. These traits make it possible to identify a given Yoruba individual as an Oyo, Ondo, Ijebu, Ekiti, and so forth (Famule, 2005:19).

In the vast Yoruba culture and traditions there also exists subgroups. The most popular and well-known Yoruba cities have become current capitals of many states in Nigeria. Capital cities such as Ibadan, Lagos, Ado-Ekiti, Ilorin, Osogbo, Akure, and Abeokuta are mainly state-political headquarters. Urbanisation has eroded many of the Yoruba cultural and tradition beliefs and values away from most of our big cities. The remaining fractions of the Yoruba culture and traditions have only been retained strongly in towns and villages, and this is where they are being carried on and practiced mostly in addition to the aforementioned big cities and capitals. It is well documented that the performance of the Contemporary Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre used to be popular and acceptable not only in the remote villages, but also in the big cities. This assertion is corroborated with Adedeji's (1980:7) submission that *Alarinjo* is a theatrical tradition which cuts across Yoruba land. To this end, he opines that "The *Alarinjo* Theatre was a traditional pastime among the Yoruba".

Obviously, these Yoruba cities had not attained high-level urbanization at the time that the Contemporary Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre turned popular and became a source of entertainment in Nigeria. Jeyifo (1984:67) states as follows:

Today, there is an almost even diffusion or spread of the travelling theatre troupes throughout the ten to twelve geographical areas of the major Yoruba

sub-ethnic groups such as Egba/Egbado, Ijebu, Oyo, Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti, Akoko, Ondo, Ilaje/Ikale and Ilorin/Kabba. This diffusion of the Travelling Theatre troupes seems to be at its most concentrated among such sub-groups as Oyo (with its centre at Ibadan) Lagos (the island and the greater metropolitan area), Egba, Ekiti and Ijesa. Conversely the points of least concentration of this diffusion seem to be among such sub-groups such as Ijebu, Ondo and Ilorin.

A large space and expanse of land has always been the main requisite for the *Alarinjo* performers and the more unpopular Yoruba *apidan*, *alalupaida* or *pidan-pidan* (the Yoruba traditional magician) to display their prowess.

Clark (1979), Adedeji (1972) and Adedeji (1971) who all labelled the craftsmanship of the Yoruba *pidan-pidan* (magicians) as 'unpopular'. This notion was borne out of the fact that the traditional Yoruba society, at the time when the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre was in vogue, rejected their dubious acts of swindling. Hubert Ogunde and many of his contemporaries such as Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola—all practitioners of the Contemporary Yoruba Travelling theatre—had the opinion that the Yoruba *pidan-pidan* (magicians) were fraudsters.

The Yoruba people took pride in certain professions such as farming, hunting, trading, etc. By the beginning of the 19th century, when the free slaves who had undergone training in various professions and vocations abroad, had returned to Nigeria, the landscape of the traditional professions started to change. By 1935 to 1960, Adedeji believes that:

(...) trade unionism had emerged as an aftermath of the Great Depression, a new breed of politically motivated Nigerians had returned home from study or travel abroad, and a new level of consciousness was apparent in the people's outlook and values. This circumstance was aided by journalism and by the fact that the editors of the Nigerian dailies of the period were themselves the leaders of thought and political directions (1980:11).

Professions like law, journalism, engineering, medicine, pharmacy, and accountancy became the 'real' and 'befitting' prestigious professions for a decent man in the Yoruba society unlike that of *pidan-pidan* (trickster or magician). The society accepted farming, hunting and trading as legitimate professions; to them, these vocations were practical and respectable in the society. In addition, they were considered to be profitable enough to feed

the usual large family. Yoruba people were mostly communal, and believed in living with their extended family during the colonial era.

Nigerian men, especially the elites during the colonial era, who engaged in professions such as law, engineering, medicine, pharmacy, accountancy and journalism, were considered to be responsible and important personalities in the Yoruba society. They were seen as the socialites and the elites of Lagos, the center of entertainment during that period, and the seat of power—until 1991 when Abuja became the new capital city of Nigeria under the regime of Gen Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida.

The *Alarinjo* practitioners suffered the same ill-fate and ridicule which the *pidan-pidan* performers went through in the Yoruba communities. This fact is well-documented in Nigerian literature: “The actor or any person connected with the theatre was regarded as an *Alarinjo*, a name which Prof J. A. Adedeji says ‘originated as an abuse and which more or less picks them out and labels them as rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars’” (Clark, 1979:4).

This study deliberately did not adopt the well-known ‘classification’ of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial labelling in literature in its arrangement, because this may not adequately suffice to explain the key issues associated with the areas of Yoruba theatre that the study set out to investigate. Thus, the three classifications below will serve as the categories of the key issues to be examined in this study.

- Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre
- The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre
- The Literary Theatre or The Literary Drama

### **3.5. The Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre**

The precise date of inception of The Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre is uncertain. However, there are existing documents about its general origin. One of those first set of studies dates back to Fadipe’s (1939; 757) view that:

The theatrical art [of *Alarinjo*] belongs to the genre of the ‘masque’ or ‘mask’. As an entertainment it originated from the religious rites of masquerades or

maskers known as ghost-mummery. Its link with court-entertainments, as will be seen later, brings it very close to the ‘court masque’ of the sixteenth century in Europe. The traditional names by which the troupes are called by the Yoruba populace are: eegun apidan (players of spectacles) or eegun alare (masque players) or the *alarinjo* (travelling dance troupes).

The Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre, according to different scholars of Nigerian theatre and drama<sup>4</sup> is a highly itinerant theatrical performance of *Egungun* (masquerade), located around numbers of Yoruba settlements, such as villages and major towns. Their performances were occasionally initiated by important personalities such as Kings and Chiefs. They gradually became open to the general audience. One scholar who has written prolifically on the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre is Joel Adedeji. He defines the Yoruba masque theatre, popularly known as the *Alarinjo*:

(...) the traditional travelling theatre of the Yoruba people. Originating in the *Egungun* masquerade cult, it dates back to the early parts of the Seventeenth century, when Ologbin Ologbojo, who was the Arokin (chief rhapsodist, cymbalist and ballad singer) and Ologbo (staff bearer) of the royal household of king Ogbolu, the Alaafin of Oyo Igboho set up a troupe of masqueraders and akunyungba (chorus) to entertain the king.

Adedeji goes further by citing that the beginning of the Yoruba theatre in Yoruba land was “The *Agbegijo*, which means; ‘one who dances with a wooden face-mask’, another name by which the professional troupes are called in certain areas of Yoruba rural areas even today”. Adedeji (citing Ulli Beier) commented that:

The *Agbegijo*’ could be called the beginning of theatre in Yoruba land. Beier’s statement on the theatre is obviously ironical since he was, in fact, a witness to the dying phase of an art which developed many centuries ago. (Adedeji, 1972: 254)

From the above studies, it is clear that the importance of the mask to the creation and performance of the Traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre cannot be overestimated—masquerading remained an important feature of this type of theatre. At this point, it is crucial to state the confirmation by Beier to the effect that the *Agbegijo*,

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<sup>4</sup> These scholars in recent times include Daramola (2012), Olayiwola (2011), Adeoye (2010), Muller (2005), Barber (2000), and in the times past: Owomoyela (1971), Adedeji (1980, 1978, 1972 & 1971), Ogunba and Irele (1978), Clark (1979), Gotrick (1984), Jeyifo (1984, 1985), Ishola (1992), Gumucio-Dagron (1994), Obafemi (1996 & 1996), Ogundele (2010 & 1997), Adedeji and Ekwuazi (1998).

meaning “dancers with a wooden face-mask” (another name for *Alarinjo*) started off with performers of this theatre covering or hiding their faces from their audience.

### **3.6. Thematic preoccupation in Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre**

The thematic contents in traditional *Alarinjo* performance were arranged around love, reward for patience, fantasy, jealousy, clashes of culture, immoralities, traditions and values, the reward of evil and compensation for doing good, dramatic biographies of their favourite heroes as well as some straight-forward didactic pieces. The *Alarinjo* “masque-dramaturge built is repertory and filled it with playlets especially with *efe* (satire)”, writes Adedeji (1981:233).

The typical performances of *Alarinjo* often adopted the style of story-telling, folklore and folktale narratives. Many of their acting styles and stories satirized individuals such as corrupt kings, murderous chiefs, jealous wives and lazy husbands. The *Alarinjo*'s style of lampooning, caricaturing, mimicry and buffoonery is perhaps one of their biggest artistic trade secrets. Their body gestures and movement, colourful costumes, larger than life masks of different images, sizes, and shapes are all artistic elements that contribute to the totality of the presentation of *Alarinjo* performance to the spectators.

### **3.7 The importance of masks to Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre**

Masks are used in a symbolic way during the performance of the traditional *Alarinjo* theatre, just like the classical Greek and Roman theatre. The mask is usually created to specifically mimic pre-determined individuals or animals whose facial structures, features and statistics are imitated.

Utmost importance is attached to costumes and makeup in the performance of the traditional *Alarinjo* theatre; however, the drummers and other instrumentalists who usually follow the *Alarinjo* masques do not cover their faces with any masks. Their performances are of serious satirical display accompanied by music, against social injustice, societal ills, as well as political and economic tragedy of their society. Therefore, the creation and usage of masks does not only allow them to mimic or lampoon their targeted individuals in the society; it is also a way to hide their faces behind their masks. Isola (1992:18) posits that “(...) in practical terms, the oral artist’s most valuable contribution

was perhaps the communication of the moral precepts that accompanied comments on the contemporary issues that were of concern to the entire community". His submission pinpoints socio-political and economic commentary of the oral artists—such as *Alarinjo* performers as major achievements. *Alarinjo* often addresses matters that has to do with collective survivals of the society, therefore, their remarks serve as check and balances in the society.

The fact that the Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* theatre performers' masks are always larger than life and highly elaborate in structure usually evokes merriment from the audience. This is a joke which Yoruba people traditionally frown at and totally reject, because being made a laughing-stock in the Yoruba society is considered to be a misrepresentation of one's family or even of one's whole lineage.

Another study on *Alarinjo* tradition states that:

In almost all Nigerian communities, there exists not a puppet theatre in the western sense but rather a masked theatre which has not detached itself from the moorings of ritual. There are as well some distinct puppetry traditions whose primary aims are entertainment and education. The mask tradition is considered as a most serious form, one which inhabits the line dividing the living world and the supernatural one. In Yoruba tradition, masked performance can be seen in both *egungun* and *gelede* dancers. A more elaborate, spectacular development of this tradition is seen in the *Alarinjo* theatre, which evolved from and developed alongside *egungun* performers. Like the *Tiv Kwagh-hir* puppets discussed earlier, the Yoruba used masked puppets in the *Alarinjo* tradition to criticize antisocial behavior. (Rubin, 1997: 230)

The above excerpt explains the three constituents attached to the masks of *Alarinjo* performers as being ritualistic, entertaining and educative. Their masks being ritualistic cannot be disassociated from the fact that the *Egungun* (masquerade) has a cult and has religious, festivalised, and consecrated sides. The devotees and worshipers of *Egungun* considers the traditional, cultural requisites and important rules and guidelines that must be observed before the commencement of their celebration, to make their outings very sacred and also taken seriously; therefore, everything that has to do with their masks and costumes which possesses a spiritual orderliness that must be respected regardless of whether one is an initiate or not. Ajayi (2004:614) explained further:

Indeed, what started as a Ritual theatre may evolve into a Festival theatre over a period of time. They both use formal rather than daily spoken language and dialogue in sparse performance and are usually a select group in the community, for example, the priesthood corps. The acting is coded in symbolic gestures and movements areas are restricted, and may be sacred or secular. However, a Ritual theatre is a much more formal and specialized affair than a Festival theatre.

It is the Yoruba belief that the *Egungun* are representatives of the dead, although they live on earth. Ajayi (2004:616) emphasizes the ritual element: “Egungun is an organization of allmale masked performers who honor and remember departed ancestors at annual ceremonies”. They are the bearers of ‘divine message(s)’, ‘good tidings’ and ‘special blessings. And the processes by which these three are transported and communicated to man are spiritual and ritualistic, often entailing a lot of sacrifices and cleansing.

The secular side of *Egungun* performance is the one that is generally referred to as the entertaining and educative side. However, their immunity against any insubordination, insults, aggression and any form of arrest from any authority who feels offended during any of their performances, remained intact regardless of the fact that the people’s ‘spiritual respect’ which were accorded them, must have given way to general entertainment which is became a ‘free for all’ during their performances.

The Yoruba people used masked performances of the *Alarinjo* tradition to criticize anti-social behaviour of individuals in their society. According to Rubin (1997:230), Yoruba people “more significantly, have also used it for social cohesion by presenting other ethnic groups in a derisive and satiric ways”, which is a subtle way to override and douse any forms of tension that may occur among different ethnic group(s) and tribes who co-exist with them. This form of performance is aligned with peace and unity among all. A situation is created where the negative elements of society can be purged and good ones are encouraged, so as not to deter the people from doing what is good for the general advancement of their society.

### **3.8 Relationship between Yoruba Oral Literature and Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre and Drama**

Adedeji (1971:134) describes oral tradition as follows: “Oral tradition is that complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past and based on the

ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of peoples. It is acquired through a process of learning or initiation and its purpose is to condition social action and foster social interaction.”

The close relationship between the oral literature and traditional *Alarinjo* theatre among the Yoruba people in the South-West of Nigeria can be better understood by evaluating both in view of the following declaration by Osofisan (1997:10):

For among us, artistic utterances have always served both goals, as much for entertainment as for education. There can be no separation, as each function networks into the other. The folktale is both fun and pedagogy; the masquerade festival is a source of amusement and escape, but also a canny and astute pretext for the voicing of current grievance. The court poet-strategically misnamed a praise-singer [as Ahmed Rajah, for example attests] - is often the mouthpiece of acerbic criticisms against the throne.

Apart from cultural and traditional materials, the Yoruba oral literature provides what can best be described as needed and necessary ingredients for the performative content of *Alarinjo* theatre. Therefore, in the theatrical discourse, the Yoruba oral literature is a wellknown reservoir and supplier of necessary content which enriches the typical production of Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* theatrical performance, either to amuse or educate audiences in terms of issues that affect their daily lives.

Consequently, Yoruba oral tradition can generally be seen as an integral part of Yoruba theatre and drama. It is vital to refer to the three features of the Yoruba theatre (as exemplified in the beginning of this chapter); as Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre, popular Yoruba Travelling Theatre, and The Literary Theatre or Literary Drama:

It is unrealistic to make a clear division between oral literature and theatre. Oral literature is always theatre, because the way in which the subject matter is performed is an essential aspect of the art. Theatre and traditional oral literature always recreate the original work. Feelings, mimicry, gestures, intonation, the use of rhythms and pauses, variations in the emotions expressed, the immediate reactions of the actors towards the audience and vice versa: this is all part of the oral character of unwritten African literature and is in fact inherent in the theatre. (Schipper, 1982:10)

Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre is clearly one of the main sources of many other types of theatre and drama in Nigeria which has become a strong influence on and has manifestations in many literary dramas written and staged within the confines of Nigerian

Universities. Mimicry, gestures, intonation, songs, riddles, the use of rhythms and pauses, and variations in emotions, amongst others are consistently expressed during the performances of Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre.

The indigenous artistic and social ways of life of the Yoruba people is strongly rooted in the communicative or verbal arts (oral literature) such as singing (*orinkiko*), chants (*esapipe*), incantation (*ofò* or *ogede-pipe*), proverbs (*owepipa*), storytelling (*aloapagbe/aloapamo*), tale-narration (*itansiso*), jokes (*efe* or *awada*), panegyrics (*orikiidile*), and others.

Also, the Yoruba people practices other aspects of arts such as visual/fine arts; colour dying (*arorire*), weaving of fabrics (*asodidi*), hair styling (*irundidi*) and claying (*amon mimon* or *ile mimon*), sometimes in combination with the performing arts such as dance (*ijo*), acrobatic displays (*ere-idaraya*), and acting (*ere-onise/ere-itage*). Isola (1992: 18) posits that:

In traditional Yoruba society, the whole fabric of living was aesthetically patterned with the thread of literature. Oral literature nourished the people by creatively preserving shared experiences in ingenious turns of phrases, idiomatic expressions, and other devices that constitute part of the collective linguistic heritage that impinges on the awareness of children as soon as they begin to utter their first words. Since every important event in the life of an individual was celebrated in poetry, all members of the community had the opportunity to observe and subsequently to participate in artistic performances, and these opportunities increased as individual grew older. Yoruba oral poets not only sought to explain the world in terms of its brilliant perfections and its puzzling imperfections; they also stoked the embers of curiosity in children and kept alive the flame of hope in their adult listeners. But in practical terms, the oral artist's most valuable contribution was perhaps the communication of the moral precepts that accompanied comments on contemporary issues that were of concern to the entire community. The behaviour and attitude of celebrants were assessed and judged, and verdicts were passed on them in beautifully memorable poetry. In this way, literature provided a sort of feedback to the society that had inspired it in the first place.

From the above, one can deduce some degree of convergence because both scholars perceive oral literature and oral artists as useful resources and advocates for the society. The common concern and subject-matter is that oral literature and its performance is about the people and their survival in their immediate society; it is also about collective means of promoting an order that may allow the society to live in peace and harmony.

In conclusion, Olajubu (1981:72) defined oral poetry as a “living and dynamic verbal art. It is meant to be sung, chanted or intoned in performance setup, which includes as a central aspect of eventification, the presence of an audience.” The contexts where these performances took place would be social, religious, cultural, political or informative occasions. The latter definition provides more illuminating background on both sociological and artistic usefulness of oral poetry. Oral poetry is a strong part of Yoruba culture and a tradition on its own. People are trained and are schooled so as to master this important artistic speech which is an aspect of *Alarinjo* performance.

### 3.9 Performance Structures and Characteristics of the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre

The name “*Alarinjo*”, according to Adedeji (1972), means a “travelling dance group”; a group that is highly peripatetic in nature, made up typically of groups of masquerades with flamboyant costumes and individuals who are agile and energetic<sup>5</sup>. Ajayi (2004:618) states that “[t]echnically, an *Alarinjo* troupe is an all-male performing company like the *Egungun*. Although women can be dancers and chorus singers, they are not allowed to perform the masque.” The female role in the *Alarinjo* performance, just like in the classical theatre, is acted out by the male troupe member. Ajayi further explains that, “[w]hen a sketch calls for female roles such as in *Iyawo* (bridal) possession, the masques dress as women, assume female mannerisms and play for laughs.”

*Alarinjo* is no doubt a masque theatre and drama, going by various details and illustrations provided by several scholars of theatre and drama. Such scholars include Adedeji (1971, 1972, 1978, 1980 and 1981), Clark (1979), Jeyifo (1984 and 1985), Gumucio- Dagrón (1994), Kerr (1995), Obafemi (1996 and 2001) and Ajayi (2004).

The *Alarinjo* performers are usually accompanied by its native vocalists and instrumentalists with their different instruments. The instruments include percussion instruments (bata drums) of various sizes, gongs, and flutes amongst many other locally made musical instruments in a fairly large sized orchestra. Adedeji’s (1981:238) posit that

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<sup>5</sup> Ogunjobi (2011), in his PhD thesis, opines that: “Writers and scholars like Femi Osofisan and Dotun Ogundeji have argued that the name (*Alarinjo*) is not appropriate for such an important theatre because of the derogatory implications of the meaning of the word”. He suggested names such as *Eegun Alare* or *Eegun Apidan*, as better descriptive names to replace *Alarinjo*.

“[t]he Orchestra was made up of the bata set. The set contains four drums: The *iya ilu*, the *emele abo*, the *emele ako* and *kundi*.” Adedeji clarified that, “*The iya ilu* is the talking drum, but it is a stammerer and is difficult to follow without previous familiarity. It has two membranes and both are played together. A leather strap is used to strike the left membrane while the palm of the right hand beat the right. (...) The other two drums are accompaniments.”

Mollen (2004: 26) asserts that music and dance have always been an important part of Yoruba culture for those living in Nigeria as well as in the diaspora. Yoruba music and dance are used for many different occasions in life such as religious festivals, royal occasions, and entertainment. Music and dance can represent happiness and sadness. Music can express mood, pity and signal for the start of celebration or jubilation. Songs of war with war dance was also part of the people’s ways of life in the history of Yoruba. Consequently, the attachment to *Alarinjo* masquerades is not accidental, but natural, since it is a manifestation of Yoruba tradition.

The artistic language of the *Alarinjo* is poetry, an oral or undocumented account of heroic pasts and legendary records of many past generations. The content of the poetry is rooted in the Yoruba culture and tradition. Also, the entire performance of *Alarinjo* poetry relies strongly on chants, songs, stories, myths, riddles, tales, proverbs and epigrams alongside many other Yoruba forms of oral and non-verbal expressions as handed down orally by different lineages, with each vocation in the Yoruba land having its own unique totem associated with it, as explained by Adedeji (1978:62):

The artistic basis of this theatre is poetry. Yoruba poetry primarily takes the form of a chant, whose harmonics and melodies distinguish various subdivisions. For example, the poetry of the *Ifa* priest is called *iyere Ifa*, that of the guild of hunters is *ijala*, and that of the minstrels is *rara*. The poetry of the guild of masqueraders, and that of the Yoruba Masque Theatre, is called *esa*.

The nature of the performance is presented in many documented accounts regarding features of traditional African theatrical performance. In this regard, Du Preez (2011:158) states that, “(...) most traditional performances in Africa, especially where masks and puppets are used, do not have a written text and as such the performance texts is usually transmitted orally.”

The Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* theatre also reflects the assertion because it does not have a written text; both the form and content are transmitted orally. However, it has a clear pattern and sequence which Adedeji (1972: 261-262) describes: “The programme for every performance is that of a variety show with items following the particular set order: (1) entrance song; the *ijuba* (salutation) or *oriki orile* (salute of the settlement); (2) the dance; (3) the drama: [a] spectacle, [b]revue; (4) the finale and recessional dance.”

The entrance song normally starts the performance of *Alarinjo* theatre, and there are two types of entrance song. Adedeji (1979:62) clarified that “[t]he first is the *oriki orile* (salute to the settlement) rendered at the portals of the town or village where the company is scheduled to perform, the song is succeeded by dance rhythms signaling the procession into the community.” He describes the second type of entrance song as “*ijuba* (pledge), which like the *oriki orile* is a processional chant and a form of salute. It marked the opening of the theatrical program.”

Both *oriki orile* and *Ijuba* are normally rendered through a ritual pattern. In addition, obeisance must be paid to the ancestry, alongside, the tutelage and tributary salutations. The lead performer must then incorporate all these performance elements to narrating the life of the masque-dramaturges, Esa Ogbin, who Adedeji (1979:62) described as the first dramaturges of the Yoruba Masque Theatre.

According to Adedeji, the ‘*Ijuba*’ or *oriki orile* is a “formal or ceremonial opening (...) [which] contains a ‘pledge’ and a salute; both chanted together, sometimes in a particular order of succession, sometimes in any order.” Next, according to Adedeji, the dance is “a pure show. It is a sequence of ritual and social dances interspersed with acrobatic display. The ritual dance is *orisa* (deity) dance.”

Commenting on the mode of drama in typical *Alarinjo* performance, he says:

The revue-masques are sociological, analysing the Yoruba society and revealing its vices, pests and morality. Some sketches like *Didirin* (Moron), *Eleekedidi* (Mumps), *W’obia* (Glutton), *Okanjuwa* (Avarice) and *Omuti* (Drunkard) are the abstraction of deviant behavior in society. (...) All the revue-masques depend on audience-participation for their full effect. As the sketches are mainly improvisational they are capable of infinite changes. The

chants they incorporate are typical to the type and songs are topical and familiar. (Adejeji 1972:262)

Furthermore, Adejeji (1972:262) describes the final, fourth item in the order of the *Alarinjo* performance as:

The *Iyawo* masque is usually the last item. Known as *idan apa-re-le* (the recessional spectacle), it is the most beautiful and most expensive to dress. It is usually acted by the leader of the troupe to display his flexibility and versatility. The masque is improvisational like the revues but its distinctive features make it a fitting drama. The masque is taken into a recessional dance round the street of the community. It is an important device for collecting money and gifts. Occasionally, for an interlude, a puppet-theatre forms an item of the programme.

Another cardinal point is that the *Alarinjo's* financial reward was not from gate takings or proceeds. The reward was communal appreciations in form of cash and gifts from individuals in the community who appreciate the performances.

At the beginning, the *Alarinjo's* performances were for the entertainment and pleasure of the Kings as recorded in the "*Journals of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander*", which is described in Adedeji's (1972) "*The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre.*" The *Alarinjo* performances then were not within the reach of the commoners in the Yoruba society.

Furthermore, Kerr (1995: 12) reinforced Adedeji's views as follows:

According to his (admittedly speculative) research, *Alarinjo* started in *Oyo* at the court of *Alaafin Ogbolu* (...) therefore the *Alarinjo* was a courtly entertainment under the patronage of the *Alaafin*.

Kerr adds that, "by early seventeenth century, however, *Alarinjo* had widened its appeal; the troupe leader, *Esa Ogbin*, took the theatre to the masses, the grassroots."

A number of *Alarinjo* masquerades who later started performing outside the king's palace have continued their routines, such as the acrobatic displays, some in dance/poetry, others in satirical sketches and mimicry and sometimes a combination of all, just as they are doing for the pleasure of his royal majesty (the king's appellation till present day in *Oyo*) and his dignitaries or visitors. Each of these groups seeks patronages from one village to another,

to perform for their audience who are usually residents of the village/settlement where the performance is taking place, or going to take place. Also, occasionally, the troupes perform for the entertainment of those who are privileged to visit other villages for trading, it is so probably because the Yoruba traditional market days, weeks and months are very precise.

In another account, Adedeji (1972: 5) clarifies other salient facts surrounding the evolution of *Alarinjo* theatre:

The history of the Yoruba masquerade theatre cannot be separated from the rise and fall of the Oyo-Yoruba Empire. Its development and growth were closely associated with Yoruba political and social history. (...) Several new troupes sprang up beyond the Ologbojo lineage [the founding father] and these were free to entertain any individual or group of people who invited them. Names of troupes like Eiyeba, Lebe, Aiyelabola and others, emerged. They participated in the annual egungun festivals as was their custom and, on non-festival days, were able to satisfy the people's desire for entertainment and diversion; whether the occasion was a birth or a death, the troupes were specially invited to perform. In addition, they organized their own itineraries and visited places. Thus, began the period of intensive professionalism.

Apart from the apparent oratory powers embedded in the various performances of Yoruba theatre and drama, through the careful usage of language such as idiomatic expressions, riddles and proverbs and many others, the Yoruba performances of the traditional and contemporary *Alarinjo* rely heavily on visual demonstration. Therefore, because the visual demonstration in typical *Alarinjo* performance is mainly practical and expressive, it can easily drive home vital points into the consciousness of the audience, through mimicry, lampooning and also effectively disseminate vital information to the general public. The totality of the performance entails non-verbal display, gestures, mimicry, sound, dance and movement, to mention but a few.

In conclusion, the Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre has also evolved within itself, right from its beginning in the *Egungun* masquerade cult, to the period when its basic function was to entertain the aristocratic class and progressed to become a popular form of entertainment with many purposes among the masses in the Yoruba communities. The start of the professional theatre could also be noted in the development of this form of performance.

### 3.10 Socio-Political elements in the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre and Drama

The socio-political elements in the performance of traditional *Alarinjo* theatre of the Yoruba can be described as an ‘inherent device’ which emanated from their culture and tradition right from the inception of the movement. The device has to do with the fact that the history of traditional *Alarinjo* theatre of the Yoruba people cannot be disconnected from sociopolitical development of the same people.

In an illustration of the *Alarinjo* dramatic performance, Adedeji (1972:262) states that the revue-masques diagnosis, analyses the Yoruba society and illuminating its evils, pests and principles. He goes further by mentioning more valuable examples, claiming as follows: “some caricature characters like *Didirin* (Moron), *Eleekedidi* (Mumps), *W’obia* (Glutton), *Okanjuwa* (Avarice) and *Omuti* (Drunkard) are the abstraction of deviant deeds in society”. He adds that “All the revue-masques rest on audience’s involvement for their full effect. As the sketches are largely improvisational they are capable of endless changes. The chants they integrate in the series of their performances are typical to the type of songs that are contemporary and well known to the people.”

The performance of *Alarinjo* theatre is evidently well rooted in the Yoruba world of social values and order. The *Alarinjo* performance, through its various thematic preoccupations such as, the triumph of good over evil, and the reward of been obedience, to mention but few, are potent conveyor which gives the moral lessons to the general public. The lessons and values are those which the society has taught the people, and are being given back in an artistic way in order to promote well-being in the community.

Also, it is important to note here that the establishment phase of their performances is recorded to have taken place in the palace of the *Alaafin* of *Oyo* (The Paramount Ruler of *Oyo* Kingdom), where it was very possible for the masque-actors (of *Alarinjo*) to have been privileged to have been privy to various socio-political developments happening during that time in the emerging kingdom; and later, as it affects the entire community which they were also part of, in general. For these later reasons, even without considering the former, the *Alarinjo* masquerades could be<sup>6</sup> said to have freely assumed the role of a ‘watch dog’

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<sup>6</sup> “In the indigenous thought of the Yoruba, nature consists of spiritual and physical phenomena. And reality, in that worldview, is not partitioned; but rather, there is a permanent continuum between physical reality and spiritual reality. In this way, the two aspects of reality are continuously interacting with one another so it is

because they were immune and empowered because of their 'sacred' origin, to critique, satirize, lampoon and question the activities of the king and the society in general. This, however, was not a direct confrontation with the authority, but a subtle mimicry through the stereotyped performances.

It is important to look at some of the attributes and functionalities of the *Egungun* (masquerades) of the Yoruba people, as they relate to this study. One of the functionalities and attributes of the *Egungun* is its physical and spirituality power.

The *Egungun* are regarded as very important symbolic spiritual figures in control of the people's social and spiritual life (including the political and economic activities of the Yoruba people) in their world-view; as such, there exists a social agreement between the people and their *Egungun*. *Egungun* (masquerades) enjoys noticeable immunity within the Yoruba sociopolitical sphere to the extent that they can criticize erring king, chief, or other important personalities in the society.

A traditional belief by the Yoruba holds the worship of their ancestors (*Egungun* as the ancestral figure and representation) in very high esteem. Among the Yoruba people, especially traditional *Egungun* worshippers, the blessings from their ancestors cannot be compared with any other. Therefore, the Yoruba "*Egungun* enjoys much reverence and adoration from the community in the same measure that people expects much from them" Oke (2007:86).

The Yoruba people are not unaware that those behind the *Egungun* costumes and masques are one of their own, including those in the *Alarinjo* theatre. Certainly, the *Egungun* worshippers and many communities believe strongly in the potency, prophecy and hegemony of the cult. Oke (2007:87) stresses that the "Yoruba know that those in the costumes and behind the masks are living persons among them, and many of them even

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not often easy to separate them in thought and practice. An aspect of this idea of nature is the entrenched belief that physical death is not the cessation of life for persons, and it is believed that those who died at ripe old ages and who lived morally well on earth, become ancestors, who have now acquired a spiritual existence and continue in many ways to participate in the affairs of their families and communities, hence one fundamental way in which they do this through re-enactment is the *Egungun* festival" (Oke, 2007:86).

often knows the names of the persons wearing the masks during *Egungun* festivals and other outings.”<sup>7</sup>

But becoming or participating in the spiritual rites of *Egungun* or that of *Alarinjo* masquerades, requires that one comes from certain Yoruba lineages associated with the *Egungun* cult from birth, with unique names such as *Ojeyemi*, *Ojedele*, *Egunbunmi*, *Ojelabi*, *Eegunleti* and so on. Sadiku and Sodiq (2004) explained that a Yoruba name, like most African names, has a meaning. It typically means the character and essence of the personality of the person. A child is named based on the conditions surrounding the child’s birth. Whereas, Adedeji (1981: 228) particularly laid emphasis on the importance and preference of names among the *Alarinjo* performers when he posits that, “[t]he masqueradaturges still go by their original descriptive name, *egungun apidan*, and their classificatory name, *oje*.”

But to the Yoruba people, once one is an initiate of the cult, specifically in a place called *IgboIgbale*, and has fulfilled all the prerequisites of their membership, one will be automatically accorded the respect and other privileges the Yoruba normally bestow on the *Egungun* in the land. Oke (2007:86) states further that “[o]nce the *Egungun* has emerged from the grove (*igbo igbale*), it ceases to be regarded as an ordinary human being; and it has from that moment taken on the spirit of an ancestor, and in its acquired spiritual personality, each *Egungun* is regarded as deserving of the respect, support and maintenance of the entire community.”

In conclusion, it has been established that the existence of socio-political elements in the traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre of the Yoruba is an integral part of the Yoruba customs, ethics and values.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Yoruba culture and tradition, the prerequisites which must be fulfilled for membership of *Egungun* (masquerade) cult are as follows: (i) interested persons must hail from a masquerade lineage. (ii) participate in all scheduled rituals and rites at *Igbale* forest (iii) learn the choreographic/sequenced movements, tricks and jokes of the cult (iv) swore to an oath not to reveal the identity of the person behind or under the mask to non-initiate. However, a limited opportunity may be opened for apprenticeship. However, some of the enlisted and the unlisted prerequisites have over the years become flexible due to influence of modernization and foreign religion.

### 3.11 Appraisal of the Traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre of the Yoruba People

This section will attempt to discuss the contexts where the *Alarinjo* was found, ranging from festivals to other cultural spaces. Further discussion on the nature of Yoruba life will assist in illuminating the function and value of the *Alarinjo* in the discussed circumstances.

The masquerades, who are the main actors in the performance of the traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre and other performers, were traditionally and culturally immune to any form of assault and arrest by the authority because their arrests might give rise to civil unrest. It was considered a taboo to arrest them, for they were seen as gods or ancestors, visiting and teaching with topics touching the very fabric of the challenges the people faced in their day-to-day lives. Isola (1992:18) asserts that “[o]ral artists enjoyed a large measure of immunity, and their songs could even destroy a king!” In addition, Isola relates an historical background to affirm the social strength of the masquerades:

On one occasion, this system of social sanction brought the demise of an Alaafin. According to history, Alaafin Jaayin had been implicated in the murder of his own son, Olusi, who had apparently become too popular for the king’s comfort. The king declared publicly that he would be happy if Olusi were dead and then allegedly poisoned him. (...) When details of the Alaafin’s deed reached the masquerade singers, they arranged to hold a special performance at the Akaesan market square, where they would sing appropriate songs of reprimand to expose the crime. When news of the impending performance reached the Alaafin, he committed suicide because he was aware of the national embarrassment that the songs would cause.

Some scholars such as Kerr (1985), Ajayi (2004) Adedeji (1978, 1971& 1972) and Ogunba (1978) believe that traditional *Alarinjo* performances of the Yoruba people are said to be closer to the people than other forms of performance for several reasons. Firstly, it is a people’s drama, meaning that interested individuals in the community are free to join the performance as it progresses, in a way of contributing to required artistic inputs such as songs, dance, acrobatic display and chant.

Secondly, there were various indigenous ways to attract people’s attention and patronage. The melodious drumming, enticing dancing styles or movement and sonorous singing by the performers were potent means of reaching the Yoruba populace (audience). Adedeji (1972: 261) states that “[t]he revue-masques are sketched out as comments on the state of

society. (...) The revues are usually based on subjects of topical interest and easily display the comic spirit of the Yoruba.” The theme or topics of such performances are usually related to sociopolitical and economic issues that will later become a topic of discussion among the people afterwards. *Alarinjo* themes and subject-matters illustrate topical issues that touch the day to day lives of the people.

The Yoruba people have unique and various forms of socializing, trading, and discussing politics. The songs or music, musical instruments, chants, myths, lineage panegyric (*oriki*), dance steps of the traditional Yoruba theatre performances and other traditional elements were all very well-known to the people. For this reason, it was quite easy for total participation and identification by members of the Yoruba communities during these performances.

Yoruba people have long engaged in trading and in other socio-political and economic activities; one of such avenues for trading and gathering is the Yoruba market days. Even before the introduction of money as a form of a legal tender, the Yoruba people had a means of exchanging goods and services in various ways, which is called “trade by barter”. Banwo and Danmole (2004:299) observes that “[t]he ethnic group that is known as the Yoruba today comprised many autonomous states before the middle of the nineteenth century. These states had evolved distinctive pattern of economic system based on the nature of their respective environments or other peculiar circumstances.” They emphasized that “[t]here was division of labour because of specialization in different spheres of production. Specialization in various productive activities led to economic interdependence among various Yoruba groups as no single group could provide all the things it needed. The need to facilitate this interdependence led to development of an exchange sector and attendant markets.”

The transactions of Yoruba people during this time involved exchange of goods and services which required verbal and non-verbal communication. The market days served as days that have been set aside for economic exchanges; and, at the same time, it is during these special days that discussions of important issues, especially themes or topics of performances by the masquerades ensue among the populace. Omul (1978:1-3) states that “(...) indigenous society had no newspapers, it had agencies and institutions which served the same purpose as the newspaper or at least answered contemporary needs of communication.” The

contents and lessons in the performance of Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre are also shared and passed on in and around the markets located around the Yoruba land. Scholars in the areas of mass communication and communication arts often referred to this type of communication as indigenous media.

John (2015:44) comments that:

Indigenous media vary from one locality to the other. The media which are widely used in the rural areas and among first generation of settlers in urban areas of the Third World are widely known for their pre-industrial techniques. They consist mainly of various festivals, forums, music, folktales, songs, rituals, clothes and other sartorial construct, architectural designs, market towncriers, social gathering like funerals, wedding, theatre or drama, social institutions like the extended family and other rallying points provided by the kings, village heads and herbalists.

Secondly, places of social gathering such as palm-wine drinking spots (where you can buy palm wine to drink and also play traditional games called *ayo-olopon*) and other locations for relaxation were very popular places to visit after a day's work. Serious talks were usually turned to comic expressions, lampooning, mimicry, jesting and more practically satirical displays amongst people at these gatherings. Kings and his chiefs and many other eminent personalities who erred in the Yoruba society were usually discussed, and sometimes had judgments passed on them, or they were condemned for their gross misconduct in the society. The contents and lessons in the performance of traditional *Alarinjo* (travelling) theatre were also shared and passed on, in, and around places such as the palm wine drinking. John (2015: 44) exemplified this mode of communication when he states that:

He (Omu, 1978), grouped the indigenous agencies of communication into informal transference and formal transference media. The first group, he says, operated through informal contact between individuals and does not go beyond circulation or dissemination of rumours or unofficial information. Examples include family visiting, organized and spontaneous gathering like wedding, death and burial and moonlight gatherings. The second group of traditional media, Omu says, is concerned with more systematized dissemination of information, 'not between persons but between the government and people.

One example from the above quotation that needs explanation is the first classification: the informal group of communication. The Yoruba people traditionally sees no need in special

gathering and merry making during the burial of an underage person, that is a person who died at a tender age of less than sixty years of age (specifically, someone who has not yet achieved socio-political and economic goals believed by the Yoruba people, or a young person whose parent are still alive). Such deaths are popularly referred to as (*oku ofo*, death of sorrow), although, age seventy is believed to be the ripe age for both male and female before death in Nigeria, Hence, the mood of any gathering where such a dead person is to be buried usually does not permit sharing of any other information than condolences to the family and relatives, mourning, and analysis of what actually caused the death of the young individual who is to be buried. With regards to this assertion, Kehinde (2015:302) states that “[a]s soon as death becomes inevitable; some of the members of the dead man assemble. In the case of an aged or elderly person, joy rather than sorrow characterized the ceremonies.”

Consequently, the dissemination of information on performance of *Alarinjo* or any other forms of artistic creativity cannot be shared or announced in and around a gathering where the atmosphere and the mood is tense due to the context. In fact, whoever shared or attempt sharing other information or discussion outside condolences or mourning may be implicated in the death of the deceased, or such person will be seen as a lunatic. Kehinde (2015:302) provides an insight into the foregoing discussion when he states that “[i]n the case of the sudden death of young persons, feelings of sorrow are evoked.” However, any gathering where the purpose is to mourn the dead, or bury the body of an elderly person, may be an avenue to discuss socio-political and economic issues, such as *Alarinjo* performances.

