

# **THE THEATRE OF WOLE SOYINKA**

*Inside the Liminal World of Myth, Ritual and Postcoloniality*

**Oluwakemi Atanda Ilori**

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**I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.**

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## **Acknowledgements and Dedication**

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## **Abstract**

Wole Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first African recipient of this honour, for his body of works covering plays, novels and poetry. Soyinka is also a literary and cultural theorist, a memoirist, and a social activist, known internationally for his campaign against tyranny and injustice. This and many other dimensions of his career as a man of letters, his cultural background and the postcolonial context in which he writes flow freely into his creative works.

This study describes Soyinka's theatre, based on eight major plays published between 1960 and 1996. This is the peak of Soyinka's literary career and provides the most illustrative instances of the maturation of his art and thematic concerns. Using the selected plays as focal points, a critical appraisal of Soyinka's characters and their cosmos, and the development of the key ingredients of his theatre is undertaken. It is argued that Soyinka's theatre portrays a liminal world in which myth, ritual and postcolonialism are ascendant elements. The main framework for this argument is Barthes's poststructuralism but other theorists apply as well, including Bhabha, Eco, Foucault, Hutcheon, Jeyifo, Jung, Kristeva, Levinas, Olaniyan, Turner, Van Gennepe, Vermeulen and Akker, and Soyinka himself.

Accordingly, this study opens new frontiers on Soyinka by delving into key concepts such as liminality, postcoloniality, modernism, postmodernism, metamodernism, abjection, "othering", and intertextuality as they apply to Soyinka's theatre. It features a wide-ranging discourse on Soyinka's "fourth stage" as a form of applied dramatic theory in which the poetics of myth and ritual and the postcolonial distinctions of Soyinka's theatre find congruence. Myth and ritual ensconce Soyinka's dramatis personae in a way that prepares them for and, crucially, prevents them from overcoming the gulf between their personal volitions and the will of their community.

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## INTRODUCTION

### WOLE SOYINKA – THE MAN, THE MYTH & THE META-MYTH

#### **The Critical Impulse of Soyinka's Theatre**

In this study, I am dealing specifically with the theatre of Wole Soyinka. Although Soyinka is also a renowned poet, novelist, essayist and political activist, nevertheless, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, it was for “fashioning the drama of existence” across his whole oeuvre (Nobel Prize Panel, 1986). Therefore, in a unique sense, what defines Soyinka's authorial signature is his acumen as a dramatist. I employ the word “theatre” rather narrowly, chiefly about the theatricality of Soyinka's dramatic texts – how Soyinka manipulates the constituents of theatrical performance, particularly, the structure and meaning of the aesthetic-symbolic world purveyed in his texts, the iconicity of his characters and the intuitive polysemous language with which he imbues their acts. This work will not concern itself with any actual performance of Soyinka's plays. Rather, the whole scope is to interpret the liminal world discoverable in Soyinka's dramatic texts and how this is framed within his deployment of myth and ritual on the one hand; and on the other, how these components of his theatrical gest help us to understand liminality, postcoloniality and the tropes of traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism in eight of his major plays selected for this study.

The plays selected for this study are: *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), *The Road* (1965), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *From Zia, with Love*, *The Scourge of Hyacinths* (1992) and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996). References will be made to other plays in Soyinka's corpus as and when appropriate. I have selected these plays because they illustrate best the main issues this study will focus on. Moreover, they represent the peak of Soyinka's literary career and provide the most illustrative instances of the maturation of his art and thematic concerns. In these plays, I find an extraordinary world carved in complex ambiguities, a coterie with outlandish notions of their own identity and place in the world, and a people circumscribed by their proclivities for the abstruse and the abject, as much as by agencies they have failed to understand. In general, Soyinka's

plays are scripted for the stage and distinguished by expressive language, complex characterisation, intensive stories, and impressive, symbolic situations. However, in terms of its overall offer, the aesthetics and morality of Soyinka's theatre and the politics of his characters often become Soyinka's method of multi-storied, single piece attacks on hidebound social and political structures.

This critical impulse of Soyinka's theatre does not diminish the profundity of his art and the anti-establishment outrage of his plays. Additionally, it underlines the more muscular portraiture of Soyinka in the popular press and in critical discourses which have adopted this press to distill simply an anti-establishment Soyinka, the man who assumes the mantle of his ancestral god, Ogun, both in life and literature. Ogun is a titular member of the pantheon of the Yoruba people who are spread across West Africa but are largely resident in the South-West of Nigeria, and Soyinka is of this stock. In classic Yoruba cosmogonic myths, Ogun emerged from ether along with certain other deities to plant the earth. They founded the Yoruba cradle city, Ile-Ife, led by Obatala, who relied on Ogun's mercurial instinct and innate astuteness with iron-ore. Conversely, the earth was not void, and the deities became absorbed into the life of the autochthons whose land they had appropriated and who, consequently, adopted Ogun as the patron of blacksmiths and the god of war (Beier, 1980; Barnes, 1997).

Arguably, myths often develop into meta-myths and Ogun's mix of inventiveness and insurgency which can be easily siphoned into liberatory agenda has recast him into a prototype genius of creativity and selfless bravery, and as a protector of the poor and the powerless. This meta-myth is the crucial mould for Soyinka, both as a literary author and a social icon, and an effacement of the mythical Ogun whose elitism served instinctually the established order of his own times. In a sense, Soyinka the man, the myth of Ogun and the meta-myth that has flourished around Ogun has consequences for the way his plays are read or performed, and the connections of these plays to politics and literature, as much as to the performative necessities of the stage. In this Introduction, I will present a literary biographical sketch of Soyinka and examine leading critical concepts about his theatre. I will

describe my theoretical framework by way of reasoned arguments for founding this study upon the poststructuralism of Roland Barthes. Finally, I conclude that Soyinka's theatre is a significantly symbolic work of art, constructed mainly in carnivalesque tones and sprung upon the contradictory impulses of traditionalism, modernity and postmodernity affecting postcolonial societies in Africa.

### **Soyinka – The Eclectic Muse**

A quick arc of Soyinka's life and times reveals five co-mingling themes which have become nearly invariably the architecture of his plays and the soul of his politics: 1) his Christian upbringing from which he draws Christ-like heroes and anti-heroes; 2) the festive rituals of traditional Yoruba society in which the uncertainties and inexactitudes of social life are celebrated in eidetic imagery, cultic personas and metaphors; 3) the experience of colonialism and postcolonialism which is the basis of his particularisation of contemporary society as a mode of being subject to the tangled cultural forms of postmodernity; 4) his profound knowledge of Western theoretical discourses, especially as they affect theatre and culture, which gives him a vantage position in constructing a poetics of theatre and culture whose sapience is distinctly African; and 5) his inimitable personal charisma and cogency, built into the lustre of his literature and adjoining his political activism, which provide a global platform for his campaign against tyranny and injustice.

Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1934. His father, Samuel Ayodele Soyinka, was an Anglican vicar and the headmaster of St. Peter's School in Abeokuta. In contrast, his mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka owned a store in the local market which retailed household goods. According to Soyinka, she was a strong or "Wild" Christian, in addition to being politically active within the local women's group (Soyinka, 1981). Although Abeokuta had several Churches, and some mosques, it was also a city in which indigenous Yoruba religions flourished and people's beliefs were an assimilation of various tenets braided into separate facets of traditional life. Inevitably, although Soyinka was raised in a professing Christian home, his curiosity and locale gave him abiding exposure to ethnic religious traditions and in later life he abandoned Christianity altogether. Conceivably, the

religious pluralism and syncretism of Soyinka's background has had a lasting imprint upon him and probably explains the origins of his eclecticism as much as a discernible festive ritual framework in most of his plays.

In *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), Soyinka deploys a phalanx of Yoruba myth and ritual to characterise the emerging postcolonial state as a project trapped in pre-colonial acts of despotism. In *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), the main character, Kongi, a populist politician, dethrones the traditional monarch and invests absolute power in his own "constitutional" office within a communal festival framework, celebrating the New Yam. In *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), Soyinka's construal of Euripides's play morphs Dionysius into Ogun and stages a communal celebration of the abolition of the structures that support slavery in society. Moreover, Christ-like heroes and anti-heroes with a Christian gradient are an intricate part of Soyinka's dramaturgy and often inform his tragic vision. In *The Strong Breed* (1964), *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), Soyinka problematises the notions of the ritual saviour, a votary that society models into a tragic hero. These plays reveal a Soyinka whose stagecraft is welded to mythic archetypes, and the colours, crowds and cosmic concert of communal festivals, as much as a Soyinka at war with exploitative structures and the institutions that prop them up. However, Soyinka's great art often becomes trapped in complex imagery and polysemy, and in spite of his clear ire against malevolent agencies, his polyvalency allows him to be critical of nearly every class in society. This lends ambiguity to Soyinka's principal characters and subtly inverts the criteria of their politics as radical but not revolutionary.