Thirdly, because the lifestyle of the Yoruba people at this period was highly communal, there were periodical meetings that were held from time-to-time among various families primarily, for security reason and also, for the purpose of finding solutions to other pressing issues. The family structure was not as fractured then as we have today due to the context of modern civilization.

Traditionally in Africa, especially among the Yoruba, family members had relatively easy access to each other, and collective welfare, lineage integrity and promotion of unity among the members of the family was always at utmost priority. Akinade (2011:39-40) describes African types of family as “groups of persons who live in the same home or village and work

together.” He explains further that “[t]he ideal thing is that the lineage kin should remain together over many generations. This is no longer so in practice since the group often break up, and modern conditions account for this. (...) [L]iving together for purpose of defence against external forces or external aggression is no longer necessary in modern times.”

In many of these occasional meetings and gatherings, families often discussed, analysed and sometimes drew conclusions on happenings in towns, villages and cities. Rumours, gossips, news (and in some cases) eye-witness accounts of incidents were also shared among the family members, which usually led to collective decision making, warnings or instructions being given within families to steer clear from other families that have been reported to have misbehaved, or erred in the society.

The Yoruba society have always communicated and disseminated vital information on sociopolitical and economic issues which are pertinent to their survival in the society through these channels. Ajayi (2004:613) provides reason for this as she comments that “[t]he theatre is also a powerhouse of communication because each of the art form it showcases has its own means of communication.”

However, well-behaved individuals, groups of people, or families also received praises and accolades for bravery, good behaviour, and any good deeds in the Yoruba society through these channels. Isola’s (1987:55) position further explains on this matter:

A vast majority of the Yoruba lived out their lives among their kinsmen and relatives, usually in large compounds, each consisting of numerous families made up of old men, their wives and grown-up sons and their own wives, some three generations or more of grandparents, children and grandchildren. The Yoruba did not usually remove themselves from their roots. Although the history of the Yoruba is replete with numerous cases of internal migrations yet, the migrant princes, chiefs and even common citizens were usually followed in self-exile and settlement by large numbers of partisans who were the migrants’ kinsmen and relatives. Relations with the old homeland generally remained constant and the host communities usually made the immigrant settlers welcome. Thus, people never lacked relatives with whom they shared intimate feelings in times of joy and sorrow.

The last among others, is the communal farming system of the Yoruba people. The people at this period, categorized themselves into groups or units, according to age-groups or peers, creating a bonding arrangement upon which they rendered a helping hand to one another

by working on their individual farmlands. They all worked all day long, and observed a break at intervals, for food and refreshments. Banwo and Danmole (2004: 301) sectionalized Yoruba communal farming and its nature as follows:

Other forms of labour to complement family labour in the cultivation of farms included the *Aaro* (co-operative labour group). A member of the group was entitled to call other members whenever he had a major assignment like clearing, weeding or planting of new seeds in his farm. The service was reciprocated when any member of the group needed it. The *Owe* (labour by relations, friends and in-laws) involved a larger workforce for not more than two days. The *Owe* was used for the same purpose as *Aaro*. It was also done with funfair because the *olowe* (organizer of the workforce) must provide food and drinks for entertainment during the duration of the work.

Wives and grown up children were often the ones who prepared the foods and the refreshments to offer to the men who sometimes cracked unpleasant and derogatory jokes concerning socio-political and economic issues that were pressing in the community. Their jokes in most cases are about some lessons drawn from the contents of the performance of traditional *Alarinjo* theatre. This was unusually shared and passed on, in and around farms. Opinion polls or civic collective decisions have been achieved through all the aforementioned examples against bad governance and against corrupt leaders among the Yoruba people. The vast majority of the people in Yoruba land through acquisitive-learning are familiar with slangs and vernacular which the *Alarinjo* performers used to communicate to them during performance, thus, the performance structure or programme of event at each show is known by heart.

Generally, the performance structure or programme of the Yoruba Traditional Theatrical Display (including traditional *Alarinjo* performance and many other types of traditional, cultural and festival display) is responsorial (call-and-response) in nature. For instance, the opening lines of some of the traditional *Alarinjo* performances may be call-and-response, where the leading masquerade actor usually starts the performance with a familiar song, accompanied by traditional musical instruments. Members of the community then respond in a chorus. Because the townspeople where the performance is taking place are accustomed to their tradition and culture, the audience understood the programme of the performance. The audience quickly answers the call by the lead player in an enthusiastic manner. This, in some cases, served as a call, invitation and publicity gesture for the townspeople.

One of the distinctive components of the *Alarinjo* Traditional Theatre and its transformative example is the *Contemporary Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre* which later gave birth to many popular serial television dramas featured on the first television station in Africa- the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). It also later marked the beginning of what is today known as the Nigerian home video. The configuration concerning the metamorphosis of traditional *Alarinjo* travelling theatre into the contemporary Yoruba popular travelling theatre, popular serial television drama or soap-opera and the Nigerian home video will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section of this study.

### **3.12. Summary and Conclusion**

The socio-political evolution of theatre and drama performances of Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* (Travelling) Theatre started with series of *Egungun* (masquerades) performances. Importantly, their artistic activity during performance relied on and utilized Yoruba oral literature and other traditional forms as its reliable source of content. The proverbial speeches rendered during performances, legendary bravery told from generation to generation and the ingenious satirical device adopted by the masquerade actors in *Alarinjo* performances, were the tap-root which marked the beginning of the socio-political theatre in Yoruba theatre.

The theatrical and dramatic comments of *Alarinjo* masquerades through satire, lampooning, gesture and masks, on contemporary issues of the community were the practical contribution to the development of socio-political theatre and drama among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Their various performances in the past conditioned social action and foster social interaction amongst the people. The common concern and subject-matter in both of them is that oral literature and its performance is about the people and their survival in their immediate society. It is also about collective means of promoting an order that may allow the society to live in peace and harmony. Adedeji (1972:254) notably observed that both Clapperton and Lander, the two English men, who had witnessed the typical performance referred to *Alarinjo* performance as “pantomime”.

The noticeable impact of *Alarinjo* theatrical performance on the socio-political and economic survival of the Yoruba people is embedded in their culture, custom and tradition.

This performance must discuss issues pertinent to day-to-day survival in order to reach the members of the society. Hence, it may remain a mere story told, full of repetitions with less didactic impact on the society.

The crux of all these insights is that, traditionally, Yoruba festivities and all the various performances associated with them have close relationship to the Yoruba people. It has always been 'performances' organized 'by the people and for the people'; and a kind of communal responsibility, which has never taken place at any conventional theatre or arena, but at the people's common places of convergence. Jeyifo states further that: "(...) the theatre is at its greatest scale of availability to 'the common man', to the popular masses, in this region of the continent". Moreover, "it is a theatre which goes to the people rather than waiting for the people to come to it" (Jeyifo, 1984:1).

Scholars such as Ogunbiyi (2014 and 1981), and Owomoyela (1971) proposed that the Nigerian theatre which includes those theatres associated with the *Alarinjo*-masquerade, Contemporary itinerant theatre of the Yoruba people of the South west (Nigeria), and other variants of theatre and drama emanating from other ethnic groups in Nigeria; originated from, or are products of diverse religious-rituals and festivals that existed in many communities and societies in the continent.

This study has attempted to establish so far, that Yoruba theatre and drama is 'poly-systemic' in nature, as it comprises different layers of both internal and borrowed cultures and traditions of various kinds. The ensemble of various types of festivals and ritual celebrations constitute the *Alarinjo* performance as a theatrical event. The various theatrical displays during many festival performances, especially among the Yoruba society, are the endproducts and confluence of all the different unique artistic ingenuities that have been with the people for many years.

The success of *Alarinjo* performances depends majorly on the cultural-traditional materials of the community or society which the performers belong to, even though they have their generic styles and programme for their performances.

Lifetime activities such as heroic achievements; specifically victory at war, conquering of communities and towns that refuse to pay homage to deities, as well as the celebration of Yoruba deities during festivals, were parts of what formed various Yoruba tales and stories (folklore, folksongs and legends) which provide useful creative materials for the Yoruba

theatre and drama such as the theatre of *Alarinjo*, its contemporary and the drama of literary dramatists such as Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan.

Yoruba theatre and drama are theatrical events - a way of playing, and theatrical playing. Its nature shares various characteristics with Sauter's (2007) description. Description such as interaction between performers and spectators at a given time, in a specific place, and under certain circumstances, featured in Yoruba theatre. The *Alarinjo*, its modern contemporary performances and the guerrilla theatre of Soyinka and some of his fellow dramatists such as Rotimi and Osofisan, mostly required active collaboration between performers and spectators during a given time, in specific places (an open space), and under certain circumstances, usually during festive period. Lastly, conventional western theatre buildings are not necessarily required for these theatrical performances.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ***THE YORUBA POPULAR TRAVELLING THEATRE***

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The *Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre* (Gumucio-Dagron, 1994; Jeyifo, 1984; Clark, 1981 & 2014) will be the major focus of this chapter. This genre and format are also commonly referred to by various scholars as *Modern Yoruba Travelling Theatre* or *Contemporary Yoruba Theatre* (Muller, 2005); *The Yoruba Popular Itinerant Theatre* (Jeyifo, 1984); *The Yoruba Folk Opera* (Obafemi, 1996 & Owomoyela, 1971), and even *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre* (Oni, 2012; Adedeji, 1971; C Gumucio-Dagron, 1994; Gumucio-Dagron, 1994; Clark 1979 & Obafemi, 1996).

*The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre* is referred to as the theatre and drama of modern-day Nigeria. This is the theatre and sphere which were widespread across the country as a major source of popular theatrical entertainment. This assertion is supported in the following claim:

The heyday of Yoruba folk opera has been widely documented in recent years and several contributions deal with the period extending from the 1940s to the 1980s. Karin Barber's outstanding book, *The Generation of Play* (2000), examines Yoruba popular theatre as one of the most spectacularly successful theatres in Africa. (Muller, 2005:176)

The Yoruba groups' performances were pre-dominantly staged around the Yoruba geopolitical zones between the 1940s and the 1980s (although many of the performances, according to some literature, also took place across the country). According to Muller (2005:176), the performances "put on by the Yoruba folk opera played to full houses in the southwestern cities of the Federation of Nigeria. Theatre-going became a feature of daily life and Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Oshogbo each had several venues for performances."

This strand of popular Nigerian theatre was invented by some courageous dramatists and theatre-makers such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, Oyin Adejobi and highly talented individuals who later became very prominent in the history of theatre and

drama in the country. Numerous troupes were founded and headed strictly by Yoruba theatre and drama practitioners during this period. Muller (2005:176) comments:

Abiodun Jeyifo (1984) estimates that there were several dozen itinerant theatre companies travelling the roads of the country. Certain productions—for example, ‘Oba Koso’ (written and directed by Duro Ladipo [1931-1978])—toured in 1972 and reached an international audience. Apart from Duro Ladipo and his circle, the best-known companies were those run by Hubert Ogunde (1916-1990), Kola Ogunmola (1925-1973), and Oyin Adejobi (1926-2000), to name but a few.

According to scholars such as Adedeji (1971), Clark (1979), Obafemi (1996) and Jeyifo (1984), this form of theatre has a striking resemblance of characteristics of and affiliation with the Traditional *Alarinjo* theatre. Some findings from the aforementioned scholars also affirm that this theatrical tradition (*The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre*) later developed into a model for various other forms of artistic entertainment, such as the popular Nigerian Home Video.

In spite of these social and economic changes, the genre of Yoruba theatre has not totally vanished. Although a number of actors, musicians and directors have indeed moved to the flourishing home-video industry (Barber 2000; Haynes and Okome 2000), a community of actors still persist to present live performances that can be qualified as neo-traditional. (Muller, 2005:176-177)

There are no existing documentations to ascertain the exact time this theatrical movement began and ended in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. Nevertheless, it is well documented that this form of theatre attained popularity during the colonial period. Jeyifo (1984:1) states: “The contemporary Yoruba Travelling Theatre of Nigeria is one of the most vigorous, widely popular and thriving theatre traditions in modern Africa, comparable only to such contemporary popular theatre expressions of the continent as the Concert Party Theatre of Ghana and the Hira-Gasy Troupes of the Malagasy Republic.”

Ricard et al. (1997:1), in their descriptions, opined that the new modern, contemporary Nigerian theatre which began with the fusion between existing traditional theatre and the European culture was “a popular, modern, commercial, travelling, musical theatre;” and “these theatres were highly mobile, travelling on itineraries.”

This new theatrical form of entertainment has parts of its root in the Western forms of entertainment such as the Victorian music hall of England, the American Vaudeville and the concert party. As time went on, the Yoruba substances were injected by the natives as a means of hybridity between the various cultures, a confirmation that even with all the fraternization and acculturation between the cultures, the new theatre still retained its characteristics of being popular in nature, as well as travelling on itineraries and of being a musical theatre—accompanying dramatic actions with music and instrumentals, but this time around in a modern form, retaining both traditional Yoruba elements and some features of Western styles of performance and entertainment.

Western patterns of popular culture no doubt, had various influences on some of Nigerian artistes of the contemporary travelling theatre period during the popular days of their performance. This assertion is supported by the theatre and drama of Nigerian theatre practitioners such as Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo.

The socio-political evolution in the contemporary form of theatre and drama performances is embedded first in the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatrical culture, with almost all its characteristics retained, except the use of masks.

Consequently, Obafemi (1996:13) asserts that “The Yoruba operatic theatre ranges widely between the serious historical mythological dramas of the late Duro Ladipo, through Hubert Ogunde’s political satires and morality plays, the late Kola Ogunmola’s comic fantasies, and the comedy theatre of Moses Olaiya (alias Baba Sala) and his Alawada Group (...) it remains true, of course, that there are important qualifications to be made about the Yoruba Travelling Theatre as a popular cultural and theatrical form.”

Apart from the dramatic display of themes such as satirical stories, morality stories, comic fantasies and lampooning in the theatre of Yoruba Travelling Theatre, there was noticeable level of appreciation and adaptation of Yoruba creative arts by the *Alarinjo* actors in their performances. In relation to this assertion, Jeyifo (1984:5) also comments that: “The Travelling Theatre troupes have extensively and consciously drawn upon, and exploited traditional Yoruba folklore, performing arts and poetry, and the resources and properties of the Yoruba language. Furthermore, there is now a pervasive, articulated feeling that this

Travelling Theatre movement is a contemporary expression of the collective identity of Yoruba society and as such should sustain and transmit the perceived traditional values of Yoruba people (...).”

## **4.2 Influences of Europe and America on the Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre**

Okagbue (2009: 1), in his comments, on how slavery and colonialism serve as channels of contact for Africans with the Europeans, states:

Africa came into contact with Europe in two ways; first, through slavery, and second through colonialism. And, as a result of trans-Atlantic slavery, Africa is bound to the Americas and the Caribbean by an umbilical cord whose point of origin can be traced to the slave coasts of West Africa and the historic dispatch of the first batch of slaves from the port of Lagos in 1444 by the Portuguese under the authority of the Papal Bull of Pope Nicholas V. Thereafter, between 1444 and 1807, an estimated fourteen million Africans were transported under the inhumane conditions of the ‘middle passage’ from West Africa to the various islands of the Caribbean, and to North and South America.

The consequence of these two contacts has since then remained one of the most remarkable occurrences in the world history which has ever affected various facets of life of the African people. In extension, the African contact with Europe has also constituted existential questions in the lives of the generations of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora.

In addition, Okagbue’s claim shows that there is no gainsaying in declaring that the aftermath or impact of the said contact can be seen in the African arts till date, in the literature of the African people, the Yoruba arts and literature as examples in this regard. Colonialism, imperialism and apartheid were the potent apparatus which brought about the most disparaging and monumental alteration to the totality of what it was like to be African, to the Africans. The following quote describes the experience of the Nigerian people:

As I have said, Nigeria is a product of British colonialism—a system of government whose exploitative machinery had to disrupt the people’s way of life, first by eliminating all possible signs of threat to the suzerainty and then by imposing measures that ensured complete control of the socioeconomic and political life of the people. A system that attempts to impose on the people’s religion touches at the baseline of life and engulfs the soul. Adedeji (1980:6)

Also, Adedeji (1971:134) states that, “[t]he theatre in Yoruba language is the folk theatre which originated from the society of masqueraders around the middle of the sixteenth century. This theatre, however, succumbed to the inroads of Islam and Christianity during the nineteenth century.”

Apart from the introduction of Christianity to the Yoruba natives during the colonial period, there was also an introduction of the Europeans’ ways of life such as modes of dressing, theatre, cinema, dance, music, ways of singing, public administration and governance especially in some big cities such as Lagos.

The Yoruba populace in Lagos (the city which was also known as *Eko* among the natives), was the first among the Yoruba people to embrace the modern lifestyles of the Western culture, notably as presented in the Victorian Music Hall, the American Vaudeville, and the concert Party. As earlier stated, these three western patterns of popular entertainment were later adopted into the performances of the theatre of some Nigerian artists such as Hubert Ogunde. These aspects will be studied in more detail in this chapter.

This new trend of acculturation started in Lagos, partly because Lagos is a city with large seaharbours; serving as routes of contacts between the European voyagers who had arrived at the shores of the country by sea and partly because the natives utilized these shores (of Lagos) as a vital business space or commercial hub to sell their goods. Even in modern day Nigeria, Lagos is still the most important commercial harbour in the country. With time, the popularity of the newly-introduced foreign cultures were spread across other major towns of the region, creating a sensation and fashion-craze among the people. Owomoyela (1971:124) explain that:

Favoured by its situation on the Atlantic coast and its command of a vast rich hinterland, Lagos soon became a flourishing cosmopolis the direction of whose affairs rested in the hands of a cosmopolitan *elite* class. The introduction of drama into the city around 1880 was a means of providing evening diversion on the European model for the Lagos *elite*, made up, as we have seen, of expatriates and westernized Africans. As one would expect, the theatrical fare was strictly European, featuring such dramatists as Moliere and Gilbert and Sullivan.

The trends quickly gripped the Yoruba theatre. After some time of fusion with the western culture and after a good number of the native artists had experimented on it and adopted it

as an acceptable genre, it quickly transformed into what we now refer to today as moderncontemporary Yoruba theatre. Thus, the modern-contemporary theatre can be said to be a hybrid of the Yoruba (travelling) theatre that had long been in existence in Yorubaland and the newly-introduced British and American types of entertainment.

The sets of distinguished people to first associate with this new theatrical form which was in vogue at the time, was the first sets of Yoruba elites or Christianized natives:

The first theatrical forms of entertainment indulged in by the so-called elite or the Christianized native was the concert, modelled after the Victorian music hall or the American vaudeville. The concerts, which were performed in English and later included items in Yoruba, were organized not only to meet social and economic needs but also to satisfy intellectual and spiritual motives. Adedeji (1980: 8)

A majority of those Adedeji described above as elites or “Christianized natives” are mainly those he describes as a dynamic body of immigrants of repatriates from slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the West Indies, in particular those who had been re-orientated in Freetown, Sierra Leone and who had returned to their fathers’ land. Adedeji provides an illuminating background to this point:

Subsequent events evidently proved that the activities of the Christian missionaries were not without political motives; to effectively change the people you must change their culture, develop in them a new consciousness through a program of enlightenment that seeks to motivate them toward a new life through the doctrine of Christian salvation. In the course of time, a new civilized community had begun to emerge, set apart from the native ones. By using a dynamic body of emigrants—the missionaries were provided with a vigorous corps of emigrants strongly motivated to be used as agents in the realization of their objectives. This body of repatriates, mainly of Yoruba stock, constituted themselves into the elite class, manning key positions in the church and later in commerce and in the colonial administration to help shape the course of events. Adedeji (1980: 7)

In the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre and Drama, there is treatment of socio-political performances and pure entertainment; also, the same can be said about the contemporary modern Yoruba travelling theatre and drama. The relationship and the resemblance between these movements culminated in the popularity and acceptance of the *Alarinjo* theatrical tradition as one of the most popular forms of mass entertainment in Africa.

### 4.3 Description of Yoruba Theatre and Drama

What, then, is Yoruba theatre and drama? Yoruba theatre and drama, first and foremost, could be the category of theatrical and dramatic performances which was associated with, and championed by, the lineage of the *Egungun* (the masquerades) of the Yoruba people. It is important to know that the activities of the *Egungun* performing artistes are both spiritual and artistic manifestations and expressions of the Yoruba people's traditional heritage and ancestral culture.

According to Adedeji (1972), "(...) this particular type of Yoruba theatrical tradition has its origin in three developmental phases [of] ritual, festival and various traditional performances." Secondly, the Yoruba theatre and drama are the contemporary or modern *Alarinjo* popular itinerant theatre of Hubert Ogunde and his other contemporaries, such as Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi and others, alongside the Western influence or acculturation that has made it a hybrid form of theatre.

Lastly, the Yoruba theatre and drama are the theatre and drama of the literary dramatists who are of the Yoruba extraction (such as Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, with the exception of J. P. Clark); some of who had studied overseas and returned to Nigeria as writers and practitioners in the theatre. Their arrival in the theatrical scene coincided with the Nigerian independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960 (Ola Rotimi returned few years after Nigerian independence) and, tapping substantially from the Yoruba culture and traditions, they created their theatre and drama in the English language. Consequently, this eventually became a trend, where socio-political and economic issues of cultural renaissance became prominent in their works. The resemblance of this also took place in the works of the Nigerian poet and prose writers such as Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo and others.

This study recognises the confluence between the pre-colonial Yoruba masquerades (*Egungun-Alarinjo* Culture) and the flourishing tradition of the Christian popular music which took place at the beginning of the 1940s in Lagos with Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola being the three most outstanding exponents, as mentioned above. According to Kerr (1995:82), "the dramatic elements of Yoruba opera were derived from

the pre-colonial Yoruba masquerades, *Egungun*, and the tradition of Christian cantatas introduced by the European missionaries.”

The confluence naturally had a kind of exotic dimension to what is now called the Yoruba theatre and drama. Even, the contemporary *Alarinjo* theatre as well as the theatre and drama of the literary dramatists, especially those who are the focus of this study, still retain the Yoruba elements and characteristics in them. This statement will be discussed further in the succeeding chapters of this study.

#### **4.4 The Nigerian colonial experience: a case of Nationalism and theatre unanimity against the British colonialism and imperialism**

Theatre and drama were actively used as part of socio-political and economic agitation against the British Colonial masters before Nigeria finally achieved her independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960. Umukoro (1994: 11) posits that:

A remarkable point of departure is the colonial period in which drama was part of the anti-colonial campaign. The political crisis therefore was the imposition of British rule on Nigeria and dramatists such as Hubert Ogunde in *Bread and Bullet* protested against foreign domination, asking for an independent political order.

Clark (1979:73) specifically acknowledges (Chief) Hubert Ogunde and his troupe’s contribution towards the gaining of the country’s independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960:

As Ogunde’s theatre participated in the cultural renaissance in the forties so it did in the nationalist movement, and by so doing often clashed with the law. It was during this period from about 1944 to 1951 that there was, for the first time, an attempt to organize a cohesive National Front for the specific purpose of accelerating independence from colonial rule.

The nationalistic aspirations for political independence and struggle against the then prevalent British colonialism and imperialism had reached its peak in the 1940s in Nigeria and more importantly, according to Adedeji (1980:13):

The theatre’s patronage had also yielded the fact of its collaboration with leaders of politics and the importance of educating the masses for political emancipation. Notably, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe’s chairmanship of some of

Ogunde's shows was an evidence of the new partnership that had been forged between the leaders of the theatre and the leaders of politics.

What followed the interaction and association between Chief Hubert Ogunde and Dr Nnamdi

Azikiwe (who later took over the leadership of the "The Nigerian Nationalist Movement" after the demise of its former leader, Herbert Macaulay in 1946) were strategic negotiations and then a decisive unison between politics and theatre.

Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (who later became the first President of an independent Nigeria) and Chief Hubert Ogunde who Adedeji (1980) refers to as "the father of the Nigerian theatre" became the two key players in the union between nationalistic politics and theatre in the country during the period under study. Significantly, this union did not come as a total surprise, because most of the representatives and members of the Nigerian nationalists' movements were patrons of theatre at the time. It appears that they all saw urgent needs and reasons to send a direct invitation to Hubert Ogunde and the members of his troupe to join forces with the movements' heated momentum that later resulted in, and contributed to, the acceleration of the country's emancipation.

All these remarkable landmarks in the development of politics and theatre in Nigeria also fall within what appeared to be a by-product of the unification between "cultural renaissance" and *The Nationalist Movement's Struggle* as stated in many available literatures such as Obafemi, (1996), Jeyifo, (1984) and Clark, (1979).

The 1940s, in the history of Nigeria, was a period when political theatre emerged as manifestations of mixtures of Yoruba indigenous popular culture and tradition, followed by a strong demand for self-governance from the British colonial masters, especially those that Adedeji observes "(...) had returned home from study or travel abroad, and a new level of consciousness was apparent in the people's outlook and values" (Adedeji, 1980: 11).

Jeyifo (1984: 117) in the same line of thought, provides an additional insight into how various political groups and movements approached Ogunde for an artistic co-operation. Jeyifo's contribution to this matter is very relevant to the point of view of this study:

Certain instances of the co-optation of some Travelling Theatre troupes by political groups and movements for their goals stand out above others. In the colonial period, the nationalist anti-colonial movement and its daily popular press actively adopted Ogunde's troupe as a cultural front for its decolonization and protest campaigns. Ogunde obliged the movement with protest plays like *Strike and Hunger* (1945) and *Bread and Bullet* (1950), on specific features and policies of colonialism, and *The Tiger's Empire* (1946) and *Towards Liberty* (1950) on the general nature of colonization itself.

These well-fashioned and timely unification of Nigerian politics and theatre by some eminent citizens of the country reminds one of Boal's (1985) treatise which is a good reverberation of how strong, powerful and potent theatre and politics could become, especially when the two are intentionally used for common goals against unpopular authorities, as recorded in the case of Nigeria versus the colonial masters. Boal (1985: ix) states "(...) that all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them."

Interestingly, what Jeyifo (1984; 117) states as a "cultural front" that is, if we critically look at theatre as a 'cultural manifestation of the people', substantiates Adedeji's (1980: 6) claims about the characteristics of Nigerian theatre and drama:

After all, the theatre as an institution is an artistic expression of people, a vital means of communication designed to inform, educate, and edify. As a work of art, it has to reflect the sensibility of the people and to project their perception of reality in an entertaining way.

It is then necessary to examine the protest performances of Hubert Ogunde. In other words, it is essential to bring the elements of opposition and agitation to the fore, from the various documented, overtly rebellious aspects of theatre of Ogunde. Obviously, this can only be achieved by scrutinizing his plays alongside some major notable elements that must have influenced his theatre in connection to style, presentation and contents. The outcome will afford one an opportunity to sufficiently document and analyse various important styles, techniques and methods that were devised by Ogunde and his theatre company, which made them record such huge success. The success is such which cannot be unconnected to their tireless effort at dramatizing numerous unfriendly policies of the British administration towards the people in the country, before the gaining of independence.

Based on documentation, the staging of series of play performance by Ogunde and his company, even when the status quo in the country was described as being extremely tense, cannot be complete without an account of the role that Ogunde and his company played in contributing to the well-being of the country. This view relates to the budding and thriving socio-political and economic growth of the nation, just before the unfortunate military overthrow in 1967 of the then democratic government.

Before the analysis and discussion of the protest theatre of Hubert Ogunde and his troupe, it is imperative to state that, among all the various theatre companies known at the time, Ogunde's theatre that was one of the only companies that were politically committed (Clark 1979: 81).

Clark also referred to some distinguished theatre-makers and music composers such as Layeni and Adunni Oluwole who made some attempts to produce this theatre genre, but which were not in any way considered significant:

Layeni and his party occasionally produced political plays based on a few actual events, such as the one which commemorated the Enugu miners' shooting incident. He called his play *Enugu Miners*. Ogunmola, however, does not appear to have concerned himself with any of these explosive political events.

Adunni Oluwole and her First Actress Party also participated fully in the new cultural movement. (...) Adunni Oluwole has the double distinction of being the first and only female political party founder in the country and also of being the only woman founder of a professional Theatre Company in Yoruba theatre history. She died in 1957 of tetanus while on a political tour; but, during her lifetime, she became a colourful and often unpredictable figure in religion, politics, and the theatre. (Clark 1979: 81-82)

Hubert Ogunde is thus the only relevant theatre-maker to this study, since the focus of the work only concerns the exploration of how theatre was used as opposition, agitation and protest against imperialism and British colonization. Nonetheless, the short discussion of the insignificance of the three theatre-makers mentioned in Clark's account is part of the examination of and contribution to this study.

Clark's (1979:79) view provides a detailed analysis of the theatre of Ogunde and the nationalist movement before independence:

In the era of the nationalist movement, there was a remarkably great interest in the existence and survival of the theatre as a channel providing political as well as cultural education for the masses. The movement astutely realized that the theatre is 'a medium of mass education having as wide an affect over the memory as the cinema', and a medium which can foster the theory and practice of association between citizens'. It teaches 'groups participation and team work which is indispensable to a community', provides opportunities for jobs for the citizens, and yields dividends to its proprietaries.

From her description, it is clear that the Nationalist Movement of the time saw Ogunde's theatre as a viable avenue to start their campaign for the total emancipation of Nigeria from the British powers. Clark (1979:74) cites Coleman's (1963) definition of Nationalism in *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, as "(...) consciousness of belonging to a nation (existent or in the realm of aspiration) or a nationality, and a desire, as manifest in sentiment and activity, to secure or maintain its welfare, prosperity and integrity, and to maximize its political autonomy."

The definition of nationalism explains the activities of the Nigerian Nationalist's Movement in the 1940s; the meaning additionally give insight into the reason why the Nigerian nationalist leaders picked theatre as popular culture and medium to help their cause and aspirations. For example, the Nationalist movement took great interest in the continuity and survival of the theatre as a channel for political as well as cultural education of the masses.

Apart from the fact that Ogunde is seen as the pioneer and father of the modern Nigerian theatre and drama, his theatre happened to be the only successful example that achieved a remarkable breakthrough in the history of theatre and colonial discourse. His theatre confronted colonialism and imperialism head-on. Detailed analysis of Ogunde's theatre and his troupes' performances as confrontation to colonialism and imperialism follow in the next subheadings.

#### **4.5 The theatre and drama of Hubert Ogunde as model for Contemporary Nigerian Yoruba Theatre**

Hubert Ogunde's theatre had established its roots long before he used theatre to confront the British domination of Nigeria. He had started work as a school teacher and an instrumentalist at the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Ebute Meta, Lagos, where he was a "celebrated organist and composer" (Adedeji, 1980). He joined the then Nigerian Police

Service, but resigned not long after and announced his intentions to start a professional theatre company.

Clark (1979:4) recounts: “Initially he was jeered at, but as the *Daily Comet* put it, he had ambition, and he was prepared to sacrifice the immediate security of the policeman’s poor pay for the uncertainty of the future. It was a big gamble.” Clark (1979: xviii) reports that Hubert Ogunde in 1945, after his disengagement from the Nigerian Police, initiated the “African Music Research Party” as an “amateur dramatic society.” This was the same year that marked the commencement of his theatrical confrontation with the authority, earning him his first warning not to go ahead with the production of his opera, *Worse Than Crime*, by the police. He changed the name of his company from *African Music Research Party* to *Ogunde Theatre Party* after his return to Nigeria from a successful tour of Britain. During 1950, the name of his company was changed from *Ogunde Theatre Company* to *Ogunde Concert Party*.

I agree with Clark’s (1979) assertion which describes Ogunde’s actions at that time as courageous and audacious, because Nigerians, at that particular time, specifically the Yoruba people, ridiculed and looked down on actors or individuals associated with theatrical or dramatic activities (or performing arts in general). They were regarded as the vagabonds of society. Clark declares that “[t]he actor or any person connected with the theatre was regarded as an *alarinjo* (...)”<sup>8</sup>. Paradoxically, it was this same theatre and theatre-makers which eventually became a powerful, potent and effective tool against the oppressive regime of the British government. However, the support and contributions of many other Nigerians to the realization of independence from different vocations and professions cannot be underestimated.

Hubert Ogunde struggled to start his professional theatre career as planned after he resigned from the Nigerian Police Force, due to the strict social embargo on any woman participating in theatre. Ogunde who modeled his theatre troupe after the traditional *Alarinjo* theatre, recognized the important roles played by women and bravely decided to hire good-looking ladies’ various capacities and functions in his new theatre company. The traditional embargo against women—which was rooted in the country’s views on patriarchy and gender—had continued when Ogunde began his theatre. Yoruba agents

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<sup>8</sup> As stated earlier in the thesis, the term *Alarinjo* was originally a derogatory term referring to performers as vagabonds or beggars. The correct name for the masquerade performers is *Egun-Alare* or *Agbegijo*.

were not negotiable about their daughters getting involved with any performers. They were warned not to mingle, marry or get carried away by such people. Ogunde, however, like many theatre and drama practitioners before him, conquered this obstacle by an ingenious act, which Clark (1979) explains as follows:

Ogunde received no reply at all to this advertise. Undeterred, he placed another advertisement one month later, this time asking for '10 CHARMING YOUNG GIRLS As Lady Clerks' and again he asked them to 'apply in person to HUBERT OGUNDE, 88 Cemetery Street, Ebute Meta'. This time, the response was overwhelming. With these advertisements, Ogunde made known to the public his intention of starting a professional theatre company. (Clark, 1979:3) During his lifetime, Hubert Ogunde married most of the ladies who applied as "clerks" and others who later joined his theatre, as a way for him to keep his theatre functioning and progressing. The male actors were labelled according as "rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars" (Clark, 1979:4) by the Yoruba society. The female actresses would have probably been shown more hostility, since women were considered or expected to be well-behaved, with a healthy approach to life, good attitude, demeanor and being more reserved in society. The women were probably labelled as shameless actresses who dance and act; ladies who expose their feminine endowments to the public for ridiculously small salaries. In fact, this issue has broken up many families in Nigeria over the years.

However, gradually the aversion of the Yoruba society for women participating in theatrical and dramatic performances has been relaxed and the theatre was enjoying fair acceptance from the Nigeria society. The exposure, fame, financial gain and recognition to the actors and actresses grew exponentially, both at home and abroad since the advent of the Nigerian Home Video.

#### **4.6 Hubert Ogunde's theatrical influence**

The influence of the Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre on Hubert Ogunde's theatre is significant and obvious in many of his performances, and is documented in different studies on his life and works. Clark (1979: xi) verified the obvious influence of the Traditional Theatre of the Yoruba, the *Alarinjo* Theatre, a phenomenon of which Ogunde was a great supporter in his youth and in which he learnt to play parts as a musician. In addition, Ogunde in his early age was acquainted to Yoruba traditional divinity of Ifa, through his maternal grand- father.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lindfors (1976: 245), in addition to the earlier-discussed factors that influenced Chief Hubert Ogunde's theatre, posits that he inherited his stage talent from his mother's parents. Ogunde, in a personal interview

Jeyifo (1984: 39) contends that the young Ogunde was well acquainted with the traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre form of the *Alarinjo* ensembles. He ran away with one of these companies as a young boy, travelled around with them for several months until his enraged father, who had been away when his son escaped, personally returned him back home. Evidently, this surviving parallel tradition of an itinerant theatre with a popular base among a vast segment of the population provided a structural and methodological paradigm for its modern counterpart. A mature Ogunde, in designing his theatre, had personal experiences and dreams of the *Alarinjo* troupes from his childhood days.

Kerr's (1995: 85) description of what later became the entirety of Ogunde's theatre is a useful point of departure to properly understand how his theatre evolved and confluenced at a certain period; and then became a potent challenge to the dominance of the Nigerian people, by the British colonial imperialists. Kerr explains that the interaction between the Western and Yoruba sources of Ogunde's theatre relates both to his position in the class structure of the Nigerian society, and to the dialectic of different stages through which his theatre styles developed.

Another noticeable influence on Ogunde's theatre is expounded by Clarke (1979; xi):

The influences prevailing on Ogunde's theatre are many. To take only one or two here, we see the effect of European theatre, particularly the European Variety Theatre which was almost the only element earlier university critics found in Ogunde's plays, but this in fact is the influence which Ogunde has refashioned to create his unique kind of theatre. Of more importance, perhaps, is the influence of the classical theatre of the Yoruba, namely, the *Alarinjo* Theatre, a theatre of which Ogunde was a great follower in his youth and in which he learnt to play parts as a musician.

The new European form of theatre's popularity and influence in Nigeria during the beginning of Ogunde's work in theatre had a huge influence that was felt everywhere in the country. It was only natural for him to also borrow from this trend for his own theatre.

Naturally, the church was clearly visible as a part of European influence on Ogunde's work. As an organist and theatre coordinator at a Lagos-based Church of the Lord, Ogunde had already dramatized some Bible verses pertaining to Jesus Christ's birth, crucifixion and

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with Lindfors (1976: 245) further explains that, "His grandfather was Babalawo (diviner). He was versed in occultism and organized masquerade performances. Thus, I was initiated into many cults at an early age."

resurrection. His theatre certainly showed influences of the European theatre, considering his different encounters with the European kind of entertainment trends that took over Lagos at the time that he was living there.

In fact, Hubert Ogunde's serious theatre career began under the patronage of the Church. In 1944, he produced his first folk operas, *The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God*. These were commissioned by the Lagos-based Church of the Lord founded by Josiah Ositelu. The performance was staged to entice financial assistance for the church building fund. The remarkable success of the production encouraged Ogunde to write more operas until he decided to turn professional and leave his amateur status behind. Even as a Christian, he was associated with the *Egungun*, the *Alarinjo*, the *Daramojo Atete*, and *Ekun Oko* as a passive member or enthusiast.

An examination of the influence of *The Yoruba Traditional (Travelling) Theatre* on the theatre and drama of Hubert Ogunde cannot be avoided. In the next section, his childhood and adult years provide a deeper understanding for the various cultural and traditional details that later heavily influenced his love of theatre and music, and even became the main source of his performances.

#### **4.7 A short biography of Hubert Ogunde**

Hubert Ogunde was born in 1916 in Ososa near Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria, to Christian parents, Jeremiah Dehinbo and Eunice Owatusan Ogunde. At that time, Christianity was not yet accepted by many people in Nigeria, and those who did practise the religion did not frown at fraternizing with the traditional religious beliefs and ways of worshipping. Hubert and his parents were examples: Ogunde was a traditional titled chief of his town, and had first-hand knowledge of the Yoruba culture and tradition.

Ogunde's substantial knowledge about the tradition and culture of the Yoruba people were later reflected in his theatrical exploits throughout his career. Obafemi (1996: 36) explains:

In examining the social statement in relation to the art-form in Ogunde's plays, it is essential to observe the syncretic aesthetics that shape his work. These qualities are traceable to his unusual origins as both the son of a clergyman, whilst being also the maternal grandson of a *Babalawo* (*Ifa* diviner). Ogunde once talked of the inevitability of 'pagan' and 'church' influences on him. These influences blend first as conflict: 'Here I was, a

youth versed, as I could claim to be in juju music and used to the altar of the Ifa priest. I had eaten fowls and sheep slaughtered in pagan festivals and enjoyed them full. Then I was in a church, singing songs of praise to God and denouncing the jujuman and his ways.' Then as syncretic imagination: 'I began to see that I could blend the charms and splendor of the church house and the colourful solemnity of the altar and use them to good advantage.

Jeyifo and Obafemi both affirm that Ogunde was a typical Yoruba man, with strong beliefs in the Yoruba tradition and culture. Almost all his work contained references to the Yoruba culture, even when he started producing and acting for cinema. Jeyifo's (1984:33) point of view illuminates the connection between the theatre and Yoruba deities:

Within traditional Yoruba culture itself, there is extensive evidence of the importance of theatre and related performance forms in the cultural life of the people. One significant illustration of this is the fact that three of the most important deities in traditional Yoruba religion—Obatala, Ogun and Sango—deities whose cults still flourish today—are thought to be 'theatrogenic' gods whose cults and worship are vitally connected with drama and theatre and their symbolic and psychological uses. Equally illustrative of this point is the fact that in traditional Yoruba folklore, art and artists, especially the performing arts, are extensively celebrated.

This clearly explains why Ogunde often invoked, appealed, praised, and often depicted his personal belief in many of the gods and goddesses in the pantheons of the Yoruba spiritual world. This was evident in many of the feature films that Ogunde produced and acted in after his successful and long venture in the practice of Contemporary Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre. One can find some strong evidence of his beliefs in the Yoruba spiritual evaluation of the universe. Although the thematic preoccupations of his films were not actively political, he displayed a high level of his Yoruba belief in Orisa, in the Yoruba world of cosmology (the Yoruba pantheon of the gods and goddesses) such as *Ogun, Sango, Oya, Egungun, Yemoja, Esu, Obatala* and many other deities located in the spiritual devotion of his Yoruba origin. For practical instance, his most popular and most often talked-about cinematic productions of the 1980s were *Aiye* (1980), *Jaiyesinmi* (1981), *Aropin N'Tenia* (1982) and *Ayanmo* (1985)— all motion pictures that were concerned with thematic pre-occupation and subject matters which Obafemi (1996:269) describes as "animist and metaphysical concerns" and "a frightening overdose of magical and voodooist effusions."

None of his contemporaries were a match for Ogunde and his company. He had attained an almost inimitable record and daunting fame through his sheer professionalism and with the cooperation of his actors. He had also used theatre collectively and successfully with the

nationalists' movement as part of the nationwide political struggle against British colonialism and imperialism. The government that came into effect on the first of October, 1960, seven years after Nigeria had gained independence, had brought Ogunde's theatre in a certain sense to the world stage in 1967, when he became a Nigerian delegate and representative in United States of America and Canada.

The nomination of Ogunde and his troupe members to represent Nigeria abroad gave them more exposure to new theatrical and dramatic sophistication, based on interaction with other practitioners around the world, and making useful connections for possible collaboration with other foreign theatre-makers. "Ogunde Theatre was sent by the Nigerian Government to perform at Expo '67 in Montreal, Canada. He stopped on his return to Nigeria in U.S.A.; and performed in the famous Apollo Theatre in Harlem, New York City", writes Clark (1979: xviii).

After successfully dominating the Nigerian stage and cinema production for many decades, Hubert Adedeji Ogunde died on April 4, 1990, at Cromwell Hospital, London, United Kingdom.

#### **4.8 Ogunde's contemporaries**

As discussed above, there were other successful Contemporary Yoruba *Alarinjo* Theatre movements and groups apart from Hubert Ogunde's at the time. They included the following:

- Duro Ladipo Theatre Group
- Kola Ogunmola Theatre Group
- Oyin Adejobi Theatre Group
- Moses Olaiya Theatre Group
- Isola Ogunsola Theatre Group and the
- Lere Paimo Theatre Group.

Remarkably, many respectable dramatists or theatre-makers, if not all, started their career or were trained under Hubert Ogunde. They were either professionally influenced directly or indirectly by Ogunde's leadership as the most notable exponent of the contemporary Yoruba *Alarinjo* theatre movement in Nigeria. The remainders of the collective efforts and

legacies of all these people are now evident in the Yoruba Movies popularly called Nollywood.

There were dramatists and theatre-makers after Ogunde. One of them is Ade Afolayan, a Yoruba theatre-maker whose name is not among those I have categorized as the most important dramatists during the active period of “the contemporary Yoruba *alarinjo* theatre movement” in Nigeria. The popularity of Afolayan at the time was no match for others in the category, even though he was a prominent member of Moses Olaiya’s theatre company. He eventually became well-liked and had a very successful career in cinema production.

Obafemi

(1996:266) substantiates this: “Firstly, the major practitioners of the indigenous language films are also the proponents and doyens of the travelling theatre: Hubert Ogunde, Ade Afolayan and Moses Olaiya.”

Oyin Adejobi, Duro Ladipo, Isola Oguniola, Lere Paimo and Kola Ogunmola were seen as prominent members of the movement, but not ever documented as producers or directors; only as invited actors. Collaboration was not an uncommon manifestation at the time in the history of cinema in Nigeria. These actors later opted for the alternative of the booming television drama series at the time, due to the innovation of alternative entertainment media such as cinema and television, and also because the travelling theatre was hectic, dangerous and the profits at that time appeared not enticing enough. Obafemi (1996: 265) believes that, “The Yoruba travelling theatre has retreated somewhat from the roads and the stage to appear instead on television and cinema screens. Technology has removed itinerant theatre practitioners from active live practice to mediatized theatrical engagement.”

#### **4.9. Self-motivation, engagement and commitment in Ogunde’s theatre**

To answer one of the objectives of this study—examining the various matters that may have influenced Ogunde to embark on the production of political theatre—a brief review of various relevant sources is necessary. Some African scholars in the area of theatre and literature are briefly examined. Osofisan (1997:8) states:

As writer or performer, composer or carver, the artist who is faithful to the original essence of his or her vocation cannot escape the curse of commitment, of l’engagement, as it was aptly called in the time of Jean-Paul

Sartre. For this reason, therefore, because all true art openly or surreptitiously carries the knife of subversion, the artist is always a target, and the creative spirit endangered, when Terror mounts the saddle of state...

It is important to understand what Osofisan refers to as the “original essence of artist vocation” and determine whether Ogunde fulfilled the “curse of commitment” or “l’engagement”. Adedeji (1980:13) comments on this: “For Ogunde, the play was his own contribution to the struggle; and, according to him, the theatre must participate in the march toward freedom and the political independence of Nigeria.”

Certainly, Adedeji’s explanation concerning the reasons for Ogunde’s action and motivations of his troupe to oppose British colonization and imperialism in his plays before Nigeria’s independence is significant. Independence was gained at a time when all apparatus and powers of the law were under the control of the colonial masters. Adedeji’s view is in consonance with Osofisan’s.

Hubert Ogunde, first and foremost, accepted the fact that he was a Nigerian. He also acknowledged the reality that whatever challenge(s) or problem(s) that faced the country must be tackled collectively. He was emphatic and precise when he said the theatre must participate in the march toward freedom and political independence of Nigeria. In another submission, Soyinka (1968: 21) in *The Writer in a Modern African State*, states that “the artist has always functioned in African society and as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself.”

Ogunde played an important role in both the Nigerian socio-political and economic history. Clark (1979) captures Ogunde’s roles at the peak of Nigerian agitation for freedom from British colonization: “As Ogunde’s theatre participated in the cultural renaissance in the forties, so it did in the nationalist movement; and, by so doing, often clashed with the law.” Clark refers to some other roles that Ogunde and his troupe played, to the effect that Ogunde’s plays and operas contributed to the country’s emancipation from colonial domination “by using stage for a reflection on the convulsions of the times.” Adedeji (1980) adds that the artist should “respond to the essence of himself.” These are two perpetual functions that Soyinka (1968: 21) attributes to the artist in the African society which, from the records, Ogunde and his theatre troupe most certainly fulfilled.

The major thematic preoccupation in Ogunde's opera was about issues of protest; they were a critique on colonial rule. Some of the subject matters in the opera were corruption, violence, marginalization, oppression and suppression of workers.

Apart from the recorded active participation of Hubert Ogunde and his theatre in the two notable socio-political periods of the country—cultural renaissance and the nationalist movement—he had moved theatre from the patronage of the court and church, and handed it to the populace (Clark, 1979: preface page).

Armah (1984: 35) posits that “[a]s far back as our written and unwritten records go, it has been the prime destiny of the serious African artist to combine the craft of creativity with the search for regenerated values.” Armah's view neatly sums up the reasons why African artists such as Ogunde adopted theatre as an artistic form which, according to Osofisan (1997: 8), “openly or surreptitiously carries the knife of subversion.”

Ayi-Kwei Armah delves into the history of Africa to reinforce the point that the African artist has never been an adequate function of the African society. The African artist has more than one single role to perform. As he or she tries to entertain society, the artist must also recognize the need to disseminate important messages, provoke and mobilise people to act against those critical issues that are vital to his existence, to his family and, most importantly, his entire community. A potentially deadly or destructive threat to his entire society is inevitably a very serious threat to his survival too. This was the essence of Hubert Ogunde and his cohorts.

#### **4.10. Developing an aesthetic: from church to stage**

Before moving many of his performances out from of the church context, Ogunde, with some members of his congregation, had staged plays such as *Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God* (1944), *Africa and God* (1944), *Israel in Egypt* (1944), *Nebuchadnezzar's Reign* and *Belshazzar's Feast* (1944) for religious festivities such as Easter, Christmas, fundraising and invitation by other churches. Clark (1979:10) comments: “For *the Garden of Eden* and *Africa and God*, Ogunde used, as his cast, members of the respective churches that sponsored the opera. But, for his future operas, he decided to form a dramatic society made up of people

with familiar interests in the theatre.” Clark (1979: 5) submits that “[t]he careers of the former teacher and police constable in the theatre began long before his bold step in 1945. His first venture into the theatre started under the patronage of the church. The church Ogunde attended in Lagos decided in 1943 to raise funds for a church building by presenting a ‘Native Air Opera’.”

Ogunde borrowed and adapted stories from the Bible and depicted characters with similar names and characterization in the Bible chapters and verses in plays such as *Garden of Eden and The Throne of God*, *Israel in Egypt* and *Nebuchadnezzar’s Reign and Belshazzar’s Feast*. “The content of the play *Garden of Eden and The Throne of God* is Biblical. Ogunde had chosen the story of the fall of man and his expulsion from the Gardens of Eden”, believes According Clark (1979: 6). The latter also mentions (1979:11) that “Ogunde in both *Israel in Egypt*, and *Nebuchadnezzar’s Reign and Belshazzar’s Feast* reverted to Biblical stories.” However, in the case of *Africa and God*, Clark (1979:9) states that the “title of the opera is misleading as, unlike Mr. Ogunde’s former opera, *Africa and God* is not a Biblical story but a musical exhibition of the conditions of things in Yorubaland before the advent of the Europeans.”

Clark (1979:7) stresses that Ogunde and his actors, during the production of these plays, as ‘Native Air Operas’, broke completely with the old norms, because the performances of the plays adopted dramatic action and followed the sequence of realism; a pictorial act of the audience experience. She states that this “was definitely a departure from the usual style of the ‘Native Air Opera’, the production of which usually had members of the cast standing on the stage swaying from side to side and singing continuously to the accompaniment of drums or the organ rather as in the eighteenth-century English oratorio, in addition, dramatic action was kept to the barest minimum.”

Ogunde had mastered the craftsmanship of a well-made play when he was staging series of performances for the church. This, in turn, availed him the required craftsmanship he needed to develop his other plays which he later staged in direct opposition to the colonial regime.

#### 4.11 Contents and styles in Ogunde's political operas

The claims of Jeyifo (1984), Adedeji (1980), and Clark (1979) all accentuate Ogunde's political drama as the most significant contribution to the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama in Nigerian history (up to 1984). The following section examines the contents and style of Ogunde's political drama. Clark (1979:110) believes that "[a]fter *King Solomon*, Ogunde moved from Biblical to secular content, concentrating mainly on political and folkloric themes. His political operas are: *Worse Than Crime*, *Strike and Hunger*, *The Tiger's Empire*, *Towards Liberty* and *Bread and Bullet* (...)."

These 'political operas' have been identified by scholars such as Owomoyela (1971), Clark (1979), Adedeji (1980), Jeyifo (1984), Kerr (1995) and Obafemi (1996) as protest theatre, because they were all written and performed as a form of protest against British colonialism and imperialism many years before Nigeria's independence. The only play not mentioned above is *Bread and Bullet*, a political opera referred to by Joel Adedeji (1980) in *Nationalism and the Nigerian Theatre*. Ogunde's political operas specifically performed against British imperialism and colonialism totaled six. The list excludes "*Yoruba Ronu*" (Yoruba, think.) produced in 1964, to address post-independent issues pertaining to a lack of unity among the Yoruba people. Adedeji (1980:18) suggests that the opera "(...) was a deliberate attempt to expose and ridicule those who were privileged by the circumstances of political chaos in the region to take over the reins of government." The present study does not focus on the last opera, because the study is more concerned with the political operas of Ogunde prior to independence.

The titles of the plays by Hubert Ogunde are self-revealing. On their own, they are direct forms of protest; potentially capable of causing or instigating the populace in the direction of an immediate agitation, specifically against British dominance at the time. The titles of some of Ogunde's plays (such as *Worse than Crime*) literally means that the forceful dominance of Nigerians by the colonial masters was worse than crime. The title of his other play, *Strike and Hunger*, provides a literary hint on the industrial action of a strike embarked on by the workers against the British government during the period, and workers' protest of hunger for non-payment of their wages and salaries by the British administration.

*Bread and Bullet* is a philosophical play that indicates people's position and general voice of dissatisfaction towards colonial maltreatment. What people wanted at the time was food, their daily bread, not bullets, which symbolizes violence and death. The titles of the plays are also indicators of Ogunde's feelings of dissatisfaction as an artist at various ill-treatments perpetrated against him and his fellow Nigerians. Because of the course of commitment of *l'engagement* of the artist to his society as mentioned earlier and as posited by Osofisan in his 1997 inaugural lecture, coupled with the fact that Ogunde and his company were active members of their society, was means that any threats to the well-being of their society is a direct threat or potential doom to their existence. Ogunde took it upon himself to actively and consciously participate in the collective struggle for Nigerian independence.

Many of Ogunde's protest plays, some of which were earlier referred to above were typically staged solely for the entertainment of the general audience. The plays depict active political undertone. The Nationalist's movement led by Nnamdi Azikiwe and other notable Nigerian first generation of politicians had coopted Ogunde's theatre as the cultural front for their protest campaigns. Obafemi (1996:39) affirms: "Yet, Ogunde remained at the forefront of direct involvement in Nigerian politics as he led the orchestra that formed part of Chief Awolowo's campaign team for Presidency." The foregoing quotation is an affirmation of the relationship between creative arts and politics. Ogunde and his troupes used many of their theatrical performances to fulfil the artistic yearning of the people and in addition, played vital political roles.

Six political operas of Ogunde are to be reviewed next. The operas are *Worse Than Crime*, *Strike and Hunger*, *The Tiger's Empire*, *Towards Liberty* and *Bread and Bullet*. The review is sourced from the short available summaries by Adedeji's (1980) account and Clark's (1979) documentation. Lack of proper documentation of Ogunde's performances is a major limitation in this part of this study.

#### **4.12 *Worse Than Crime* (1945)**

According to Adedeji's (1980:13), "*Worse Than Crime* was presented to the Lagos public in March, 1945. In it, Ogunde depicted the story of the transatlantic slave traffic and exposed

its atrocities, showing that slavery in any shape or form is worse than crime.” The play was an analogy that put colonialism and slavery on the same platform of crime. We see the echoing or resonance of the atrocities of the past (transatlantic slave trafficking of Nigerians) reflecting in the ongoing atrocities of that period, particularly in terms of forceful colonization and expansionism on other people’s land or territory. Clark (1979:11) reports the following information on the intention of the play from the perspective of publicity: “The advertisement for the opera boldly states that ‘Slavery in any shape or form is WORSE THAN CRIME.’”

Going by Clark’s (1979:11) account, the opening glee of the opera “was ‘well rendered’ and it impressed the audience”. She further explained that

The first act which featured folk dancing ‘earned applause of the audience’, the second act caused a lot of humour when pregnant women (...) were brought to the market for sale.” Clark concludes, in her final analysis of the play, that “The old slaves (...) kept the audience indescribably amused and thrilled’, and in the third act, the ‘the Sailors’ impressed the audience by a soul stirring song, the ‘San+gos (...) kept the house spellbound by their gymnastic dances while ‘Agere’ [stilt dancers] and the ‘Ageo’ masquerades vividly reminded the audience of those days gone by when African night entertainments were real, unadulterated and impressive.

Clark (1979:11) states that the “content of the play is political although in a subtle manner.” She adds that with “*Worse Than Crime*, Ogunde began his contribution to the Nigerian independence movement.” The thematic and subject matters in this political opera of Ogunde are very momentous, because Ogunde equate the colonial government with the old slaves of the past. They deal with human dignity, the right to freedom and free-will—topics which today are pertinent and disturbing across the globe.

Adedeji (1980) and Clark (1979) respectively states that the operatic play, *Worse Than Crime*, was staged as a combination of dramatic style of acting, music and dance. This conclusion is predicated on the information given by Adedeji.

#### **4.13. *Strike and Hunger* (1945)**

Adedeji ‘s (1980) account of Ogunde’s second political opera, titled *Strike and Hunger*, is a clear description of the participation of the aggrieved Nigerian workers in the first industrial and labour strike ever recorded in the country during the nation’s collective struggle against the Nigerian workers by the British authority in 1945. The theme and

subject-matters were motivated by the events of general strike by labour unions, led by Michael Imoudu. According to Oyemakinde (1974), Imoudu was the one who championed the labour union activities as a member of the Railway Workers Union (RWU) in the historical Nigerian Labour Union Organisation. Adedeji (1980:13) asserts:

In June 1945, Nigeria was plunged into a general strike that involved more than half a million workers. The strike projected the industrial phase of the nationalists' reaction to imperialism.

Following quickly after the end of World War II was a climate of inflation and poor wages. The workers' agitation fell on the deaf ears of the colonial administration. The strike dragged on for forty-four days and was called off only when an interim award had been announced and a commission had been set up by the colonial government to look into the grievances of the workers.

The Railway Workers Union was formed in 1931 and duly registered under the Trade Union Ordinance which allowed legal authority to seek collective bargaining with their employers. The registration of this union in 1931 infers government's recognition; however, the protest of the members of the union to demand higher wages, de-casualisation and improved working conditions for workers in all sectors of labour such as railway, mining, communication, and other areas, resulted into fracas and face-offs by the workers against the British authority.

Yet again, we see the uniqueness of theatre and drama in action as Ogunde and his troupe enacted and mirrored real-life sufferings of the workers to the general public. To portray the event of the time, the operatic enactment by Ogunde's troupe dramatised the Nigerian workers' plight in relation to poor wages been paid to the Nigerian workers, due to the high inflation that followed the Second World War II. The call for wage increment, which was supposedly a right of the Nigerian workers and which the British authority was supposed to look into carefully, was deliberately ignored. This resulted in a total strike for forty-four days, affecting the much-needed economic and social recuperation back home in the United Kingdom.

The strike was finally called off when the British authority succumbed to the workers' plight, seeing that the situation was becoming quite unpredictable and getting out of hand as, the workers were ready to fight for their right to the end, according to Ogunde.

The disgusting treatment experienced by the Nigerian workers from the British colonial masters in the pre-independence era is comparable to what happened in 2012 in Nigeria (the biggest producer of crude oil in Africa). On the 1st of January, 2012, the subsidy on fuel was removed abruptly, and the price of petrol in the country was suddenly increased by the government. This deliberate increment in the pump price of fuel under the past administration of former president Goodluck Jonathan took effect on the first day of the New Year—the day (the first of January, 2012) on which many Nigerians traditionally travelled across many states in the country to celebrate the festive period with family and friends. People got stuck at motor parks as they were about to return to their various workplaces and businesses. Strangely, the removal of the fuel subsidy was carried out by a newly-elected regime that was barely one year in office after all the pre-election pledges of improved welfare for the nation, adequate security for life and property, new provision and development of social welfare and job creation.

This destructive and inconsiderate action by the Nigerian government, like that of the British authority in June 1945, plunged the country into one of the most devastating and chaotic times in the history of the country, after the trade union and other stakeholders had pleaded unsuccessfully with the Federal Government of Nigeria to reverse the price to what it was previously.

#### **4.14. *The Tiger's Empire* (1946)**

Adequately significant literature review on the content of Ogunde's political opera, *Tiger's Empire*, could not be found, except for some discussions on the storylines of the play by Adedeji (1980) and Clark (1979). In addition, a recent newspaper review (*The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> of July, 2016) revealed that *The Tiger's Empire* "(...) marked the first time in Yoruba theatre that women were billed to appear in a play, as professional artists ... *The Tiger's Empire* was an attack on colonial rule." Adedeji (1980:14) states that "Ogunde was undaunted, and released his most vitriolic attack on the colonial government in Nigeria with his opera *The Tiger's Empire* (1946)." The release came shortly after Ogunde's house had been ransacked by the police who were directed by the British authority. His international passport was seized to prevent him from travelling to the United Kingdom on a trip he had openly announced as an effort to promote his troupe's creative development.

The storyline of the play *The Tiger's Empire* is narrated by Clark (1979:11): "The theme is based on an old African story depicting the 'here and after' of a man who signed a pact with an evil spirit in order to be wealthy." The play was a sarcastic criticism of the British colonial masters, a direct comparison which portrayed the British government as the character who signed a pact with the devil in an exchange for wealth in the play. The British government saw the play as an unswerving challenge to the imperial government at the time.

The title of Ogunde's protest opera, *The Tiger's Empire*, like others, is also self-revealing in meaning and message, even at first glance. The play was staged in 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1946, the year when Ogunde's theatre company (African Music Research Party) turned professional. The play likened the colonial rule and its characteristics at the time, as incarceration of Nigerians in a Tiger's colony.

We may, from a dramaturgic point of view, allegorically compare the unfortunate and pitiable condition of Nigeria as a nation under the control of the British to that of powerless animals in the territory of tigers. Tigers are well-known and respected for their enormous power, insatiable appetite and superior strength which makes them capable of devouring other animals (including humans).

According to Clark (1979:11), Ogunde was primarily concerned by the ongoing mistreatment perpetrated against himself, his troupe and fellow Nigerians. At that point, he decided to actively pursue a possible way out of the situation. But he must have also considered the nation's seemingly insignificant power and strength against the enormous power and strength of the British. He later settled for the potency of theatre and drama in alerting and mobilizing the public for collective action against their common enemy.

#### **4.15. *Bread and Bullet* (1949)**

The above political opera of Ogunde was apparently not fully documented except for the brief reference below in Adedeji's (1980:15) account in *Nationalism and the Nigerian National Theatre*: "Although the nationalistic struggle was in disarray from 1949, Ogunde had come out with his opera *Bread and Bullet* to reflect his reaction to British atrocity against the coalminers of the Ira Valley in the then Eastern Region of Nigeria."

Analogous to his other works, Ogunde's title for this political opera is revealing as well as metaphoric. His political plays appear to have emblematic logos that usually give some clues about the plays, as evident in the titles of the plays.

According to Eburn Clark's (1979), *Bread and Bullet* was an enactment of a true story of an incident that took place in Enugu (in the Eastern part of Nigeria). Her account was, however, based on the preview carried by the *West African Pilot*, the popular newspaper in Nigeria at the time.

Clark believes that this play, like *Strike and Hunger*, is based on a national issue—the Enugu miners' shooting incident which occurred on 8 November, 1949. The hero of the play is Joseph Okeke, who was elected leader of the miners in their demand for higher wages from their employers. Being a poor miner, Okeke was always apprehensive of his fiancée being lured away by a better-paid male typist working in the locality. Although he spent a great deal of his time safeguarding his romantic interests, he found time to carry out his duties as leader of the miners. He organized a 'go-slow' when the miners' employers refused to accede to their demand for higher wages and various meetings. During one of these arranged events, a clash ensued between the police and the miners; the police misjudged the situation and eighteen miners were shot dead in cold blood. They had asked for bread, but were given bullets. The preview informed the readers that the play was in English and Yoruba; Ogunde's Theatre was banned in Kano in May 1950 for the staging of *Bread and Bullet*. He was subsequently arrested and charged for sedition. He was eventually discharged but fined 6 Pounds for pasting posters for the play without obtaining any permit.

#### **4.16 *Towards Liberty* (1950)**

*Towards Liberty* was one of the last of the protest theatrical and operatic performances by Hubert Ogunde and his company in 1950, ten years before Nigeria's independence. Clark (1979: 85) reports: "For *Towards Liberty*, a summary is not possible since we have no script or extensive documentation of this play although its theme is explicit in the title. It is a call for freedom from colonial rule. In 1950, the *Daily Services* described it as "The greatest political play ever produced by Hubert Ogunde".

Clark (1979:90) further commented:

The reasons for Ogunde's withdrawal from the political arena in the fifties appear to be many. Firstly, he did not write many new plays in that decade, but concentrated mainly on touring with revised versions of his old operas. Secondly, the appearance of Bobby Benson's jazz and boogie woogie western-oriented theatre in 1948 gradually changed the taste of the public from the traditional cultural fare of Ogunde's operas to the new types of variety theatre. By early fifties, the popularity of Bobby Benson's theatre was such that Ogunde could no longer afford to ignore this rival; he decided therefore to tackle this commercial challenge by giving the public the new type of theatre they now preferred.

Clark (1979:91) ends her comments with an illuminating analysis of Hubert Ogunde's philosophy of politics and nationalism. It is imperative to realize that Ogunde was a strong supporter of the nationalist's movement who clearly understood that the emancipation of the Nigerian people from the British imperialism could be affected through a joint national front that could challenge the adversary foreign ruler to free the people. He clearly did not have any faith in party politics as a means of attaining the desired and long-awaited liberty, for party politics often resulted in biased politics, and Ogunde's theatre was never partial to any leader of the nationalist crusade except perhaps for Herbert Macaulay, only after his death in 1946. Instead of leading his theatre to biased politics, Ogunde remained silent. It is no coincidence that from 1951 he neither wrote nor revived any of his political plays, until the freedom that his theatre so courageously fought for was at last granted to Nigeria by Britain on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1960.

#### **4.17 Style and mode of presentations of all the six political operas**

Clark's (1979: 110) examination of Ogunde's structure of the programme in the presentation of his political operas included a glee and a dance for the opening, followed by the opera or play, and yet another glee for the closing of the play or opera. However, it is pertinent to examine what Clark describes as the features of these operas as she discusses the content of the operas:

One of the main features of the opera was the absence of dialogue, an absence which Ogunsheye missed very early in Ogunde's works. The emphasis at this time was on music and production that would give visual delight, rather than on plot. Another characteristic of this phase was the conscious use of Yoruba

music, folklore, proverbs, chants, incantations, and dances in order to achieve and maintain the aim of the African Music Research Party.

Clark (1979: 110) mentions that Ogunde, alongside his troupe, refined, modified, and rearranged the mode of presentation of their theatre at a later stage: "First, the 'refined African music was played on foreign and native instruments combined' and secondly, the opera had been 're-arranged to include a dialogue'". The striking innovation was that Ogunde moved Yoruba theatre from unscripted theatre where the actors sang their lines, to an improvisational theatre in which the actors eventually spoke their lines, according to Clark.

Here, one is alerted to two new styles appearing in Ogunde's theatre. Thus far, his operas were accompanied solely by native musical instruments and did not include dialogue. Since one is not certain about the language of the dialogue in the opera, one may conclude that it must have been in Yoruba. Based on the preview of *Bread and Bullet*, the play ran in both Yoruba and English. Ogunde's introduction of English into his operas was another important 'stylistic development,' according to Clark.

Clark (1979:47) asserts that this new innovation in the orchestration of Ogunde's Concert Party must be acknowledged before any further analysis can be achieved. These innovations recorded in Ogunde's theatre have always been part of interesting characteristics of theatre and drama generally, because both genres possess unique flexibility to accommodate other artistic forms and expressions, which often creates a confluence of other artistic forms.

Clark further contends that "(...) the curtain came down to separate each scene from another, and there was generally a time-lag of five minutes or more before the curtain went up on another short scenes" (1979:111). The audiences never got bored since the profuse scenes changes gave them an opportunity to discuss the show. The numerous incorporated dances helped to lengthen it, as did the slow 'Apala' (Rhumba) tempo of the singing and dances. This proves another manifestation of a Western influence on Ogunde's theatre. African traditional performances introduce the sequence of plays through oral narratives unlike Western productions. The influence of using the curtain to separate each scene from another was not peculiar to the presentation of his political opera, but the entirety of his theatre. This structure is one of Ogunde's personal trademarks.

The opening glee is followed by the opera or play. Then, there is the concluding part, known as the closing glee, which signifies that the day's performance is being wound up and that the show is being concluded. It is the time to show appreciation to the deities for their spiritual support in achieving a successful completion of the performance.

According to Adedeji's (1981) description, the opening glee is usually a praise chant with dance performance, accompanied with music created to pay obeisance to the deities, especially to a masquerade called '*Esa Ogbin*', who was believed to be the first Yoruba actor in the *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre. Adedji believes that Yoruba dance is a traditional feature, just like the *Bata* dance filled with acrobatic displays and rhythmic choreographic steps.

To understand the programme format of Ogunde's theatre, one must explore the origins thereof. Olajubu (1970) comments that the structure drew from the traditional entertainment forms. Clark (1979:97) says that a "quick look at the format of some oral performances, such as Iwi *Egungun* chants, a story telling session, as well as the *Alarinjo* theatre, will confirm this point ... Iwi *Egungun* is a piece of verbal artistic creation having a beginning, middle, and a clear end."

It is abundantly clear that there is a striking resemblance to the *Iwi Egungun* structure, which is also the structure of traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* performance. This indicates a direct link between the performative structure of Ogunde's theatre and the Yoruba traditional entertainment of *Alarinjo* theatrical performance.

Ogunde's theatre was evidently hybrid in nature. Not only is the structure born from the *Alarinjo* performances; the performances also incorporated Western elements, whether it was in structure, performance style or the use of some Western instruments in the opera. The colonial aspects are not just a point of revolt; he also appropriated some of the colonial components to form his own style of theatre. There is space for political or social commentary—another element that was used by Ogunde in his theatre.

#### **4.18 Suppression of Ogunde's protest and political theatre**

Considering Hubert Ogunde and his company members' roles between 1945 and 1950 in agitating Nigerians of the political environment of the country through theatre during the

struggle for independence, it would have been a miracle if he and members of his troupe had escaped severe punishment in the form of persecutions, stiff sanctions and wrath from the colonial masters.

Adedeji (1980:14) discusses such censorship of Ogunde and his troupes:

Apparently, the colonial government had not only become apprehensive of the play's political implications; it had also been perturbed by the popularity that had attended Ogunde's theatre from place to place. The charge was that Ogunde had used his theatre to incite the public against the legitimacy of the government's act of governance. He was given a jail sentence with the option of a fine. The play was banned. The public quickly liquidated the fine through voluntary donations and saw the ban on the Ogunde Theatre as a continuation of the oppressive measures of the colonial government against selfdetermination and freedom of speech.

Reflecting on the many responsibilities of an artist to his community, it is gratifying to see how the African society also collectively reciprocated the honest service of the courageous Ogunde's theatre troupe by promptly rescuing the performers at the time of their vulnerability.

Clark (1979: 46), in her account of the ban on Ogunde's theatre, comments: "His play was to have been staged last Monday at the Colonial Hotel Hall, Kano, when the Assistant Superintendent of Police, it is understood, invited Mr. Ogunde to the police station and after reading out from the Criminal Code laws relating to sedition, he is reported to have said: "The words contained in your play *Bread and Bullet* are seditious and I, therefore, ban the play from being staged in Kano." Apparently, even the local religious leader who was expected to have identified with the course of emancipation as demonstrated by Ogunde acted unexpectedly: "It is further understood that the Sarkin Kano also told Mr. Ogunde that according to their own laws, they objected to the staging of such plays."

Other significant sanctions arrived in form of the restriction of the movement of Ogunde and his theatre, as he was denied an international travel passport alongside one of his famous actresses who later became one of his numerous wives. Clark (1979: xviii) affirmed that "[a]fter public pressure, passports were granted to Ogunde and Miss Ogunbule in March to travel to Britain." Once again, the general public had to intervene by mounting pressure on the British Government before Ogunde and Ogunbule could procure international travel passports.

These are clear indications that the British were ‘threatened’ by the messages that were delivered through the production. The milestone of Ogunde and his troupes turned theatre into a potent means of disseminating and propagating vital socio-political and economic issues in Nigeria’s history. It is essential to add that Ogunde wrote an explosive, full length drama titled “*Yoruba Ronu*” (*Yoruba, think*). He composed a song with same title in 1963.

*Yoruba Ronu* was a musical that encouraged the struggling Yoruba leaders to unite rather than fighting each other for the mantle of political leadership in the region. As usual, Ogunde re-enacted the Yoruba political conflict that turned a certain individual, Alimi, who was not a Yoruba indigene, become the king of a Yoruba community, Ilorin, in Nigeria. Clark notes:

Ogunde, as a matter of fact, was only drawing upon history, using the story of the famous nineteenth-century Yoruba Field-Marsal Afonja of Ilorin, who in his revolt against the Alaafin of Oyo, allied with Alimi the Fulani. When the Fulani used the opportunity to extend the Muslim Jihad to Yoruba country, they found the people hopelessly divided. The parallels between the nineteenth century and contemporary Yoruba history this time were close, as indeed Chief Awolowo himself had pointed out during the open breach between himself and Akintola. (1979: 58)

The reality of Ogunde’s role was recognized by the Yoruba elite who became political leaders a few years later when the British handed over governance to Nigerians. This was evident, as Hubert Ogunde and his company received a ban from the newly-constituted authority of his region (Government of Western Nigeria, as it was then called after independence)—a government that was relatively new and less than four years in office, declaring Ogunde’s Concert Party an ‘unlawful society’, dangerous to good governance of Western Nigeria.

#### **4.19 Conclusion**

It is vital to emphasise this passage by Clark (1979: 81): “Just as all the theatres did not participate in the cultural renaissance so not all did in the nationalist movement. Ogunde’s theatre was the only one that was politically committed”. The participation and contribution of Hubert Ogunde and his theatre troupe to the Nationalists Movement in Nigeria for attainment of socio-political and economic independence cannot be over-emphasized, considering the outstanding roles of Ogunde and his committed actors and

actresses in the struggle for Nigeria's independence from British rule. Their courageous acts were not a result of personal aggrandizement; rather, they were a collective responsibility, a social duty which every loyal member of any given society owes society.

In conclusion, even though Ogunde rebelled against British colonialism and imperialism, his rebellion totally excluded the Christian missionaries, being a believer in their religious faith and their humanitarian services to the people of Nigeria. Clark (1979:89) explains this:

It is important to note that Ogunde's attacks on the white man were directed solely at the political masters, namely, the official agents of colonial rule; not once did he direct his attacks at missionaries. Ogunde objected vehemently, as many southern Nigerians did, to political subjection and all the evils of colonial domination. For him, however, the missionaries brought nothing but good to Africa. With them came Western education and the beginning of advancement in technology and industry.

The style and craftsmanship that have been discussed this far in Ogunde's political operas cannot be disassociated from the influence of the traditional theatre of the Yoruba people, the *Alarinjo* Theatre. The interaction between the Western and European styles of entertainment were the sources of Ogunde's theatre that related both to his position in the class formation of the Nigerian society and spoke to the dialectic of different stages through which his personal theatre styles developed.

Yoruba philosophy and world-view has served various purposes such as performance philosophy and content adaptation (enactment of Yoruba folktale and folklore) in the craftsmanship of Hubert Ogunde's theatre and drama. Ogunde's theatre in content and performance structure includes music, theatre, drama, painting, and oral performance to mention but a few.

Another effective artistic approach of Ogunde in the creation of his theatre is the adaptation of stories from the Bible to tell dramatic story. The fusion between Yoruba philosophical ideas, world-view and Western influence remained the important factor which contributed to the popularity of Ogunde's theatre.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE EMERGENCE OF THE NIGERIAN LITERARY DRAMATISTS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This section of this study is concerned with the discussion and analysis of the contributions of the literary theatre and drama to the development and growth of socio-political drama and theatre in Nigeria.

In order to do this, some significant developments which have occurred and have affected the growth of theatre and drama in Nigeria have been critically identified for discussion. The examination may not be complete in its approach, but it is suitable for an analysis within the epoch of the drama and theatre history in Nigeria. The following important features are examined:

- (a) The emergence of the modern Nigerian writer,
- (b) The emergence of the Nigerian English literary dramatists,
- (c) The creation of the first school of drama in Nigeria (at the University of Ibadan, in 1963),
- (d) The creation and contribution of Mbari Club,
- (e) Characteristics of theatre and drama of the Nigerian English literary dramatists,
- (f) The emergence of Wole Soyinka in 1960,
- (g) The return of Ola Rotimi from America in 1968,
- (h) The arrival of Femi Osofisan into the Nigerian theatrical scene in the 1970s.

The features listed above may not necessarily mark the beginning of and encapsulate all that culminated in the rise of theatre and drama of the literary theatre practitioners, literary dramatists or their contribution to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performances in the country. However, the examination of the features can at least provide an adequate foundation for relevant analysis.

## 5.2. The Emergence of the modern Nigerian writers and the importance of Fagunwa as an early modern Nigerian writer

The emergence of the modern Nigerian writer should not be mistaken for the emergence of the Nigerian English literary dramatists. The modern Nigerian writers started emerging approximately two decades before the Nigerian English literary dramatists came on board and according to Osofisan (1997:10) the Modern Nigerian writer began to emerge from the 1940s.

One of the very first among these authors was Chief Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa. We can assume that Fagunwa was a leading exponent of the modern Nigerian writer in Yoruba language, who in his lifetime, wrote many novels and other works that were based on Yoruba myths, legends and magical realism. Most of his novels were written in the Yoruba language and many were later translated into English by his contemporaries. Some of his novels were adapted for the theatre. In 1960 Wole Soyinka translated Fagunwa's Yoruba popular novel, titled *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* into an English novel named *The Forest of A Thousand Daemons: A Hunter Saga*. Another Nigerian playwright, Wale Ogunyemi adapted the novel into a stage play, with a different title, *Langbodo*; and he directed the play for Nigerian's entry during FESTAC 1977.<sup>10</sup>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, 2008 and also on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2009, Femi Osofisan staged his adaptation of two novels *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* and *Ireke Onibudo* respectively by Fagunwa, first at the Department of Theatre Arts of University of Ibadan, also at Oduduwa Theatre of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria; and lastly, at MUSON Centre, Lagos, for the general audience. The performances of these productions were sponsored by a Nigerian Company in an effort to preserve the rich culture and diversity of Nigeria, and in a bid to keep the works of notable writers, such as Fagunwa, alive.

Consequently, Fagunwa cannot be referred to as one of the Nigerian English literary dramatists who gained popularity between when Nigeria was about to gain independence

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<sup>10</sup> FESTAC 1977 was the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, which took place in Lagos, Nigeria, from 15th January to 12th February 1977. The festival was a cultural jamboree which showcased to the world African music, fine art, literature, drama, dance and religion. The first edition took place in Dakar, Senegal in 1966.

and when the independence became a reality. Some of his works served as an inspiration and provided readily available storylines or contents for a good number of theatre-makers in the country.

Bamgbose (2004:547) provides an illuminating background to the foregoing when he comments as follows: “Folktales are interesting not only as an aspect of Yoruba folklore, but as a popular form of oral literature. They are important in themselves as stories, but they are probably more important as background material which novelists such as Fagunwa and Tutuola have drawn on heavily in their writing.”<sup>11</sup>

G.O Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola (another notable Yoruba writer of prose) were neither theatre artists nor dramatists, but were novelists who also tapped into the Yoruba folklore and legends to tell their stories. This assertion is further supported by Whittaker (2001:6): “Tutuola undoubtedly followed a form of narrative structure first employed by D.O. Fagunwa, in his stories written in Yoruba and published in the 1930’s and 1940’s.”

Those Nigerian writers that emerged after G.O. Fagunwa were Amos Tutuola, Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola and others. Adedeji (1980: 23) writes about Ulli Beier, a German scholar, who studied and documented Yoruba arts and culture for many decades.

Many of the plays written and staged in the Yoruba language in the 1960s and which were later translated into English language by Beier, adapted some familiar story lines in some novels of Fagunwa and Tutuola. Yoruba Plays like *Lanke Omuti* and *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* are good examples of this assertion. Notably, one important connection between these plays is, evidently, the usage of Yoruba myth, legend, folklore, proverbs, riddles and other cultural and traditional properties of the Yoruba people.

<sup>11</sup> Bamgbose’s explanation provides some relevant background to how Beier translated many plays written by some Nigerian Yoruba playwrights into English:

“The following publications are helpful:

1. Duro Ladipo: *Three Nigerian Plays* (Longmans), 1967.
2. Obotunde Ijimere: *The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays* (Heinemann), 1966.
3. Duro Ladipo: *Three Yoruba Plays* (English adaptations by Ulli Beier) (Ibadan: Mbari Publications), 1964.”