The beginnings of Soyinka's own radicalism are outlined in his first memoir *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981). Whilst this chronicles the first 11 or so years of Soyinka and was chiefly presented through the eyes of a precocious child, *Aké* is actually adult Soyinka lancing the colonial landscape in which he grew up. *Aké* pits us against British colonial rule which comes off as a kind of spectral hand fomenting trouble for the population through the Native Administration headed up by the Alake, the city's indigenous sovereign. Soyinka's mother and relations were key players in the local women's movement and the tax protests they plotted, and Soyinka himself debuted at

that early age as an anti-colonialist by running errands for the protesters. His experience of colonialism only became more concrete as he grew up in colonial Nigeria, a time noted for anti-colonial and pro-Independence movements, and as a student in Britain in the 1950s, where he took part in anti-colonial protests and demonstrations. In the 1960s, anti-colonial struggles eventually produced several independent African nation-states, including particularly Nigeria which gained independence from Britain on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960.

In later memoirs, *Isara* (1989), *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years 1946-1965* (1994) and *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006) Nigeria becomes the seabed and metaphor for Soyinka's political angst and several of his plays can be read or performed as outcries against the misshaped and thwarted expectations concerning independence from colonial rule across the African continent. These memoirs together with Soyinka's numerous essays, particularly, *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* (1988), *The Open Sore of A Continent* (1996) and *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness* (1999) express Soyinka's experience of postcolonialism as an important aspect of his writing career and expound the different hues of postcoloniality shaded into the deeply pessimistic and tragic vision that one encounters in some of his major plays, for instance, *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *From Zia with Love* (1992), *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996) and *King Baabu* (2001). In most of these plays, there is a surfeit of anger and frustration, often providing a direct and visceral attack on particular notions of statehood and national identity which deny the prospects of collective retrieval and communal rebirth following colonialism. The theatricality of anger and frustration combined with a ferocious satirical bent, and the symbolic indexation of malaise in stage props and directions adjoined by iconic stage personas, make these plays weighty arguments against the effectiveness of cultural and political institutions in post-colonial Africa, even if sometimes the arguments are patently subverted by Soyinka's overtly dense imagery and symbolism, his propensities for ambivalence and often a journalistic assemblage of facts and fiction.

However, Soyinka's attitude to postcolonialism in his essays and imaginative works cannot just be construed as frosty frustration and frothy anger – it runs more deeply. It illustrates his commitment to a certain type of politics that is anti-dictatorship and a culture in which humane social ideals flourish. However, even though he rails against corruption, injustice and tyranny, there does not seem to be a stout ideological underpinning for his political views which are more of a dissident nature, and a mocking, satirical flaying of every type and form of authority. His memoirs and essays convey a deeply humanist concern for the well-being of man everywhere but his attacks upon the political structures that appall him and the particular forms of power that deny the humanity and dignity of the people Soyinka writes about always end pretty short of telling us what kind of society Soyinka himself wants beyond the plain prosaicisms for a humane and just order. This is also the telling nature of Soyinka's theatre: it subsists principally on protest and a deafening denunciation of the harm and hardships in the postcolonial state but rarely discharges hype or hope for a certainly different order of things.

Matters are provocatively different in Soyinka's contribution to the discourse on culture. In *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) and *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* (1988), particularly, Soyinka's originality sweeps across European literature and culture in search of contingent and contextual comparative categories which find resonances and resistances in African literature and culture. Perhaps, Soyinka's most unusual artefact is his Nietzschean model of Yoruba tragedy which offers "the fourth stage, the vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit" (Soyinka, 1976:149) as a kind of numinous acronym for African theatrical forms. He acts as the critic of his critics mostly in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* (1988), but in between the notoriety that his combative stress imposes on his views, he supplies ample neoteric submissions to place his own writings, specifically, and African literature and drama, more generically, in a postcolonial discourse shaped, not by the clichés of "the West versus the Rest", but by notions of the adequacy of African culture for theorising the politics and aesthetics of global literature and culture. That this is not co-terminus with négritude, a mere affirmation of black identity processed through the conditions of colonialism (Wilder, 2005), or "Afrotude", my label for the peroration of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike

(1980/1983) for whom black identity is, arguably, mere nativism, is manifest in Soyinka's persuasive notions of the plasticity and transferability of culture as more or less the public property of the human race (Geertz, 1973; Alvard, 2003). In the end, Soyinka's memoirs and critical essays provide separate and conflicting constructs of his experience and reflection on colonialism and postcolonialism. They particularise contemporary society as a mode of being subject to the matted cultural matrices of postmodernity. The volume of perceptive references and readings of European literature and culture in, particularly, the critical essays, prepares us for the level of intertextuality and inexhaustible echoes of classic European dramatists such as Shakespeare, Synge, Yeats, O'Neill, Genet, Jarry, Pirandello and Brecht and the theories of Jung, Nietzsche and Barthes that we often divine in Soyinka's plays and critical idiom. They define Soyinka as a man of letters.

The memoirs and critical essays serve another peculiar interest: they outline Soyinka's inimitable personal charisma and cogency. They deepen the influence of the Ogun myth in Soyinka's works, substantiate sources of his eclecticism and adjoin his political activism; they tantalize us with many shades of Soyinka – he is a cautious wolf; a sworn thorn in the side of every monarchy; a lone and guileless dissident; a pal of the powerful and the privileged; and a man of letters whose pen is a deadly cudgel evenly against crass politics and the “crass” critics of his works. Vintage Soyinka will easily replace any of his own heroes and anti-heroes – Kongi in his adamant will; Professor in his prodigious but wild élan; Elesin in his handspringing joyance; Olunde in his “Churchillian” sedulousness; Iyaloja in her haunting, taunting craftiness; Lakunle in his word-minting prolixity; and Baroka in his sly, seductive traditionalism. For the current study, three companion pieces from the critical corpus, namely, his essays titled, “The Fourth Stage”, “Drama and the African Worldview” and “Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype” in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) are germane to my focus on the liminal world presented in Soyinka's theatre through myth and ritual, and postcoloniality.

### **Interrogating Soyinka's Fictive Cosmos**

In view of their prominence, Soyinka's plays have generated a substantial industry of scholarship. Most of the scholarship centres on how his African background, specifically, Yoruba mythology and rituals, informs his complex dramaturgy (Gibbs, 1980, 1981; Jeyifo, 1985, 2004; Jones, 1988; Moore, 1978; Ogunba, 1975); the treatment of postcolonialism, tyranny and social malaise in his writings and the ideologies they convey (Gibbs, 1986, 1993; Jeyifo, 2001; Jones, 1987; Oko, 1992); his satirical cosmos (Ebewo, 2002); the compass of his tragedies (Katrak, 1986; Oko, 1992); and his adaptations of European plays, myths and motifs in a way that substantiates his own thematic concerns and dramatic theory (Jeyifo, 2004; Msiska, 1998; Wright, 1996). In the most representative of these studies, the personages, events and issues depicted in Soyinka's drama are treated largely within the mimetic relationship between drama and society. Some of these studies are grounded in Marxist discourse, for instance, those of Jeyifo (1985, 1990), and others are examples of cultural and literary criticism, for instance those of Gibbs (1986), Jones (1988), Ogunba (1975) and Wright (1996).

Soyinka's distinction as a man of letters is recognised by many, although Ogunba (2005), for instance, berates him for a Western cast of mind in his adoption of the mysteries of Ogun as parallels of Hellenistic rites. Moore (1978), Gibbs (1986), Jones (1988) and Lindfors (2008) concentrate on the festive handles of Soyinka's theatre in terms of Soyinka's innovations and experimentations, with implications for his stout political stance. Katrak (1986), Oko (1992) and Ebewo (2002) explore the traditional genres of tragedy, satire and comedy that they can fit to Soyinka's major plays and how these recall canonical models of European dramaturgical sensibilities. Osofisan (1982, 2001) and Jeyifo (1985, 1990) pursue Soyinka to uncover his lack of Marxist memoranda. Much later, Jeyifo (2004) attended to the wider issues of postcolonial identity and crises in Soyinka's writings. Additionally, some commentators have referred to the ritual handles and the "festival complex" in the theatre of Soyinka as notions of communal theatre and participatory theatre (Jeyifo, 2004; Crow and Banfield, 1996; Figueiredo, 2011; Haney II, 2011). Some other studies have referred to Soyinka's "guerrilla theatre"

(Gibbs and Lindfors, 1993; Banham, Hill and Woodyard, 1994; Banham, Gibbs, Osofisan, 1999) as experimental and participatory and others, for instance, Lindfors (1993) have commented on the Brechtian elements of his *Opera Wonyosi* (1981).

These works have their strengths in their biographical and analogical approaches to the writings of Soyinka. Biographical details excerpted from the life and times of Soyinka are deployed as critical lenses upon both the semiotics of his poetry and drama in particular, and the controversial worldviews of his *dramatis personae*. Analogical approaches tend to see the worlds composed in Soyinka's writings as largely analogous to historical chapters in African political development, most importantly, colonial and post-colonial junctures. As a result, these works also carry certain limitations. For instance, Marxist discourses on Soyinka's plays can sometimes read as mechanistic transpositions of class warfare into the native politics of Africa. Analogical studies are also often over-weighted by a kind of historical realism in which the myths and motifs of Soyinka's drama are treated as aspects of literary anthropology (Iser, 1993). Moreover, the givenness and axiomatic nature of their arguments sometimes limit their territory more or less to medium-specificity and sensitivity, despite the celebration that attaches to their conceptual categories in the domains of cultural meaning, historiography and historicism as they apply to Soyinka's theatre.