### 5.3 Contribution of modern Nigerian writers to the development of Theatre and Drama that addresses social, political, and economic theatrical performance in Nigeria

Generally, the discussion of Nigerian literature and theatre has attracted global attention. Such attention is noticeable in the popularity of the country's staged plays at theatres outside Nigeria, reading of play-texts authored by Nigerians outside the shores of the country, both for academic and leisure purposes and most recently, the booming film industry.

Writers in the country such as Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Femi Osofisan, J.P Clark, Ben Okri and many others, have achieved world recognition through their works. The relevance of socio-political commentary concerning the ills of the present-day Nigerian society is perhaps the main reasons why theatre practitioners and scholars cannot but be associated with creating or re-inventing new works from their works. Various works by these notable writers, many of whom are masterpieces, are readily available materials for adaptation, appropriation and experimentation for theatre-makers and film-makers of today.

According to Yerima (2003:120) the "simple answer here is 'choice'; and the reasons for it are not far-fetched." Yerima further explains thus: "Choice in adaptation can be seen as the interest of 'likeness' or even 'fondness' for an older work."

Stage adaptation of any work transcends "likeness or fondness." There is also the issue of relevance and whether or not the adapted work will serve the purpose of the theatre maker or dramatist who adapted such work. An excerpt published in one of the Nigerian daily newspapers a few years ago supports this view:

The maverick playwright died ten years ago leaving behind a retinue of plays, all which remain relevant to the social, political and economic lives of the Nigerian people. Among these plays is *Langbodo*, the epic drama which the late Chief Wale Ogunyemi, foremost writer and actor adapted from D.O Fagunwa's book entitled, *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*.  
(An excerpt titled "*Why Wale Ogunyemi still lives on Nigeria's stage-Director of Langbodo*" from Sun News Papers, Thursday, February 16, 2012).

Another excerpt provides a short historical background on another play adaptation of a novel written by Amos Tutuola. The play is titled *Palmwine Drinkard*. The director, in his 'Directors Note' found in the production programme of the play directed by Tunde Awosanmi (2014) posits:

*The Palmwine Drinkard*: [translated as] *Lanke Omuti* was premiered on the Nigerian stage, precisely the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan, in April 1963. It was a product of that versatile actor and renowned practitioner of the Yoruba folk-opera, Kola Ogunmola, who adapted it from Amos Tutuola's novel *The Palmwine Drinkard*. At birth, the drama was not only expressive of a dominant theatrical style which had become a force and a definitive icon of Nigeria's post-colonial- the opera- it joined other Yoruba operatic experiments on the formal stage such as *Oba Koso* and *Obaluaye* to register the adaptive and experimental spirit of the theatre practitioners of the stage. And, of course, Kola Ogunmola's achievement was that his invention helped in pioneering the adaptation of novels to stage. (An excerpt from the *Director's Note*: (Tunde Awosanmi), 16th of April, 2014).

Awosanmi's explanation provides useful information on how long the concept of adaptation of novel to stage has gained popularity in the Nigerian theatre and drama. Awosanmi named Kola Ogunmola, a contemporary theatre practitioner of Hubert Ogunde, who gained prominence during the era of the *Yoruba Contemporary Travelling Theatre* with his folkopera performance as one of the pioneering figures who first experimented with stage adaptation of Yoruba folkloric story into a staged drama. Hence, Ogunmola can be described as one of the pioneers of the adaptation of novel to stage scene in Nigeria.

The idea behind Ogunmola's adaptation of *Lanke Omuti* [Yoruba translation of *Palmwine Drinkard*] was not because he lacked ability to create his own piece; his reason for doing so cannot be dissociated from the fact that Amos Tutuola's novel *The Palmwine Drinkard* is an artistic work that was carefully crafted, and which borrowed greatly from the Yoruba reservoir of history, legendary and folklore, which Ogunmola deemed useful to address some social vices facing his society at the time. Social vices such as greediness, excessive drinking habit, and love for money are few themes in Kola Ogunmola's plays. He wrote other plays such as *Oba Ko So*, *Love for Money* and others, which also tapped from Yoruba oral trading and folklore.

In conclusion, the contribution of modern Nigerian (prose) writers to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performances in Nigeria can particularly be seen in the area

of adaptation, since many of their works were not originally created for the stage. Theatre practitioners and dramatists in the country have considered many of their works useful in achieving and contributing their own quota to the growth of theatre and drama; such works have thematic pre-occupations applicable to address socio-political and economic challenges facing the country. Many of the works of these icons, especially those who are Yoruba writers, borrow or draw from the Yoruba wealth of legends, proverbs, folklore and other materials which serve as a potent means of sensitizing and educating the general populace concerning issues that threaten their socio-political and economic survival.

#### **5.4. The emergence of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists (1960: The year of political independent and literary awakening)**

The emergence of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists, to some extent, coincides with the country's independence in 1960. The period was a significant one, due to the unfolding political, economic and cultural transition. The period also marked the beginning of the decisive contributions of theatre artists and dramatists through literary writings and performances, the positive growth of Nigeria as a nation. One primary concern of this group of well-trained practitioners and scholars was how to identify means of tackling various postindependence challenges that were facing the country. Their effort was to consolidate the success of Hubert Ogunde's participation in the nationalist struggle. In fact, one may even assert that the work of Ogunde and his theatre company encouraged the appearance of the new crops of theatre and drama practitioners in the country, starting from the 1960s. It can be concluded that the baton of theatre and drama as a potent expressive channel against the tyrannies of the Nigerian rulers was passed on to those Nigerian English Literary Dramatists who emerged after the time of Ogunde. This assertion is substantiated by Umukoro:

Since then, [after independence was achieved] Nigerian dramatists have been pre-occupied with the crisis of neo-colonialism, seeking for ways to reverse the condition so that Nigeria can become a truly independent country where power is used for the good of the common people. It is, in other words, a search for democracy: government of the people by the people for the people. (1994:12)

During this epoch in the history of Nigerian theatre and drama, we see a kind of symbolic bridge between Ogunde's protest and political theatre and literary dramatists who had

garnered adequate trainings in theatrical and dramatic creations and performances both at home and abroad.

Credibly, the emergence of Nigerian English Literary Dramatists at the University of Ibadan (one of Nigeria's premier universities) during this period no doubt marked the take-off of, and opened up the academic channels and contributions towards genuine developments, both artistically and politically. The channels have since then become proliferated and continue to be a permanent intellectual arena or melting-point for series of positive sociopolitical and economic debates among many scholars across the country.

Some of these scholars specialized in theatre, drama or literature and deemed it fit to discuss and analyse and attempt alerting Nigerians to post-independence problems that usually accompany nations emerging from colonialism and imperialism. Wake (1969: 44) states that: "It is obvious, however, that the literary awakening of Africa is directly associated with the political awakening, which can probably be taken to precede it." Wake's view further associates the literary awakening in Africa to the political atmosphere of the continent. This was the case with Nigeria in the 1960's. The dawn of the new political era immediately opened the doors, setting the stage for both literary and artistic expressions in the country. The Nigerian playwrights, poets and novelists saw opportunities and avenues to express themselves and to voice various concerns associated with the ripples, rebounds, complications and effects of the long years of British domination of Nigeria.

Like Hubert Ogunde, the apprehension of post-colonial Nigerian English literary dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande, and others was towards the conspicuous decadence, vices and ills of the Nigerian society, championed by the nation's political class handling the affairs of the country at the time. Their actions and ruling styles were perceived as an offshoot of the British legacy left behind to create disunity among the many tribes and ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The Nigerian English Literary Dramatists were not alone at the time in this line of thought. Writers of poems and novels such as Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo and Gabriel Okara, to mention but a few, also went ahead after the emancipation of the country in 1960. They wrote on themes and subject-matters of the negative effects of the colonization of Nigeria

and the incessant military take overs of mantle of the leadership in the country, warning of the consequences and aftermath of this mode of rulership and likening it to a volcanic reaction by the people against the colonial masters. In relation to the foregoing, Adeoti (2004:12) asserts that, "in the particular case of Nigeria, the utilitarian value of literature is undeniable as it more often than not, yields a greater insight into socio-political events. To this end, Nigerian literature presents a poignant engagement with historical realities in a manner that is rewarding, not only to literary scholarship, but also to the study of politics in the postcolonial state."

In addition, this set of people who quickly seized and idealized the momentum during this period of post-colonial despair and disenchantment were those Nigerians who had returned from studying abroad and those who had acquired education at the University of Ibadan; particularly those who received training in theatre and drama at the first school of drama in Nigeria, at the University of Ibadan. Adedeji (1978:10) states: "The School of Drama was formally opened in October, 1963. This was a feat which coincided with the inauguration of the University of Ibadan as an independent and autonomous institution of higher learning."

It will be of important here to add that the themes in the Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists and The Contemporary *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre practitioners are often similar; some themes in their various works included need for emancipation of Nigeria from British domination and the political turmoil which took place immediately after independence. The Contemporary *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre and the Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists, therefore, inescapably marked and represented a certain epoch and developmental manifestations in the history of theatre and drama in the country.

The practitioners of these two theatrical movements partly found their craftsmanship not only from Western theories and practice, but considerably tapped into the vast Yoruba culture and tradition in the creation of themes in their performances, including themes that addressed social issues and those that merely celebrated Yoruba customs and tradition. And, in addition, the craftsmanship of the plays of The Contemporary *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre practitioners such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and others, alongside the *Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists* such as Wole Soyinka, Ola

Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotosho, Bode Sowande, Zulu Shofola and Wale Ogunyemi and many others cannot be dissociated from western influence.

### **5.5. The creation of the first School of Drama in Nigeria: The University of Ibadan in 1963**

The first School of Drama at the University of Ibadan was established in 1963, just three years after the country's independence. Ibadan is an old city which was formerly a part of the old western region, but known today as the capital city of Oyo State, Nigeria. The creation of this university turned out to be a major catalyst and factor in the development of theatre and drama in Nigeria. Adedeji (1980:16) comments:

The English language theatre had been set to struggle for its own existence on the professional level. Aided by the establishment of the first School of Drama at the University of Ibadan in 1963 for the training of professional theatre artists and educators, the foundation was supposedly laid for the boost of the theatre in English. The English language had acquired an aura of prestige and encouraged the building of an elitism which had the means and resources to support a viable theatre.

Apart from the fact that the Ibadan School of Drama; which today is known as The Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan; has trained numerous theatre practitioners, it has also produced large numbers of notable theatre and drama critics, theatre directors, stage managers, technical directors, costumiers, designers, body make-up artists, film directors, choreographers, television producers, playwrights, script-writers, novelists and others.

The notable theatre icon, Wole Soyinka, who won the Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1986 is a product of the department. The number of notable scholars and theatre practitioners produced by the Department of Theatre Arts is extensive; however, this study focuses only on those of relevance to the study.

Many Nigerian writers, specifically playwrights, received international training at certain times in their careers as theatre scholars and practitioners. Consequently, their contact with the Western theatre and drama of Europe, America, and Asia (and many other parts of the world must have) in one way or the other, influenced their theatrical and dramatic works, both in text and performance. Their exposure to the theatre and drama of different

epochs and major developments that shaped the history of the world such as the classical theatre of the Greeks and the Romans; the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press, the exploration of Africa by the Europeans, the 'Industrial Revolution' and the Modern Age must have enriched their knowledge about world theatre. Adesokan (1996:92) expands on this matter when he asserts that: "The development of this theatre, [English literary drama] like a good number of other cultural products of modern Nigeria, has been closely linked to the colonial educational system."

The creation of the School of Drama in Nigeria at the University of Ibadan in 1963 also marked the beginning of a high level of literary, specifically in theatrical and dramatic, experimentation and exploration by the Nigerians and other foreigners who were residing in the country at the time. The residence of these foreigners in Nigeria was attributed firstly to what appeared to be self-imposed exile, since a huge number of them fled their country to escape the colonial oppression in their countries of birth. A good example of this is the involvement of Ezekiel Mphahlele, a South African writer who was a founding member of the Mbari Club. Noticeably, the creation of the first school of drama at the University <sup>11</sup>of Ibadan has then paved a way to the establishment of other theatre and drama schools in the country. A considerable number of federal, state and private universities all over Nigeria today, have department of theatre, drama, performing arts and creative arts. Apart from the universities that contributed to the development of theatre in Nigeria, other organizations also acted as instigators of development and experimentation. The Mbari Club was one such an organization.

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<sup>11</sup> The first and the oldest University in Nigeria, the University of Ibadan was established in the City of Ibadan which was formerly a part of the old western region, but known today as the Capital of Oyo State, in 1948. However, the first school of drama at the University of Ibadan was not established until October 1963, three years after the country's independence. The creation of this university and later, the school of drama (known today as Theatre Arts Department) turned out to be a major milestone and a key-factor in the development of theatre and drama in Nigeria, for some reasons. Firstly, the function of the School of Drama, as posits by Adedeji (1980:10) are as follows: "(...) its function is "to carry out dramatic training designed to develop the use of such media as theatre, film, radio and television in Nigeria and train Nigerians for positions of responsibility in these fields." In addition, the creation of the School of Drama has "(...) provided a new dimension to University education. A discipline that provides a meeting point for the critical and artistic approaches to the study of art within the womb of social consciousness that emphasizes the importance of life and the study of the concrete objects of life demands a new methodology of approach" Adedeji (1980:13-14).

## 5.6. The creation of the Mbari Club

The Mbari Club was a social organization which later became a strong and useful platform for artistic and academic deliberation and training. This club later put the University of Ibadan and Nigeria on the world map as a hub for literary development in Africa. The Mbari Club brought together many Nigerian and foreign playwrights, theatre directors, novelists, poets, theatre designers and others, under the same umbrella for collective reasoning and possible solutions to the various problems facing the continent. One of the major and immediate topics which were the cardinal foci of the Mbari Club at the time was possible ways of liberating South Africa and other parts of Africa which were still in the hands of dictators and oppressive governments.

The Mbari Club contributed immensely to the post-colonial build-up of all forms of arts, but more specifically to theatre and drama (both literary and in practice), in such a way that they were put to use as a viable means of discussing, exposing and informing the larger society of the country about the various ills and vices at the end of colonialism.

The Mbari Club was a catalyst in the development of modern African visual and verbal art. The German scholar, Ulli Beier; the South African writer, Ezekiel Mphahlele; and Nigerian scholars such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, J.P. Clark and Demas Nwoko were the founding members of the first Mbari Club.

In 1962, an additional club was formed by Ulli Beier, Mphahlele and Duro Ladipo (an Osogbo based folk-opera dramatist), to also serve as an artistic and intellectual center to stimulate the people of Osogbo and its environs. This club was called Mbari Mbayo (Adepoju, (2008:665).

In an additional account, Wole Ogundele, a renowned lecturer who has taught Nigerian literary drama for many years, in a personal interview at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria on 10<sup>th</sup> June,

2010, gave an enlightening explanation on the formation of the Mbari literary and artistic club; and equally provided some useful insights into what necessitated its creation:

Many young artists at the beginning of the Sixties that is, immediately after the independence of the country, were looking for a platform to exchange their views and share their various talents and so, in 1961, the Mbari Writers and Artists Club was born in Ibadan, founded by the German writer and critic, Ulli Beier. He was later joined on invitation by Wole Soyinka, Georgina Beier, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Amos Tutuola, Ezekiel Mphahlele, D. O. Fagunwa, Dennis Williams, Demas Nwoko, Uche Okeke, Frances Ademola and Janheinz Jahn (the ethnologist) and many others to mention but a few.

Ogundele also posits as follows:

The Mbari Club was a large-scale project with various activities including visual arts exhibitions, theatres, creative workshops and a publishing house. The latter played a decisive role in the birth of modern African literature; in addition to the writings of its members and adherents, it published the South African artists and writers such as Dennis Brutus and Alex La Guma. For the visual arts, it presented the pioneers, such as the painters Uche Okeke and Yusuf Grillo, the sculptor and painter Demas Nwoko and the silk-screen artist, Bruce Onobrakpeya. All these great individuals later became well known artistes in their respective vocations in the country and abroad.

Adepoju (2008:665), commenting on the remarkable achievement of the Mbari Club, states as follows:

The club provided a space for creative interaction, fueled by its library; sponsored exhibitions of artists of African descent from within Africa and the Diaspora, as well as non-black artists, and ran the magazine *Black Orpheus*, which Beier had founded in 1957 with the pioneering German Africanist Janheinz Jahn. The club developed a publishing house that published what have become iconic works of modern African literature. It also initiated and hosted performances of seminal African theatrical and musical works.

The crucial role of the Mbari Club was the creation of a true movement of contemporary African artists whose ultimate aim was to generate a new artistic culture. They reconciled the continent's cultural traditions with the technical language imported by the colonialists.

It was this same Mbari Club that served as the arena where art icons met to discuss and proffer solutions to the socio-political and economic problems of the country at the period,

and where they got<sup>12</sup> inspiration from, as well as the drive for the struggle for emancipation from postcolonial, socio-political and economic complications that often faces newly independent countries, such as Nigeria. Ogundele (2010) in his interview notes that, “the club marked the beginning of the awakening of the struggle for a better society by many Nigerian artists of various vocations in the country.”

Some of the impact and influence that has been attributed to both the Mbari Club at Ibadan and the Mbari Mbayo Club at Osogbo included the flourishing artistic and academic environment which served as a platform for the unification of Nigerians and other nationals, in a bid to find a common resolution to the socio-political and economic challenges facing the country at the time. By inference, the creation as well as the artistic and academic activities of the Mbari Club and the Mbari Mbayo Club also contributed immensely to the development of arts as a potent tool capable of dissecting the social ills, economic hardship and political unrest in Nigeria in a bid to surmount them. Rea (2006:41) in regards to the foregoing explains that:

Perhaps the most important publishing exercise at this time was the journal *Black Orpheus*. While *the Home*, a student magazine first edited by J.P. Clark, indicated what was to come, it was *Black Orpheus* that catered for the writers and poets of Ibadan as they came into their full maturity. Edited at first by Ulli Beier, a German ex-patriot, who arrived in Ibadan in the 1950s to teach in the University extramural department, the journal included poems and prose by Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, the South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele, Abiola Irele, Ama Ata Aidoo, D.O.Fagunwa and Chinua Achebe (...).

Noticeably, at this period, the association of Wole Soyinka (who later became the co-editor of *Black Orpheus* between 1960 to 1964) and other theatre and drama scholars and practitioners with the Mbari Club and Mbari Mbayo Club was an enhancement which radically sharpened and informed their forms and contents in creating theatre and drama which was well structured to confront the socio-political and economic problems facing the country.

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<sup>12</sup> Many literary works such as poems, novels and plays written by Mbari Mbayo Club members contributed immensely to the beginning of arts as a potent tool capable of dissecting the social ills, economic hardship and political unrest in Nigeria and other parts of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Literary works written by panAfrican writers such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Gabriel Okara, D.O. Fagunwa, Leopold Senghor, Camara Laye, Aime Cesaire, Hampate Ba, Denis Brutus, Kofi Awoonor and host of others, were first published in *Black Orpheus* (the journal that was closely associated to promoting Mbari intellectual works) and edited by Ulli Beier, as magazine of an anthology of New African and Afro-American Stories. *Black Orpheus* eventually ceased publication in 1975.

## **5.7 Characteristics of theatre and drama by the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists**

Unlike Hubert Ogunde's political theatre which started largely with no definite consideration for stage directions and operatic styles of actors singing their lines and progressing to the point of improvisational acting styles by the actors, scripting of dialogue and culminating into the cinemas, the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists such as Soyinka, Clark and many others who came later had always adopted and started creating their plays in the western styles of playwriting.

Their plays followed well-developed plots, well-built characters (minor and major), and went ahead to create conflict resolution as the plays climaxed. The costumes and lighting were adapted to support the themes of the plays, while the stage designs were often considered in the writing of the plays, thereby serving as instructions for the directors when staging the play.

The thematic preoccupations in many of their plays are creatively developed, like well-made plays of realistic plays of Henrik Ibsen. One phenomenon about their published play-texts is their geniuses in combining well-known popular traditions of western playwriting techniques such as dramatic theatre and epic theatre as has been seen in some of their works, even though many among them have occasionally denied any deliberate attempt at conforming to any western tradition, techniques and styles of playwriting.

It must be emphasised that some of the thematic preoccupations and subject matters found in traditional Yoruba theatre and drama such as love, reward of patience, fantasy, jealousy, clash of culture, immoralities, traditions, values, the punishment of evil and compensation of doing good, dramatic biographies of favourite Yoruba heroes as well as some straightforward didactic pieces can also be found in some dramatic works of Nigerian literary dramatists.

According to Omofolabo (2004:626) in relation to this:

There is a preponderance of straight dramas in literary theatre, but there are also many great tragedies and comedies. Themes and subject matters are varied and complex. While thematic construct, dramatic structure and

performances style are clearly Yoruba, there is still a lot of indebtedness to Western traditions in stylistic and technical means of production.

Plays such as *Dance of the Forest* written in 1960 and *Death and King's Horseman* written in 1975 and many others plays by Wole Soyinka depict themes and subject-matters which are similar to that of traditional Yoruba theatre and drama. Also, *Kunrunmi* (1971) and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971) by Ola Rotimi also depict themes and subject matters which have close resemblance to the many stories told in a typical traditional *Alarinjo* performances. Various works by Femi Osofisan, such as *Morountodun* (1979), share themes and subject matters which are related to Yoruba oral literature and performance. The reason for this artistic influence on the various works of modern Nigerian playwrights and others is that they find the Yoruba culture and tradition useful as sources which can provide them the needed materials for creating and telling their story. The Nigerian literary dramatists adapt, tap into and use Yoruba oral literature and performances in their various dramatic works to query, question and ask pertinent questions pertaining to post-independent socio-political and economic situation or condition which has been generally believed to be unfavourable to the Nigeria masses.

### **5.8. The emergence of Wole Soyinka as author in 1960**

Adedeji (1980:16) states that “the theatre in English has since independence produced a number of Nigerian playwrights and dramatists, of whom the most distinguished is also the most politically conscious. He is Wole Soyinka, Africa’s leading creative artist.”

Wole Soyinka, the foremost and no doubt the most popular Nigerian playwright, returned to Nigeria and united with his compatriots after completing his study abroad. However, Soyinka’s first duty to his fatherland was to artistically alert, forewarn and appeal to the sensitivity of Nigerians on the various pertinent issues that were to come as challenges of a post-independent state.

He confirmed his political revolutionary and visionary prowess as a theatre artist who was in touch with the realities of the time and who was sensitive to the various (positive and negative) developments of his society by writing and performing *Dance of the Forest* specifically to felicitate with Nigerians for the attainment of independence on October 1<sup>st</sup>,

1960. Sadly, the cautions Soyinka provided through the use of folklore in *Dance of the Forest*, just like Hubert Ogunde did, in *Yoruba Ronu*, were not appreciated. Yet, the performance of this play marked the beginning of Soyinka's reaction to the fast-growing political immoralities, tensions and disunity in the country which persist till today. Adedeji's (1980:

16) observation in connection to this is clearly expressed:

Since the production of his play *A Dance of the Forest*, written especially for and premiered to mark Nigeria's political independence in 1960, he has become a Colossus that bestrides the African theatre world. *A Dance of the forest* will go down in the history of Nigerian dramatic literature as the play that embodies not only the paradigm of African theatre but also one that uses folklore to communicate a political statement in which the visionary artist shows his consciousness and nationalistic sensitivity. From Soyinka's creative works since that onslaught it has become apparent that the nationalistic spirit that inspired the independence movement has found a new expressive mode to serve a new cause.

Following from Adedeji's account, literary drama was not popular until Soyinka came back from the United Kingdom, shortly before independence. Soyinka was not the only budding Nigerian playwright at the time. His emergence as one of the notable Nigerian English literary dramatists happened at the same time with the emergence of J.P Clark.

Nonetheless, J.P Clark's stature as Soyinka's contemporary evidently dwindled somewhat after four debuts of his most popular plays. Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981:32-33) states this point in his essay:

It used to be the case to affirm that J.P. Clark and Wole Soyinka are Nigeria's foremost and best-known playwrights. That may have been correct only up until about 1975 or thereabout. That view would be contested today. Certainly, Wole Soyinka remains Nigeria's most versatile and enduring dramatist, standing above the others, not in his prolificity but sometimes in the depth of his perception. Clark's stature seems to have dwindled somewhat. For instance, as against Soyinka's fourteen published plays, J.P. Clark's reputation as a major dramatist rests principally on his first four plays- *A Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade*, *The Raft* and *Ozidi*. Perhaps, what ought to be clearly stated in any attempt to re-examine the young history of our literary drama is the fact that so much has happened to Nigerian theatre since Soyinka and Clark came on the scene.

Significantly, Soyinka, after the period under discussion, had written, published, and staged many other plays such as *Opera Wonyosi* (1981), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *The Beatification*

of *Area Boy* (1975), *King Baabu* (2002) and others, while *The Boat* (1981) and *All for Oil* (2000) was the last recorded play written by J. P. Clark.

From the ongoing accounts, Soyinka has resolutely emerged as the most tenacious and politically conscious English literary dramatist of his generation. Right from the dawn of Nigeria's socio-political freedom, Soyinka has accomplished many other laudable milestones via theatre and drama; and even politically, this view is discussed further in aspects of this study. The work of Soyinka and the political engagements to be found in some of his work will be discussed in a later chapter.

### **5.9. The return of Ola Rotimi from America (1968)**

After his return from America in the late 1960s, having studied theatre at Yale University and then later at the University of Boston in the United States of America, Ola Rotimi returned to Nigeria to join the likes of Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark, Dapo Adelugba and Wale Ogunyemi, in the struggle for the emancipation of the Nigerian masses from military dictatorship. Rotimi became popular and gained prominence on the Nigerian stage first, with his good numbers of historical and classical adaptations. This is affirmed by Obafemi (2001:270) when he states that “since the initial historical and classical tragedies discussed in this work (*The gods are not to Blame* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*), Ola Rotimi's theatre has grown more politically committed, addressing realistic contemporary issues more overtly than ever before.”

Rotimi started off by writing plays such as *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*; then *Kunrunmi*, a Yoruba historical play; *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), a Benin historical play, followed by numerous others. And, although he was criticized for allotting too much power, influence and manipulations to the gods and goddesses over the characters and his environment in these three plays, which made many scholars and critics of theatre tag his ideology as being cultural, Rotimi did not relent on his artistic expression. He wrote many more plays which are of immense relevance and importance to the Nigerian society. He proceeded to write and stage plays that sensitized and educated many Nigerians about serious issues which needed urgent attention. The plays included *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1968), a political satire; *If...* (1983), a communal tragedy of the ruled that exposes the continuous failure of the authority to

provide adequate social amenities for the Nigerian masses; *Hopes of The Living Dead* (1985), based on the “lepers’ rebellion” of 1928 – 1932; *Holding Talks* (1979), a drama piece that identifies with theatre of absurd tradition; and *Man Talk, Woman Talk*, a play about gender conflict and struggles.

Ola Rotimi was the brain behind the creation of the popular Ori-Olokun Theatre Company in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria; the theatre company later metamorphosed in the 1970s to the present-day Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun-State, Nigeria. In relation to this, Coker (1992:69-70) opines that no article or discussion on Rotimi would be complete without an examination of the Ori Olokun Theatre, the theatre group Rotimi founded while he was a research fellow at University of Ife.” However, the following statement by Ogunleye (2007:65) explains Ola Rotimi’s role in the creation of Dramatic Arts Department at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile- Ife:

In 1975, Professor Ojetunji Aboyade took over as Vice-Chancellor of the University and he spearheaded the dissolution of Institutes, including the Institute of African Studies, replacing them with teaching departments. For example, the Department of Dramatic Arts was formed and was confronted by the need to absorb the theatre company. Rotimi, who was appointed the head of the Department, was called upon to design a syllabus and opted to start with a Certificate courses for professional theatre practitioners.

Rotimi’s work will be discussed in more depth in a subsequent chapter to highlight the sociopolitical aspects that are found in the plays.

### **5.10 The rise of Femi Osofisan into the Nigerian Theatrical Scene in the 1970s**

The contributions of Femi Osofisan to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performance in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. His conspicuous contributions to the resolution of the post-colonial, socio-political and economic issues faced by the country after independence are noticeable in the thematic preoccupations of a good number of his published works, especially the plays he mostly premiered at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and in the recent times. As Obasi (2013:36) states:

On the other hand, the major themes in his [Osofisan] plays are corruption, injustice, oppression, treachery, self-reliance and perseverance. Others are determination, feminism, compassion, collaboration, blackism and revolution, among others...Like other theatre scholars, past and present, who have the singular task of making their societies conducive for human habitation, Osofisan focuses his energies on themes such as injustice and oppression, selfreliance, corruption, treachery, determination, collaboration, revolution, compassion, among others in their works.

Osofisan is a prolific Nigerian critic, poet, novelist and playwright whose works are directed strongly towards political corruption and injustice. He was educated at the Universities of Ibadan, Dakar and Paris; he is a professor of drama at the University of Ibadan.

He has written and produced many plays, among which are *Midnight Hotel* (1986), *Morountodun, who is Afraid of Solarin? Birthdays are not for the Dying*; and his latest play is *Ajayi Crowther*. His poems, published under the pseudonym 'Okinba Launko', are *Minted Coins and Dream Seeker on Diving Chain*. His writing employs a range of literary devices such as humour, irony, song, dance, folktale and fables. No doubt, Osofisan says one of his favourite books is Toyin Falola's (2004) *A Mouth Sweeter than Salt*; the reason, according to him, being that "the quality of its language, its extraordinary use of proverbs, its humor, its sense of history and the robust and rippling picture it paints of the history and the politics of Ibadan at a time contemporaneous with my own life in the city." A more detailed description and analysis will be provided in subsequent chapters.

## 5.11. Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of the English dramatist in Nigeria (and to a lesser extent) the influence of older, cultural forms in their work. What can be concluded from the historical narrative is that the lead up to independence and the time that followed independence was crucial in the development of socio-political commentary through the arts in Nigeria. The importance of the first drama department at a university, as well as art groups such as Mbali must be highlighted, since these aspects form a context wherein authors (and especially dramatist and theatre-makers) could develop their artistic and critical voices. It can further be concluded that the various dramatists, theatre-makers and academics did not work in isolation. They were continuously in contact with other artist, but also the community which they serve. These connections are important when the socio-political commentary of their work is studied. This complex set of interrelated nodes

is a clear indication that theatre is also a poly-system and that theatre productions, as events, speak from and to the social circumstances where it is created.

This section of this study has also introduced the key factors and contributions of mentioned people to the evolution of literary works, particularly, theatre and drama in Nigeria. It has also set a foundation, and also introduced three distinguished Nigerian theatre scholars and practitioners, namely Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan, who have, over the years, contributed immensely to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup>

The works of other younger playwrights who do not belong to the generation of Wole Soyinka and J.P Clark, such as those of Bode Sowande and Kole Omotoso, who also started emerging at the same time when Femi Osofisan started gaining prominence in the theatre in the early 1980s, are also of relevance in the study. However, since this study has defined its focus of concern, less attention is paid to them in the study.

After the contribution of Hubert Ogunde and his company to the realization of Nigerian's independence in 1960, through series of performances staged in virtually every region of the country to show resistance to British colonialism and imperialism, various Nigerian literary dramatists emerged and another theatre soon gained popularity in the country. As a result, it seemed Hubert Ogunde had recruited; and, in extension, trained more dramatists or theatre artists in preparation for the enormous challenges that lay ahead, such challenges that usually characterize most 'post-colonialist' and 'neo-colonialists' states, such as postcolonial Nigeria. Adedeji (1980:15-16) gives some insights into this new type of theatre gaining popularity in Nigeria when he states: "Although the political situation did not inhibit the popularity of the Yoruba language theatre that had gained its own economic viability in the hands of Chief Hubert Ogunde and his followers, it did create and encourage a new theatrical development which gained momentum with independence—the theatre in the English language."

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<sup>13</sup> This chapter has highlights and discusses some significant developments which have occurred over the years, and have affected the growth of theatre and drama in Nigeria. Consequently, the critical contributions and examination of the works of the Nigerian literary dramatists to the development and evolution of the sociopolitical theatre and drama will be done in the next chapter.

The struggle for a better Nigeria after independence was all-inclusive; in other words, it did not only involve the Nigerian theatre artists and dramatists, it was a collective effort of various individuals and groups in other areas, vocations and from diverse walks of life; as well as artistes in different areas of art. For this reason, Jeyifo (2004:6) says:

In Nigeria alone, there is a large group of writers, artists and musicians who have played prominent roles in placing the arts at the forefront of the nationbuilding, democratic struggles of the last five decades. The group includes, among others, Ola Rotimi, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Sunny Okosun, Molar Ogundipe, Femi Osofisan, Femi Fatoba, Niyi Osundare, Festus Iyayi, Bode Sowande, Iyorwuese Hagher, Funso Aiyejina, Tunde Fatunde, Esiaba Irobi, Olu Obafemi, Tess Onwueme, Salihu Bappa and Ogah Abah. This list can be considerably widened to embrace the role that a highly visible and articulate radical intelligentsia has played in the political life of the country. Indeed, some figures here have created public profiles for themselves almost as visible as Soyinka's public persona as a permanent intellectual dissident of the postindependence system of misrule and inequality: Yusufu Bala Usman, Bala Mohammed, Beko Ransome-Kuti, Gani Fawehinmi, Mokugwo Okoye, Ola Oni, Eskor Toyo, Segun Osoba, Omafume Onoge, Eddie Madunagu and Dipo Fasina. What distinctly marks Soyinka out in this formation is precisely the degree to which he has consistently been prone to taking political and artistic risks most other writer-activists and the whole phalanx of radical academics and intellectuals would consider either totally unacceptable or quixotic, even when they applaud the courage and originality underlying such propensity for risk taking.

Such Nigerian literary dramatists include Wole Soyinka and J.P Clark, both of who belong to the first generation of Nigerian literary dramatists and who emerged at the same period (shortly before 1960). Others who emerged after them, just a few years after the Nigerian independence, and through the same process of 'westernized education' included Ola Rotimi, who came aboard in 1963, but became popular after his second play *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* in 1966 (his first play titled *To Stir the God of Iron* in 1963 has no record of publication). Femi Osofisan with his debut play, *Oduduwa, Don't Go!* in 1968 only became famous in 1975 when he staged *The Restless Run of Locusts*. These three Nigerian literary dramatists and theatre directors (Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan) have over the years, remained most prolific in terms of artistic contribution and achieving of indelible landmarks on the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria.

Besides Soyinka and J. P. Clark who were pre-independence literary dramatists, others belong to the post-independence era dramatists, and they came with divergent philosophies and unique perspectives on what or how drama and theatre should be

appropriated in addressing a series of socio-political and economic issues prevalent in the country. While some of their works celebrated some aspects of Nigerian culture, customs and traditions, some are seen to have castigated other aspects of it; then, there were noticeable areas where issues bordering on socio-political and economic situation of the country at different points in history are brought to the fore.

Before the emergence of the Nigerian literary dramatists or any other group or individual literary writers in the country, there is evidence of a historical account of a play titled *King Elejigbo* written by D.O. Oyedele in 1904. Ogunba (undated:1) in *Nigerian Drama*, (an online version) states as follows:

Soon, there was a clamour for works based on indigenous Nigerian subject matter, and one D. O. Oloyede is said to have written a play entitled 'King Elejigbo' (1904) in response to the call. The play cannot now be traced, but there are references to it in the Lagos theatre reviews of the period. This theatre tradition did not last beyond the first decade of the twentieth century. Politics was already in the air in Lagos and in other parts of Nigeria, and many of the leading spirits behind the Lagos Theatre Movement, like Herbert Macaulay, soon found politics more attractive than the theatre.

The literary and artistic concern of many writers of theatre and drama in Africa, specifically towards and during independence of many African nations, has always been self-rule, the type of self-rule that encompasses socio-political and economic independence. Writers such as Leopold Sédar Senghor, Sembene Ousmane, Camara Laye, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, J.P Clark, Kofi Awoonor, Ayi Kwei Armah and many others, in their various works and in their individual ways of life, laid importance on Africanism. Emphasis was laid on doing things in African ways and manner. Omotoso (2009:28) corroborates this assertion when he argues as follows: "The first generation of modern African writers writing towards the end of colonial rule in Africa, wrote against the background of the pan-African movement, a blanket answer to pan-Europeanism."

Writers such as Ola Rotimi, Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Niyi Osundare, Bode Sowande, Wale Ogunyemi, Tunde Fatunde, Tess Onwueme, Kole Omotoso and others in the area of theatre and drama that evolved later on may have shared their aspirations and sentiments. Yet, they harbored serious concerns and aspirations towards better sociopolitical and economic conditions for the people of Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole.

The narratives of the worsening socio-political condition in most African countries in the 1960s, down to this present age, is dominated by images of institutional 'fragility', lack of socio-political and economic legitimacy, if not an outright 'collapse' and/or 'failure' in some cases. In addition, having survived the scourge of colonialism and imperialism in the past, most African countries, especially Nigeria, was faced with series of obvious socio-political and economic upheaval with dire consequences. Ogunba (1978: x) states that:

With the coming of independence, African countries (usually a fortuitous agglomeration of ethnic groups) have had to face the problems of a new ethos, that is, the creation of a new synthesis out of so many unlike entities. In the same way, a new individualism appears to be supplanting the communalism of the past. Materialism has also become increasingly fierce amidst the general poverty and debasement of the majority. All these things seem to have provoked young artists to creative endeavor and many of them have chosen the dramatic medium to give expression to their vision.

The consequences of independence for many African countries are abject poverty, lack of good infrastructure such as good roads, regular supply of potable water, provision of good health care and services just to mention a few. In addition, the crime rate and issues associated with incessant insecurity and loss of lives and properties all over the country became rampant and almost uncontrollable. All these became issues of great concerns to the Nigerian theatre artistes, scholars, making them rise up in the attempt to address the menace as it threatened the collective survival of the Nigerian people. Osofisan (1997:12) in his inaugural lecture provides an insight to the background of what culminated to the postindependence violence and problem in Nigeria:

The decisive point, if we had been wise enough to note it, should have been that violent morning in January 1966, when some giant woods in our first civilian cabinet were savagely cut down by impetuous, idealistic reformers from the attacks. From that moment, it seems, we signed our covenant with anomy. That primitive shedding of blood, which we applauded- foolishly now, in retrospect-was to be the opening prologue to a series of catastrophic events which would later usher in the Age of Terror, which has now set upon us, and from which there seems to be no immediate possibility of reprieve.

Historically, the impact of theatre and drama on socio-political and economic related issues in post-independence Nigeria could be said to be confrontational; a deliberately directed,

concerted effort against the terror that besieged and contaminated the country's political atmosphere after independence. The Nigerian theatre artists, dramatists and scholars at this period began to use theatre and drama to create consciousness, praxis, and to disseminate vital messages to the entire nation in a way it had never been done or experienced before. Adedeji (1980: 17) states that "the use of the theatre as an instrument for socio political change in Nigeria has received the critical attention of Nigerian politicians, especially those with power. They tend to keep a watchful eye on the theatre artist" in the ongoing sociopolitical struggles.

Umukoro (1994: 11) provides some explanations of the circumstances that led to the colossal disenchantment which immediately followed the independence:

But once political independence was achieved, the focus changed primarily because the pre-independence mood of anticipation and excitement gave way to that of disillusionment and despair. It was discovered that the nationalist elite, who took over power from the British after independence were out to preserve their privileges; to dominate and exploit the mass of the Nigerian people; and to perpetuate the culture of dependency in the country.

Notably, the grievances of the populace against the ruling-class were nepotism, corruption, tribalism and ethnicity, all of which was in sharp contrast to the promised and much anticipated 'good governance' and fair ruling of the country.

Adedeji (1980: 15) blamed the British colonial masters for these evident excesses and other vices of the nationalist elite as well as the disunity among the newly emerged ruling class (the nationalist elite). He says: "It will be recalled that Nigerian nationalism had been punctured by such divisive forces as tribalism and regionalism. Regionalism, which was nurtured by the British before the granting of independence, had matured with political groupings along tribal lines. Tribal loyalty, tribal affinities, and even tribal felicities had become spices for the savoury of political indulgences." Astonishingly, one would have thought such occurrences would not or should not have happened since these new sets of ruling-class were themselves Nigerians who witnessed, experienced, and reacted against the British aggressions and maltreatments towards their fellow Nigerians. They were supposed to understand the past sufferings, since the nation was no longer under the forceful governance of the British.