Overall, current scholarship on Wole Soyinka can be classified into three distinct but overlapping methods: Eurocentric, Afrocentric and structuralist. Eurocentric studies often point the ingredients of Soyinka's theatre towards traditions in European dramaturgy and aesthetic sensibilities. Parallels, allusions and references are drawn from his thematic concerns, his avant-gardism, his dramaturgical facilities towards representative examples in European drama and theatre. In this way, Soyinka is established within mainstream European literary culture as a concrete metaphor, even when this is not directly stated, for the novelty and continuity engendered by the processes of European imperialism in knowledge production in ex-colonies and on the education of the ex-colonised. Talajooy (2008) supplies a succinct summary:

Soyinka's plays echo the works of some western dramatists: Shakespeare (Jeyifo, 2004:128) and O'Neill (Gibbs, 1986:31) in range, intensity and some plot lines; Synge, Yeats and O'Casey (Moore, 1971:19 & Mack, 1995:26) in mixing the mythical and the topical to create a national drama and in stylized echoing of an alien form of speech in English; Brecht (Iji, 1991) and Arden (Gibbs, 1986: 32) in their depiction of anti-heroes; Aristophanes (Jeyifo, 2004:83 & 123) in their cynical comedy; Jacobean drama (Jeyifo, 2004:83) in their absurd satire and gory scenes; and Genet (Ibid. 96) in turning these scenes into bloody rituals of purgation" (Talajooy, unpublished PhD Thesis, 2008:119).

In contrast, Afrocentric studies exalt the peculiar ethnic attributes of Soyinka's corpus both as a statement on his personal, radical and controversial "nativism" and the universalism that they engender through Soyinka's inimitable inventiveness in encoding within his works his postmodern visionary take on social and political issues. The methodology this involves stretches from the anthropological fixation of certain of these studies on the ritual cosmos of the Yoruba (Soyinka's ethnic) nation in Western Nigeria, as evidenced in the works of Irele (1980) and Ogunba (1975, 2005), to variant forms of biographical sociology in which Soyinka's phenomenal political activism, his historicism and artistic impulses are handles for gripping the cultural artefacts in his writings – evidenced in Gibbs (1986), Jones (1988), Jeyifo (2004) and Wright (1996). On the one hand, Irele (1980) notes:

(Soyinka's) elaborate use of Yoruba mythology... can be explained partly by the need ... to give resonance to his handling of the larger problems of existence, and partly also by the evolution in him as an artist toward some kind of comprehensive framework of thought that would provide a foundation for his own spiritual needs and imaginative vision" (Irele, 1980:60).

On the other, citing Jeyifo (2004) at length, we are offered two complementary paradigms as the seat for the biographical sociology on Soyinka:

The first of these is the paradigm, or arc, of a complexly and subliminally “representative” self whose authority and originality receive their greatest validation from access to the repressed recesses of collective memory, as codified in myths, rituals and other cultural matrices. This paradigm, I would argue, provides the textual and ideological base for Soyinka’s great solicitude for the vitality of a collective African cultural and literary modernity. The second paradigm, or arc, is that of a unique, “unrepresentable” self which locates its replete identity in the endless chain of signification and the polysemy of language, especially as these are teased and played out in our author’s writings between figures and idioms of both high and low literariness in the Yoruba and English languages. (Jeyifo, 2004:22)

This links directly to the third typology – the structuralist. The best example is Jeyifo’s towering output on Wole Soyinka which amounts to a solid critical poetics on the author framed, initially, within Marxist discourses on capitalism, class consciousness and the production of knowledge, and (latterly) on aspects of cultural Marxism which play down the role of economic factors in the arguable exploitative class-oriented social relations within society (Jeyifo, 1985, 1990). More directly, Jeyifo’s (2004) work on Soyinka appears to be arguing a view of culture, not so much as the bricolage of economic and social systems, or purely the effluvia of social relations but as specific forms of rationalism in which the oppression of particular segments of society is ordinarily concealed. Jeyifo then ranges through Soyinka’s art and social outrage to expose this concealment, uncovering the ambiguities in the nature of sociality that Soyinka depicts and how these represent vital scenarios in the capitalist hegemony which promotes the tyrannies and traumas represented in Soyinka’s art and outrage.

I have applied the term “structuralist” appreciatively to Jeyifo’s methodology to cover his critical approach to the writings of Soyinka. The methodology here, although embossed in Jeyifo’s extended explication of Aristotle’s mimeticism succeeds in unveiling Soyinka’s “nativism”, postcolonial identity and

writer/activist schemes as indented in the author's cultural landscape and in his acute sense of mission as the conscience of his society. However, by placing Soyinka's authorial self and self-narration at the centre of his poetics, Jeyifo's engagement with Soyinka's postcolonial identity, artistic experimentations, and political activism remains firmly entrenched in the structuralist binaries of writer/activist, representative/unrepresentable modalities, and ritual/anti-ritual. This appears to be his main goal despite his occasional forays into decentering Soyinka in, for instance, his Chapter on the ritual complex in Soyinka's drama where he examines "the dramatist's artistic resourcefulness" within a "group of dark, brooding plays" (Jeyifo, 2004:120-166).

As Jeyifo concentrates on the "self-writing or self-constitution" of Soyinka in the maze of meanings discoverable in his dramaturgy by exploring the author's biography, political activism and self-portraits in the crowd of characters and course of history in the author's works, issues relating to liminality and postcoloniality appear rather marginal to his concerns. In the end, Jeyifo's sharpness on the self-writing and self-constitution of his author fails to decentre Soyinka and "destabilise" the authorial self within his dramaturgy in order to uncover the polygonal systems of knowledge behind the variant forms of sociality inscribed in his theatre. This absence of decentering or deconstruction à la Jacques Derrida (1976) in Jeyifo's influential work leads to a form of historicism in which the author's selfhood is basically a rectilinear social construct. Jeyifo then packs into this construct such binaries as writer/activist, representative/unrepresentable modalities, and ritual/anti-ritual as the main grammar of Soyinka's writings in a way in which their significances are embedded in the self-constituted historiography of the author.

In various ways, Jeyifo and others, as cited earlier, have drawn attention to Soyinka's mythopoesis and mythology. They offer a special warrant for studying or staging Soyinka's plays as great specimens of genres of theatre, emphasise their periodicity and calculate their canonicity within postcolonial African literature and drama. However, the current study is about the liminal world composed by Soyinka through his theatre, particularly, as informed by

his deployment of myth and ritual and his presentation of postcoloniality in the selected texts. In my view, it is liminality that sustains Soyinka's metaphoric and eidetic imagery, subversion of linear chronology, inversion of popular norms, eclectic iconoclasm, and an aggressive anti-structural register.

The questions I wish to examine in this study are:

1. What dramaturgical functions does liminality serve in Soyinka's theatre?
2. In what ways are these functions associated with Soyinka's approaches to the cultural processes of myth, ritual, postcolonialism, the metaphysics of death, modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism?
3. In view of the poetics of his "Fourth Stage", can liminality explain the presentation of the performative self embedded in Soyinka's play texts?

In view of the limitations of the three approaches I have described, in order to tackle these questions, I will adopt Roland Barthes's poststructuralism as my model framework.

### **Towards a Relevant Theoretical Framework**

The generalities of theatre as a system of signs are nearly self-evident in reference to the processes of imitation, representation and abstraction in which the dramatic fictive world is translated from text to stage (Pavis, 1992, 1998; Elam, 1980). The structure of this system, modelled on language and positivism, becomes the exclusive focus of analysis in a kind of mentation in which meanings are constantly abstracted to document the relationship between *signifiers* and the *signifieds*, as between the "real" and the "imaginary" (Culler, 1997; Eco, 1978; Saussure, 1959). As Claude Lévi-Strauss argues, "Structure has no distinct content; it is content itself, apprehended in a logical organization conceived as a property of the real" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963:115).

This "logical organization" often translates into a technique of binary polarisations undergirded by a concern that meaning is unintelligible except

through their interrelations. I do not need to prove the roots of this kind of intellection in Saussurean linguistics or the Prague school of linguistics (Vachek, 1966; Holdcroft, 1991). The story of semiotics documents this and the consequent rigidity and ahistoricism of several versions of structuralism (Deleuze, 2002). In Jeyifo's case, by anchoring Soyinka's selfhood and authorial voice and vocation on binary opposites, he produces a useful grammar of Soyinka's writings in which the symbolic mediation of sociality is reduced to the binary logic of oppositions. The grammar predicts itself constantly almost autonomously and reduces to something of a mechanical outcome.

Perhaps, this is the kind of deficit that structuralist theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Barthes attempted to surmount by moving beyond the binary logicism and positivism of structuralism into poststructuralism (Sturrock, 1979; Foucault, 2002). Whilst Foucault turned to ontology and its derivatives, Derrida opted for deconstruction, Lacan returned to Freud and Barthes became the proponent of the "demise" of the author in literary texts (Derrida, 1982; Barthes, 1977). It is Barthes's poststructuralism, in a constricted sense, which I find germane to my occupation in this study. Barthes's semiology treats the text as an object that can stand apart from its own author because "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture," (Barthes, 1977:146) rather than the individual experience or ideology of its author. It is in this sense that Barthes proclaims "the death of the author", explaining that "a text's unity lies not in its origins," or its creator, "but in its destination," or its reader or audience (Barthes, 1977:148).