Ironically, these were the same sets of mainly 'learned individuals' who were expected to know the true values and definitions of liberal-democracy and good governance, and who saw themselves as 'liberation fighters' under the auspices of the Nigerian Nationalists Movements.

The important question to ask at this point is: What then could have been responsible for such negative attitudes of these newly appointed leaders towards the poor masses of Nigeria? From the larger context or perspective within many years of the political history of Africa, the African political classes are well known to have set out to preserve their privileges and to dominate and exploit the masses of their people.

The so-called freedom fighters and liberation movements' fight for and demand for sociopolitical and economic freedom of their countries. Sometimes, the freedom fighters and liberation movements engage in bloody and confrontational struggles or in peaceful negotiations, or a combination of both. Then, once in control of power, they begin to punish, maltreat, marginalize, and persecute their people who have accorded them the legitimacy and the much-needed support in realizing the freedom of their country from colonialists and slave masters.

Their routine is familiar and has a popular stereotype: the African 'freedom fighters' or 'the liberation's movement', who enjoy the support and cooperation of the vast majority, if not the entire populace, depending on the level of unity and collectivism among their people during the struggle for independence often disappoint the masses who gave their movement legitimacy and supported them.

**PART 2**

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTED LITERARY  
DRAMATISTS TO THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIO-  
POLITICAL THEATRE AND DRAMA PERFORMANCE  
IN NIGERIA**

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF SELECTED LITERARY DRAMATISTS TO THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL THEATRE AND DRAMA PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

#### 6.1 The theatre and drama of Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka is one of the highly creative Nigerian theatre and drama practitioners and scholars who have succeeded in using social commentary in his theatre and drama. He became famous for his dramatic published and staged plays, and for his revues and sketches which were largely performed in the form of guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda styles at various instances and periods in the country. Yerima (2005:83) confirms that "*Home to Roost* and *Big Game Safari* were the only scripts written by Soyinka and performed by the Guerrilla Theatre Unit of Ife." His contribution to the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama performance in Nigeria is hugely significant and began shortly after the country's independence. A brief investigation into Soyinka's life and theatrical achievements will highlight his contribution to the evolution of socio-political theatre in Nigeria.

#### 6.2 Abridged biography of Wole Soyinka

The Nigerian playwright, novelist and poet, Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka (Wole Soyinka) was born on July 13, 1934 in Ake, Abeokuta in the former Western Region, now known as Ogun State, Nigeria. His father was Samuel Ayodele Soyinka, a Canon in the Anglican Church and also Headmaster of St. Peter's School in Abeokuta. His mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka, was a local market shop owner and political activist within the women's movement in the local community in Abeokuta. Soyinka was the second of six children; he grew up in an Anglican mission compound, but also followed indigenous Yoruba religious traditions because of his family's closeness to Yoruba culture and tradition.

Soyinka grew up in an atmosphere of religious syncretism with both Yoruba and Western influences. While he was raised in a religious family, attending church services and singing in the choir from an early age, he later became an atheist. Soyinka (1981) discussed his

childhood in one of his memoirs titled, *Aké: The Years of Childhood*, where he recounts how various influences became a part of his growing up.

Soyinka attended St. Peters Primary School in Abeokuta in 1940, and proceeded to Abeokuta Grammar School in 1946. He continued his studies at Government College in Ibadan, which was one of the highly-rated colleges in the country at the time. After his study at Government College, Ibadan in 1952, he progressed to BA studies in English at University College in Ibadan between 1952 and 1954, and achieved his Bachelor's Degree in English Literature at Leeds University in the United Kingdom in 1958. While in Leeds, Soyinka worked as a script reader, actor and director at the Royal Court Theatre, London.

He returned to Nigeria, and was appointed as a lecturer at the school of Drama at the University of Ibadan, where he became politically active. He apparently played a major role in trying to avert the first major post-colonial bloodshed, following the military coup of January 1966. Jeyifo (2004:7) sheds more light on this:

Barely two years after this incident, on the eve of the Nigerian civil war, Soyinka contacted elements within the Biafran secessionist leadership, making no secret of this visit to Biafra if not of the details of what transpired with his contacts there, even though at this particular time such action was considered highly treasonous by the Nigerian federal military regime, with its large clutch of fractious, rabidly anti-Biafran military and civilian zealots. [Soyinka was] ... [a]pprehended for this action but never formally indicted or tried, Soyinka was held in gaol for the entire duration of the civil war, most of this in solitary confinement.

Soyinka was consequently imprisoned from September 1967 to 1969 because of the pacifying role he played during the civil war between the Federal Government of Nigeria and Biafra (the region which attempted to secede from Nigeria in 1967). While in prison, he was refused access to materials such as books, pens, and paper; nonetheless, he still wrote a significant body of literary works and notes aimed at criticizing the Nigerian government for what he perceived as a 'senseless war'. Later, in October 1969, when the civil war came to an end, amnesty was proclaimed by the Federal Government of Nigeria, and Soyinka and many other political prisoners were freed from jail. Soyinka, concerned about the deteriorating socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria as a result of bad leadership, resigned his appointment, disengaged from his duties at the University of Ibadan, and went into years of voluntary exile in April, 1971. Jeyifo (2004:8) add that:

Perhaps the most 'uncharacteristically' populist of his cultural production in the cause of political activism are his effective forays into the domains of popular culture through the use of media like music and film for biting satire against the corruption and brazen brigandage of the Nigerian political class, and for making rousing calls for the dispossessed and the disenfranchised masses to take their fate in their own hands. The film, *Blues for a Prodigal* was made in 1983 (but released in 1984) the story is based on actual events, which depicts the maximum use of violence and intimidation by the ruling party of Shehu Shagari, the Nigerian president.

Between 1975 and 1984, Soyinka again turned politically active through his artistic work; he criticized the corrupt government of the then democratically elected President Shehu Shagari, whose regime was marred by of series of corrupt practices. Some of the President's ministers such as Umaru Dikko was reported to have embezzled and transferred millions of the country's monies abroad without proper authorization or permission. Soyinka continued his condemnation of the Nigerian government even when the military junta led by General Muhammadu Buhari and other top military officers took over governance through series of coups and counter coups in 1983. Wole Soyinka was consistently at war with the Nigerian military governments till the democratically elected government of President Olusegun Obasanjo took over from the last military head of State, Gen. Abdusalam Abubarkar, on May 29, 1999.

In essence, Soyinka used theatre and drama as a tool for agitation in the country against the Nigerian military during the periods of the military incursions which took place between 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1966 and 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999, (although there was a short-lived return to democracy between 1979 up until 1983) when the country eventually returned to democracy.

From the point of military incursion, the Nigerian military were exceedingly hostile towards Nigerian media, drama and theatre practitioners. Esiaba (1989:14) cited Soyinka's ordeal under the military junta: "Soyinka stayed and tried to be pragmatic what happened to him? His house was vandalized... he had to cross the borders on foot by night to escape into the West."

Soyinka has won numerous laureates, accolades, and awards over his lifetime for his contribution to the freedom of the less privileged and the oppressed in the society, both in Nigeria and abroad. He is widely acknowledged as an erudite writer of novels, poetry, autobiographical works and for his active intellectual criticism. The climax of his success

came when he became the first African writer ever to be awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.

### 6.3 Wole Soyinka's drama and staged plays

Wole Soyinka's presence in the Nigerian theatre and drama scene, which culminated in the agitation for socio-political and economic sovereignty, was the desire of the majority of Nigerians. According to Jeyifo (2004:3), Soyinka returned to Nigeria the year before independence. Adedeji (1980:16) states that, "The theatre in English has since independence produced a number of Nigerian playwrights, of whom the most distinguished is also the most politically conscious. He is Wole Soyinka, African's leading creative artist. Since the production of his play 'A dance of the Forest,' written especially for and premiered to mark Nigeria's political independence in 1960, he has become a Colossus that bestrides the African theatre world..."

Soyinka's dramatic plays are numerous and they all touch on various subject matters through the use of diverse writing styles and genres. He founded "Nineteen-Sixty Masks", his first Theatre Company in 1960 which later presented his first set of major plays after his return from England. He also founded "Orisun Theatre Company" in 1964. Some of his most accessible published and staged plays are:

*Keffi's Birthday Treat* (1954),

*The Invention* (1957),

*The Swamp Dwellers* (performed in 1958 and published in 1963),

*A Quality of Violence* (1959), *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959),

*A Dance of the Forests* (performed in 1960, published in 1963),

*My Father's Burden* (1960),

*The Strong Breed* (performed in 1966 and published in 1963),

*Before the Blackout* (1964),

*Kongi's Harvest* (performed in 1965 and published in 1967),

*The Trials of Brother Jero* (performed in 1974; published in 1973),

*The Lion and the Jewel* (performed in 1959, and published in 1963),

*The Road* (1965),

*Madmen and Specialists* (performed in 1970 and published in 1971),

*The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973),

*Camwood on the Leaves* (1973),

*Jero's Metamorphosis* (performed in 1974, and published in 1973),  
*Death and the King's Horseman* (performed in 1976 and published in 1975),  
*Opera Wonyosi* (performed in 1977 and published in 1981),  
*Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985),  
*Sixty-Six* (1984),  
*A Play of Giants* (1984),  
*From Zia with Love* (1992),  
*The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996),  
*King Baabu* (2001),  
*Etiki Revu Wetin* (date of first production and publication not known), and  
*Alapata Apata* (2011).

Various sources indicate that the above dramatic plays were first premiered on Nigerian stages before they were staged in other parts of the world, often directed by Soyinka himself, or by his theatre and drama associate and enthusiasts such as Dapo Adelugba. There are even indications that he personally acted in some of these plays. Osofisan (1978:153-154) describes that Soyinka as a versatile actor. He stresses further that “[b]efore Soyinka, there were no professional theatre company to undertake the production of plays in English” in Nigeria. Unfortunately, Soyinka’s detention in 1967 by the Federal Military Government more or less halted the growth of the later company [Orisun Theatre], even though Dapo Adelugba bodily kept the company running.” Osofisan’s revelation explains why Soyinka at many occasions directed and produced most of his plays himself, except when he was in incarceration under the military rule.

Many of Soyinka’s plays have been read as literature texts, staged as normal performances or workshops at various tertiary institutions and conventional theatres. The acceptance and prominence of Soyinka and some of his works can thus be seen as the recognition of his creative acumen, and a platform which is readily available for intellectual discussion on African theatre, drama and literature in a broader perspective. Osofisan’s (1978:155) position affirmed this view: “It is evident, therefore, from the forgoing that Soyinka’s influence has been quite extensive on contemporary Nigerian theatre, indeed, on the entire field of literary creativity in the country.”

The review of some theatre and drama literature in this study reveals that apart from the aforementioned published dramatic and staged plays, there are other forms of theatrical performance by Soyinka in the form of revues and sketches which had more direct sociopolitical and economic themes in them—even more importantly, the forms were directly used by Soyinka and his associates while he was at the Dramatic Arts Department of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria as a lecturer. While he was the Head of Department at the institution in 1978 that he founded his third Theatre Company, “Unife Guerrilla Theatre”. The company was located outside of the campus of the university, and several radical dramas in forms of sketches and revues were performed at markets and on street corners, confronting corruption and political oppression. His troupe achieved the goal of confrontational drama by collaboration with the local communities, exploring their problems and expressing some of their grievances in the dramatic sketches.

#### **6.4 Soyinka, J.P Clark and other literary dramatists**

The return of Wole Soyinka from Britain to Nigeria before the country gained independence symbolizes a reunion with his compatriots such as J.P Clark. Clark had returned to the country earlier, after their studies abroad. Soyinka’s return and that of others who had gone abroad to study represents a personal passion for the development of their nation, and can also be described as an artistic commitment or engagement. Several other artistes from different vocations also embarked on this collective nation building effort, to ensure that the future of the country was salvaged from the prevalent societal ills. Using the arts, Soyinka’s first duty to Nigeria was to sensitize Nigerians on the various pertinent issues and challenges that were to unfold in the post-independence country.

At the right time in the socio-political history of Nigeria, he confirmed his political, revolutionary and visionary prowess as a theatre artist in touch with the realities of the time, being sensitive to the various developments in his society. Going by this, at Nigeria’s independence, Wole Soyinka performed his *Dance of the Forests* which had a theme which forewarned of the inherent complications associated with self-liberation or independence from the colonial masters. Jeyifo (2004:10-11) provides a vivid background on the performance of *Dance of the Forests* when he recounts:

For instance, nothing then in existence in Nigerian or African literature quite provided anticipation or inspiration for the sheer audacity, the artistic gamble of a work like *A Dance of the Forests*, the very first full-length play written and staged by Soyinka. Without a pre-existing company of professional Englishlanguage actors highly trained in the theatre and with years of perfected performance style or staging experience to its credit, 'The Masks,' the newly formed company Soyinka put together for that first production of this play, had the odds stacked heavily against it when the company mounted the play in October as part of the celebrations for Nigeria's independence. With a sprawling plot and a large cast of characters derived in conception from such diverse sources as *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the world of Yoruba ritual drama and cultic masque, as well as the 'forest phantasmagoria' of folklore, the play attempted to yoke together into an artistic whole vastly disparate African and Western theatre and performance traditions which had never before then remotely been in contact. And as an item in the new nation's independence celebrations, the play's subject matter also calculatedly set the sights against the euphoria of the moment by insisting on exploring, not the glorious achievements of the past, but its crimes and evils, suggesting thereby that the sort of 'new' beginnings touted in independence from colonialism is fraught with unexorcised moral and psychic maladjustments. Neither the contemporary reception of the play and its staged production, nor subsequent critical commentaries on the play indicate that the artistic gamble quite paid off, that 'The Masks' was quite up to the challenge of the play's synthetization of disparate African and Western theatrical and performance styles and idioms, or that the profound moral and political vision of the play found communicable rendition appropriate to the playwright's apparent intentions to confront his nation at a crucial historical moment.

Soyinka's tireless agitation, artistic caution and advice to the newly-emerging Nigerian politicians at the time, all of which was the theme of the performance in the play, were thrown to the winds. As a consequence, the performance of this play marked the beginning of Soyinka's full-fledged battle against political tyranny and disunity in the country. *A Dance of the Forests* (performed in 1960, and published in 1963) by Soyinka and another play by Hubert Ogunde titled *Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba Think)* in 1966 which employed the use of folklore and other Yoruba cultural and traditional artistic properties can be seen as two distinctive artistic performances that foretold the future of the Nigerian socio-political and economic situation. While one might have argued that J.P. Clark and Soyinka were contemporaries, it is important to note that Clark's stature as Soyinka's contemporary dwindled after four debuts of his most popular plays (Ogunbiyi, 1981:32-33).

While many theatre and drama work of his other contemporaries are seen as lacking some elements of continuity as regards portraying issues of major concern in the country, Soyinka has resolutely emerged as the most-tenacious and politically conscious English literary dramatist of his generation. He has continually remained at the forefront, right from

the time Nigerians began a collective agitation for socio-political freedom, and has had many other laudable achievements in theatre and drama. The bulk of the works of his contemporaries that emerged at the same time with him, such as the works of J.P Clark still enjoy some degree of attention and staging occasionally in many Nigerian theatre and drama schools.

## **6.5 The beginning of Wole Soyinka's contribution to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama in Nigeria**

Although there is no record that Soyinka's active contribution to the nationalist struggle resulted in independence for Nigeria, coinciding with the period Ogunde championed the struggle for independent Nigeria, his artistic contribution to the socio-political and economic reality shortly after independence is a fact. Jeyifo (2004:14) maintains: "The combination in Soyinka's career of political risk taking with a propensity for artistic gambles reveals a convergence of aesthetic and political radicalism which, apart from Soyinka, we encounter only in a few other African writers."

Wole Soyinka's contribution is enormously meaningful. His metaphorical play, "*A Dance of the Forests*", symbolically represents his first assignment as an artist whose concern and commitment are eternal. The play, according to Adedeji (1980: 16), "(...) embodies not only the paradigm of African theatre but [is] also one that uses folklore to communicate a political statement in which the visionary artist shows his consciousness and nationalistic sensitivity". Adedeji is certain about this:

From Soyinka's creative works since that onslaught it has become apparent that the nationalistic spirit that inspired the independence movement has found a new expressive mode to serve a new cause. In this light Soyinka's deliberate use of the theatre not only to mirror the conscience of the people but also to pave the way for the cultivation of transcendentalism, is seen as a purposeful social and political commitment. (1980:16)

Soyinka was relentless in his efforts to ensure that his works serve as the mouthpiece of the less-privileged masses in the society. Indeed, his involvement put the socio-political and economic issues firmly on the agenda in his subsequent theatrical performances which followed the performance of *A Dance of the Forest* in 1960. He had written and performed at least five major plays, such as *Keffi's Birthday Treat* (1954), *The Invention* (1957), *The*

*Swamp Dwellers* (1958), *A Quality of Violence* (1959) and *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), before performing *A Dance of the Forest* in 1960.

His visions in many of his plays are multifaceted. For example, one part deals with social and economic injustices through vices such as religious exploitation of the poor masses (as depicted in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* where Brother Jero represents a fake prophet), a scenario which is still very much relevant to the present-day Africa. Some of his other plays are overtly against tyranny, nepotism and corruption of any form by oppressive regime in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Mireku-Gyimah (2013:270) in her analysis of the play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, describes it as such:

In Scene One, which serves as introduction to the play, Soyinka prepares us by skilfully giving us a feel of all that is to happen and will constitute his themes and criticism of fake Christian religion. He ridicules and condemns in no uncertain terms Brother Jeroboam (Jero), as a shame-less, self-confessed rogue of a beach divine, who embodies all the evils of fake Christianity and its leadership together with the Old Prophet, Jero's master. (...)

In a derogatory self-introduction, Soyinka reveals to the audience the true nature of this man of God through this man's own words and commentary on his own actions. He turns out to be the very opposite of what he is supposed to be. Jero, who claims to be a prophet 'by birth and by inclination, is just a quack. To him the ministry is only a trade: it is just a means to fill his stomach and acquire property, and he will stop at nothing to protect his own selfish interests even if this means hurting others'. When Jero says '...I was born a natural prophet. And I grew to love the trade', the word 'trade' becomes ambiguous: does 'trade' refer to the prophethood, ordinarily, or it refers to a profit-making business where the accent is on money-consciousness? We realize that Jero takes his prophetic job as a trade, meaning a profit-oriented venture and, therefore, we understand Jero's idea of being a prophet as a money-siphoning activity. This idea of the work of God as a money-making business is reinforced later by Jero's perception of the flock as customers. Jero even confesses that: I always get that feeling every morning that I am a shopkeeper waiting for customers (Soyinka, 1964:20). With the ambiguity of words in this scene, Soyinka criticizes Jero's materialism.

In other plays such as *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), more concerned with social concern and issues than politics, Soyinka satirizes Lakunle, a school teacher who struggles between his new-found Westernized way of life and the Yoruba culture and tradition into which he was born. The performance of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* amongst others portray the technique of total theatre, where music, dance, non-verbal movement, mime, acrobatic display and chants are all used in communicating with the audience. According to Kumar (2011:2) "[t]he plays focuses on the failure of an elementary school teacher to apprehend

the sense of culture, advancement or civilization.” Lakunle symbolically represents many Africans, not necessarily Yorubas, who, through their encounter with Western culture, devalued their African heritage in a number of social spheres. Lakunle sees many elements of his culture, for example, ‘bride price’ (a required amount of money for marrying a lady in Yoruba culture and tradition) as an obsolete requirement of custom. His low level of comprehension of his culture and tradition is well dramatized by Soyinka in brooding humour and satire in the play.

Unlike Lakunle, Sidi, another character in this play, and a beautiful village girl, represents a conformist with the Yoruba culture and tradition which expresses values and respect for the rules and regulations of the land. She attaches value to the fact that she is a virgin. Therefore, whoever proposes to marry her must fulfil all the requirements attached to the value of the Yoruba people, respecting her customs satisfactorily and also fulfilling the entire requirements for proper marriage, which is primarily about ‘keeping herself for her future husband’. The following excerpt of the play is a conversation between Sidi and Lakunle, when Lakunle asks for her hand in marriage in an unacceptable manner:

**“SIDI:** Now there you go again.  
 One little thing  
 And you must chirrup like a cockatoo.  
 You talk and talk and deafen me With  
 words which always sound the same And  
 make no meaning.  
 I’ve told you, and I say it again I  
 shall marry you today, next week  
 Or any day you name.  
 But my bride-price must first be paid....  
 But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have The  
 full bride-price. Will you make me A  
 laughing-stock? Well, do as you please.  
 But Sidi will not make herself A cheap  
 bowl for the village spit....  
 They will say I was no virgin...  
 That I was forced to sell my shame  
 And marry you without a price. (Soyinka, 1963:8)

**LAKUNLE:** Ignorant girl, can you not understand?  
 To pay the price would be  
 To buy a heifer off the market stall.  
 You’d be my chattel, my mere property. No  
 Sidi! [Very tenderly.]

When we wed, you shall not walk or sit Tethered,  
 as it were, to my dirtied heels.  
 Together we shall sit at table  
 --Not on the floor-- and eat  
 Not with fingers, but with knives  
 And forks, and breakable plates  
 Like civilized beings." (Soyinka, 1963:9)

In his political plays such as *King Babu* (performed in 2001 and published in 2002), common African authoritarian leadership and Soyinka's disenchantment with the Nigerian society as a whole is expressed through the use of satire and intertext. In *the Beatification of Area Boy* (1995), Soyinka uses humour and fine poetic style as well as his gift of irony and satire and accurately matching the language of his complex characters to their social position and moral qualities. In the play Soyinka interrogates the position of power against the less-privileged in Nigeria. He dramatizes the socio-economic condition of a group of Area Boys (being sets of poor individuals with no economic power and also known for stealing valuables from their targets) in Lagos Island, which tells the love story between Sanda, the leader of the Area Boys, and Miseyi, her lover. Soyinka examines the particular roles played by the society: power in dehumanizing the young and agile youths in Nigeria whom the society describes as thugs, extortionists and hooligans and whose duty it is to terrorise people.

In Soyinka's other dramas, various Western elements are adeptly fused with subject matter and dramatic techniques deeply rooted in Yoruba folklore and religion. Symbolism, flashback and ingenious plotting all contribute to a rich dramatic structure.

## **6.6 A short background to Nigeria's post-independence tumultuous history**

When Soyinka addresses the audience at the Loeb Drama Centre, United States of America, in 1981, he points out that "Guerrilla theatre involves a subversive activity even when it appears to be an appendage of the power structure." Soyinka's guerrilla's theatre at Ile-Ife clearly involved various occasion of rebellious against the Government of the past administration in Nigeria. However, the discussion on Soyinka's guerrilla theatre cannot be done in a vacuum. There is a cause for his choice of theatre of which one was the socio-political and economic tension of the day. A background discussion is crucial for the general understanding and discussion which will be articulated in this section of the thesis.

In 1914, Nigeria merged in what was known as the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorate. Adedeji (1980:5) comments that “[t]he political exercise that brought all these about took place in 1914, the year of the amalgamation of the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria together with the Colony of Lagos under the sagacious leadership of Lord Federick Douglas Lugard, the first Governor General.” The merger of the various parts of Nigeria was done by the Colonial Administrators with doubtful tones of transparency across the nation’s stakeholders. The sense of a united Nigeria however began with full manifestation of self-government after independence in 1960. Consequently, the need for indigenous leaders to take over the mantle of leadership and steer the wheel of the country became imperative.

After the transition of power, the expectation of many Nigerians was a carefully formulated political formation and sharing of political positions among all the regions in the country. Balanced self-governance in the country warranted a cautiously drafted formula for rotational governance, as the entity called Nigeria does not belong to a single protectorate; it is now an inclusive deal of membership.

The British handed over the mantle of leadership to the Nigerian Nationalist’s leaders in 1960, although the struggle and agitation for self-rule and governance had started in the 1920s by Hubert Macaulay who is renowned as the founder of the Nigerian’s Nationalists Movement. After the demise of Macaulay, other notable members of the Nationalist’s movement such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, the first democratically elected President of Nigeria in 1960, Ahmadu Bello, the First Northern Premier, Obafemi Awolowo, the first Southern Premier, and others followed.

Many of these Nigerian politicians very soon became corrupt, ethically biased and in addition, derailed from the vision for a better Nigeria where people from all the regions will be treated equally. Disillusionment became the order of the day and what then followed in 1966 was the first Nigerian Military *coup d’etat*. The military officers of Igbo descent overthrew the democratically-elected government of Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, alongside other notable politicians in 1966 through a bloody coup.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria was ruled between 15th of January, 1966 until May 29, 1999, when the former military Head of State, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo took over as a

civilian president. Obasanjo again emerged as Democratic President in the April, 1999 election under the People's Democratic Party (PDP). A short-lived democratic dispensation between 1979 and 1982 followed. The democratically elected president at the time was Alhaji Shehu Shagari. However, his mandate ended abruptly through a *coup d'état* executed by Gen. Mohammadu Buhari and his compatriot (Late) Gen. Babatunde Idiagbon.

The military were initially declared as Nigeria's saving grace but people soon saw them as corrupt sets of selfish men in uniform. They embezzled the country's huge monetary reserve and in turn plunged the country into a rather poor political and economic state. Adeoti (2003:6—7) asserts that "... the soldiers were celebrated initially as messiahs who rescued the polity from corrupt politicians; they became vampires in the 1980s and 1990s after plunging the nation into political turmoil and economic tribulation."

After independence in October 1960, Nigeria experienced what could be described as her worst post-colonial turmoil in the hands of the newly elected nationalists who turned politicians. The country gradually sunk into poverty, corruption ethno-religious conflicts, nepotism and lack of basic infrastructures. This led to the first *coup d'état* in Nigeria on 15 January 15 1966. On the other hand, some groups of young military officers had also alleged that the idea of quota system in the Nigerian army yielded nothing, and rather favoured some ethnic groups than others. The result of their grievances and disgruntled attitude was the first coup which still hunts the country to this day, because of the gruesome murder of some of Nigerian politicians and military officers. Abaya (2008: 21 - 22) is quite clear on this:

Coming to the immediate cause of the fall of the first republic was the constitutional stalemate following the 1964 general elections and the violence that attended the 1965 Western Nigeria's parliamentary elections. The politicians did not play the political game according to the constitutional and regulatory rules. It was the winner-takes-all and always the winner syndrome. This state of affairs apparently angered the five majors and with their cohorts who felt the anomalies. The political tension was further aggravated by the Tiv riot that threatened the corporate existence of the country. Hence, on 15th January, 1966, the civilian government of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was ousted in a dawn coup announced from Kaduna by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. Unfortunately, some of the military officers that staged the coup seemed to have allowed tribal sentiments and prejudices to becloud their sense of judgment.

On August 1, 1966, Gen. Yakubu Gowon took over the mantle of power and promised to hand over power to a democratically elected government—but Gowon never fulfilled his promise to Nigerians and faulted on his promise in 1974. Gowon was also “accused of allowing a dangerous class of indigenous exploiters in close collaboration with foreign marauders emerging on the Nigerian scene.” He was overthrown in a bloodless coup on July 29, 1975.

Major General Murtala Mohammed then became the Head of State. Abaya (2008: 24) confirms: “The nation has been grouping in the dark and situation would inevitably result in chaos and bloodshed if not arrested” (*Daily Times*, August 4, 1975). The military regime of Gen. Murtala Mohammed took a number of steps to reform his newly constituted government and consequently sacked some public officers and dismissed twelve military governors who were found culpable during Gowon’s regime. Murtala’s reform appeared to have satisfied the yearnings of Nigerians until he was assassinated on February 13, 1976 by Col. Dimka. The latter accused Murtala of highhandedness; he cited that his regime was too harsh to the Nigerian populace with his many authoritarian military decrees. Dimka’s coup was not successful and he was executed alongside his cohorts according to the military rules and dictates.

General Olusegun Obasanjo, who was Murtala’s second in command, soon became the Head of State and he was “able to build a new pro-civilian political culture” (Abaya, 2008: 25). Obasanjo’s military government handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari peacefully on October 1, 1979. His democratically elected tenure was nonetheless soon short-lived, after he and his political allies were accused of massive corruption and looting of the country’s resources.

On 31st of December, 1983, Alhaji Shehu Shagari’s government was usurped by Gen. Mohammed Buhari. Buhari’s government was determined to turn the socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria around for good. Thus, he secured the much-needed support from Nigerians because of his style of strict and disciplined culture, which people believed would help restructure Nigeria for positive growth. He impressed the people because of his progressive economic programmes which promoted socio-economic growth. Abaya (2008: 25) posited that “[h]is regime attempted to address the problems of indiscipline and the ailing economy.” However, his approach did not go down well with some factions of the

military and what followed was another coup plot on August 27, 1985 led by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida.

The Nigeria's populace had become tired of coup and counter-coup at this period, but nonetheless, the Babangida government who was seen by many as the solution to the various lingering problems facing the country, eventually became one of the most corrupt military governments in Nigeria. Corruption and other vices became more widespread under Babangida regime, if possible.

Adeoti (2003: 28) summarises the second coming of the military from General Muhammadu Buhari to General Abdul Salam Abubakar:

The second coming of military rule was premised on failure of democracy indexed by breach of law and order, inept and corrupt leadership, collapse of social utilities, unemployment, porous economy etc. however, the noose of autocracy became tighter between 1984 and 1999. From General Muhammadu Buhari to General Abdul Salaam Abubakar, repression was more brazen power, and by extension resources of the state, became increasingly personalized. Corruption still persisted and hopes for poverty eradication dimmed in spite of several anti-poverty programmes of each military administration.

The missing name from the list of those who ruled Nigeria as military Head of State is that of (late) General Sani Abacha. General Abacha took over power from General Babangida on November 17, 1993, in a palace coup to unseat the interim National Government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan. Abacha's tenure in office was full of bloodshed, and clampdowns on journalists, theatre practitioners and writers who opposed his government's decision. He contested a general election that was organized by his regime, but died a mysterious death before the scheduled election time.

Lastly, General Abubakar Abdulsalam took over the leadership of the government in the country and later handed over power to retired General Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999, which ushered in the current republic. From the fragmented narration of *coups d'états* which took place in Nigeria from 1966 to 1999, it is evident that ineptitude, maladministration and corruption were the main reasons behind the incessant military take-overs.

To this end, playwrights, theatre directors, poets, novelist and many other concerned Nigerians from all works of life rose up, and conspired to challenge these military juntas which destroyed the country's economy and the political landscape. Wole Soyinka was certainly a major figure who became a thorn in the flesh of all the military governments during this period.

### **6.7. Socio-political Ideology in Soyinka's radical plays**

Wole Soyinka's vision for Nigeria and Africa as a whole, seems evident in his works: that of a society where the political leaders, governments and those delegated to be in charge of power will positively recognize and respect the existence of all people without any form of prejudice or discrimination against class, race, origin, gender. He advocates for a Nigeria and Africa where the standard of human welfare will not be compromised for any reason, be it political or socio-economic gains or favoritism. As a dramatist, his vision for Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, is that of a society where justice will be upheld. In addition, he places great value on people living with absolute dignity. Adedeji (1980:16-17) underlines it as follows:

The regenerative process must begin with a social vision. Soyinka preaches change in new beginnings and proceeds by piercing the encrustations of souldeadening habit to bare the mirror of original nakedness. Whereas this humanism supports an egalitarian state, his disposition is that of a cultural nationalistic, except that for him the relation between culture and politics must be broadened. The political-cultural dynamic of change must rest on faith in the people's identity. Although Soyinka's ideological orientation is humanistic, his nationalism savours of the Hegelian dialectic—the collision of two differing but equipotent, dynamic forces, the communal praxis and self-individuation. Two valid ethos. His theatrical method is heuristic and strengthens his faith in the immanence of African aesthetics.

Soyinka interprets his personal role and calling as an artistic commitment and engagement, applying his plays to inform and enlighten people of the consequences of the failure of government. He considers it the responsibility of the leaders of Nigeria, as well as individuals who have been saddled with the enforcement of law and order in the society, to ensure the development and the welfare of the Nigerian people as a noble cause. Therefore,

he has been a strong critic of succeeding Nigerian governments, especially during military rule, as well as other political dictatorships all over Africa. <sup>14</sup>

None of the plays written by Wole Soyinka can be said to lack socio-political or economic content; neither can his radio or television dramas or even his three known movies. *Culture in Transition* (his first featured lengthy movie which was released in 1963), his second, *Kongi's Harvest* (1970, an adaptation of his play *Kongi's Harvest* (1964) and the third, *Blues for a Prodigal* in 1984 were of this nature too. Soyinka's works showcase subject matters that are closely related to politics, liberal humanism, importance of good aspect of human culture, tradition, re-evaluation and denunciation of inhumane tradition, good governance, human rights and freedom, condemnation of corruption, tribalism and nepotism of at any level. Though the artistic preoccupations of the plays vary, there is always a string showing Soyinka's concerns about socio-political and economic upheavals of Nigeria, as well as the continent of Africa as a whole. Jones (1983:11) comments on Soyinka's involvement in sociopolitical and economic related issues:

Soyinka's life is inseparable from his work, much of which arises from a passionate, almost desperate, concern for his society. This concern is apparent in his poetry, drama and essay, but is not merely literary. It shows itself in his letters to the Nigerian papers which can always be relied upon to rouse enthusiastic support or bitter opposition. Indeed, it is this very concern, and the speed with which he translates ideas into action that puts him so often at odds with institutions and governments.

Jones further emphasises: "For Soyinka any form of political repression is a suppression of this individual will, which is the force through which new ideas and new life proceed. The suppression of the individual will be thus a suppression of the very forces of life."

The theatre evidently was one of the foremost tools for the struggle in Nigeria for Soyinka. He was busy with the practice of his agitation propaganda theatre at the university setting of Iles Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, uses theatre as resistance against the military junta at the time, doing plays such as *Before the Black Out* and others in form of revue and short sketches. This setting provided practically the beginning of the involvement of Obafemi Awolowo University in the struggle against oppressive rule in Nigeria. The

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<sup>14</sup> Soyinka directed and acted in a film titled *Blues for a Prodigal* in 1984, based on 1983's election malpractices in Nigeria, which was later banned by the then president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, who was later overthrown by another military regime on December 31, 1983.

university served as a kind of laboratory where the theatre was rehearsed to challenge the menace of the time; a potent vanguard for the people to fight the military.

English theatre was no longer confined to the elite environment, but was also taken to the streets. Hence, theatre practitioners and scholars started challenging the government and government policies from the university arena, taking their struggle for emancipation to the streets so as to create awareness and to garner people's attention.

This development, ironically, coincided with the period that the military developed interest and hence started their involvement in the sustenance of the theatre (lending financial support to institutions and individuals in the theatre); theatre in the sense of performances, cultural elements as well as cultural programmes. Segun Oyewo (in an informal interview, in 2009 at the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria) comments as such:

The military wanted to use culture and theatre to gain some form of legitimacy. Looking at the progressive policies that influenced and affected theatre positively, they were made during the military era, including the cultural policies. Almost all the cultural institutions were established during this period by the military. This was during the regime of General Ibrahim Babaginda in 1988. Most of the cultural centres and institutes were created from 1971, 1972 up to the period of the Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977 during the regime of General Gowon.

General Gowon was the military ruler in Nigeria from 1972 to 1975, before General Muritala Mohammed took over from him in 1975 in a bloodless coup. After General Muritala Mohammed's demise (in February 1976, through assassination by Buka Suka Dimka and others in a violent coup attempt), Olusegun Obasanjo succeeded Mohammed as head of state. Obasanjo was the military ruler from 1976 to 1979.

The celebrated and popular Festival of Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC) was held in 1977 in Nigeria under the military rule of Obasanjo. We can conclude that the military created some basic structures for arts and culture to thrive in Nigeria. The National Theatre of Nigeria, which, arguably, is the only significant theatre owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria, was built and completed in 1976 during the military era, in preparation for FESTAC. This explains why the building was designed in the shape of a Nigerian military cap. The military, having realized the potential power of the theatre for mass mobilisation,

used it to gain some level of legitimacy and popularity during their rule. Indeed, they used matters of arts and culture to sponsor and promote their various programmes.

Eventually, the sponsorship of theatre by the military became a case of 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune'. Theatre artistes in some quarters were silenced, as non-compliance with the dictates of the ruling military would result in non-availability of government funding of their theatre productions. Some who got funds from the government for theatre projects found it difficult or even impossible to produce plays with themes that were confrontational or anti-government. Therefore, the drama texts that were written, produced and directed by well-known theatre practitioners during these periods, and sponsored by the National Theatre in the 1980s (during the military era), were censored to certain degrees. According to Oyewo (2009), "some universities which benefited from the sponsorship included Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria and the University of Ibadan (UI). (...) Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) did not benefit from this, because the authority of the university and especially, the Department of Dramatic Arts of the University and Wole Soyinka refused to compromise their stance about the military rule in the country."

Oyewo's comments explain why Soyinka at a point in time in his career at the former University of Ife, staged a play titled *Requiem for a Futurologist* in 1983. The representative of the Nigerian military government, who had come to watch the performance, walked out because the theme of the play was anti-military and anti-government.

A large number of Soyinka's political theatre works were written and premiered within the confines of the University of Ibadan and then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife), alongside some resident actors of the university's acting company; actors like Sam-Loko Efe (an Ibadan based actor), Jimi Solanke (also an Ibadan based actor, who later moved to Ile-Ife at the invitation of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi), Laide Adewale, Peter Fatomilola, Femi Fatoba, Kola Oyewo, Tunji Ojeyemi, Tunji Oyelana and others, who featured regularly in a number of his productions.

Jeyifo (2004:11-12) provides a broader perspective on Soyinka's philosophy of collaborating with his actors and other important personnel in the theatre. This includes actors, both professional and amateurs, and friends that not only supported Soyinka's artistic view, but also his political stance:

This observation can be extended to Soyinka's reliance, over the years, on a corps of actors, musicians and assistants in constructing many of the characters and situations of his plays, and especially in the composition of music and the writing of songs for these dramas. (...) Soyinka has depended heavily on and tapped into the particular gifts and talents of a core of devoted collaborators and followers like Tunji Oyelana, Jimi Solanke, Yomi Obileye, Femi Fatoba and the late Wale Ogunyemi for the realization of the roughhewn, streetwise humor and parody in the dramatic action of these plays.

The type of work that Soyinka produced created some logistical problems in the producing process since it was not supported by the government. He did not have a specific place or location for his rehearsals. He had to move from one place to another with his crew due to the complexity of the Nigerian military system in the West; the security of the crew was uncertain since political intervention had more prominence in this part of the country.

## **6.8. Guerrilla Theatre and agitation propaganda under the military regime in Nigeria**

Soyinka used theatre and drama as human right advocacy against all odds and intimidation to confront the military dictatorship and several death threats. Some of the popular terminologies given to his effective types of theatre and drama during this period are guerrilla theatre and theatre/drama of agitation propaganda otherwise known as agit-prop.

According to various scholars, Wole Soyinka's contribution to the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama performance in Nigeria actually started with his revue-sketches (short plays) which were more directly confrontational in relation to the corrupt practices of successive Nigerian governments and their inhumane policies. Adedeji (1980:17) says this:

The successful presentation of 'The New Republican' in 1964, followed by 'Before the Blackout' in 1965, marked a new thrust. These satirical sketches poked fun at the vagary of Nigerian nationalism, political gerrymandering, corruption and nepotism in high places, and the life and death struggle of political neophytes for a share in the nation's cake [nation's wealth (personal emphasis)]. These revues and sketches more than his numerous staged plays have shown Soyinka's direct use of the theatre as a mirror to reflect the state of the nation, and his readiness to point up the odium of a political process which seems to him to be suffering from a recurrent malaise that needs the urgent attention of the surgeon.

Modwa (2008:223) also comments as follows:

It is argued that in order to understand Soyinka's later dramatic works, readers must pay attention to his involvement in street theatre in the 1960s, as this was the seedbed for his better-known plays. Common theatrical features in the sketches include a small cast, a relatively bare stage, action presented through music, dance and mime, and various types of flashback. These works comment critically on the political state, human dignity, freedom and liberty. More importantly, revues are performed and not necessarily meant to be read. This is what gives them the dynamism of oral literature.

Soyinka describes these revues as aspects of 'guerrilla theatre' which, over many years, helped to shape his published dramatic plays that continue to address pressing sociopolitical concerns in Nigeria. Guerrilla theatre is not the kind of theatre that are confined to theatre houses; rather, they are the kinds of theatre taken to the street, markets and public gatherings.

Different names have been used over the years to describe such theatre which are applied to address socio-political issues. While some practitioners call them guerrilla theatre, others name them street theatres; many refer to them as agit-prop (agitation propaganda) theatre, invisible theatre and protest theatre. However, the links between these various names lies in the fact that the efficacy of theatre performance is situated in being performed in public spaces and places.

Furthermore, an article titled *Guerrilla Theatre: Intersection of political activism and institutional performance (view on Serbia)* published in *European Electoral Studies* (1999) states as follows:

By guerrilla theatre we refer here to acts that question or re-envision in-built social arrangements of power. This theatre happens in streets, which means that signals theatrics that take place in public by-ways with minimal limitations on access. Performance here indicates type of communicative behavior intended for public viewing. It includes but is not restricted to theatre, which usually implies presence of actors and spectators in their respective places and prearranged roles. Guerrilla theatre draws people who comprise a contested reality into what its creators hope will be a changing script.

This genre, amongst other objectives, aims to sensitize the majority of the citizens towards the need for socio-political and economic emancipation from the hardship brought about as a result of corrupt government policies around the world.

Motsa (2008:224) explains the performance patterns of Soyinka's guerrilla theatre as against formal theatre: "Guerrilla theatre modifies the cultural and even theoretical assumptions in the models of formal drama that seek a well-developed theme and well-rounded character. Soyinka uses agitprop theatre in his short plays aimed at conducting working-class agitation and propaganda through dramatic performance."

In conclusion, guerrilla theatre, agitation propaganda theatre, invisible theatre and protest theatre can all be described as unconventional theatre which entail certain methodologies and procedures to highlight issues of importance in particular communities. The performance style of guerrilla theatre, especially the Soyinka style, is very similar to traditional *Alanrinjo* Yoruba theatre. This is because they are not performed in the theatrebuildings, but in places easily accessible to the community—additionally, the structures of their performances thus have space for social commentary.

## 6.9 Soyinka's revues and sketches

A short analysis of three of Soyinka's revues and sketches—*My Father's Burden*, *The Night of the Hunted/The House of Banigeji* and *Before the Blackout*—divided into thirteen sketches as parts of his guerrilla theatre, follows in this section of the study.

Motsa's (2008) article and another collection of articles (Banham, Gibbs and Osofisan, 2005), are to the best of the researcher's knowledge the only two full-length publications that are available on Soyinka's guerrilla and agitation propaganda theatre. Few other available articles discuss Soyinka's guerrilla and agitation propaganda in full detail.

Banham's (2005: viii) submission in the preface of a collection of articles by him and other authors affirms the paucity of literature on Soyinka's agitation propaganda and guerrilla theatre. In his speech during the opening of the conference, *Pre-, Post-, and Neo-Colonialisms: Wole Soyinka and Contemporary Theatre*, at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama, University of Toronto in October 2001 affirms the

... connection between many of Soyinka's more recent plays and the early satirical works from the 1960s onward. But what became apparent at Toronto was that a whole generation of younger scholars - Nigerian and international - had no knowledge of this work in detail, only tantalizingly knowing of its presence under famous titles such as *Before the Blackout*, or in activities such as those of the University of Ife's Guerrilla Theatre. The revue material exists only in small and rare local publications that are collectors' items, or in manuscripts and typescripts which were haphazardly prepared and collected and often exist only in fragments ...

While this study acknowledges the contribution of works such as Umukoro's (1994) *Drama and Politics in Nigeria*, Obafemi's (2001) *Nigerian Theatre, Cultural Heritage and Social Vision*, Jeyifo's (1985) *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama*, Adedeji's (1980) in *Nationalism and the Nigerian national Theatre* and many others on Soyinka's theatre and drama, their works mostly discuss and concentrate on Soyinka's literary works, paying less attention to his guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda.

### ***My Father's Burden (1960)***

*My Father's Burden* was originally a television drama before being adapted for street performance, with the theme of purging of corruption in government. Motsa (2008:225) describes it as such:

The sins of the father (Chief Nwane) are visited upon the son (Onya). The play opens in a messy and terribly-littered living room. It is Onya's apartment and he is moving house. Onya, a young government official armed with English university training in law, discovers after five years that his esteemed position as Public Relations Officer for Ferrari [sometimes written as Farelli] and Sons was in fact pre-arranged by his father, Nwane, then a very influential government minister. On Onya's return from law school, all has been set in place by his father. The young man feels moral responsibility to dismantle this 'empire' albeit at personal loss; his wife, Tola, does not agree with him. Throughout the play, his friend, Chuks, does not want to side openly with anybody. It is a burden and a moral stigma for Onya to stay in a job which he got with the underhanded help of his father.

For the meantime, his father, the mastermind, is comfortably retired and feels no regret. Soyinka's direct piercing criticism of prejudice is clear. Dramatically, Soyinka depicts in the sub-theme of tribalism in the play. Onya is an extraction of Igbo group, while his wife, Tola, is of Yoruba ethnic group.

Motsa (2008:225) concludes as follows: “*My Father’s Burden* dramatizes one of Soyinka’s beliefs, that man is the worst vermin ever to infest society. Acholonu actually confirms this observation when he states: ‘... Soyinka sees man as the creator of his troubles’ (Jones 1984: 17).”

### ***The Night of the Hunted (House of Banigeji) (1961/1964)***

Motsa (2008:227) confirms that stylistically speaking, “*The Night of the Hunted* is more mature when compared with *My Father’s Burden*.” Motsa gives his view:

The stage directions indicate that the announcement of the play should be preceded by ‘Three gun-shots. Long high-pitched barking of hounds answered by the “drums” of the hunters’, and then after the announcement, there should be other sound effects described as ‘Long low-pitched barking of hounds answered by “drum-rolls” ...’ When the action actually begins there is to be ‘a long very distant harrowing scream of the witches – “the witches’ call” which runs’:

Voice: Beware then of the shadow of the falling leaf; let it not pass between you and the sun and watch you lest the feathers of the nesting bird drown your mother’s voice when she calls at dusk.

Inferring from the above account, Soyinka successfully used the sound method to create the atmosphere of terror in the play. Its nature simply lends itself to the artistic use of a selection of sound effects to create setting and general mood. The main character in the play, Banigeji, runs around chasing the shadow of his late wife, which sooner or later evades him and scoffs him till the end of play. The thematic preoccupation of witchcraft carnages also shows the conflict of beliefs in a village set against the general world view of the Yoruba, where the departed souls and the living co-exist. Situated both in the mystical and the human world, the play portrays the theme of retaliation and witch-hunt. Soyinka uses one of his favourite techniques, a setting that reflects a range of life between the temporal and the spiritual world. The time situation overlaps within the present world and the world of the dead, depicting a repeated life formation. The two worlds co-exist and impact on one another correspondingly in the play. Individual characters in the play in either world is able to relate and impact on the course of one another’s’ existence, much like persons who exist in the same surroundings.

## ***Before the Blackout (1965)***

It is imperative to distinctly acknowledge the contribution of Motsa (2008) in the discussion on Soyinka's *Before the Blackout*. According to Motsa (2008:229), *Before the Blackout* covers thirteen (13) shorter pieces of subsections. A short review of each of these revues and sketches, starting with *Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy*, is an attempt at documenting the styles and techniques which Soyinka employed in creating his guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda.

### **(a) *Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy***

*Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy* was produced by Soyinka as varieties of satirical sketches under one title which consist of other works. Motsa (2008:229-230) comments that:

Both the first and the last pieces in this collection are ballads that bear the same title. There are strong indications that this is not a mistake because the first ballad has the subtitle, 'I Èmí á Bí Befá' and the last, 'II the Ogbugbu of Gbu'. These different sub-titles encourage us to perceive the two ballads as prologue and epilogue, which qualifiers I have then attached to each poem for easier distinction. Keeping in mind the possible influence of the Apidan theatre where a single performance may house many independent stories, I am persuaded to perceive these sketches as one unit comprising thirteen sub-sections that open and close with a ballad (*Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy*).

*Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy* is a dramatic poem which portrays a very disillusioned and embittered Soyinka reacting to the multiple political challenges that Nigeria was confronted with at a time. The persona, a middle-aged man, indicates the independence of the Nigerian Nation directed towards atrocious intentions especially with innumerable political romances which became manifest in the events after 1965. It was clear that Soyinka foresaw the political rainbow that was to come in the form of six Geo-Political zones as evidenced in the phrase *Èmí á Bí Befá* (*I shall give birth to sextuplets*). Fifty-two years later, the country is thrown into the rhetorics of restructuring agitation—it is obvious that the states under these zones cannot cater for the needs of the people.

### **(b) *In Carcarem Conicio***

This sketch consists of three characters cast in parody. The characters are Pope, Cleric and Martin Luther. The first scene presents a judge swearing a hoodlum and felon into a

prestigious office of state. Earlier, before the action of the play begins, this very felon had been convicted by the same judge for a repugnant crime. The very outline of the cast suggests an episode that will address political and religious matters. Again, the stage is bare. In a style similar to that of an African king's bard, Cleric walks in front of Pope, ringing a hand-bell and in a way mock-praising an announcement very reminiscent of African courtly etiquette. Cleric gives a taut summary of the nature of corruption, fuelled by the general atmosphere of reconciliation in the state. This tirade is a parody of a praise rendition, but it articulately lambasts the government for improperly handling land deals, memorial funds, court cases and many such...

Motsa (2008:231) affirms a relationship between the “episode recorded in this sketch and mid-1990s occurrences in South Africans which cumulated into the ‘truth and reconciliation’”. However, in *In Carcarem Conicio (Thrown in Prison)*, the element of truth seems to be far outweighed by blind reconciliation”. Unlike in South Africa, where truth and reconciliation has at least taken place, Nigeria is yet to witness this political reality. The country was plunged into Civil War in the 1960s and ended without establishing any reconciliation. The Oputa Panel of the Olusegun Obasanjos Administration—which was to address salient political imbalance in the history of Nigeria—ended as mere political drama on national television.<sup>15</sup> This is what Motsa calls a caricature of blanket clemency among politicians, men of the cloth and laymen.

### **(c) Babuzu Lion Heart**

Motsa (2008:232), in her analysis of the play, explains that “*Babuzu Lion Heart* is a hilarious political comedy. With the characteristically Soyinka's small cast of five characters, song, and dance, the dramatist presents a mockery of this greedy, amoral, pleasure-seeking old man.” She deduces: “Soyinka's criticism cuts right across the social spectrum and focuses on the folly of a British educated medical doctor whose greed and overweening pride almost see his heart literally scooped out of its chamber while he breathes. There are reproductions of this sketch in the longer play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, although on a smaller scale. The drama ends with a twist in the tale as the general citizenry falls for the deception of the doctor's tricks.”

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<sup>15</sup> Oputa Panel also known as the Human Rights Violations Investigations Commission was headed by a former Supreme Court justice, (late) Chukwudifu Oputa. The commission was formed on June 14, 1999 by former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo as a ‘Truth Commission’ to heal the wounds of the past and move beyond them through reconciliation based on knowledge of the truth.

*Babuzu Lion Heart* is a brief revue that barely uses any stage properties, like the drama of the *commedia dell'arte*, which belongs to the Italian theatrical tradition. It appears as if the sketch can be easily performed in an open space; it is ideal for improvisational street theatre. The revue can be easily performed in market squares, motor parks and generally, any open space would be ideal, similarly to the English *medieval plays*, as well as the *commedia dell'arte* troupe performances in Europe. The main benefit of this kind of theatre, which was to produce a more intimate physical connection between actor and audience would still be appreciated by Soyinka's out-door audiences, above all, because popular theatre was not new to the Nigerians whose rich theatrical culture Soyinka emphasised in his interview with Kreisler (1998). He reaffirmed that the Nigerian society is very rich in theatrical traditions.

#### **(d) Vintage Scenes: Onitsha Market**

Motsa (2008:233) establishes that “[t]his sketch is the most typically anti-illusionist of Soyinka’s short plays. The entire action is presented in mime. There are only three characters: First Sickly Looking Man, Second Sickly Looking Man and One Man behind the mat-screen”. Motsa further believes that the “simple staging is in keeping with the principles of ‘the poor theatre’ as well as Brecht’s theatre, where techniques are used to expose those mechanics of performance that are usually concealed by naturalistic dramaturgy such as ‘... a half-curtain above which set changes [can] be seen’ (Innes 1992: 122)”. She concludes that, equally, Soyinka’s stage set is labeled as just one mat screen about 4½ ft high, and by inference, the rest of the stage is bare, save for this one piece of décor. The opening scene effectively depicts the mood of fatal sickness through the mimed action of extremely ill ‘walking corpses’. The mood is to change dramatically when First Sickly Looking Man pulls down his trousers, pushes his buttocks toward the mat and receives an injection. The effect of this elixir is detected from the changing face of the patient.

In this sketch, Soyinka perceives the Nigerian society as very sick. Consequently, there is a need for the country to go through medical examination so the sickness could be eradicated from within before sanity, which he symbolically describes as “lost health and vitality” could return.

**(e) For Better for Worse**

This is one sketch that mimics the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria Protectorate to form the single colony of Nigeria. This has historically proven to be a marriage with complications and it is deemed the foundational perspective into the many socio-political upheavals in Nigeria. *For better for Worse* brings out the elements in the historicity of the amalgamation at a time when the narratives were unpopular.

Motsa's (2008:233-234) assertion that, "*For Better for Worse* is another unconcealed attack on the government of the day" is a partial view of the narrative. The authoritarian powers of the ruling party are sarcastically described in the opening stage directions because this was the attitude of the colonial government. Motsa describes that it is the norm in Soyinka's sketches, there are only two characters, with type names: A and B. The stage is again bare, holding the two characters joined together like Siamese twins. The essence of these characters' argument, whether they are moving forward or backward, reveals very clearly the unimaginable implication of the insincere merger of a nation.

**(f) Symbolic Peace, Symbolic Gifts**

This revue displays the now familiar character-naming style of using alphabetical labels instead of names in some of Soyinka plays. In this sketch, there are four characters: A: Away Politician, B: Home Politician, Signboard Man, and Old Man. The play depicts a residential area where A. and B are touring B's region. Both are political leaders but in different areas of the same country. They are on a guided tour and Away Politician is being attacked with rotten eggs, because he is not able to fulfil his campaigned promises which he made with the electorate in his region before he was elected into the office. The politicians tour the length and breadth of the country but could not point to a major project which could benefit the people who voted them into power. Motsa (2008: 234) provides a dramatic account of their fruitless touring: '*They travel some more*', '*They travel again*', '*They turn and travel*', '*They parade*', and '*They tour*'. The thematic preoccupation of this revue is the seeming busy-ness of government officials when, in fact, they are doing nothing." This type of political commentary is often found in forms of protest theatre where the theatre-makers critique the lack of action on the part of the government. The people of the country require action and change, but the change take too long and the people are left in the horrible circumstances that they wish to escape.

The relevance of *Symbolic Peace, Symbolic Gifts* to the contemporary socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Many of the issues and concerns raised by Soyinka are still the major challenges faced by many in the country today. As of today, higher percentages of the Nigerian population in the country lacks basic social amenities such as good roads, portable water, electricity, employment, good health facilities and other dividends of democracy. The huge annual economic budget of money is announced on the pages of newspapers, deletion and radio by the government, but the greater percentage of the budgeted money ends up in the pockets of the Nigerians political leaders, political elites and their associates. The repercussions of this negative attitude have left the country in deplorable condition.

### **(g) Obstacle Race**

*Obstacle Race* is yet another humorous ridicule at the political scene in Nigeria which was not designed for naturalist theatre. There are four characters and the stage set consist of two chairs that represent the seats of a car.

The revue dramatizes a British lady, who is a visitor to Nigeria. She is being driven around by her tour guide. The subject-matter in the sketch focuses on the criticism on the level of infrastructural deterioration in Nigeria and the culture of passing the buck—shifting the blame of government inabilities to provide needed social amenities on the past regime, as revealed in character B in *Symbolic Peace, Symbolic Gifts*. The character of the Driver in *Obstacle Race* offers no excuse, but cynical, humour-filled explanations on some of the inadequacies to which the visitor is exposed. In the sketch, the visitor's investigative questions and Driver's prompt replies are used quite successfully to present the story of the dreadful road and bad safety condition in this area. The audience hears of the ill-placed signboard that has led many cars to the fatal bottom of the ditch, the self-centred and sadistic police who position their check-point in the middle of the road, a road that has more potholes and ditches than it has safe patches, and a river-bank whose bridge has been washed off, compelling tourists to be transported across by people. Moats (2008: 236) concludes: "Out of sheer frustration with Lady's questions, and perhaps with 'brain dead' government, Driver's double entendre cuts back in his answer to the question about why there is no drainage system to the drenched roads and why there is no bridge."

Once again, satire is used to comment on the failings of government. What is important here, is the characters that are used to create the comedy. The lady from England (the old colonial master) comes to visit. She is unaware of the situation of the country. Her ignorance is used as a comic tool to enlighten the audience and focus on the current problems of the country. The driver, just like the audience, is in the know. They are aware of what the problems are and how those problems developed. By juxtaposing the two characters, the information is delivered in a comic fashion which is not only entertaining to watch, but also underlines the message that the author wants to communicate.

### **(h) *Death before Discourtesy***

Moats (2008:237) states that this farcical satire bears some biographical veracity. *Death before Discourtesy* is based on the deterioration of a university, sparked off by the dismissal of a professor from his position for allegedly being rude to a government official. She adds that [the play] "...goes on to depict the lifestyle of another academic whose attitude towards overbearing government officials is horribly accommodating. The review was created at the height of political interference in Higher Education wherein the university Council meddled and ended up with the dismissal of a high-profile Professor." Here, Soyinka has combined the socio-political context with his own experience. It can also be said that he was commenting on the dangers of government interference with critique from an academic context.

### **(I) *Go North Old Man***

*Go North Old Man* is about the interference of government in the freedom of the National Broadcasting Corporation. Soyinka weaved humour with lampooning of Nigerian politicians who set out to sanctions media practitioners so as to deprive them their right to freedom of information and objective reporting. The politicians want a direct and total grip on the newscaster; they want them to "doctor the news" in the government's favour.

Moats (2008: 239) portrays Bodega, the boss of the Broadcasting Station, as a man "who cannot stand up for truth and justice when in the presence of the political leader, called His Highness and sometimes His Presence. All Bodega manages to emit in their first encounter is the salutation, 'rank deed, rank deed'- a greeting for an 'August Person'..."

The sketch is finally a direct satire on the highly-learned citizens who have relinquished their responsibilities as intellectuals and watch-dogs of errant behaviour; but the story is based on the codes and conducts of journalism. It is a narration on the gross violation of the freedom of the press. Soyinka directly criticises the silenced mouth of state media, a total violation of fundamental human rights, and the freedom of the press. He lambasts politicians' incessant attacks on Nigerian journalists who disseminate vital information concerning wrong doings in their political parties or individuals.

**(j) Nigerian National Mart**

*Nigerian National Mart* displays no dramatic action at all. It communicates the occasion, the name, the events of 1962 to 1965 and especially the 1964 Federal Elections. The stage properties consist of a table, a chair, and a blackboard on which is pasted the graph to which the commentator and sole character refers as he makes his running commentary. Like other sketches, Soyinka in this play recommends a simple décor and a small cast. Moats (2008: 241) suggests that “[t]he text is a commentary on the performance of the ‘stock market’ and a factual graph of the Nigerian ‘economic’ climate, named the Nigerian National Mart, from April 1964 to March 1965.”

The sketch is created as a parody of the stock market but instead of commenting on financial issues, the comments are on the unstable climate of the various Nigerian political parties, much like the currencies of various parts of the world. The central theme is the unpleasant condition of Nigerian economy at the time. However, this crisis remains the major challenge facing the country even at this moment. Presently, the black market is a threat to open market in the country; the situation Soyinka satirized long ago in *Nigerian National Mart*. The political elites get rich in the sketch, while the majority of the people in the country perpetually remain poor.

**(k) Childe Internationale**

Moats (2008:241) states that *Childe Internationale* “... was for a long-time part of the *Before the Blackout* collection, it was eventually published independently (1987) by Fountain Publications in Ibadan.” This stage play was first performed in 1964 in the Orison Theatre.

Even though it was conceived more than three decades ago, perhaps to address a topical social problem in the burgeoning Nigerian middle-class, the central theme of *Childe Internationale* is still very topical today even here in southern Africa. Central to the theme is the deculturised African child who has been uprooted from her base, taken to and educated in a white private school, only to come back completely brainwashed and a terrible embarrassment to her parents who, in spite of all their riches and influential position, have not been wise enough to pre-empt the damage caused by cultural disassociation in their offspring. The predicament for the father, who sees this damage, is that the other parent, the mother, does not see anything wrong with their child. (Motsa, 2008:241)

Soyinka's social commentary in this sketch is a direct attack on certain individuals who become so attached to western values and other ways of doing things in African society. These set of Africans have jettisoned their African culture and tradition, and by extension their children who are supposed to carry on the African legacies from them, who could not do so because they were nurtured and trained in Western ways at the expense of their African heritage. Soyinka portrays a ridiculous domestic life style of a Nigerian politician; his wife and daughter, who just returned back to Nigeria but struggle to balance their Western imbibed culture and African lifestyle. Titi, the daughter of the politician complains in the play how the local food upsets her stomach, which signals a preference for Western food. The sketch is a social commentary because it addressed issues such as, cultural conflicts between Yoruba and English, table manners and general etiquette of conduct in a family.

### **(1) Press Conference**

Motsa (2008:243) contends that *Press Conference* "... is yet another of Soyinka's blatant attacks on those persons he sees as poisonous to the country's much-needed transition to stability and self-rule". She comments further on this:

This piece is set after the elections have been rigged. Instead of admitting culpability, the guilty party hides behind many irrelevancies while boasting of a string of overseas degrees and spouting empty slogans. Again, it is only the theme that the writer is presenting; there is nothing else to suggest good theatrical or dramatic quality in this sketch. It is thus only useful as a social, topical satire that is not meant for orthodox theatre.

Soyinka in *Press Conference* provides a vivid picture of a typical political situation in Nigeria, when the majority of politicians in the country sees themselves as the 'anointed' or 'God sent messiah' whose mandate is to deliver the masses from their deplorable socio-economic

condition. This archetypal occurrence often leads African countries into a state of war and pandemonium because the personal aggrandizement of the politicians is now a hindrance to the process of free and fair election which dictates that people can freely vote for political candidates of their choice. The sketch is produced in a typical guerrilla-theatre style which makes the storyline suitable for the type of commentary that Soyinka wants to deliver.

**(m) *Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy: II The Ogbugbu of Gbu***

Motsa (2008:243) concludes her analysis of Soyinka's revues by explaining that "Soyinka's style of parodying serious English poetry, first encountered in the Ibadan University magazine of the early 1950s, resurfaces in this *"Ballad of a Nigerian Philosophy: II the Ogbugbu of Gbu*. Motsa maintains that "Soyinka recognizes the verse-source of his ballad as *The Vicar of Bray*, by stating, 'to the tune of *The Vicar of Bray*' underneath his poem's title. In *the Vicar of Bray*, the narrator, who is the vicar, repeatedly defends his fickle loyalty to all the different monarchs that ascend the throne of England from King Charles II (1660)". It is finally concluded: "Like the Vicar, Soyinka's narrator, a king, also profusely defends his questionable loyalty. He adapts himself and retains his position through the various political periods of colonialism, fighting for freedom and the end of colonial rule".

The sketch is categorized as social commentary because it tells a story of fallen imperial order of the British Empire in the 1960s. The *Nigerian Independent* on 1 October 1960 is an example. Soyinka emphasizes that power belong to the masses of the people and they can always retain the privileges of making their own choice of self-rule if they so desired.

**6.10 The reaction of the audience to Soyinka's Guerrilla Theatre and Agitation Propaganda**

Without an audience for Soyinka's creative and artistic works, be they traditional or modern, the artiste has no sense of fulfilment. Even the traditional African performing arts, particularly the Nigerian traditional theatre and drama which is presented in the market square, palaces and public spheres, attract spectators who often enthusiastically mobilize themselves from around the village square. During such traditional and cultural performances (such as the performance of Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre), the artistes are appreciative of the involvement of spectators. For this reason, Schipper (1986:128) states that "... performances were meant for the entire community." Most of the performances of the *Egungun* (masquerades) of the Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Travelling

Theatre were in form of ‘call and response’ or a responsive style. The lead actor or a lead actor and a lead actress start the play with a song, while the villagers in a familiar manner quickly answer affirmatively to the call; this is because the storylines and other properties of such performances are not strange to them. Schipper (1986:123) expands:

Oral literature is always linked to the performances itself. The significance of the performance and the essential presence of the performers, without whom the oral literature cannot even exist, is a fundamental characteristic which in the past has often been overlooked in the study of oral literature. This same characteristic is an essential aspect shaping all theatre. There is a strong parallel between oral literature, theatre, dance and music, which all depend on repeated performances for their continued existence.

Most Yoruba people could easily identify with the story of the *Alarinjo* Theatre during its popular days; people were well familiar with the oral poetry or oral narration of the actors because it did belong to them. The stories, legends, proverbs, folktale and fables narrated by the performance had been told to them times without number by their fathers and mothers under the moonlight for many years, from generation to generation. Schipper (1980:59) posits:

The traditional epic is much more than a reflection of historical events. The dramatic narrator wants first of all to fascinate his audience, and being an artist, he subordinates history to his own imagination. However, there remains always a ground of truth from which the creative imagination of the poet narrator starts. The epic always describes the illustrious achievement of one or more historical persons, living on in the memory of later generations.

To this end, the audience’s reception and reaction to the street performances and sketches under the umbrella of guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda cannot be analysed through any published literature. Moats (2008:246) states that unlike “performances presented formally in theatres, these revues and sketches do not have formal newspapers reviews from which to draw a commentary on their reception in society”. She remains convinced: “This is understandable, given the fact that by its nature, political street theatre does not aim to accommodate the luxury enjoyed by other forms of theatre largely aimed at entertainment.” The reaction and reception of the Nigerian audience to Soyinka’s guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda can be described as an unpredicted one. Because the audiences saw their story of hardship, they mirrored it within minutes on the streets, market places and motor parks. The audiences were left to draw their individual or collective conclusion on the socio-political and economic situation during the period.

## 6.11 Censorship and brutality against Soyinka under military regime

The situation during the military rule resulted in a downward turn in Nigerian drama and theatre at this period, because theatre at this period had lost its patronage, and its sustainability was threatened for two reasons. First, theatre was not economically rewarding for the practitioners: box-office takings were not commensurate with the energy and monetary sacrifices invested. Secondly, people's security can no longer be guaranteed when they go to the theatre to watch performances, especially at night. Therefore, theatre could not survive without commissioning and/or sponsorship.

During their long dominance in Nigeria (1966-1999), the military were particularly hostile to Soyinka, other writers, and the arts in general, but more specifically, to the art of theatre and drama which was leading the questioning of the activities of their rule. This was quite evident in the various decrees and prohibitions of theatrical performances. Adeoti (2003:31) strengthened this claim as he states that, "[s]everal instances of brutal suppression of public protest by law enforcement agents, arbitrary arrests and detention of the regime's critics, indefinite closure of media houses and seizure of their publication have been documented."

Soyinka became more politically active following the military coup of January 1966. He secretly and without government's authorization met with the military governor and the then leader of the Biafran movement (Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu) in the Southeastern town of Enugu, August 1967, to try to prevent civil war. Consequently, Soyinka had to go into hiding because of the federal government's decision to get him arrested and punished for his act of "sabotage". Soyinka was later arrested and then charged with treason resulting to his years of incarceration by the federal government of General Yakubu Gowon.

His jail term lasted for twenty months, beginning from September 1967, when civil war became deadly between the federal government and the Biafrans. Soyinka was refused any stationery in a bid to stop him from writing notes and letters that can instigate Nigerians during the civil war. Soyinka managed to write some of his most important creative works and letters criticising the federal government. While still imprisoned, Soyinka translated

from Yoruba a fantastical novel by his compatriot D. O. Fagunwa, entitled *The Forest of a Thousand Demons: A Hunter's Saga*.

The dictatorial regime of the military ruler, General Sani Abacha, in November 1994, attempted a forceful arrest of Soyinka for his perpetual criticism of his government but he escaped from Nigeria to travel abroad and avoided persecution.

## 6.12 Conclusion

The contribution of Wole Soyinka to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria through his various genres of theatrical and dramatic works, which began in the 1950s and continues till this present time, cannot be overstated. His contribution has been categorized into dramatic plays (many of which were performed on conventional stages in Nigeria and abroad) and revue sketches (performed in unconventional spaces such as marketplaces, motor-parks and other public spaces in Nigeria). In addition, the establishment of his three theatre companies: Nineteen-Sixty Masks in 1960, Orisun Theatre in 1964 and Unife Guerrilla Theatre in 1978 can all be seen as vital parts of his contribution to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria. Finally, his personal published articles, books and those written about him and his works by others cannot be separated from his literature which provide useful academic information on the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria.

An analysis of Soyinka's sketches under guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda analysis in this section can be linked to Sauter's (2007:8) theory of The Theatrical Event. As explained in Chapter Two of the study (the theoretical foundation of the research), "a theatrical event can be described as a way of playing and, more exactly, as theatrical playing." Consequently, sketches in Soyinka's guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda can be analysed as theatrical playing, which often adopt everyday expression.

In reference to an earlier quote in Chapter Two of this study, Siro (2014:7) posits that "[p]laying is a characteristic of performers, participants and spectators during a theatrical event, though the agents involved use different strategies of playing or play different games." The foregoing explanation can be linked to the performance structure of the sketches in Soyinka's guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda, because its performance

structure must involve the active and full participation of the performers (the actors) and spectators (audience) to be effective.

Sketches in Soyinka's guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda aligned with Sauter's (2007:8) concept of The Theatrical Event—theatrical events can happen anywhere. Through the events described in the sketches, it is clear that the theatrical components made it clear that a theatrical event is taking place. Soyinka's sketches in his guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda can happen anywhere, outside conventional theatre spaces, theatrical events also happen: in the streets, in galleries, in parks and other public places, even in private places. The short nature of these sketches also implies that it required very little time to set up or strike in the spaces where it was performed, which is suitable for the aesthetic of guerrilla theatre. The various spaces where the sketches can be performed also link with the subject material of the sketches. The social critiques of the plays are delivered directly to the intended audience. Even the different ways of messaging help to deliver the protest. The various aesthetic ways of presentation include miming, normal dialogue, to poetic drama. This is another indication that Soyinka is sensitive to not only the content of the social critique that he wants to deliver, but that he is also concerned with the style in which this message is delivered.

This study concludes that Soyinka's contribution to the evolution of political performances in Nigeria can be categorised into dramatic plays—many of which were performed on conventional stages in Nigeria and abroad—and revues sketches (performed at unconventional spaces) as revealed earlier in the study. Soyinka employed the radio drama to deliver social commentary, which indicates his understanding of genre and medium and adapts to the medium to deliver the social commentary suitable for the particular form of expression. These forms of theatrical and dramatic traditions all have their distinctive features, yet served common goals. Their goals among others are to dramatically portray the atrocities committed by the Nigerian leaders, both the politically elected and the military who hijacked the political power by force, to the Nigerian populace. The later tradition under guerrilla theatre and agitation propaganda tends to arouse the audience's emotion and prompts action against autocratic policies and government.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE THEATRE AND DRAMA OF OLA ROTIMI**

#### **7.1 The return of Ola Rotimi from America to Nigeria in 1968**

The arrival of Ola Rotimi in Nigeria after the completion of his first degree and Master's degree in theatre and drama studies in the United States of America, in 1968, is highly significant in the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama in Nigeria. His theoretical and practical contribution lies in his numerous published and unpublished plays and in their performances. In addition, his several academic publications on African and Nigerian theatre and drama forms an important part of the academic canon on African theatre.

#### **7.2 Biography of Ola Rotimi**

The Nigerian theatre and drama scholar, actor, playwright, and erudite director, Ola Rotimi, named Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi at birth, was born on April 13, 1938 in Sapele, in the present Delta State, Nigeria to Samuel Gladstone Enitan Rotimi, a steam-launch engineer (a successful director and producer of amateur theatricals) and Dorcas Adolae Oruene Addo, an Ijaw drama enthusiast.

The youngest of three children, Olawale attended St. Cyprians School in Port Harcourt from 1945 to 1949; St Jude's School, Lagos from 1951 to 1952, and the Methodist Boys High School in the then capital city of Lagos from 1952 to 1956, before travelling to the United States in 1959 to study at Boston University. After receiving a B.A. degree in Fine Arts in 1963 from Boston University, he proceeded to Yale School of Drama where he bagged a M.F.A. in Drama in 1966, concentrating on playwriting. Cooker (1992:61) states that:

His socio-political comedy, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, was selected Yale's student play of the year in 1966, and respected New York director, Jack Landau, was invited to direct it.

Shortly after his return to his fatherland in 1966 to further his research on African theatre and drama, Rotimi a young, vibrant and enthusiastic scholar saw the need for the creation

of a true indigenous African theatre and drama, especially where he could experiment, workshop and stage plays that expressed, primarily, his African lineage and heritage. He founded the “Ori Olokun Theatre Company” in 1968 at Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. His OriOlokun theatre company, in conjunction with the then University of Ife, (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in the South-West, Nigeria in 1977 metamorphosed into the Department of Dramatic Arts, where Rotimi taught for many years. He later taught at the University of Port Harcourt, in Rivers State, in the South-South part of Nigeria where he also created the Department of Drama, which was later changed to the Department of Theatre and Film Studies.

Because of worsening political conditions in Nigeria, Rotimi spent much of the 1990s living in the Caribbean and the United States. He taught at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota and finally returned to Nigeria in 1999 to continue teaching and researching on African drama and theatre at the Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Rotimi acknowledged the importance of cultural diversity, therefore, it was a recurring theme in his various dramas, where he often investigated Nigeria’s history and ethnic traditions, in search of peaceful co-existence and need for collective responsibility and a common front among all tribes in Nigeria, in a bid to ensure collective efforts at tackling the socio-political and economic problems facing the country.

His first plays *To Stir the God of Iron* was first staged in 1963 (with no record of publication) while *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (was first staged in 1966 and published in 1977). Both were staged at the schools of Drama, Boston University and Yale University, in the United States of America, before he emerged on the Nigerian stage. His later dramas include *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (first staged in 1968 and later published in 1971), an adaptation of the Sophocle’s *King Oedipus* (a play based on the conflict between divine will of the gods and the manipulation of human destiny against human freewill), *Kurunmi and the Prodigal* (first staged in 1969 and published as *Kurunmi* in 1971, *Kurunmi* is an historical play about the superiority of power and rivalry between two Yoruba powerful warlords and chiefs which escalated into a war between the people of Ijaiye and Ibadan during the hinterland war between Yoruba communities in the 1860. It was written and performed for the second Ife Festival of Arts). *Ovonramwen N’ogbaisi*, premiered on the Nigerian stage in 1971 and

later published in 1974, was about the encounter between the last ruler of the Benin empire and the British invaders of Benin in 1898. *Holding Talks* in (1979) is a drama piece that many believe identifies with theatre of absurd tradition. His later plays, such as *If... (Tragedy of the Ruled)* was published in 1983. The play depicts a communal tragedy that exposes the continuous failure of the authority in providing adequate social amenities for the well-being of the Nigerian masses. Another play by Rotimi, titled *Hopes of the Living Dead*, was published in 1988. It is based on the popular Nigeria's "leper's rebellion" of 1928 – 1932, and was premiered at the University of Port Harcourt. His radio drama titled *Everyone His/Her Own Problem* was broadcast in 1987.

Rotimi died on August 18, 2000 at Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. His later works such as the Four One-Act Plays namely *Who is a Patriot? When Criminals Turn Judges, Man Talk, Woman Talk*, and *Tororo, Torororo-ro-ro* were published posthumously in 2006.

During his life time, Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi won and was conferred with many honours and awards such as two Fulbright scholarships and many others, in recognition of his contribution to the popularization of African theatre and drama.

### **7.3 Ola Rotimi and His Ori-Olokun Theatre Company**

Apart from Ola Rotimi's literary contribution through various published and unpublished plays, journals, articles, and books on theatre and drama, it is important to add that his contribution to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama started with the Ori-Olokun Theatre Company, which he founded in 1968. Cooker (1992:70) highlights the significance of the Ori-Olokun Theatre Company in relation to the artistic contribution of Ola Rotimi and the development of Nigerian theatre and drama:

On Rotimi's return from the United States, he immediately realized that there was a serious need for an authentic African theatre, with African values and allegiance to African customs and tradition. The era of colonialism was over, but its legacies remained entrenched in the lives of African people politically, socially, economically, and even in their aesthetics. Hence in 1968, the OriOlokun center was founded, and in that same year it hosted the first Ife Festival of the Arts. The performers at Ori Olokun were a rare group, made up of students, farmers, laborers, academicians, mechanics, and so on. It included both the educated and people with little achievement in terms of Western education, but who were masters in the art of traditional theatre,

music, songs, and performance. The advantage for the educated members of the group was that they were being resensitized to their own true aesthetic.

His creation of Ori-Olokun Theatre Company in 1968 did not only mark the beginning of his personal artistic contribution towards the advancement of African theatre and drama; it also stands as a remarkable effort in the making of several Nigerians who emerged as well-known actors, drummers, wood carvers, singers, choreographers, painters, art academicians and masters in various vocations today; their success can be attributed to the strict artistic training undergone under the tutelage of Rotimi who was a strict theatre director. Some of these Nigerian artistes that emerged under Rotimi's watch and who were members of Ori Olokun Theatre Company are Gboyega Ajayi, Muraina Oyelami, Tunji Braimoh, Segun Akinbola (now Oba [King] Segun Akinbola), Jimi Sholanke, Yinka Adeyemi, Olu Akomolafe, Peter Fatomilola, Laide Adewale, Peter Badejo, (late) Rufus Orisayomi, Uko Atai, Kola Oyewo, Tunji Ojeyemi, Jimoh Fakoyejo who, today, are prominent figures in the Nigerian theatre, drama and media practice.

Ogunleye (2007:66) provide insights into how these artistes were recruited when she comments:

At Crowder's suggestion, some actors with proficiency in, for example, music and fine arts had been employed for the Ori Olokun Centre in 1968. Others were taken on as research assistants, who, equipped with tape-recorders, traversed the rural areas of Yorubaland, recording traditional songs, chants and other cultural materials.

The artistic and structural establishment of Ori-Olokun Theatre Company can be likened to the traditional practice of repertory type of theatre in the sense it always had a series of already rehearsed plays waiting to be staged. That was only because Rotimi had already established artists and master trainers such as South African born British choreographer Peggy Harper, who Nwoko (2014:) describes as "a white South African who was trained in the European classical ballet and the modern dance company of Martha Graham, joined the staff of the School of Drama at the University of Ibadan in 1963", the renowned music composer Akin Euba, and master sculptor and painter Solomon Wangboje in the company.

Their artistic roles in the company were well-defined. While Rotimi relied on Peggy Harper to train and teach members of the company different movements and steps of African dance and more specifically the Yoruba dance, Akin Euba was saddled with the responsibility of

voice and music training of the members. Solomon Wangboje was in charge of teaching the members of Ori-Olokun Theatre Company how to paint and produce African fabrics such as *Adire* (Yoruba traditional cloth) and other types of traditional fabrics. Today, this aspect is referred to as technical theatre.

According to the interview conducted with Mr Tunji Ojeyemi of the Department of Communication and Performing Arts, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria, in September, 2015, another professional trainer who was at Ori Olokun Theatre Company was Dr Laolu Ogunniyi. He was engaged at the Ori-Olokun Theatre Company as a speech specialist, whose job was basically to train the members of the company speech and phonetics.