In this way, the text encompasses, within its own layers, innumerable levels of meaning which depend upon the reader/audience for their articulation and prioritisation. In contrast to the emphasis of Jeyifo on the "self-writing or self-constitution" of Soyinka, my focus will be on how the characters in my selected texts define their own reality and respond to the social challenges presented in their world. As such, I will probe the subtexts of Soyinka's fictive cosmos and de-emphasise (or, better, decentre) Soyinka's authorial self in the assemblage of meanings embedded within his dramaturgy. I will engage the symbolic-aesthetic world created by Soyinka in these plays as the lived reality

of the people we find in them. If, as Barthes argues, the author dies where the text begins, the freedom to examine the selected plays that form the basis of this study, in terms of the people and culture that are dramatised, the performative practices and the forms of discourse behind them, as modes of cultural production and exchange, provides the latitude I require for a deconstructive approach to Soyinka's theatre. This affords me the scope that I require to investigate the selected plays in the way they approximate reality or social processes as a symbolic configuration of the complex and inexact notions of self-identity, communal well-being and the politics of postcolonialism.

Arguably, the kind of dramaturgy and scenography encoded in Soyinka's plays assumes performance and a performance context constantly shifting gears through exhaustive visual themes. In Soyinka's dramatic texts, we are not only bewildered by the iconicity of his characters, the irreality of his narratives and the polysemy of his language, we are also besieged by demands for role doubling, flashbacks and flash-forwards; recitation and music; dance, trance and mime; props and sets that act as metaphors and symbols, and characters seemingly specifically carved as part of the stage furniture to facilitate a type of *mise-en-scène* deliberately contrived and experimental. As I discuss later, this is the essence of the performativity that infuses Soyinka's dramatic theory in his essays "The Fourth Stage", "Drama and the African Worldview" and "Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype" in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). My poststructuralist methodology will assist in de-layering each selected play, exposing the complex world in which the characters are submerged as largely explained by the liminal conditions imposed by postcoloniality, and reinforced through the peculiar attributes of myth and ritual.

Myth and ritual are socio-religious constructs in traditional societies (Frazer, 1996; Mircea, 1963, 1967). However, the relationship between myth and ritual is the subject of unending controversy. For the "Cambridge Ritualists", myth developed from ritual (Ackerman, 2002). For others, the connections between myth and ritual do not necessarily argue that one developed from the other, but myth and ritual are aspects of the folklore and worldview of popular

culture, conveying possibilities that ritual is the enactment of myth (Sebeok, 1965; Segal, 2004). This study is not concerned, however, with the controversies around the “primacy of ritual” versus the “primacy of myth”, or the etiological interpretation of myth. The way Soyinka deploys myth and ritual in his works appears to support Walter Burkert’s (1982) argument that when myth and ritual come together they reinforce each other and provide a “socializing function”. Myth supplies Soyinka a fictitious account that traditional or popular culture has created for dramatising and critiquing particular worldviews. Ritual enlivens this account by invigorating it with some sort of sacral, perhaps even conservative authority. Perhaps, Soyinka is interested in myth “Because myth relates the *gesta* [deeds] of Supernatural Beings [...] it becomes the exemplary model for all significant human actions” (Eliade, 1963:6). Arguably, Soyinka’s attachment to mythology, particularly, African (Yoruba) myths of ancestral deities is his pathway to the collective archive of heroes and antiheroes whose lives intersect with the historic and quotidian experiences of the postcolonial societies depicted in his works. This is the window that my poststructuralist study of liminality in Soyinka’s theatre will utilise in assessing the place of myth in Soyinka’s theatre.

There are numberless commentaries on the origins of theatre in ritual performances across all cultures (Turner, 1969; Schechner and Schuman, 1976). Ancient Egypt, not classical Greece, offers the earliest remnants of ceremonies and rituals evolving towards theatre. In all cases, “anonymous stories having their roots in the primitive folk beliefs of races or nations and presenting supernatural episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view” form the flesh of these rituals (Holman et al., 1960:298). They contain theatrical and performative elements such as mimicry, masquerade, music and magic realism and are enacted in designated places in the presence of witnesses. Often they follow a prescribed form, performed by specialists who sometimes double as spectators. For African drama, many similar models have been constructed in the attempt to establish the emergence of African theatre and drama as consequent to indigenous festive rituals. In Nigeria, particularly, in addition to Soyinka, notable scholars such as J.P. Clark (1981), Joel Adedeji (1969) and Oyin Ogunba (1968) among others

mention directly the connection of festive rituals to the development of literary and non-literary traditions in Nigerian drama.

When rituals move from being a private ceremony in some secret location, they often become public ceremonies, involving a large part of the community; a greater level of spectacle, diverse participatory elements and processional acts often become included (Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2005; Rozik, 2002; Nelson, 2002). These elements turn rituals into festivities and carnivals in which pageantry, pomp and stylized performative techniques are elevated above narrative or dialogic necessities. Although there is in the background a prescribed format, ritual ceremonies often have a kind of fluidity, suggestive of the open-endedness of improvised enactments. Compared to performances engendered by some dramatic text, ritual enactments in festival forms often display a greater evidence of collaboration of different story-tellers/myth-makers. They evince a performance medium geared towards audience-participation and the use of open spaces unlimited by the “fourth wall” principle of conventional Western theatre. Moreover, they hint of a utilitarian function collectively owned by the community in expectation that the validity of the ritual act will be authenticated by some natural outcome, for instance, rain, bumper harvest, renewal of nature, communal harmony, and cessation of drought or a plague, etc. These aspects, which are common aesthetic and ethical properties of rituals that are publicly accessible in any culture, are central properties in Soyinka’s theatre. This, in a large sense, contributes to the world appeal of Soyinka’s theatre.

In spite of its global appeal, however, Soyinka’s theatre is deeply rooted in Yoruba performance stratagems. Adedeji (1969) traces the origin of Yoruba theatre to the seasonal ritual festivals of masked performers, impersonating ancestral spirits and divinities. He appraises the divinities of the Yoruba pantheon, their transgressional acts, and the feuds between them and with humans, as supplying a body of mythic narratives with potential for the dramatisation of their anthropomorphic attributes. Ogunba (1975) examines Soyinka’s theatre to excavate the mythic narratives borrowed from several Yoruba ritual festivals. He finds, for instance, that the conflict in *A Dance of the Forests* is, arguably, a shard of the rituals of a community confronted by

the unexplained incidents of sudden infant deaths, namely, the Abiku-Abiye or Kumapayi mythology of the Yoruba. The manic absurdities of Professor and mystic reification of Murete (in *The Road*) are, to Ogunba, Soyinka's construal of the ritual of freezing and rejuvenation of life in the Ijebu Agemo ritual. He associates the power struggle between Oba Danlola and Kongi in *Kongi's Harvest* with images of the ritual of power transfer in the Odun Moko festival of Ondo, a prominent town in Yoruba land. La Pin (1971) and Sekoni (1993) have also linked some of Soyinka's plays to specific Yoruba festive rituals.

Although these authors have pressed the correspondence between certain aspects of his plays and a number of festive rituals, I will not attempt to pin Soyinka down to a sturdy dramatisation of Yoruba mythic narratives. It is my argument in this study that Soyinka is not staging ritual in his plays. He is renovating (re-interpreting) them, and re-inventing through them a critique of the postcolonial societies that we find in his plays. For instance, what we encounter in *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973) - the dramatisation of the ritual and mythos of the Greek deity, Dionysius, given an extended life in its adaptation to the binarism of Soyinka's Yoruba god, Ogun, as a creative-destructive essence – is not repeated elsewhere in Soyinka's theatre. The closest we get to a dramatised life of divinities in the Yoruba pantheon is *A Dance of the Forests* (1963). However, even there it is not the content of a particular Yoruba myth that is dramatised but a set of myth-suffused worldviews. In assent to the poststructuralist methodology I have argued, this study will, therefore, not read Soyinka's plays as **actual** specimens of Yoruba festive rituals but as **probable** dramatic narratives, borrowing the familiar apparatus of myth and ritual, composed by Soyinka to illustrate the ambiguities and irrationalities in the postcolonial societies we meet in his plays.

As a result, through the frames of rite, drama, festival and spectacle, there is a constant visual theme that invokes and challenges mimesis at the same time, and builds on the boundless semiosis in the junction of text and theatre in Soyinka's plays (Schmid and Kesteren, 1984; Alter, 1990). For that reason, the key to unlock "the freedom and complexity" that Jeyifo (2001) aptly

arrogates to Soyinka is not, in the main, the structuralist methodology – the repetitive binary formula of “writer/artist” and “the representative and unrepresentable modalities of the self” - that Jeyifo (2004) employs but the kind of poststructuralism that is the overriding methodology of the current study. Conceivably, every play in the entire corpus of Soyinka can be quarried indiscriminately for any number of literary and cultural tropes. However, as a consequence of adopting poststructuralism as my methodology with particular focus on the dramaturgical functions of liminality and the processes of myth, ritual and postcolonialism, I have elevated my exemplar plays as concrete specimens of the liminal world in Soyinka’s plays. They illustrate how this world is constructed through his deployment of myth and ritual, and the notions of ritual death and the performative aspects of his dramatic theory, the “fourth stage”. My methodology assists me to uncover the facets of postcoloniality arguably discoverable in the tropes of traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism when applied to these texts.