According to Ojeyemi, both Peggy Harper and Solomon Wangboje were commonly referred to as Oshogbo artistes. They were initial members of Oyin Adejobi's Theatre Company before Ola Rotimi officially engaged them with due permission from Oyin Adejobi himself, who was Hubert Ogunde's contemporary in the Nigerian theatre scene. Laolu Oguniye, on his part, was a member of staff of the then Nigerian Television (now Nigerian Television Authority NTA), but was a part-time visiting speech and phonetics trainer at Ori-Olokun.

Ojeyemi adds that the space for the first performance by Ori-Olokun Theatre Company was a Palm-Tree Hotel owned by one Chief Pedro, and which also served as the place where a prominent political party called Action Group (a party with prominent Nigerian politicians such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo) held series of their political party meetings at Arubidi, in Ile-Ife. The hotel was eventually acquired by late Ola Rotimi as the base for his Ori-Olokun Theatre.

The Ori-Olokun Theatre Company and the artists that trained there are amongst the individuals that contributed to the socio-political commentaries on Nigerian society. Although Rotimi's work is not always associated with the theatre company, he remains an important figure that assisted in guiding other artists in their respective careers. He is therefore not only important as a critical artist, he is also important as a guide and as individual that helped shape the artistic landscape of the country. This can also be seen in his contribution to the Department of Dramatic Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University.

## 7.4 The Establishment of the Department of Dramatic Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife, Nigeria

The establishment of the Department of Dramatic Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ileife in 1977 by Ola Rotimi has not only contributed to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria; it has also produced great scholars and practitioners of high repute both within and outside the country in the areas of playwriting, dramatic criticism, dramatic literature, directing and theatre history. Such scholars, to mention a few, include Wole Soyinka, the first African winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 and a former head of the Department of Dramatic Arts, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University); Biodun Jeyifo, an author of a good number of books and other publications on Nigerian theatre and drama; Kole Omotoso, a notable theatre scholar and critic based in South Africa; Yemi Ogunbiyi, an erudite scholar of theatre and drama, who edited the book titled *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical source book*, a publication that has remained the first of its kind; Akin Euba, an experienced theatre director and music scholar, based in the United States of America and Hamed Yerima (a playwright and former artistic director of the National Troupe of Nigeria).

The Pit Theatre at the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University was built in 1974/75 in accordance with the agreement that the Ori-Olokun Theatre Company be relocated to the campus of the university. After the formalization of the agreement by Ola Rotimi and the then University of Ife in October 1967, the Pit Theatre was built. The department itself, like many others, started as a unit under the Institute of African Studies, and had their blocks under an umbrella building known as the African Studies building. The African Studies building was constructed when the Institute of African Studies was established in 1972. Consequently, the establishment of the institute in which the Department of Dramatic Arts was a unit, later brought about the creation of “Awo-Varsity Theatre Group”. Today, the group is a production unit of the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, and has the responsibility for regular performance and turnout of plays.

The Pit Theatre was built by Fry-Drew-Atkinsons, an architectural firm. The name Pit came about when a former member of staff of the department, Mr Segun Akinbola (now His Royal Highness, Oba Akinbola of Alade town in Ondo State, Nigeria) nicknamed it ‘Pit’, perhaps in

an attempt to derogate the design, the designer and the builders or more probably because of the shape of the theatre. This name has since stuck and is used till date.

The first play that was performed in the department (when the Pit Theatre was still a theatre-in-the-round), and which marked the beginning of all plays in the theatre house was *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi, in 1974. Among the audience were the Chief Obafemi Awolowo—the Premier of the then Western Region—and the then first Vice Chancellor of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Professor Hezekiah Oluwasanmi.

The play was performed in a symbolic setting and it was later observed that not all plays would fit into the theatre-in-the-round because of their actions and stage directions. Therefore, in 1981, the theatre was converted into an adaptable theatre incorporating an arena and the performance *Hopes of the Living Dead* by Ola Rotimi was used as a test case. The conversion was done in such a way that the theatre can be used both as a proscenium, an arena and a theatre-in-the-round. Ola Rotimi's *Man Talk, Woman Talk* was performed in the theatre-in-the-round in 1994 at the Pit Theatre; soon other productions such as Comish Ekiye's *The Family* and Wale Ogunyemi's *The Divorce* were also performed in the proscenium setting in 1997. The maximum capacity for the theatre both in-the-round mode and in the proscenium mode is 500.

Some other plays which have been performed in the theatre are *Kurumi* by Ola Rotimi, *Kongi's Harvest* by Wole Soyinka and *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola. *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, written and directed by Femi Osofisan, was performed between 20th and 22nd May 1998. *Drums of War* by Bakare Ojo Rasaki was staged in the theatre as well. All these productions pulled large audiences. Members at the theatre included students, academic and non-academic members of staff, people from the neighboring towns of Ile-Ife and Modakeke, as well as people from other surrounding towns and villages. The most critically-minded members of the audience are the academic staff of the university and they are therefore also a suitable audience for the critical, socio-political work of authors such as Rotimi.

Adedeji (1978) states that theatre in an African university is an *investment par excellence*. He is of the view that universities with theatre as an area of discipline exists as a centre for

change and modernity, for resources and experimentation in artistic concept and for cultural development.

The university context and the access to a theatre building is important in the development of Rotimi's work. Apart from the critical engagement that can be traced in the works, the theatre and the company that is situated at the university is a suitable space for developing the plays.

## 7.5 Ola Rotimi, the playwright and director

Ola Rotimi is undoubtedly popular for being one of Nigeria's foremost playwrights and theatre directors, although his theatric and dramatic personality, as well as the profoundness of many of his plays have been compared and contrasted with those of his compatriot, Wole Soyinka, in many instances. Yet, these two Nigerian theatre and drama icons need no unconstructive comparison for superiority of any kind. This is because of the distinctiveness in their individual artistic and literary ways. Banham (1990:1) states as follows:

Ola Rotimi lives somewhat in the shadow of his fellow Nigerian dramatist, the Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka. But while Soyinka commands international respect and admiration, Rotimi's reputation within Nigeria, both as playwright and director, is unsurpassed.

The emergence of Ola Rotimi was a uniting force, as was that of other theatre and drama scholars and practitioners such as Wole Soyinka in the struggle for the emancipation of the masses from the military oppression and corruption of the Nigerian politicians at that time. The scholars and practitioners all came together, using their works as an instrument and channel to fight for emancipation.

The fact that Rotimi became famous in Nigeria through his writing and staging of historical plays such as *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *Kunrunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*—other plays with themes that are connected socio-political comments in Nigeria—is known, especially by his critics. He has been condemned for allotting too much power, influence and the ability to manipulate human beings to the gods and goddesses as seen in the characters and the settings of these three plays. For these reasons, scholars and critics describe his ideology as being 'cultural'.

This did not deter Rotimi in his choice of artistic expression at the time; instead, he moved on to surprise his critics when he produced other plays which are of utmost relevance and importance to the contemporary Nigerian society. He consolidated his ability to delve into history to bring about much needed change in Nigerian society by being a keen observer or watch-dog of various socio-political and economic developments in his environment, as shown in his writing and performing of plays that sensitized and educated many Nigerians about issues which needed urgent attention. Such plays included *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* (1977), *If...*, (1983), *Hopes of The Living Dead* (1985), *Holding Talks* (1979), *Man Talk*, *Woman Talk* (2006), *Who is a Patriot?* (2006), *When Criminals Turn Judges* (2006), and *Tororo, Torororo-ro-ro* (2006) (Obafemi, 2001:270).

These later plays by Rotimi are of paramount relevance; they are plays that connect to everyday struggles of the masses of Nigerians in relation to their socio-political and economic situation. The demand of the majority of Nigerians was for plays which dealt with man and his immediate environment; and with socio-political problems, all of which is found in Ibsen's prose plays. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi in 1974 marked the beginning of socio-political discussion, not only in the Department of Dramatic Arts, but also in the Obafemi Awolowo University community in general. The play was about a character (Lejoka Brown) who turns his wives into objects of self-gratification, serving different selfish purposes to fulfil his political ambition. He suppressed the rights of his wives and their freedom of expression, and also denied them of means of economic survival.

Nigerian theatre scholars who belong to the radical school of thought (Marxist scholars such as Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, and Bode Sowande) believe that the influence of the gods, goddesses, deities and other supernatural powers on man and his environment should not exist, because such influence is always negative and has little or no contribution to the development of man and his immediate environment. Playwrights should rather discuss and portray general problems of society in their works. Two Nigerian foremost playwrights with plays in which the belief in the influence of the gods is evident are Ola Rotimi in *The Gods are Not to Blame* and Wole Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman*. Both of them commenced with plays related to the negative influence of the gods and goddesses on man and his environment, and only later changed the thematic pre-occupation and subject matter in their plays to socio-political and economic dramas.

The thematic pre-occupation in Ola Rotimi's *Man Talk, Woman Talk*, a play about the gender struggle, as well as *Hopes of The Living Dead* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* can be compared to Ibsen's socio-political plays such as *Pillars of Society, An Enemy of the People* and *A Doll's House*.

*Man Talk, Woman Talk, Hopes of The Living Dead, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and other socio-political dramas by Ola Rotimi represent a transition from the phase of writing plays that deal with the supernatural gods, aesthetics, customs and tradition to the writing of plays with the thematic preoccupation of questioning the status quo; plays that portrayed Nigeria's socio-political problems. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* takes a comic swipe at ideological misfits and opportunists who strut over the political landscape of contemporary Africa. It is essential to add that the great Ibsen also changed from romanticism to writing realistic plays. He understood the social and dynamic significance of modern dramatic arts, the functions of art for arts' sake and art as the mirror of life. The attitude of modern art must have prompted Rotimi to later change his themes, subject matters and ultimately go into more radical writing in the latter parts of his works. Theatre and drama is an aspect of art which possesses natural ability to discuss deep into issues related to society and to this end, Umenyilorah (2014: 34) emphasises:

The theatre is known to be alive to the social-political realities of its time; a kind of court where the economic, social, religious, and political issues of society are outlined, evaluated and judged. To bring about a better society, the theatre, its practitioners, and in fact, all artists are vanguards of social change in their respective capacities- keeping a watchful eye and an attentive ear on the happenings in the society.

### **Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again**

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Rotimi portrays a character, Lejoka Brown, who shares some traits and characteristics with Ibsen's characters such as Consul Bernick in *Pillars of Society* and *Torvald Helmer* in *A Doll's House*. Lejoka and Bernick's perception of women is derogatory; in addition, these two characters could do anything for economic realization, fulfillment and self-aggrandizement.

Lejoka-Brown is a retired military major, who takes to politics as a means to realize his material gains. He married three different women for different purposes. First, Mama Rashida, whom he inherited from his late brother, whom he married for the mere fact that

she had lost her husband and because she “...is well-mannered, quiet, and full of concern: a well-bred, African pigeon...” (Rotimi, 1977: 9). She is more or less a dummy in Lejoka-Brown’s house, and she raises no opposition to his authority. She is obedient, a typical African woman who will dare not ask questions when ordered. Second is Sikira, whom he married because he needed the votes of the women if he was to win the elections. Sikira was the daughter of the President of the Nigerian Union of Market Women.

**Lejoka-Brown:** That woman’s case is only for necessity, anyway – temporary measure. We need women’s votes, man, if we must win the next elections. (Rotimi, 1977:10).

Liza is another one of his wives. She is a Kenyan girl working for the Red Cross. He met her at Stanleyville during a war in the Congo, when he was shot in the thigh. He married Liza because, by her medical profession, she will be more presentable and befitting to his status in the nearest future of his political career, should he eventually win in the elections.

Lejoka-Brown represents a number of Nigerian politicians who see political offices and appointments as an avenue for self-aggrandizement and at the same time, he has no regard for the womenfolk. He perceives them only as a means to justify an end, a mere instrument to his future political ambition.

**Lejoka-Brown:** [triumphantly]. See what I mean? Everything would have worked out according to plan once the elections were over. See? I give Sikira lump sum capital to go and trade and look for another man or something like that; Mama Rashida remains right in this house of my fathers; and I move into Minister’s quarters on Victoria Island. Liza joins me there: everybody is happy (Rotimi, 1977:10).

On the one hand, Ola Rotimi, in the play, depicts the perspective, cultural ideology, traditional orientation and popular mentality of certain people in Nigeria. Many among the readers, the audience and the society at large regard the womenfolk the same way as the character called Lejoka-Brown. Women like Liza, Mama Rashida and Sikira were perceived to be instruments in the hands of men to achieve various objectives and to attain certain goals. Being the weaker sex, women are relegated to the back seat in the society in the economic, political and, importantly, in the social sector.

On the other hand, Rotimi opens the eyes of the masses to the awareness of how politicians who are meant to put the well-being and welfare of the people who have voted them into

political offices as their primary assignment, have been caught, home and abroad, and charged with series of allegations such as money laundering, misappropriation of public fund, misuse of power and embezzling, to mention just a few.

### **Hopes of the Living Dead**

The play *Hopes of The Living Dead*, based on the ‘leper’s rebellion’ of 1928—1932, is another play by Ola Rotimi which depicts vital socio-political and economic tenets. The play provides the historical background of what can be described as “drama of struggle”. Faced with the decision of the British colonial administration to flush out all lepers from the Port Harcourt General Hospital into a slow but certain death in the bush, the lepers decided to press their claims for humane treatments. They chose Harcourt Whyte (1905—1977) as their leader, who then assumed the responsibility of mobilizing and leading them in a moral and physical protest against the decision of the British authority. Mekusi (2007:92), in the course of analyzing the play, states as follows:

Rotimi advocates a sense of physical and psychological display of togetherness among the invalids in *Hopes*, in the face of abandonment by the government and discrimination from the elite class. The case of linguistic multiplicity is made evident since Whyte and Hanna speak Kalabari and English. Mallam speaks Hausa. Nweke uses Edo and English. Catechist converses in Ibibio and English. Dancer and Inmate relate by using only Ibibio and Edo respectively. Jimoh is fond of articulate good Yoruba while Mama Musi speaks Yoruba and what Ayo Banjo calls ‘ademotic form of English’ (9), just as Alibo solely expresses his feeling by using Okrika. Saint Gbilekaa posits that ‘Hopes makes use of at least eight diverse Nigerian languages. (169).

In the process of attaining victory during their struggle, some lepers were beaten, humiliated, dehumanized and detained, as force was used in an attempt to flush them out. This crisis bred mistrust among the different ethnic groups in the play. But it was also through the capable leadership of Harcourt Whyte that solidarity and a sense of unity was restored among them. In the end, the lepers won their freedom and were moved to the befitting new hospital at Uzuakoli.

Solidarity is one issue that is a focus in the play. A crisis situation within a multilingual social environment almost naturally brings about antagonistic, ethnic clashes amongst the people. Ola Rotimi represents the voice of the oppressed. This he does by bringing the happenings of the past into writing, thereby enlightening the readers and the audience at

large to the importance of collective responsibility in fighting for a just cause. The group of lepers can be seen as a microcosmos of the whole Nigeria and the citizens of the country is equated to the lepers who suffer under the oppressive rule of the government. The call for equality is then extended not just to the lepers, but all citizens of the country. Rotimi approaches his thematic treatment and aesthetic approach to include symbolic representation of society. Mekusi (2007:88) echoes this statement:

*Hopes* is a satire of a group of people whose 'insignia', leprosy, symbolizes poverty and deprivation in a society unknown to beautiful objects of experimentation. Both *Hopes* and *If* are full of characters who could pride themselves on the leadership qualities of Papa and Whyte, respectively. However, *Hopes* is set in Port-Harcourt and has people analogous to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* surviving the malice of their oppressors as a result of collective revolt.

### **If..., a tragedy of the ruled**

In *If... a tragedy of the ruled* (1983), Rotimi expresses the common traits of bad leadership in most African nations, especially in Nigeria. He depicts a community with lack of basic amenities and government presence, a community suffering from socio-political and economic neglect, a community comprising of people who possess the power as electorates, to vote for and against the politicians during elections. Anyoku (2012:81) provides a vivid synopsis of the play:

Ola Rotimi uses a decrepit and ghettoized 'mega-prison', which effectively is the tenement apartment block in which a human herd is housed. In a typically Sembene Ousmane novelistic style, Rotimi in *If...a tragedy of the ruled* assembles a fractiously discordant slew of characters, polarized by ethnicity, moral and ideological differences, age and status, and gradually welds them into a formidable phalanx of resolute, ideologically-minded counterinsurgents against a rampaging capitalist landlord.

Rotimi satirizes the self-indulgent property-owner, who happens to be dating Betty, an occupant in his house, who is contesting an election into the national assembly and needs the votes of his tenants. In order to coerce and intimidate them into voting him into office, the landlord increases their rent. He excludes Papa, Betty and Hamidu, from this random rent hike, in an attempted divide and rule approach. But the tenant at the end of the day collectively cast their votes for an opponent, their landlord's political rival. Even though they really do so, their landlord and his incumbent party win the general elections.

Rotimi's *If...* is inspired by Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. In this connection, Ola Rotimi assembles a wide range of Nigerian ethnic groups including, natives of Kalabiri, in present Rivers State (represented by Mama Rosa and Fisherman), Bini (Benin, the present day capital city of Edo State) [represented by Betty, a prostitute with a vision and purpose], Ibibio (presently, Akwa Ibom State) [represented by Akpan, Adigba and Ukot], Yoruba (in Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun, Ogun, and Lagos States) [represented by Banji Falegan alias 'Di Law'], Hausa (who occupies the entire Northern parts of Nigeria) [represented by Garuba Kazuire and Dr Hamidu Gridado alias "Ernesto Che Guevara"], Igbo (in South-East States of Nigeria) [represented by Chinwe Ejindu, Onyema Ejindu, Obiageli and Chike], among others.

Furthermore, these characters are selected from various vocations of life, characters such as Papa, "martinet of the neighbourhood", is a retired headmaster. Dr Hamidu is a fresh graduate with a degree in medicine and is on National Youth Corps Service in a hospital in Port Harcourt. Chinwe is a graduate and her nephew, Onyema, a secondary - school prospect (who later died in play due to societal negligence). Banji is a lawyer. Akpan is a clerical officer. Garuba, a former boxer, is now a deaf - mute labourer; and Betty is a petty trader and part time prostitute. The various classes of the community is well represented through the choice of characters.

In this play, Rotimi's most powerful tool in depicting the common struggle of the masses is expressed through complex, ethnic and tribal lines. He portrays a diversity of culture and backgrounds, but yet emphasized on collective struggle against the oppressive authority. He often, in his plays, advocates for collective, social, political and economic consciousness as a way to stay aware to our civic responsibilities and also to hold our leaders accountable to their responsibilities to the people who elected them. Sadly, the climax of this play is the demise of Onyema (a very young, promising secondary-school prospect, representing continuity and a better future in the play) due to a preventable disease of asthma, but who could not be saved because of the neglect by his society. The play depicts wanton deaths faced by many poor Africans who survive under a deplorable condition without any intervention or help from government or individual in the society. To this end, Onyema symbolizes citizens whose lives are often cut-short by preventable diseases.

Rotimi, being a literary artist and theatre-maker, believed that true social cohesion in a multilingual setting, such as Nigeria (a country with more than 200 ethnic groups and languages), can foster the required peace and harmony. He clamors for peace and co-

operation in most of his socio-political plays, not only amongst individuals or groups that share the same language, culture and tradition, but also from every member of the society. Examples of these ideas are seen in *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *If... the tragedy of the oppressed*.

Furthermore, the position or the belief of many scholars (such as Obafemi [2001] and Umukoro [1994]) that Ola Rotimi, through his socio-politically relevant dramas represents the socialist's vision and aspiration for the society (where authorities and government must be held accountable for lack of provision of essential amenities for the benefit of the populace), is justifiable since many of the themes in his engaged plays often depicts the despicable situation of the people in the country.

Rotimi, because of his multi-lingual background (born by a Yoruba man and an Ijaw mother), recognises the need for a proper process of communication among his characters (who often represent Nigerians in culture and diversity). To him, this process is a recipe for proper understanding; the type of understanding that can unite the masses against any external aggression. Mekusi's (2007:87-88) argument corroborates the above position:

He makes language the leading motif, as shown by his reliance on the use of polyglots in *If* and *Hopes*. Reuben Abati sees this as using varieties of English language as a thread that may unite a country in diversity (40). Aside the fact that the English language has enhanced the sharp divisions that exist within people in these plays, it, at least, offers Ola Rotimi what Balme captures as the '*growing political commitment as a result of the ethnic disputes in Nigeria, which are closely tied to issues of language and language status*' (113). Rotimi's major concern in *If* and *Hopes* revolves around some emasculated or, in his words, 'chosified' individuals in the contemporary society.

In a similar vein, the unfortunate people in *If...*, are not lucky enough as they face the brutalization and dehumanization of the landlord that culminates in the death of Onyema, the beacon and symbol of hope, who should have enlivened the struggle and precipitated the desired egalitarian society. The demise of Onyema is reminiscent of Wole Soyinka's encapsulation of the wasted generation. The dramatic situation of *If...* depicts certain sociopolitically and economically marginalised characters in a multi-tenanted building, whose lives the landlord ill-manneredly threatens with quit notices to secure their votes. The landlord becomes a representative of the ruler in the Nigerian

nation struggling to make sense of divide and rule tactics during political transition, towards achieving manipulation and taking advantage of people who are already deprived and abused by the society.

In summary, Ola Rotimi's contributions to the evolution of the socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria are easily recognized and are appraised in many of his sociopolitically and economically relevant plays, such as *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *If...The Tragedy of the oppressed*. His other plays, which he had directed on stage himself at Dramatic Arts Department, Obafemi Awolowo University, and were later published posthumously, such as *Who is a Patriot?*, *When Criminals Turn Judges*, *Man Talk*, *Woman Talk*, and *Tororo, Torororo-ro-ro* are also relevant socio-politically and economically in terms of various contemporary issues.

In conclusion, Rotimi's historical tragic plays such as *Kunrunmi*, *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* depict some level of socio-political relevance which has to do with historical accounts of some events in the history of the Yoruba and the Edo people. While *The Gods Are Not to Blame* may be an adaptation of the classical Sophocles *King Oedipus*, a lot of themes in it are still applicable today for the purpose of collective mobilization, sensitization and responsibility.

## **7.6 Themes in Ola Rotimi's Historical Tragic Plays: *Kunrunmi* and *Ovanramwen Nogbaisi* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame***

The well-known Ola Rotimi's historical tragedies, *Kunrunmi*, *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, need to be analyzed at this point in order to assess the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria, as well as the relevance of some other selected works of Rotimi. The works are rooted in the culture and tradition of the people of Nigeria. While *Kunrunmi* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* associate firmly with the Yoruba customs, adapting its theme and subject-matter from Sophocle's *King Oedipus*, the play *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi* represents a direct re-enactment of the historical event that shaped and definitely changed or altered the history of the Benin Empire in 1897. Obafemi (2001:90) asserts that Rotimi had "(...) recourse to Nigerian pre-colonial history for thematic inspiration and to Nigeria's traditional performance heritage for his dramaturgy"

in the plays so as to educate, entertain and inform his readers and audience about some important events that impact the lives of the generality of Nigerians.

In *Kunrumi*, Rotimi particularly advocates for peaceful resolution of all forms of sociopolitical problems as an alternative to war and bloodshed. The reason for the war between the people of Ijaye and Ibadan, in the play, is the coronation of Alafin Atiba (a paramount ruler of Oyo Kingdom of Yoruba land) in 1890. However, his installation contravenes the constitution of the ancient Oyo Empire. Cooker (1992:64) explains what the traditional constitution of Oyo people prescribes: “Rotimi (1971, p.7) informs us in the historical preface to the play that the constitution of Oyo required the Aremo, or crown prince, who enjoyed great power while his father ruled, to commit suicide on his father’s death.” Cooker (1992:65) further deliberates:

The political system was thus a complex and delicate balance with checks and counterchecks against the concentration of power in one man’s hand. The Aremo did not succeed but died with the Alafin, after which the Oyo Mesi [the king makers] chose a successor from a number of candidates.

Are-Kunrunmi (a prominent warlord from Ijaiye) who strongly believes in upholding the culture and tradition of his people rejects the installation of Aremo (the Crown Prince). As a result, war ensues between the two sides. Rotimi emphasizes the need for peaceful coexistence among all tribes and races. Also, in the play, he rejects the dogmatic view of enforcing culture and tradition that are no longer relevant to human advancement.

Similarly, *Ovonramwen N’ogbaisi* dramatizes a strong-willed Oba Ovonramwen who lived to protect the Benin Empire against British invasion of his people’s heritage and spiritual belief, even in the face of cruel death. In the play, according to Cooker (1992:68), “Rotimi portrays a traditional ruler attempting to hold his people together in an African world fast losing its own identity.”

The analysis of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* should not be based entirely on the enormous power arrogated to the gods in the play by the playwright; rather, the readers and audience should take cognizance of the pragmatic-humanistic action and advice given by Odewale in the play, to the people of his town. In the play, Rotimi addresses the people of Kutuje town through their king, King Odewale, when plague and famine besieged them. King Odewale asks all his subjects to get loose from the habit of inaction and enter into the woods and

forests to fetch leaves, roots, and many other forms of herbal remedy they could lay their hands on for their healing, having led by example himself by providing the herbal remedy he personally prepared for his royal household. King Odewale's converses with his people:

**TOWNSPEOPLE:** We thank our king for-

**ODEWALE:** No, no, do not thank me. I am only doing my duty. Do not thank me; instead let me ask you one question. Now; you have all come here sprawling, vomiting, rubbing tears on one another, begging me to do my duty, but what about you yourselves? What have you done to help yourselves?

Answer, or is the land at peace? Are not people ailing and dying?

**TOWNSPEOPLE:** We are suffering my Lord, we are-

**ODEWALE:** Yes I know. But what have you done about it. I ask. You there Mama Ibeji-what- did you do to save your twins from dying? It is sickness that man can cure, not death. What did you do to cure their sickness? Nothing! Oh I see, your body is too weak, your bones suddenly gone soft, you cannot move, you cannot go into the bush and cut herbs to boil for your children to drink, is that so? Answer! 'The land is bad' you all cry, 'we suffer much', 'we die' you moan. Yet each one of you lies down in his small hut and does nothing! Now tired of doing nothing, you all come like lobsters, carrying your large heads of complaints to my door steps. Well, let me tell you, brothers and sisters, the ruin of land and its people begins in their homes. If you, in your own small huts and does nothing. Now tired of doing nothing, you have all come like lobsters, carrying your large heads of complains to my door-step. Well, let me tell you, brothers and sisters, the ruin of a land and its people begins in their homes. If you, in your own small huts are so helpless, so crippled that you now come to me, a single man, expecting magic, then, let me tell you that we shall soon all die, hand in hand, in one big grave; hand in hand, is say smiling at each other's eyeballs, and smelling the rot of our gross corrupt bodies. If you need help, search for it first among yourselves. Do not open your noses at me, I cannot help. Why? Because I, Odewale, son of Ogundele, I am only a person, human like you, and you, and...you... Rotimi, (1971:12-13)

*The Gods Are Not to Blame* represents the ability and boundless power of theatre and drama in a discussion of various issues. It depicts the universality of creative art, which has no boundary; neither can it be bound by location or people; it possesses the power of adaptability (Eze, 2009:1).

In essence, almost all of Ola Rotimi's plays that have been read as literature and performed at one time or the other in Nigeria and outside the shores of Nigeria demonstrate various levels of socio-political themes. His well-known plays have been said to be 'socially and politically committed' and the ones which are dubbed as historic tragedies and adaptations of historical records, such as *Kunrunmi* and *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi* have also contributed to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria. These two plays

—in terms of performance or play-text—depict some influence of the older theatrical performance forms of Alarinjo. In them, Rotimi used some performance styles such as elaborate customs, dance, proverbs and more importantly, situate them in festival setting during performance. However, the levels and phases of the contribution of each play can only be examined in terms of performance evaluation through audience survey and readers' perception; and may also depend on various assessment methods which may be a good topic for a future study.

## 7.7 Conclusion

This section of this study has examined and documented the contribution of Ola Rotimi to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria through his published socio-political and economically relevant drama and theatre. Many of these plays have been read as play-texts, and have also been staged in Nigeria and abroad. Some of his other plays which are historical tragedies can also be seen as relevant to the contemporary. They cover different genres and styles, while his published articles, those written on him and his works by other authors, cannot be separated from being parts of useful literatures which provide useful academic information on the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria.

Plays such as *If...*, *Hope of the Living Dead*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and few others which are not mentioned in the analysis of the section of this study, such as *Holding Talk*, *Man Talk*, *Woman*, *Talk*, etc., by Ola Rotimi were strictly crafted after Western literary style or form of playwrighting/drama. Issues of great concern—such as socio-political and economic matters—were aired and discussed alongside the prevalent situation in the country. On the other hand, Rotimi's earlier plays such as *Kunrunmi*, *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi*, and *The gods Are not to blame*, tapped greatly into *Alarinjo* culture and tradition. These plays borrowed greatly from Yoruba philosophy and culture in addressing issues related to the collective survival of the populace in the society. However, both types of plays address social issues, but in differently.

The attempt to analyse some of Ola Rotimi's plays in this section can be linked to Sauter's (2007:8) Theory of Theatrical Events, especially, the playing culture aspect of the event. These plays identify with culture of playing, especially, in relation to language, culture and tradition which each of the plays adapts from.

Theatre as a poly-system is also at play in the work of Rotimi. He not only borrows from the traditional Yoruba culture or forms of playing culture; he also borrows from Western stories and cultural forms to create a hybrid form of theatre. The influence of Marxism (as a Western philosophy) is also very important in the world view of Rotimi (and in the work of Osofisan as we shall discover later). We have seen the same combination of styles in the work of Soyinka as well, and the fact that both these authors used English as a language for the productions is an indication that they wanted a wider audience to have access to the messages that they wanted to deliver.

The potential audience includes not only the academics and students at universities—it includes the workers in the streets, since they are the ones that suffer most under the injustices of corrupt or ineffective governments. These productions do not take place in a political vacuum and the socio-political commentary, the format in which the production is delivered and the political context wherein the work is being created and performed, is woven together in a complex system of meaning making activities in order to ‘play’ the new ‘culture.’

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE EMERGENCE OF FEMI OSOFISAN TO THE NIGERIAN THEATRE AND DRAMA SCENE**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The third and last Nigerian literary dramatist examined in this part of the study, has over the years contributed immensely to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria.

Femi Osofisan, as he is popularly known, is the youngest of the three dramatists under discussion. An abridged biography of Osofisan is provided, aimed at understanding and determining the various influences that shaped his theatrical works in the Nigerian theatre and drama world.

#### **8.2 Femi Osofisan's abridged biography**

Nigerian literary dramatist, Femi Osofisan, was born as Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1946, in the village of Erunwon in the old Western Region of Nigeria, now known as Ogun State, Nigeria. He was born to Ebenezer Olatokunbo Osofisan, a lay-reader, church organ player and school teacher, who died three months after Osofisan's birth. His mother is Phebean Olufunke Osofisan, a retired disciplinarian and school teacher.

Osofisan attended primary school at Ile-Ife from 1952 to 1958, and secondary school at Government College Ibadan, from 1959 to 1963. He then studied French at the University of Ibadan between 1966 and 1969. From 1967 to 1968, he attended Universite de Dakar, Senegal, on a scholarship from the French Government for the year-abroad French language programme. Osofisan embarked on his post-graduate studies at the Sorbonne, Paris, France, from 1972 to 1973, again with the assistance of the French Government Scholarship for graduate study. In 1973, he was appointed as assistant lecturer at the Department of Modern Languages, University of Ibadan. In 1974, he obtained the degree of Doctor of

Philosophy (Ph.D.). Femi Osofisan was appointed as visiting Professor of Drama in 1985 at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). Later, he was promoted to the position of Professor of Drama at the University of Ibadan.

His published and performed plays in chronological order include the following:

*Oduduwa, Don't Go!* (1968)

*You Have Lost Your Fine Face* (first performed in 1969, no record of publication)

*Red Is the Freedom Road* (1974)

*A Restless Run of Locusts* (1975)

*The Chattering and the Song* (1977)

*Who's Afraid of Solarin?* ( 1978)

*Morountodun* (1979)

*Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980)

*No More a wasted Breed* (1982)

*The Midnight Hotel* (1986)

*The Midnight Blackout* (1986)

*Altine's Wrath* (1986)

*Oriki Of A Grasshopper* (1986)

*Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* (1986)

*The Esu And The Vagabond Minstrels* (1987)

*Another Raft* (1988)

*Birthdays Are Not For Dying* (1990)

*Fire Burn and Die Hard* (1990)

*The Inspector and The Hero* (1990)

*Twingle-Twangle A-Twynning Tayle* (1992)

*Aringindin And The Night-watchmen* (1992)

*Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest: A Parable for Our Times* (1993)

*The Midnight Blackout* (1994)

*The Engagement* (1995)

*Reel Rwanda* (1996)

*Tegonni: An African Antigone* (1999)

*One Legend, Many Seasons* (2001)

*Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* (2003)

*Aringindin and the Night Watchmen* (2003)

*Women of Owu* (first performed in 2004 and published in 2006)

*Nkrumah-Ni...Africa-Ni!* (2009)

*Richard Langder and the Travelling Polygamist* (2009), and *A Night With Elephant* (2009).

His latest known published play is *Ajayi Crowther* (2011).

Osofisan is a prolific Nigerian playwright, publisher, critic, poet, novelist, essayist and cultural activist whose work confronts political corruption and injustice through the radical, revolutionary approach dominant in his many social dramas. The many literary accolades and commendations he has won, include prizes from the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) for Drama (1980) and Poetry (1989); in 2004 he was awarded the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM), the highest academic prize in the country. His most recent award is the 2006 Fonlon-Nichols Award bestowed annually on an African writer for excellence in creative writing and contributions to the struggles for human rights. Osofisan is the President of Pen Nigerian Center, and the immediate General Manager of the National Theatre, Lagos. He is married to Nike Osofisan, the first Nigerian Ph.D. holder in Computer Science, and they have four children.

### **8.3 Influence on Femi Osofisan's theatre and drama**

Various factors have influenced Osofisan's theatre and drama studies and career. Being from the Yoruba extraction, his traditional background and the role that the Yoruba culture and played in shaping his works cannot be emphasized enough. Having been abroad for his studies, one must also acknowledge the Western and European influences on him. Theories and philosophies of theatre icons Bertolt Brecht (1898—1956), known for his 'Epic Theatre'; the French satirist and lively farcical writer, Georges Feydeau (1862—1921); and Karl Marx (1818—1883) and his Marxist philosophy have played huge roles in Osofisan's works. According to Okur (1998:1), "It was through Ibadan's intellectual atmosphere that he was exposed to the Negritude movement of the 1930's, initiated largely by French colonial students. During those days he took a close look at Frantz Fanon's observations of the Algerian revolution and found numerous resemblances."

Awodiya (2010:265), in his analysis of Osofisan's satirical play *Midnight Hotel*, gives insight into Osofisan's drawing of some of his techniques from Bertolt Brecht and Georges Feydeau:

*Midnight Hotel* is a comic opera that uses theatrical devices of humour, satire, music and songs to portray ills like political corruption, moral depravity and religious charlatanism that plague the Nigerian society. (...) In the play, Osofisan combines Brecht's anti-illusionary theatre with Feydeau's theatre of illusion to create a unique style, comic opera that is quintessentially Osofisan's. He achieves this by breaking the flow of the play in order to use the songs as comments on the main actions of the play as well as on the state of the Nigerian society...

Similarly, Obasi (2013:36) associates Femi Osofisan with Marxist ideology. He asserts that "Perhaps there is no doubt that Femi Osofisan could be classified as a Marxist writer who demands social change in favour of the oppressed and downtrodden masses in the society as the theme of his plays expresses." However, there has been many academic discourses and differences with reference to the level or strands of Marxism adopted by Osofisan in his works.

#### **8.4 Osofisan and Marxism influence**

The influences of Marxism on the dramatic works of Osofisan are many. In this respect, Okonkwo (2015:11) comments as such: "Femi Osofisan ranks among the foremost contemporary Nigerian dramatists. He is a prolific and radical writer who addresses himself to the socio-political problems in contemporary Nigerian society. The interest to undertake a Marxian perspective on Osofisan is predicted by the Marxist influence which informs most of his works." He further believes that "This is an influence which places Marxism as *the ideology of the proletariat... a formidable weapon in the struggle for social struggle for social progress and world's reconstruction along new and just lines.*"

The notion that Osofisan shows solidarity with the poor is affirmed by Ajidahun (2012:12), who also describes Osofisan's stance as Marxist ideology:

Osofisan identifies with the poor and the oppressed in the society and wonders why they are usually called upon to sacrifice their lives at the expense of the rich. This is typical of Marxist ideology, which Osofisan's text represents, whereas Soyinka in *The Strong Breed* depicts the scapegoat principle, which is typical of the annual ritual of the traditional riverine people of Nigeria in particular.

Marxism ideology and concepts have a fairly long history and scholars often get 'baptized' in it at higher institutions of study. Karl Marx made important statements about culture and society during the 1840s. The Marxist literary methodology derives from the

philosophies or dogmas of Karl Marx and Fredric Engels, published in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels argued that the history of man is equal to the history of class struggle. It was their contention that the main goal of man's struggle is to liberate himself from certain forms of oppression.

Terry Eagleton (1976) elaborates on this liberation struggle: "Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them: and what that means, rather more concretely, is what the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression." The main message of Marxism is the struggle for the revolution of the human society, so that man can be liberated from manipulation and oppression in all its forms and ramifications.

Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez (1979:96) moved a step further to a broadened controversy about Marxism as related to aesthetics and the sociology of art. He argues:

In speaking of aesthetics and Marxism, and of the relationship between them, it is not simply a matter of applying the principles that obtain on all levels of social existence and consciousness to a determinate domain. What a Marxist has to say with regard to art cannot be reduced to a proposal for extracting the underlying ideology of a work of art, and even less to an attempt to equate its aesthetic value and its ideological content. Nor is it a matter of reducing art to its social conditioning, which is undoubtedly opens or closes a vast range of creative possibilities. If that were the case the task would be relatively simple: Marxist aesthetics would be reduced to a sociology of art, and both sociologists and artists would have less to worry about, especially those those who erroneously believe that the role of Marxism is not so much to give a greater richness and depth to our existence as to impoverish it and reduce its dimensions.

What Vazquez thus rather proposed is that Marxist concept must be understood beyond its sociological function in relation to art of all kind. The concept must function holistically. We must also investigate other functions that the concept can explain in art. Hence, Vazquez (1979:97) concludes that "We could say then that art, like all autonomous, qualitatively distinct spheres, exists as such to the extent that it transcends the particularity of its social conditioning. This transcendence, which in essence resides in the very bowels of art, is the exact opposite of all sociological reductions."

The question whether Osofisan has reduced the concept of Marxism to ‘a sociology of art’ is not the focus of this study at this juncture—rather, the study is concerned with how he has explored and applied it in the craftsmanship of his plays. Osofisan explores the Marxists ideology through an artistic reflection of the effects of social and economic disparities in the Nigerian society. For instance, *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) addresses the scourge of violent armed robbery which has engulfed the length and breadth of Nigeria since the end of the Civil War in 1970. On the other hand, *Morountodun* (1979) portrays the usual and familiar way of silencing the poor mass majority of the people in the face of operation and exploitation by an authoritarian government. The thematics in these two plays can be related to the present reality in many of the African continents, but more precisely, the current situation in Nigeria.

The notion, style and technique of borrowing and drawing from culture and tradition by both classical and modern writers, especially playwrights, had become an acceptable norm in the creative and artistic world. Awodiya (2010:70-71) states as follows:

Certainly the most dominant trend in contemporary African literature is that of writers going back to their tradition roots to borrow from oral literature to enrich written literature. Osofisan is of special interest in this aspect because he has consistently employed the devices of oral literature in his drama. The effective manner in which these devices are used in his plays demands attention. Apart from their aesthetic functions, folkloric techniques in Osofisan’s plays often become the vehicle of critical thematic commentary on the society.

In addition to the aforementioned influences, the impact of Western theories and philosophies on Osofisan’s works can be attributed to his early contact with the French language and literature at the University of Ibadan between 1966 and 1969. His early exposure to Yoruba, English and French, and also to Western theories and philosophies such as Marxism, have been major sources of the styles and techniques in many of his theatre and drama.

Creative artists such as practitioners of theatre and drama, depend on their culture and tradition for a continuous supply of useful ideas and content for their work. Producing such works of arts became a kind of heritage to their people. In his Marxist-Leninist theories, Mao Zedong (1893- 1976), also known as Mao Tse-tung, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Revolutionary Movement, states in *Talks at The Yan’an Forum On Literature and*

*Art* that “... through the creative labour of revolutionary writers and artists, the raw materials found in the life of the people are shaped into the ideological form of literature and art serving the masses of the people.” It is evident in the performance of Osofisan’s plays that a range of literary devices such as humour, irony, song, music, dance, folktale, legends, fables, flash-back and narrative techniques are employed. One more important style and technique in Osofisan plays is the demystification of the gods and goddesses by means of storytelling during performances of his plays.

The Yoruba traditional *Alarinjo* performers, the contemporary theatre artists such as Hubert Ogunde, as well as modern theatre artists and dramatists like Osofisan and his contemporaries, take appropriate elements from their culture and tradition to benefit their craftsmanship.

## **8.5 The theatre and drama of Femi Osofisan**

From the very beginning of his career as writer and dramatist, Osofisan set out to inform or educate his audience about matters pertaining to their society. He uses his plays to tell his audiences about the injustices of the ruling elite. He challenges his audience to change their situation. His artistic vision is of emancipation of the masses that are perpetually oppressed in the society. Osofisan, “through his techniques and themes, preaches that the masses should doggedly fight for their right to ensure that national wealth is distributed equitably” (Onwuka, 2011:102).

In most of Osofisan’s plays, he wants to alert his readers and audience to the injustices and the vices of the government or the ruling class; he attempts to open their eyes to what is politically, economically and socially at work in their environment. He uses his plays, both as text and stage performances, to challenge the audience to do something about their unpleasant conditions in the society, with the belief that “a timely collective action” taken by the masses in any given society is the requisite for a better society. According to Awodiya (1993:137), Osofisan states that he wants “(...) to get close to the spectator, to teach and every one I have trapped in the darkness or half-lighted, to penetrate very close and intimate, like a knife in the ribs. I want to make the spectator happy but uncomfortable. I want to turn him open, guts and all, spice him (...).”

Many of his plays have served as a potent vehicle in showcasing the ills and decadence in the Nigerian society under various military and democratically-elected governments. This view is supported by the following view:

Femi Osofisan is a ... literary theorist, and newspaper critic, and he is part of a generation of Nigerians who feel they have experienced Nigerian independence as an empty slogan. Thus he fashions a committed literature designed to shatter the enduring shackles of religion, custom, and colonialism and to stimulate a confident, imaginatively self-critical sensibility capable of charting a course toward a more humane, egalitarian society. Writing in English, he aims his dramas at those whose education enables them to manage the nation's destiny, but his manipulation of the theatre's rich nonverbal resources, coupled with an exploitation of indigenous African performance aesthetics, means that his work has the potential to reach a wider audience. Within Nigeria, he is often viewed as a radical intent upon completely destroying the past, but his radicalism actually builds on the best of tradition while seeking to encourage pervasive change. (Bakare in *Newswatch*, October 23, 2013)

Osofisan familiarizes his audience with his content, using the familiar Yoruba folklore, legends, story, song, idiomatic language and other indigenous Yoruba cultural identities, all of which make his audiences feel comfortable while watching or reading his plays. He also discomforts them by reconstructing or altering the usual flow of performance by sudden, unexpected interjections. He then proceeds to allow the orchestra to introduce music and songs that tell a relevant story-line with the performance of his actors. This style and technique is borrowed from Bertolt Brecht.

Brecht, the originator of Epic theatre, uses his Epic Theatre with its popular element of 'Verfremdungs-effekt' commonly referred to in English as 'alienation effect', 'distancing effect' or 'estrangement effect' to keep his audience undistracted by the flow of the performance of his plays.

Theatre artists and dramatists such as Osofisan, influenced by Brecht and his Epic Theatre in their performances, usually interrupt the action in their plays at 'key junctures', with songs or other forms of direct appeals to get the message across to their audience. The purpose is to alienate their audience during the performance. They thus hope the audience will not be too relaxed and get carried away by the amusement or excitement of the play in order to also engage them in a critical analysis of the social aspects portrayed in the play.

In most instances, Osofisan's dramas identify with and emphasize the plight of lessprivileged people. His plays often rebel against the gods and authorities because of the perceived incessant and unfair treatment meted out to less-privileged members of the society. An example of a performance where Osofisan depicts obvious solidarity with man against gods and goddesses is *No More the Wasted Breed* (1983).

### ***No More the Wasted Breed***

Biokun, the main character at the beginning of this play, is seen offering a sacrifice as appeasement to the goddess, Elusu, for the reason that his son, Erindo, has taken ill and all attempts to cure him have thus far proved unsuccessful. The boy's illness makes it seem as if the gods have been provoked by his family. Biokun needs to pacify the goddess before his son can be delivered. Saluga, a close friend and co-fisherman with Biokun, already a disheartened man towards the goddess, opposes Biokun's move to honour the request of the spirits world, because he feels the goddesses are not worthy of human's appeasement and placation. He thinks that the gods lack goodwill to deliver humanity from tribulations. Togun, the priest, senses that Saluga will instigate Biokun against the deities and in the end prevents Biokun from pacifying the gods through the sacrifice.

The gods notice a mole on Biokun's chest which readily distinguishes him as the carrier for the village. In the meantime, Olokun has confided in Biokun that his father, Osoosi, is the last carrier and that during a ritual progression, a woman horribly rushed out of the reeds and clenched on to him, thus soiling the tradition. The woman is alleged to have been stoned to death while Biokun's father never return back home. The deities attack him because he has shattered their cult. Because Biokun is from the family of carriers, it is now his turn to volunteer himself as the bearer of the sacrifice to appease the deities for the evils of perpetrate by the people of his village.<sup>16</sup>

In the play, the gods want their cult reestablished so that the flooding and the epidemic can end. Biokun is convinced by the gods to volunteer himself as a sacrifice. Saluga, Biokun's friend, counsels him against yielding to the demand of the gods to sacrifice himself:

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<sup>16</sup> A carrier in the play *No More the Wasted Breed* is the chosen character (such as Biokun) who must provide and carry the required sacrifice to appease Olokun, the sea goddess.

**BIOKUN:** That was different, can't you see? The situation was never as desperate. The entire life of a people did not hang like this on a man's head. And who knows, maybe it's a chance at last for the boy to live, for Oroki to dry her tears---

**SALUGA:** For how long? For what? So that one day, when he is grown, Erindo can be sent too across the water to his death?

**BIOKUN:** At least he would have lived a little. Would have known laughter, tears, salt and wind. The pride of setting up a *koko* or *kulu*, or the agbagba of shallow rivers. Would have known the sound of the *kowe* bird, the horn of Yemoja's *abori* fish...

**SALUGA:** Daydreams! What do they add up to, except that one day he'll be ripe for the long teeth of a goddess? Biokun, listen to me, your wife will not live happier as a widow. (Osofisan, 1982:104)

Femi Osofisan, speaking through Saluga, registers his protest and revolt against the demand for continuous sacrifice to the gods which had, over time, yielded no result. The two characters in the play then reasoned together, and decided to put an end to the serving of the gods and goddesses who have been of no benefit to their collective well-being. *No More the Wasted Breed* is a response to Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, one of the plays which a radical revolutionist such as Osofisan rejects because of its perceived lack of will to positively advance the human course, but instead upholding cultural and traditional aesthetics and belief. In relation to this, Ajidahun (2012:10) states:

These writers reject the tragic vision expressed in the works of their predecessors because such works are incapable of raising the revolutionary impulse and consciousness of the masses. Both generations of writers utilize materials from oral literature to realize their visions. Both Soyinka and Osofisan address the theme of scapegoat and ritual in their texts. They delve on the same materials from oral literature but they differ in their conceptualizations and perspectives of the myth of the theme of the carrier because of their different ideological leanings.

The contemporary relevance of some of Osofisan's drama to the socio-political and economic issues and reality in present day Nigeria, and around many other parts of Africa is clear in this case.

### ***Morontodun***

*Morountodun*, a tragic play by Femi Osofisan, portrays courage and strong will as solution to oppression. The play centres on the happenings which occurred during the turbulent years of the Nigerian civil war in 1967—1970.

There was a major peasant farmers' uprising in the Western Region (Yoruba region) at the time. The play starts with numbers of actors trying to enact the story of the Agbekoya

uprising. Titubi, the overpampered daughter of Alhaja Kabira, after some negotiation with the police agrees to help the government arrest the leader of the rebellious group, whose name is Marshal. Titubi later finds herself among the farmers and recognizes that their cause for agitation is 'legitimate'. She engages in the day to day activities of these peasant farmers, experience their sufferings and oppression by the government, and decides to fight side by side with the group and their leader, Marshal, with whom she later falls in love.

Marshal ends up dead, Titubi mobilise the group to victory and ends up with a new name Morountodun that means "I have discovered something sweet or interesting".

In *Morontodun*, he depicts the view that the pains and sacrifices often associated with revolutionary efforts is usually an ultimate price. In the play, Mosun portrays a profound sense of justice, even to the point where the blood of his biological father is demanded. Osofisan captures the sufferings of the farmers as a consequence of the authority's imposition of high tax on the farmers. The following conversation between Bogunde, Marshal, Baba and Baba illustrates the foregoing:

**BOGUNDE:** It was too late. Sisi could not help any more.

**MARSHAL:** Terrible, the way they writhed to death.

**BABA:** May their souls rest with our ancestors.

**MARSHAL AND BOGUNDE:** *Ase!*

**BABA:** Poison! What is the land turning into?

**BOGUNDE:** All because we refuse to pay money we haven't got. Because we refuse to let men with two balls like us march upon our heads.

Because we refuse to let men with two balls like us march upon our heads. (Osofisan, 1979:49)

The pain of these peasant farmers in *Morountodun* continues until Titubi, the daughter of Alhaja Kabira (a very wealthy woman, who benefits from the government who inflicted hardship on the peasant farmers), commits class suicide. She willingly leaves her comfort zone that guarantees the pleasures of wealth, to live in the forest with the peasant farmers, so as to personally experience their pain and agony. Her intention is to witness and experience the hardships of the marginalized in the society.

Osofisan believes that the success of any revolution rests on the involvement of the economically advantaged people of society. Gbilekaa (1997:87) reinforces the argument: "The revolutionary hero has to enter into communion with the people. He has to study them, their psychology before he can earn their confidence or make any headway."

At the end of the play, Titubi, the previously pampered and uncultured young daughter of a wealthy mother transforms into a compassionate, radical visionary who wants to help saving the less-privileged people in her society. Osofisan uses Titubi's character in *Morountodun* to present the analogous ideological concept between class struggle and class suicide to the audience and spectators.

In his many other plays, Osofisan artistically cross-examines history, critically scrutinizing myths and challenging legends, and also encouraging man to use his knowledge and environment to improve and free himself from a series of socio-political and economic hardships associated with bad governance. In many of his plays—such as *One Legend, Many Seasons* (2001), *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* (2003), and *No More a Wasted Breed* (1982), Osofisan demystified the gods and goddesses and used them as metaphors to articulate his vision for a better society.

The socio-political commentary in Osofisan's works articulates one specification: certain conditions must be met by the general populace before the society can be socio-politically stable. For example, in *Morountodun*, Marsal started the struggle, but later loses his life while fighting for right cause. Titubi, however, is able to continue the fight until the end when the desired revolution eventually took place.

## **8.6 Music in Brecht and Osofisan's Theatre**

Music is an important element or characteristic of Brecht's Epics. The musical parts of his epic theatrical performances express thematic pre-occupation and concurring ideas entrenched in his plays. In Brecht's theatre, music often independently provides separate comments on the character, action and general mindsets in his plays. It aids to position the audience or spectators of Brecht's drama by not only reinforcing the text, but also by providing a counterpoint to the action on the stage. The words and tunes jar as the performance progresses. The attention of the audience is drawn to the words and actions in his plays. In Osofisan's theatre, conversely, music is not meant to express his performance independently; rather, it should be accepted as an integral part of the play.

Osofisan thus makes ample use of music, text and action to register his dissatisfaction with the many negative vices that shape the Nigerian society. Awodiya (2010:230) underlines this:

Through his lyrics, Osofisan protests and revolts against the social, political and economic conditions of the Nigerian society: the squalor, corruption, injustice and misuse of state power. Through his songs, he takes a message to the proletariat and peasantry: that they must rise and seize their rights and denounce corrupt leadership. He does not only see music and songs as essential ingredients of his drama, but also as agents that encapsulate his political philosophy: the dislodgement of an oppressive and unjust political system.

The notion that music plays purely aesthetic roles in theatrical performance has long been debated and discussed. A further debate on it would amount to sheer repetition. Nonetheless, music and songs undoubtedly played major roles in African societies in the past. Music, just like other forms of arts, can promote social harmony as confirmed by Lawal (1987:27-28):

... [S]ocial harmony depends for the most part on patience, restraint, diplomacy as well as doing good and being fair to your fellowmen. In pursuit of these ideals, painting, sculpture, textile design, music, dance and poetry are blended with great expertise, so much so as to communicate a strong element of art for art's sake, even though within a larger context of art for life's sake. In this quest, art serves not only as a kind of social medicine for peace, unity and human development, but also as a vital instrument in man's endeavour to subject his society to some kind of order.

By inference, arts—be it drama, theatre, music, dance, painting, chanting or any other mode—are not only for pleasure or aesthetics. They serve important purposes of maintaining continuous human survival in the society. One of the generally-acknowledged reasons why music and songs accompany theatre and drama, is that the orchestra whose responsibilities include contributing to the act of story-telling on stage, is vital in passing the messages or themes of the production across to the audience. Gbilekaa (1997:180) states that the cultural musical forms, such as drumming and dance, are linking the existing forms with older cultural forms of presentation.

Osofisan's theatre and drama embrace the concept of 'total theatre'. This notion of total theatre—through the fusion of acting, dance, music, songs, acrobatic display, chants and visual effects—is neither a borrowed concept nor an external influence. It has been part of African and specifically Nigerian theatre and drama in terms of the cultural performative styles and techniques, from time immemorial. The traditional Travelling Theatre of

Egungun Alarinjo (masquerades), the Kwagh-hir (puppets) theatre and other theatrical traditions in Nigeria and Africa are good examples in these respects.

The obvious influence of the total theatre concept of African drama and theatre on Osofisan is likely responsible for the adaptation of music and songs in many of his plays. Awodiya (2010:230) maintains that “As a cult in his drama, music and song is deified and glorified by Osofisan as a means of asserting the need for a reassessment of societal conflicts; conjuring it as a carrier which gives vent to the afflictions and hardship of the poor and the wretched (...).”

To Osofisan, music is expressive in nature; music is as effective as drama and theatre in addressing socio-political and economic issues in the society. For instance, in *Another Raft*, Osofisan applies lyrics to comment on socio-political matters in the play. Theatre and drama are cultural properties; so is music. They are all a part of African culture, and they possess the capacity to attract and discourse opposing issues that are connected to human survival in the society. Osofisan allows his characters to reveal their identities and pasts in his plays through music, just as he does through dialogue. For this reason, his characters often enjoy the opportunity of moving from the stage to the orchestra stand where the musicians and singers are to join in singing, dancing and even the playing of musical instruments. The characters (actors), at some points during the performance may demand special musical renderings. The characters in Osofisan’s theatre freely tell parts of the ongoing story in the play.

From my personal experience, not only as a spectator who has seen many of Osofisan’s plays performed on stage but also as a director who has directed his *Midnight Blackout*, directing many of Osofisan’s plays requires a separate orchestra stand, usually close to the stage. The performance of actors on stage and the rendering of songs by the orchestra in many Osofisan’s dramas follow the same script; this means there must be a good level of synchronization between them. They tell the same story. One actor tells his or her story through acting, while the other does so through music. For this reason, music and songs in his plays become an integral part of the total performance.

## 8.7 The contribution of Osofisan to the socio-political evolution of Drama and Theatre in Nigeria in comparison to Soyinka and Rotimi

The contribution of Femi Osofisan to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performance in Nigeria dates back to the post-independent historical of the country. His theatrical career and exploration right from the beginning of his emergence adopted different and variable styles and methods, which have been mentioned and discussed earlier in this study. Most of his plays are written and performed not as usual dramatic texts, but also as Epic Theatre Tradition, championed by Bertolt Brecht. Osofisan, through his use of Brechtian technique and other influences, have written and performed plays to expose and examine various socio-political and economic issues associated with bad governance in Nigeria, especially during the many years of military dictatorship. The reading and performance of his plays have informed people and challenged both individuals and groups to demand accountability and fairness from their government.

The struggle for the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama by Osofisan started mostly as academic-based critique, since most of his plays were staged within the context of Nigerian universities (Ibadan, Ife, Benin and others) before they were later exposed to other strata of the Nigerian space. Osofisan (2001:62-63) himself declared:

In most radical circles, university-based activism is instinctively suspect. Out of a prejudice whose origins are Eurocentric [after all the current idea of the university system was imported into our countries from Europe anyway]—the weight of radical practice leans heavily against the academy as a possible site of popular struggle. Hence the ‘radicalism’ of the theatre that we practice and promote, we dramatists on the various university campuses in black Africa, is cited invariably within brackets.

in another essay, *Insidious Treasons: Drama in A Postcolonial State*, Osofisan (2001:50) provides further discussion on how he successfully and tactically engages various authoritarian governments through his works:

But happily however, against the inert silence which autocrats seek to impose upon their subjects, the dissenting artist can triumph through the gift of metaphor and magic, parody and parable, masking and mimicry. With this gift, properly deployed, the Terror of the state can be confronted, demystified. But it has to be a conscious tactics of deployment, one that has also to be constantly re-tuned and re-honed to the particular moment, a

covert and metamorphic system of maneuvering which, for want of a better term, is surreptitious insurrection.

As established from the beginning of this chapter, the theatre and drama of Femi Osofisan and his contemporaries such as Bode Sowande, Femi Fatunde and others are referred to as revolutionary theatre and drama, serving as a bridge between the contemporary itinerant theatre of Hubert Ogunde and Soyinka's literary-drama type of the first generations of writers spearheaded by Wole Soyinka and J.P Clark. The real beginning may be traced to the colonial period's theatre and drama, which brought about a radical theatrical tradition that protested against the European forms of entertainment, both in contents and forms. The argument was against cultural invasion and hegemony of the Western type of theatre, drama and other forms of entertainment.

The theatrical movement that became popular after the Colonial period and post Soyinka and J.P Clark was indeed revolutionary. Osofisan revolted against the existing theatrical and dramatic traditions of Contemporary Theatre, championed by Ogunde and others, and that of Soyinka and his generation. Gbilekaa (1997:202) clarifies the term "revolutionary theatre and drama" and differentiate between the agitational propaganda type of theatre and drama. He says that "it is important to note that agitational propaganda is not revolutionary art. Rather than examine, agitational art support, explains but does not analyse."

In conclusion, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan all were part the group popularly referred to as the 'Nigerian literary dramatists', although major differences in their various approaches to their works are evident. Ajidahun (2012:10) summarises the viewpoint:

Femi Osofisan, on the other hand, belongs to the new generation of Nigerian writers immediately following Wole Soyinka in the early 1970's. To them, independence has fetched them nothing. Their hopes have been dashed as an independent nation. The desire to liberate the masses from the economic exploitation of the oppressive ruling class continues to be their preoccupation. They are not concerned with the cultural renaissance, which is the focus of the earlier writers. They are concerned with the economic survival, equity, justice, end to corruption, nepotism, oppression and other social vices plaguing the Nigerian society. Their views are therefore more radical than the views of their earlier writers whose interest is purely cultural.

While playwrights like Soyinka and Rotimi, in some of their works, romanticize the African culture and tradition mostly in pursuance of the meaning of human existence and to foster socio-political and economic stability in the society, the generations of the dramatists that followed, such as Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande and Kole Omotoso, kicked against these ideas; they critically looked at and probed the socio-political and economic landscape of the country. They demanded that citizens unite in asking for accountability, fairness and dividends of self-governance from the ruling class. They embraced the perceived useful parts of culture and tradition, while the parts that are identified as anti-progressive in terms of human development, are ignored or rejected.

Femi Osofisan's approach and philosophy can be seen as eclectic and multi-dimensional.

Osofisan rejected the Western hegemony over African values; yet, he placed it in a proper setting, where the language of the West served as a conduit to decipher for him what has been said by others who came before him. As his critics assert, his dramaturgy yields to a multi-faceted interpretation: from Soyinka, Mbari Club and Brecht to Marxian dialectics, Fanon, Cabral, Yoruba philosophy, and Esu principle. His drama is set in reconstruction; ritual and tradition initiates re-interpretation and revalorization of both the old and the new. His rendezvous with history is a commitment he will never abandon. (Okur, 1998:4)

Rotimi's emergence appears more like a bridge between Soyinka and Osofisan. His presence and contribution to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama began in 1966, approximately six years after the emergence of Soyinka and his other contemporaries, while the emergence of Osofisan and his generations only became apparent in the 1970s. Thus, the combination of cultural renaissance of Soyinka's generation, as well as the revolutionary and radical aesthetics associated with Osofisan in works such as *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and *If...* are very apparent.

Nonetheless, the commitment and desire of the older generation of Nigerian playwrights such as Soyinka and J.P Clark, in relation to the realization of a better society as shown in their works are as glaring in the various works of the younger generations, championed by Femi Osofisan. Their approaches and techniques are the final differentiators in their works. Umukoro (1994:14-15) encapsulates:

In other words, Soyinka and Clark are as politically committed as their younger compatriots. In fact, the two groups of Nigerian dramatists are moved by similar motives and actions. They both show in their works that

the present condition of their society is bad and that there is a way to change it for the better. What distinguishes them is the ideology and the vision which is proposed to safeguard the future and these are no more than variations of the same subject: the quest for democracy in Nigeria.

Based on the foregoing, this study absolutely infers that the artistic visions of the African, especially with regard to Nigerian theatre and drama practitioners and scholars, are densely interwoven and interrelated. However, what visibly separates the older and the new Nigerian literary dramatists through their works are differences in terms of their cultural perspectives, ideology, approaches and applications.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

The contribution of Femi Osofisan to the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria lies in his unique application of theatrical and dramatic technique and style. His unique technique and style can be interpreted as the results of the various influences of Western theatre icons and theories of Bertolt Brecht. Also, the influence of the French satirist and lively farcical writer Georges Feydeau, and Karl Marx and his Marxist philosophies are recognizable in many of his works. Osofisan's Yoruba background avails him the opportunity to adapt Yoruba history and oral literature to tell his stories in many of his plays—a contribution that can never be underestimated in the making of his theatre and drama. Apart from the fact that his plays have been read far and wide (both in Nigeria and abroad), his published articles and books have furthered the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performance in Nigeria.

Femi Osofisan's works reflect different backgrounds which later informed his style of writing and craftsmanship. For example, he grew up under the British colonial influence in the Yoruba-speaking part of the country; in addition, he had his secondary as well as his tertiary education during the early years of Nigerian's independence in 1960. Consequently, he was influenced by the Yoruba cultures of traditional Travelling Theatre, storytelling, rituals and festivals. These inspirations later confluence with his Western education; specifically, the works of Bertolt Brecht, alongside Marxist's theory and philosophy. He is certainly one of those individuals among the sets of revolutionary Nigerians who became major writers in the 1970s and who were popularly referred to by the Nigerian literary critics as 'the irate young men of Nigerian playwright' because of their Marxist engagement and commitment to collective social change. Many of Osofisan's dramas challenge popular

myths and historic facts through socialist tenets and arguments. More recently, he embraced a pan-Africanist quest in his dramaturgy.

The plays of Femi Osofisan, some of which I attempted to analyse, can be linked to Sauter's (2007:8) theory of the Theatrical Events and the Epic tradition. The latter breaks away from the traditional dramatic culture: for example, the audience can interject by playing and acting in the proceedings. It was earlier explained in the theoretical foundation of the study that a theatrical event is a way of playing and, more exactly, as theatrical playing. Osofisan's plays can be analysed as theatrical playing, which often adopt expression of people's culture; specifically, Yoruba culture and tradition, whilst also engaging with the socio-political context wherein the plays are situated.

# CHAPTER NINE

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Summary

This research study has offered a penetrating inquiry into the evolution of socio-political theatre and drama performances from traditional Nigeria Yoruba *Alarinjo*, to Contemporary Itinerant Theatre, and reviewed selected works of Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan.

The work was theoretically underpinned by Hauptfleisch's (2007) concept of *Festivals as Eventifying Systems*, the concept of *Theatrical Event* as propounded by Sauter (2006), and Cremona's (2007) concept of the *Festivalising Process*. These foundational philosophies were selected for their suitability for the analysis, and in particular their applicability for an analysis of theatrical and dramatic works of the selected authors.

These theories have explained the formation, development and various manifestations of socio-political theatre in Nigerian (Yoruba) theatre and drama. The culmination of the Yoruba theatre and drama can be traced in the content and modes of presentation of ritualistic celebration and festivalisation.

The study has equally focused on the origin and thematic contents in traditional *Alarinjo* performance. The thematic preoccupation generally concentrated on love, reward for patience, fantasy, jealousy, clash of culture, immoralities, traditions and values, the reward of evil, compensation for doing good, dramatic biographies of their favourite heroes as well as some straight-forward didactic pieces. It is in this last genre where the practice of sociopolitical commentary can be strongly tracked. The *Alarinjo* was offered as a 'safe space' for social commentary and with its roots firmly embedded in the cultural form of expression, it created a blueprint where theatre-makers could adopt and adapt the methods of critical rhetoric.

It was argued that masks played a critical role, symbolically speaking, during the performance of the traditional *Alarinjo* theatre, much as in the cases of classical Greek and

Roman theatre. The mask's function is primarily to mimic and impersonate pre-determined individuals or animals whose facial structures, features and statistics are emulated.

The *Alarinjo* masquerades communicated with spectators through satire, lampooning and gesture. Contemporary, socio-political and economy-related issues were dramatized to inform and sensitise the populace. These aesthetic conduit of expressing commentary served as one of the pertinent contributions of the *Alarinjo* performance to the Yoruba society.

The common concern and subject-matter in both Yoruba Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre and contemporary drama is that oral literature and its performance is about the people and their survival in their immediate society; it is moreover concerned with collective means of promoting directives that may allow the society to live in peace and harmony.

Through satirical presentation of deviate individuals in the society, the *Alarinjo* revuemasques analyse the Yoruba society, illuminating prevalent ills and principles while praising those individuals that are morally good and upright at the same time. It is crucial to note that all the revue-masquerades rested on audiences' involvement to be fully effective. As the sketches were largely improvisational, they were also capable of endless changes. The chants they integrated in the series of their performances were typical of the type, and songs are contemporary and well-known to the people. It is vitally important to note that these performances took place in a festival setup, where various theatrical events are bestialised in order to create a poly-system of events in which the culture and socio-political elements were dramatized.

The literature study and an analysis of the relevant writers and dramatists—Ogando, Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan—triggered useful discussion dialogue on important sociopolitical and economic issues that transformed the Yoruba theatre into a readily available and digestible source of socio-political drama in contemporary Nigeria.

The study attempted to differentiate characteristics of Yoruba *Alarinjo*, its contemporary, modern and literary theatre and drama, and also, investigate how and why Yoruba theatre and drama was used as sources of creating socio-political drama by the *Alarinjo* masquerades of Ogunde, Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan. The influence of particular socio-political and economic contexts in Nigeria on theoretical, practical and methodological

approaches employed by the theatre practitioners in this study were analysed and deliberated.

This study revealed the various types of performance modes, styles, methods and techniques which were used during the different developmental stages of the socio-political evolution of theatre and drama in Nigeria, concentrating on Traditional Yoruba *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre created by Egungun (*The masquerades*), the Contemporary *Alarinjo* Travelling Theatre (which was championed by Hubert Ogunde and his contemporaries) as well as the Nigerian Literary Dramatists, who emerged shortly after the independence of the country in October 1960. It documented some of the theatre and drama practitioners that participated in the ritualistic-religious and festivalised period of the colonial and post-colonial era, using selected works of Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan.

The contribution of Western culture was identified as partial trigger of the evolution of sociopolitical theatre and drama performances in traditional Nigeria Yoruba *Alarinjo* and Contemporary Itinerant Theatre. The same is valid with respect to the effects of the West on the Nigerian Literary Dramatists, because the said influences expanded into the future work of many other Nigerian playwrights and theatre-makers.

This study documented the involvement of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and many other important artistes who established the Mbari Club in Ibadan in 1961. The artistic and academic associations and activities of the club members, inspired new writers of prose, poetry and dramatic works with socio-political and economic inferences of post-independent Nigeria. The creation of the Mbari Club later stimulated more interaction amongst artistes elsewhere in Nigeria; this time, at Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria, where another club named Mbari Mbayo was created in 1962.

The contribution of these two clubs to the development of socio-political theatre and drama in Nigeria is still visible today in the various works by former members. There is evidence of primary play texts and workshop materials in Nigerian Universities and abroad. These clubs created spaces where artistic experimentation could take place, and likeminded artistes could meet and work. Western perspectives in addition to older forms of cultural expression are noticeable. The hybrid form of work is therefore another development and manifestation of socio-political commentary in Nigerian theatre.

The study scrutinized the establishment of the first School of Drama in October 1963 at the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. This School was an important factor which over the years shaped the development of theatre and drama in the country, especially, when trained individuals in theatre and drama continued to produce politically-engaging theatre. Much like the Mbari clubs, the universities created space for experimentation. Naturally, the university setup is conducive to critical thinking and comment which might not necessarily be found in commercial theatre outside of the university structures.

Finally, the first sets of the Yoruba novels written before independence by Nigerian authors—such as G.O Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola—contributed immensely to the evolution of the socio-political theatre and drama in Nigeria through its thematic preoccupation and subject matters. The translations and adaptations of the works not only recognized the importance of the older, traditional performance and artistic forms such as oral literature; it reframes these forms—just like in the examples indicated above—to form a hybrid form of theatre that suits the delivery of socio-political commentary through the use of familiar, traditional forms, and contemporary performance practices.

## 9.2 Final remarks

The *Alarinjo* masquerades integrated dramatic devices such as lampooning, mimicking and caricaturing with the use of mediums such as masks, costumes and body-makeup, to satirise delinquent individuals and the general public, no matter how important the offender may be. The masquerades enjoyed the trust bestowed them by the society as ‘representatives of the dead’ on earth, hence, the communal immunity to them is sacrosanct and extremely sacred to the people.

The theatrical and dramatic acts and arts of the *Alarinjo* have no Western influence in its contents or performance structure. This assertion is premised on the historical accounts in Adedeji (1978 & 1972), which affirm that the *Alarinjo* theatre is as old as the creation of the Yoruba people’s kingdom.

The other type of significant theatre and drama that has been discussed in this study became known in Nigeria after the *Alarinjo* tradition. This is the Contemporary Theatre and Drama of Hubert Ogunde and his generation: Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and others.

These dramatists championed the cause of removing the masks off the faces of the masquerades and turned them to actors, and then, took the patronage of the theatre to the people across the country. Their movement gained popularity in the 1940s up until 1980s. This contemporary theatre and drama combined some aspect of the traditional *Alarinjo's* artistic characteristics with an infusion of the Western dramatic forms, such as the Concert Party and Vaudeville. They drew stories from the Bible and re-enacted them, using native or localized performance styles with dance, Yoruba songs and musical instruments.

A selective analysis and discussion have been executed on the life and works of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan; all of who belonged to the group known as the Nigerian Literary Dramatists. Their various works focus primarily on the post-colonial issues (such as military dictatorship, abuse of power, corruption, and embezzlement amongst others) which threatened the socio-political and economic growth of their fatherland. Members of the Nigerian literary dramatists who emerged in the 1960s transcended these three authors; the emphasis is, however, on the selected works of the three most outstanding members of the group for purposes of a case study.

The study establishes that many Nigerian literary dramatists, especially those discussed earlier in this study, borrowed various significant theatrical devices from the two older traditions of *Alarinjo* masks and contemporary theatre. Nevertheless, the research also recognises and documents the major impacts of the Western theories and techniques acquired by the Nigerian playwrights and theatre-makers while studying abroad. Their contact with foreign education inevitably exposed them to European, American and other Western types theatre and drama of the world. This is clearly illustrated in the work of Soyinka, where the theories of ancient drama, works of Shakespeare and the forms of agitprop theatre all acted as influences on his own work. He integrates the narrative and performative means of traditional Yoruba theatre, but he writes in English. The symbolic structures that he utilizes straddle two worlds: that of Europe, and that of Africa. The gods of the Yoruba are still present in Soyinka's work as a means to illustrate social problems.

In comparison, Osofisan wanted to remove the gods from the Nigerian stage. He also works in English (and not Yoruba) that might also reach a broader audience. The strong influence of Marx (as an ideological influence) and Brecht (as an aesthetic influence) has shaped his texts in a completely different way. The political commentary is more direct and even though music and dance is used (just as in the work of Soyinka and even Rotimi), the motive

for the use of music differs. We can conclude that we are here also dealing with a hybrid form of theatre, but manifested in a completely different form. The festival contexts of the earlier forms of Yoruba theatre are no longer present, although elements of the festivalisation process is called forward in the theatrical events created by the post-independent authors.

This study has been able to establish that the three major theatrical movements in Nigerian history used theatre and drama for socio-political agitation during the different phases of the country's development. Nonetheless, the Nigerian theatre and drama in the present day and situation may not address socio-political and economic issues in the same manner that the selected practitioners discussed and analysed social themes.

The era of Traditional *Alarinjo* Theatre and the Contemporary Itinerant Theatre may have come and gone, but the useful theatrical traditions associated with oral performance are still embedded in their various artistic works. The oral nature of the traditional forms, as well as the interactive nature of these form remained major influences on the present generations of the Nigerian playwright and theatre director—and others continue to sustain theatrical and dramatic traditions.

I fully concur with Inegbe's contention (2003:7):

As the world embraces a new millennium, it is remarkable that traditions of literary and theatrical activities have continued to gain momentum in the Nigerian society. This is not surprising because the populace understands the truly functional impact of drama and theatre in their lives. The young generation of dramatists understands what it is to be truly representative. They have, therefore, not departed from the ways of their theatre forebears exploring traditional idioms and nuances, in their creativity, to reach out to their target audience.

The bulk of the theatrical and dramatic performances that one can lay claim to in this dispensation is the type of theatre and drama regularly performed at the Nigerian theatre and drama schools, most of them first for academic purpose and also, to entertain the university academic community.

Except for the occasional theatrical productions at various places in and around the big cities —such as Lagos, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Akure, Calabar, Akwa-Ibom

and a few other cities in the country—theatrical and dramatic performances have decreased significantly. Some of the recorded theatrical and dramatic productions are either sponsored by one or two big companies who have vested interest in theatre and drama as an important cultural institution that must be kept alive, or as an artistic platform which is viable for making money, but not yet well-defined.

Examples of such recent productions which received serious popularity are “*Saro The Musical*”, currently running on a London stage. It is a dramatized story of the freed slaves from Sierra Leone who settled in Nigeria in the early 1800s. In the same manner, the musical, which is set in contemporary times, celebrates immigrants to Lagos from other parts of Nigeria. The play is produced by Bolanle Austen-Peters, a theatrical entrepreneur, who owns one of the biggest theatre house on the Island of Lagos, Nigeria.

Importantly, the presence of series of annual and periodical carnivals, such as Abuja, Calabar, Eyo Carnivals and a host of other less popular festivals that are celebrated in many states all over Nigeria represent a platform by which theatre, drama, dance, acrobatic display, drumming, oral performance and other aspects of arts in general, can be showcased to the people. The process of festivalisation is still present, although it takes a different shape to older, more traditional forms of cultural festivals. Asigbo (2012:5) astutely observes:

In a manner of speaking, culture can be regarded as that which already is hence, even though or that which does not easily change, hence its view as an accepted way of doing things. Carnival, on the other hand, is a costumed street party and connotes spectacles, elegance, gaiety, pageant, and dancing. While culture celebrates that which is, carnival celebrates that which could be. In other words, carnival celebrates possibilities and fantasies or where we could get to in the future.

The notion that the military era has almost wiped out the culture and tradition of life theatrical and dramatic performances in Nigeria is suspect. Rather, what has happened, and what is still happening, is that theatre and drama has certainly evolved and adopted new cultures, changing political and new entertainment landscapes. This study has acknowledged these various restrictions and bans extended to practitioners of theatre, drama, masscommunication and other cultural institutions during the military rules in the country.

The hostile military regime in Nigeria was certainly not a good era, because many lives were lost and many patriotic Nigerians were exiled against their wishes. But the military era has also contributed to the level of vibrancy of theatre and drama which is thriving in Nigeria now—in short, theatre and drama that address social and political injustice thrive during crisis. The socio-political messages dramatized during the period of *Alarinjo* masquerade theatre were predominantly used to address various communal societal ills and deviant behaviour. Subsequent times and political turmoil, from colonialization through the military dictatorships to the current democratic Nigeria, all called for different types of social engagement in the theatre. This is an indication of the theatrical event as a poly-system, where various elements, such as culture and politics, are present. The theatre-makers that I have discussed in this study, adapted to the times to create individual aesthetic styles to address the needs of particular times and spaces. The socio-political commentary differs in nature, and the history and aesthetic of socio-political commentary is an everchanging phenomenon. The study is itself an evolving story of the development of the socio-political theatre in Nigeria; a story that is not completed yet.

### **9.3 Recommendations**

There is a need for theatre-makers to revisit the concept of employing the people's familiar cultures and tradition in their various works, both on stage and as literary text. Theatre and drama can be taken to the populace as a form of vital intervention in the traditional spaces of performance, such as town spaces, market squares, village squares, king's palaces, waterfronts and other areas where unconventional theatre and drama can play out. In this way, people can identify with the socio-political and economic messages of the time. Stage performances at an exorbitant cost is certainly not meant for the common people, but for the elite and working class in the society.

The importance of language to theatrical and dramatic works, either as performance or text, is crucial. The medium of linguistic connection between the playwrights and scriptwriters must consider the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of Nigerian society. The fact that Nigeria still remains one of the countries where high levels of illiteracy persists, is of major concern to this study. Therefore, if English language remained the only chosen mode of communication in theatre and drama production to the audience, the question needs asking: what will be the essence of taking such theatre and drama to the

multitude of the Nigerian people who cannot read nor write in other languages except that of their mother and father land? Asomba (1986:323) contended that “it would be inappropriate to use the English language or any foreign one for that matter in addressing the peculiar societal ills entrenched in the socio-cultural propensities of Nigerian society.”

This study recommends options to address people from diverse ethnic and tribal groups through the medium of a language known to them, in particular in theatre. For example, presentation of issues concerning climate change, global warming, poor livelihood, deforestation, killing of endangered species for profit, HIV/AIDS and other related issues through theatre and drama must consider the use of languages which can speak to the people’s adequate understanding of important facts and figures concerning their lives and wellbeing. People understand their native language better—certain words or nomenclature cannot explain or provide adequate meaning and expression to people when it is passed to them through foreign languages.

The type of work and theatre-makers which were discussed in this thesis operate in a particular context. Many of the post-independence authors of literary works in Africa, especially in Nigeria, address social-political issues as it concerns the survival of the general populace, but in an artistic context. The plays are for the people, but very often the ‘people’ do not get to see the work, because of the context of an aesthetic product. This stands in comparison to Applied Theatre (such as Theatre for Development) where the message is taken to the masses.

Conclusively, adequate emphasis on clarity and understanding must be given to any adopted mode of communication, especially language by theatre-makers when creating and presenting their works to the people. It must be priority to them, because it is crucial that language of expression in theatre and drama as form(s) of intervention must be comprehensible to the people before it can fulfil the purpose of intervention. Artists and scholars who unintentionally create a void between his/her work and audience by the use of unfamiliar language runs the risk that the message would not be received by the audience, thus creating detachment between the artists and the society. It is, after everything is said and done, of never-ending importance that artists, especially theatre and drama practitioners, remain engaged with the communities wherein they create their work.

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