Consequently, the impact of this methodology on the structure of this study is trifold: firstly, Soyinka’s plays are often read and performed as platforms for demonstrating the key concerns affecting postcolonial societies in Africa. However, liminality, as embodying postcoloniality (Childs, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002, 2006), and, especially, as a notion of death (Turner, 1969) has rarely been raised as a constitutive element of the postcoloniality we encounter in Soyinka’s plays. In this study, my aim is to start with the notion of death as a kind of analysis of the traditional environment in Soyinka’s dramaturgy. As a result, the possibility of a cultural and literary trajectory in Soyinka’s plays, commencing with the traditional concept of death (as re-interpreted by Soyinka in his essays, “The Fourth Stage”, “Drama and the African Worldview” and “Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype”) and extended to the discourse structures of modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism becomes an essential aspect of my methodology. By adopting poststructuralism, the structure of this thesis becomes congruent with a trajectory that moves from traditionalism in Chapter 1 to modernism in Chapter 2, then postmodernism and metamodernism in Chapters 3 and 4. It allows me to avoid the strictures of linear history in selecting my exemplar plays. As I am interrogating the cosmos and people we discover in Soyinka’s

plays in relation to a set of distinctive tropes – specifically, traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism – as framed within the context of liminality and postcoloniality, there is an emergent structured relationship between these tropes. For instance, in chapter 1, I concentrate on Soyinka’s multi-faceted deployment of myth and ritual in *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) by laying bare the traditionalism or metaphysics surrounding death, both as a canonical testament on the cultural power that death invests in ritual saviours, and as an element of craft in staging certain neuroses of postcolonialism.

The metaphysics of death in Soyinka’s theatre features in a number of studies, for instance, Booth (1993), Jeyifo (2001a; 2001b), Appiah (1992), Msiska (2007) and Fernandes (2008). For Booth, death becomes an illustrative narrative of Soyinka’s confusion of “an irreducibly primitive human sacrifice with an authentically African sacrifice of self” (Booth, 1993:146). In the works of Msiska, death is the centrepiece of Soyinka’s concept of tragedy which is “clearly akin to the Aristotelian conception of tragedy, particularly, in its representation of subjectivity as a duality between determinacy and free will” (Msiska, 2007:65).

In Appiah’s view, “Soyinka, the man of European letters, is familiar with the literature of authenticity and an account of it as an exploration of the metaphysics of an individual self, and he is tempted, by one of those rhetorical oppositions that appeal to abstract thinkers, to play against this theme an African exploration of the metaphysics of the community” (Appiah, 1992:82). As a result, according to Appiah, Soyinka’s metaphysics, particularly, with reference to the death of community heroes in his theatre is an assertion of the author’s relationship to his own social world. In another critical reading, the metaphysics of death in the theatre of Soyinka “betrays a reactive desire for history” (Fernandes, 2008:16). Based on their roots in biographical realism and contentment with history as evidenced in the author’s literary career and motivations, these are, arguably, valid readings of the author’s social history and politics. However, my poststructuralism enables me to press beyond such readings in order to account for the diverse postcolonial discourses that

characters in Soyinka's fictive worlds robustly engage in as they grapple with the dissolution of the flesh.

Accordingly, in chapter 1, I have attempted what might classify as a forensic survey of the scope and scale of the dilemmas and functional particularisms that death intrudes upon the people in Soyinka's aesthetic-symbolic universe. I discover a tenacious hold on death in both *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, as a category of cultural and political power; as the effective site for the postcolonial identities we discover on stage, and the formula for a local economy in which transactional behaviours often mesh into the deviancies encoded in the social structure. As Whitaker (1999) notes: "He sees that we must risk the appearance of death on the way to refreshed life, that the tragic *protagonist's* destiny of self-breaking and transcendence is normative, and that modern actors and witnesses must be led toward participation in such a destiny" (Whitaker, 1999:208). However, I disagree with Whitaker's appraisal of Soyinka's usage of death as an entire digest of African metaphysics.

Secondly, my poststructuralism helps me to theorise Soyinka's theatre as a series of varifocal worlds in which people act out and react to postcoloniality with complex and often bizarre end goals in view, without necessarily (and self-reflexively) attaching them to Soyinka's social or political views and values. In other words, I do not see the selected plays as, possibly, Soyinka's art projects, extending the boundaries of his well-known social activism. As a result, this study does not describe Soyinka's theatre as a variant of political theatre or the theatre of protest. Neither do I see the people in the fictive cosmos of Soyinka's plays as mouthpieces for his own personal idiosyncrasies, or the caricatures of his own cultural predilections. Therefore, I do not discuss the selected plays as grand examples of Soyinka's African (Yoruba) culture, or as aspects of his own bio-history. Rather, I pierce the fictive world in Soyinka's theatre to reveal how its interiority is submerged in liminality and postcoloniality through the behaviours and worldviews of the inhabitants.

For instance, in Chapter 2, the postcoloniality of the new citizens that emerged at the dawn of Independence is examined in *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), whilst introducing what I describe as the modernist provenance of both plays. Most studies on Soyinka avail somewhat limited historical appraisal and dramatic provenance to modernism as a contextual structuration of both the concerns of the playwright and the culture and politics beaded in the life and histrionics of his characters. They develop commentaries on Soyinka's modernism as part of that socio-aesthetic paradigm in which modernity challenges tradition, and there is a tussle between Western and African aesthetics. Often the question is not so much the place of modernism as a particular Western mode of thought and literary culture within the works of Soyinka but as the unresolved set of contradictory political and populist impulses discoverable in Soyinka's oeuvre. Gugelberger (1986) pointedly sums up the proclivities those commentaries, spawned by this view of modernism, purport to establish in the works of African authors: "to change the status-quo, to improve, to abolish classes, to end exploitation, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism" (Gugelberger, 1986:16). They then foist this kind of political populism, rehearsed as modernism, upon Soyinka as his sole literary and political strength: "This undoubtedly is Soyinka's greatest strength as a writer; his relentless attack on the tragic abuse of power by the present ruling elites in Africa..." (Nkosi, 1981:138).

This wholesale coloration of Soyinka's "greatest strength" within populist modernism as "artist-vs-state" in the 80s finds fresh foliage in, for instance, Jeyifo's focus on Soyinka's modernism as "a richness of figural, symbolic and allusive language acting as an eloquent replacement for the realist reliance on expository modes of expression" (Jeyifo, 2004a:171). A different pointer is found in Moola's (2014) attestation to modernism in African literature in which she brackets Soyinka with Armah, Awoonor, Ngugi, Achebe, Farrah and others. For Moola: "...modernism denies the existence of an external ethics altogether. On this paradigm, the aesthetic comes to embody morality. Inherent in modernism thus is not only critique of the epic world of tradition, or the individualist world of the nation-state, but critique of any higher order which is not the higher order of art" (Moola, 2014:108). Ominously, there is a grave absence of analysis of the historical and cultural significance of

modernism as a European mode of discourse, and its connections to colonialism and postcolonialism.

Accordingly, in Chapter 2, I make these connections, arguing that they endow Soyinka's theatre with certain dramatic attributions by specifying the external ethics impinging upon the fictive cosmos in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*, and laying bare the mashed-up cultural and political exigencies inherent in the postcolonial disorder ensuing at the dawn of Independence for ex-colonies.

Thirdly, by adopting poststructuralism to prise open the inner lives of Soyinka's characters and the complex structures of their world, the intertwined concepts of liminality and postcoloniality help me to build a critical appraisal of the failure and frustrations of these characters as postcolonial identities, whilst unveiling their cosmos as steeped in the irrationalities ensuing from a worldview circumscribed by crude notions of selfhood and statehood. I am uncertain that I would have explored effectively in Chapters 3 and 4 the thematic and aesthetic arguments that these notions present without reference to postmodernism and metamodernism as structures of thought and theatricality in Soyinka's theatre. They illustrate in peculiar ways the extent of liminality and postcoloniality in Soyinka's dramaturgy. In current scholarship on Soyinka, the rubrics of postmodernism and metamodernism usually do not feature in investigating these notions. Perhaps, the cog in the wheel for many commentators is Soyinka's sharp surgical rebuttal of the discourse apparatus deployed in describing the cultural phenomena in European drama and theatre as "period dialectics", in contrast to the universal "irreducible truths" of African (more or less Yoruba) metaphysics, in which the whole of life is a continuing stream of world consciousness. Let me cite Soyinka at length:

The serious divergences between a traditional African approach to drama and the European ... will be found more accurately in what is a recognisable Western cast of mind, a compartmentalising habit of thought which periodically selects aspects of human emotion, phenomenal observations, metaphysical intuitions and even scientific deductions and turns them into separatist myths -- (or

"truths") sustained by a proliferating superstructure of presentation idioms, analogies and analytical modes...And the difference which we are seeking to define between European and African drama as one of man's formal representations of experience is not simply a difference of style or form, nor is it confined to drama alone. It is representative of the essential differences between two worldviews, a difference between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by period dialectics (Soyinka, 1976:37-38).

As a result, in my view, most commentaries on Soyinka appear to avow the rudiments of his metaphysics and avoid reading the "period dialectics" of European cultural movements into his works, although voices, such as Jeyifo and Appiah are either cautious (Jeyifo's) or critical (Appiah's) of Soyinka's, possibly, neo-Negritudist approach to Western metaphysics and cultural periodicities. Jeyifo states:

In the light of Soyinka's reformulation of the issue [of the differences in the European and African cast of mind] in this manner, it would seem that his "race retrieval" project is *neo-Negritudist* to the extent that it is a response to this so-called "second epoch of colonization," whereas classical Senghorian Negritude had been a response to the "first epoch of colonization." It is in this response, in its forms, contents and contours, that Soyinka locates what he calls the project of "race retrieval" (Jeyifo, 2004a:66).

Compare this to Appiah's criticism:

If there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous pure African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots). And there is a clear sense

in some postcolonial writing that the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West – the binarism of Self and Other – is the last of the shibboleths of the modernisers that we must learn to live without. (Appiah, 1993:124)

Essentially, poststructuralism gifts me with the “caveat” – the theoretical distance – that I need to press beyond what Soyinka affirms, so that whilst I understand his standpoints, my accent is on the way his fictive world is probably more than the parameters that he has set in his theory of ritual drama and the politics of the postcolonial elite. Therefore, whilst I appreciate the literary and cultural ferment that Soyinka urges to confront, debate and eventually dismiss in his criticisms of Negritude, I will side with Appiah that, ultimately, the straightforward divide he makes between African and European intellectual and cultural mentation is a particularism that obfuscates the employment of European cultural traditions in his own works. I will not go as far as Appiah (1993) to question the validity of Soyinka’s reading of African (Yoruba) mythology as an endogenous and unitary account of the complexities of African thought-systems constructed merely to counter the reductionisms of the European mind. However, it is certainly curious that most commentaries on Soyinka seem to tread warily around and avoid altogether “the shibboleths of the modernisers that we must learn to live without” in the loud silence on postmodernism and metamodernism as cultural influences on Soyinka.

More generally, the obvious transnationality or internationalism of Soyinka’s theatre, clearly situated in his education and psyche as a man of letters, is sometimes largely argued in essentialist terms, as belonging to Universalist tropes on the angst and antinomies of a fallen world. As a result, the kind of postcolonial discourses, particularly, those of Bhabha (1994/2012), and theoretical handles, for instance, those of Levinas (2003), Kristeva (1982) and Foucault (2002), and Vermeulen and Akker (2010) and Bourriaud (2009) which I deploy, particularly, in Chapters 3 and 4 have not been developed within the extant three main critical vehicles outlined earlier. By adopting poststructuralism, I am able to encapsulate certain features of postmodernism and metamodernism as an adequate register for the postcolonial world

scrambled by crises of identity and the bewildering politics of abnegation in Soyinka's theatre.

Accordingly, in *A Play of Giants* (1984) and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996) - Chapter 3 - I interrogate the postmodern irony of Soyinka's characters. I stress its axes in the politics and culture of a people striving to overwhelm the neo-colonial fabric of their society with absurd notions of personal power and state power. This only culminates in a form of empiricism in which the possibilities of social renewal vanish in the chasm of communal malaise and personal mythologies. I associate the theatre in all of this with the inflections of postmodernism argued by Hutcheon (1989) but mediated by my critical reflections on Soyinka's dramatic model, the "fourth stage".

Differently, in the texts of *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (1992) and *From Zia with Love* (1992) - Chapter 4 - I stretch the ethics and aesthetics of metamodernism over the acts of Soyinka's protean characters to account, peculiarly, for the oscillation of despair and hope, promise and pretense, and art and life in the instabilities and irruptions in the social cosmos of Soyinka's characters. Although metamodernism, arguably, only became well-established in Europe in the 21st century, however, as I argue in Chapter 4, it is speculative to date the precise historical moment for the emergence of metamodernism as a form of post-postmodernism. It is of note that *A Scourge of Hyacinths* and *From Zia with Love* were published in 1992, a period when postmodernism was being described as passé. Between 1990 and 2010, several scholars had argued that postmodernism had been replaced by a variety of post-postmodernisms, including metamodernism (Frow, 1990; Toth, 2010). Conceivably, as an accomplished dramatist, noted for his eclecticism, Soyinka probably dipped into the "period dialectics" of post-postmodernism as a valuable literary framework for dramatising aspects of postcoloniality in his fictive world, although this has not been stated by him. In any case, despite its periodicity, I am using metamodernism as a type of literary or dramatic genre. This allows me to complete the cultural (or traditional) and historical trajectory that is the structure of this study by plotting the dramatic narratives of Soyinka from the traditional to the modern, postmodern and metamodern attributes of his theatre.

Accordingly, in Chapter 4, I fix the rationalities of metamodernism to the ambiguities of myth and ritual in *A Scourge of Hyacinths* and *From Zia with Love*, and temper the postcolonial outlines of the character's "lived" world with what I describe as the "neo-romantic" sensibilities of metamodernism. This approach also aids my analysis of Soyinka's theatre in terms of its symptomatic ideations of African ritual drama, as illustrated in his "fourth stage" dramatic idiom. Moreover, in both Chapters 3 and 4, as I am concentrating on those plays, employing farce and burlesque to flay the military dictatorships that terminated the putative democracies that came with Independence, I delve into alterity and abjection as the core properties of the liminal world in these plays.

In my Conclusion, I introspect about my understanding of Soyinka's theatre in the light of the tools I have employed to access its manifold parts. I also query my own methods and admit my limitations, indicating the possible scope of future work on Soyinka's theatre.

### **Soyinka's Theatre – The Poetics of the "Fourth Stage"**

The "Fourth Stage" is uniquely Soyinka's interpretation of Yoruba mythology in which there are four parallel worlds of the living, the dead, the unborn and the chthonic realm, where the ambiguities of cultural identities are contested. These worlds exist in a non-hierarchical manner, and their membranous nature allows the dwellers to access these different worlds at will. This interpretation is the central thesis of Soyinka in his essays, "Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype", "Drama and the African Worldview" and "The Fourth Stage", as companion pieces (Soyinka, 1976a). The main argument is that African myth and ritual (exemplary in Yoruba mythology) are not discrete background cultural objects but form the continuing aesthetic and social foregrounding of African society. Soyinka frames this as a contrast to modern European cultural experience in which myth and ritual are simply discrete background material constructs. Although Soyinka offers the fourth stage as "the vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit" (Soyinka, 1976:149), it is not Carl Jung's psychology that interests him but Friedrich

Nietzsche's model of tragedy which dwelt on the literary implications of Jung's ideas.

Accordingly, Soyinka adopts Jung's "archetypes" loosely as universal, primordial images interred in the collective unconscious and encoded in certain of the myths he adapts for his theatre without Jung's predilection for the psycho-physical and inheritable properties of archetypes (Jung, 1959). On the one hand, Soyinka explores the way myth and ritual contain "story" (mythos) and imitation of life (mimesis), following Platonic and Aristotelian rubrics in which life has three stages: the ethereal realm (of essences), the material realm (of humans / appearances), and the imaginative/aesthetic realm where mimesis as illusion, imitation and abstraction predominate. By starting off with Nietzsche's theory of the ritual roots of classical Greek theatre, Soyinka explains the roots of African (Yoruba) ritual tragedy in the myth of Ogun and the sacral rites depicting his prowess in battle and metallurgy. In a general sense, in this model, ritual becomes the play form of myth, as a mode of "symbolic" or "illusory" imitation of life. This kind of logicism is detailed in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1999). For Nietzsche, Dionysius and Apollo are not merely certain deities, but are also actually art "states" or affects. Dionysius is the "state" of wild dreams and Apollo is the "state" of rational contemplation. Soyinka envisions Nietzsche's parallels in the mythic rituals associated with Ogun and Obatala, two central Yoruba divinities.

For Soyinka, Ogun is "coarse" and creative, but Obatala is calm and contemplative. Soyinka argues that these neat categories conceal a lot of complexities. Obatala's contemplative essence conceals his radical force as "creator". And Ogun can be rational and irrational, creative and destructive. In general, it is possible to read Soyinka's plays or even stage them as illustrating this binary of Ogun/Obatala. On the other hand, Soyinka challenges mimesis, and mystifies the boundaries between art and life further by invoking a "fourth stage" which in his view is accounted for in Yoruba mythology: "It is the chthonic realm, the area of the really dark forces, the really dark spirits, and it also is the area of stress of the human will" (Soyinka, 1976:89). The poetics of the fourth stage rests on Soyinka's assumption that there is an umbilical cord between the world of the unborn, the living, the dead

and the chthonic realm which the Yoruba ritual act celebrating Ogun illustrates in the protagonist's agonistic passage through these membranous even contemporaneous worlds.

In other words, it is not only possible to configure a binary of Ogun/Obatala in Soyinka's mythic cosmos, but also a continuum of Ogun-Obatala, in which archetypal figures carry in a conjoined manner the essences of both Ogun and Obatala. In this continuum, Soyinka's promethean figures are usually characters seeking to transcend cultural concerns by daring to cross the abyss between being and becoming and, as such, mimesis as purely an imitation or illusion of life is challenged, and becomes akin to Brecht's idea of representation of life (Willett, 1967, 1998; Benjamin, 1998). In a Brechtian sense, actors are required to represent these characters faithfully in a way in which it is clear to the audience and themselves that they have not "become" the characters. In Soyinka's view, "In our journey to the heart of Yoruba tragic art which indeed belongs in the Mysteries of Ogun and the choric ecstasy of revellers, we do not find that the Yoruba, as the Greek did, "built for his chorus the scaffolding of a fictive chthonic realm and placed thereon fictive nature spirits ..." on which foundation, claims Nietzsche, Greek tragedy developed: in short the principle of illusion"" (Soyinka, 1988:22).

In contrast, "Yoruba tragedy plunges straight into the "chthonic realm", the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming" (Soyinka, 1988:22). Soyinka reasons that the Ogun protagonist is not "copying actuality" but merely steps forward as "the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering visions symbolic of the transitional gulf, interpreting the dread power within whose essence he is immersed as agent of the choric will" (Soyinka, 1988:23). Interpreting Soyinka's "fourth stage" as a performance prototype suggests that the actor can either be the virtual mime (or imitation) of the deity, or a mouthpiece (or representation) of the deity he is playing; or, a cross between both possibilities. As Soyinka's emphasis is not on illusion, as in Greek theatre, but on representation, the end result is not the Aristotelian catharsis, but a continuing kinesis in which the actor as well as the audience or society is engulfed in the interminable consequences of the actor's will; as much as

equally differently, kenosis, a subjective “emptying out” of the rationalities underpinning the actor’s will and the audience’s or society’s complicit participation in the act itself. In other words, Soyinka’s enunciation is highly suggestive of the contours of performativity.

Performativity, as a dynamic of semiosis, is not a unified literary or philosophical concept but a receptacle of different ideas about the constitution of the self as a matter of indeterminable processes of social and historical importance (Goffman, 1956/1990; Austin, 1962; Butler, 1995; 1997; Parker & Sedgwick, 1995). Performativity suggests that speech and communication have the capacity to assert modes of action intended to construct and achieve an identity. As Goffman notes:

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. (Goffman 1969: 17)

Goffman stands his theory on his observation of the “dramaturgical” in everyday life. He argues that this is characterised by social interactions in which people present themselves to one another on the basis of their cultural values, norms and beliefs. Goffman argues that this theatre of everyday life, in which a dramaturgical action is a social action presented to be viewed by others, can be observed in dramatic works.

For Butler (1997), performativity is the kind of discourse which aids identity-formation and the capacity of language and words to describe and define identity. In Butler’s view, the performative self is constituted within a particular context which, acting as agent, interacts dynamically with the self. The context can be some cultural, momentous or quotidian situation and the self intentionally performs iteratively within this context in a continuum of defiance and compliance in order to assert its selfhood and identity. Consequently, the performative self is constantly in a state of restiveness, of being and doing, of

selecting and de-selecting the rationalities that underline its materiality, and the facticity of its existence. In my pursuit of liminality and postcoloniality in this study, illustrated through the replete self-identities constructed by Soyinka's characters, Butler's analysis helps me to see the creation and transitions of these identities in the performativity that I argue for Soyinka's "fourth stage" dramatic idiom, sourced, as we know, in myth and ritual.

The performative nature of myth and ritual have been stressed in the works of Victor Turner (1988) and Richard Schechner (1985), for instance. Moreover, as Conquergood notes: "Performance privileges threshold-crossing, shape-shifting and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters and jokers, who value the carnivalesque over the monumental" (Conquergood 1995: 137-138). Soyinka's characters can well be included in this list. As such, my reference to performativity in Soyinka's "fourth stage", therefore, necessarily merges the concept of performance (**the theatrical**) into understanding how Soyinka's characters situate themselves in the world, for themselves and for others (**the dramaturgical**), in terms of their social interactions as a facet of their everyday life. I have not privileged one above the other but both aspects are allowed in this study to document liminality and postcoloniality in Soyinka's theatre.

In other words, applied to the poetics of Soyinka's "fourth stage", the Ogun-Obatala continuum furnishes the social and psychological processes in which the social actor is immersed. The actor engages in these processes at multiple levels, constructing and deconstructing his or her own persona or identity. This ceaseless self-iteration can appear arbitrary, contrived and subjunctive in Soyinka's theatre because of his polysemous language and the dense imagery and symbolism that infuse his works (Haney II, 1990; Banham, Gibbs, Osofisan, and Plastow, 1999; Banham, Gibbs, and Osofisan, 2001). This is Soyinka's calculus of the "chthonic realm, the area of the really dark forces, the really dark spirits ... the area of stress of the human will" (Soyinka, 1976:89). In this study, my elucidation of the performative self will entail unraveling the dramaturgy and theatre art inlaid in Soyinka's texts. At the level of dramaturgy, I aim to expose the cultural categories of Soyinka's metaphysics or traditionalism on death, his approach to modernism,

postmodernism, metamodernism and postcolonialism, exploring them largely as variations of the liminality that the performative self negotiates. As for the theatricality of his texts, my emphasis is on the visually artful ways which endow these texts and contribute to the kinesis and kenosis that I have argued are the principal aesthetics of Soyinka's theatre (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009; Howard, 2002; Pavis, 2003).

I will also apply the concept of the performative self in Soyinka's "fourth stage" to the treatment of postcolonialism in his plays. For instance, Soyinka's critical argument in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) is that the rupture of traditional Africa by its junction with the imperial hegemony of European powers slices the cultural landscape into two competing and yet overlapping worldviews: the one that is colonised and aspires to the cultural dividends of Western education, politics, commerce, custom and technology, as consequences of colonialism, even if stated within a fiercely anticolonial or postcolonial ideology; and the other evidences a deep attachment to, longing for, and even conscious return to the indigenous (autochthonous) social praxis, although it too is being mediated invariably by its proximity to or embeddedness in the cultural dividends of coloniality and postcoloniality. In between there is the chaotic territory in which idealised conceptions of sociality strive to come to terms with difference and acceptance, accommodation and rejection of the synthesis of the cultural dividends concomitant to coloniality and postcoloniality; and the resurgent and sometimes receding claims of valuable autochthonous social praxis. This schema closely resembles Homi Bhabha's (1994/2012) tripartite approach to postcolonial discourse, specifically, his theory around "hybridity", "mimicry" and "ambivalence" as conceptual tools for handling the complex tropes of rejection, resistance and adaptation of the cultural universe of the coloniser by the colonised.

A lot of excellent work has been done around the importance of "The Fourth Stage" in Soyinka's conception of theatre (Ogunba, 1975; Gibbs, 1980, 1986; Katak, 1986; Jeyifo, 1988, 2001; 2004; Jones, 1988; Oko, 1992; Ebewo, 2002). Some of these have broached performativity in Soyinka's "fourth stage" in broad terms. For instance, Annemarie Heywood (1976) conceives the

staging of Soyinka's plays more-or-less in the context of innovative "fourth wall" explorations; Andrew Gurr (1980) and Derek Wright (1992) delve into "The Fourth Stage" as a kind of metaphysical compact in which Soyinka compounds the ingredients of Yoruba rituals of Ogun and Obatala into "the union between the stasis of tragedy and the dynamism of the rebellious spirit" (Gurr, 1980:143) on the one hand and, on the other, Wright asseverates that "the prevailing pattern in Soyinka's ritual dramas is one of rebellious chaos and disintegration, represented by Ogun, repeatedly accommodated by but never wholly resolved into the quiescent harmony and wisdom represented by Obatala" (Wright, 1993: 40). Some other scholars follow this vein, adjudging Soyinka's "fourth stage" as part of the metaphysics of African (Yoruba) mythology and not as a possible general theory of theatre (Gibbs, 1978; Jeyifo, 2004; Anyokwu, 2012). An exception is Ann Davis (1980) with her observation that: "Wole Soyinka has developed an innovative theory of drama which provides workable new theoretical constructs for contemporary dramatic criticism and validates the ritual approach to drama by universalizing its insights" (Davis, 1980:147).

In view of Soyinka's thesis in his essays, "Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype", "Drama and the African Worldview" and "The Fourth Stage", as companion pieces, I am inclined to agree with Davis that "Soyinka's theory differs most obviously from those of the earlier theorists in its rejection of their exclusive concern with the relationship between ritual and tragedy" (and that) "The theory is also unique in that it focuses on the dynamics of social and psychological processes within the dramatic experience" (Davis, 1980:148). Davis appears to be arguing, without being specific, the singular point about this theory: the representation of a performative self. Arguably, in my view, performativity is central to Soyinka's dramatic theory and is crucial for unlocking the polysemous language and the dense imagery and symbolism we encounter in his corpus.

For Soyinka, in ritual drama, the burden of the "violent" warfare, irreducible to merely the tragic paradigms of personal versus communal wills, individuals versus society, is borne by promethean figures whose psychology is always complex and always compromised by their own psychological contradictions

as much as by the tough, tenuous and travailed sociality of the world in which they find themselves. In contrast to the devices of plot and narration in Western drama which often resolve dramatic tension into the struggle between individuals, or between individuals and society, Soyinka conceives the narrative scheme of African ritual drama as scenarios of conflict often engulfing the world of the past, the present, the future and the chthonic realm – his adumbrated “fourth stage”. What is at stake in the ensuing disorder is more than a way of life, but the idealised social praxis in which individual well-being and community well-being are constantly susceptible to breakdown and disaster due to the irreconcilable proneness of the human psyche to both creative and destructive tendencies.

In Soyinka’s works, these tendencies find artistic illustration in *Ogun*. In a reconstructed didactic form, *Ogun* is Soyinka’s patron saint who dares to forge a path through the undergrowth in order to access a world that is shaped by creativity and the integument of uninhibited and sacrosanct personal freedom (Barnes, 1997; Ogunba, 2005). In Soyinka’s hand, *Ogun* is a questioning, critiquing, and transforming ideologue whose quest is often marred by social excess. He contrasts and clashes sharply with *Obatala* whose effectual calmness is viewed by Soyinka as assenting to merely the given norm, the prevailing view and, therefore, ineffectual in renewing society or the sociality of his own being. This redacted form of the inner lives of *Ogun* and *Obatala* is the flesh of Soyinka’s mythopoesis in almost all his writings where myth and ritual inhere, and, secondarily, serves as his shorthand for embossing his own active political stance against social injustice as much as against cultural philistinism (Ogunba, 1975, 2005).

In the end, although Soyinka’s postcoloniality is very nuanced, there is a relentless focus on a type of social discourse in which African literature and culture are not merely contrasted with European literature and culture as the continuing foreground of Africa’s postcolonial context, but it is also a grand critical project that is adequate for accounting for the ideological necessity which posits postcoloniality as an interminable conflict between the creative and reforming social being, the deadening moralism of quietist social types,

and the destructive ethic that often outflanks the march towards an idealised future of a settled world in which social and economic justice prevails.

As a result, Soyinka's characters are jammed in certain horns of dilemma: whether they are "revolutionary" ideologues such as Kongi (*Kongi's Harvest*), Professor (*The Road*), Demoke (*A Dance of the Forests*), Igwezu (*The Swamp Dwellers*, 1958), Eman (*The Strong Breed*, 1964), Dr Bero (*Madmen and Specialists*, 1971), Olunde (*Death and the King's Horseman*) and Dionysius (*The Bacchae of Euripides*, 1973), or regressive social washouts such as Lakunle (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 1959), Chume (in *The Jero Plays*, 1973), the tyrants in *A Play of Giants*, the twilight faces and voices in *The Beatification of Area Boy*, Sebe (*From Zia, with Love*) and Bibabae (*King Baabu*, 2001) they remain critically unable to escape the horns of traditionalism, modernity, and postmodernity. Although Soyinka's characters are drawn from all classes of society, they are not drawn with any ideological class sympathies; neither are they in-depth psychological portrayals of particular classes in society. Instead, Soyinka's schema of ritual drama, projecting collision of rational/irrational and creative/destructive essences, existing as a continuum and conjoined inseparably, create characters that are specimens of humanity and serving as his forward operating base for guerrilla attacks on various facets of the postcolonial state and its people and props. This noted "Freudian" habit – the conflict between two overlapping behavioural tendencies locked into the character's personal volition and the unyielding claims of their community upon their self-interest - informs the postcolonial discourse we find in Soyinka's fictive cosmos.

If we follow the principal theorists of postcolonial discourse, say, Edward Said (1978/2003), Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Homi K. Bhabha (1994/2012), the attitudes of the inhabitants of Soyinka's fictive cosmos often coincide or conflict with the insights we find in their theories. Said's "oriental" is framed by the West as exotic, curious, negatively different, and needing the norms of European civilisation. In Said's theories, the "oriental" appears to accept this discourse and seeks to work within the framework towards self-expression and a symbolic cultural identity. Spivak's "subaltern" is muted by the grandiloquence of Western discourse, but the "subaltern" links with helpful

aspects and agents of the discourse to define new cultural norms of their own world, and which can mediate their relationship with the Western world. I think, in Spivak's theories, "subalternity" is a form of "affective resistance" within the dialectics of the relationship between the West and the colonised.

Homi Bhabha's "hybridity", "mimicry" and "ambivalence" are his conceptual tools for situating the narratives of rejection, resistance and adaptation of the cultural universe of the coloniser by the colonised as important categories of postcoloniality. For Bhabha, the colonised's sense of personhood and nationhood is striated within (a) the necessity to imitate the coloniser's modernist values and technologies; (b) adapting them to serve a new sense of self and nationality; and (c) ambivalently rejecting and resisting what the coloniser constructs as the "natural" social universe for all because there is nothing "natural" about it, and because it is constructed to serve/perpetuate the hegemonic interests of the coloniser (Bakhtin, 1981; Bhabha, 1990; Young, 1995; Memmi, 2003; Kraidy, 2005). I have earlier on summarised the foundational propositions in Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) into a similar schema. Soyinka's deployment of myth and ritual in my exemplar plays seemingly reiterates Bhabha's overlapping and colliding concerns and, consequently, the inhabitants of his fictive cosmos appear trapped in a hyperreal world, a liminal world. In this study, I will investigate how these concerns are dramatised in a way in which liminality, as an overriding element of postcoloniality, is the key affect (or emotional state) of Soyinka's dramaturgy.

Liminality (from the Latin word *līmen*, meaning "a threshold") is a term invented by Arnold van Gennep (1960/1977) in his analyses of a class of rituals he labelled "rites of passage". These are rituals enacted to mark the participants' passage from one stage of life to another. Gennep specifies three phases in such rites - separation, liminality, and incorporation. He states, "I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*" (van Gennep, 1977:21). Victor Turner (1969) borrows this triadic model and expands, particularly, the liminal phase to describe the social and

psychological processes that people and communities go through as they transit from one stage of development to another. In the liminal phase, the participants “stand at the threshold” between their previous identity or community, and a new one. Turner argues:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial (Turner, 1969:95).

As liminality covers the flux, intermediacy and permeability of the web of social relationships which rituals often occasion, the “fourth stage” principals of Soyinka loom large again (Ackerman, 2002). In the works of Turner and others, liminality assumes a greater cultural relevance in its application to postcolonial societies in which there are continuing socio-political instabilities and irruptions as a permanent phase of people’s life (Turner, 1967, 1974; Thomassen, 2006, 2009). For van Gennep (1977), rites of passage dramatise the transitions that participants, particularly, experience within a social process designed to mark their change of status from one level to another in society. For Turner, rites of passage are social dramas. They are:

Occasion(s) for the most radical scepticism – always relative, of course, to the given culture’s repertoire of areas of scepticism – about cherished values and rules. Ambiguity reigns: people and public policies may be judged sceptically in relation to deep values; the vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses of contemporary holders of high political, economic, or religious status may be satirized, ridiculed, or contemned in terms of axiomatic values, or these personages may be rebuked for gross failures in common sense (Turner, 1984:22).

Such occasions provide an environment ridden with conflict and consensus, introspection and retrospection in a manner suggestive of the “creative” and “destructive” social processes that we find in the poetics of Soyinka’s “fourth stage”. Applying Turner’s model, and shifting the paradigm from a physical society to the symbolic-aesthetic society in drama and theatre, movement through liminal space and time is integral to the sociality one finds preeminently in such plays as Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests*. The individuation that shapes the psychology of the main characters we find in such works, along with the sociality that ceaselessly shifts the centre and scope of their social world, create complexity, ambiguity, internal moral and morphological contradictions and the deconstruction of conventional logic and value-systems. Such works seem to major in creating disputed social territories, people dealing with crossroads in their world, and the psychological, moral and social effects of traversing liminal spaces, involving separation, marginalisation, hybridity, and re-aggregation (a re-assemblage) of their splintered social selves (Turner, 1974). In critical postcolonial discourse, postcoloniality is, in itself, a liminal object – it marks a continuous transition of in-between antithetical concepts of time and space, difference and identity, past and present, here and there, a restless threshold in which disorientation and disturbance are important categories of social experience (Bhabha, 1994; Pieterse, 2004). Postcoloniality helps us to imagine how these vistas of social experience are negotiated, accommodated and resisted in postcolonial societies.

Arguably, Soyinka’s “fourth stage” echoes liminality in its description of the material world as spheres of the living, the dead and the unborn, in addition to the chthonic realm, that space of ancestral deities reproduced in seasonal rites as “a storehouse for creative and destructive essences” (Soyinka, 1976:2). These are parallel and intersecting worlds in Soyinka’s fictive cosmos and the characters in his plays have to negotiate these worlds as participants in a continuing rite of passage, as threshold people whose identities are unstable and under constant negotiation. As Bhabha reflects, “...the temporal movement and passage that [this] allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains

difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, 1994: 4). This is Soyinka’s territory in adapting myth and ritual to serve as his basis for the presentation of alienating and disturbing worlds as part of the anatomy of the lived world of his characters. In my view, what this “interstitial passage” offers, especially, in terms of its performativity and postcoloniality in Soyinka’s theatre, is a further opportunity to assess that lived world in terms of its relationship to modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism.

Finally, although Soyinka offers the fourth stage as “the vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit” (Soyinka, 1976:149), he does not stage these archetypes (for instance, Ogun, Obatala, Sango, etc.) in his plays as characters in their own right, they are mostly discernible as psychological essences or social references in the urban legends that Soyinka creates in his plays. Apart from *A Dance of the Forests* where ancestral deities appear in their own appellation and personalise the myth surrounding their source, Soyinka’s characters are earthy mortals, shaped by and shaping the postcolonial conundrums of their social world. Accordingly, my articulation of the “fourth stage” in relation to Soyinka’s treatment of African (Yoruba) mythology is to probe my exemplar plays for how his main characters typify “threshold” people, and how the facets of his art are anchored in his dramatic theory.

### **Encapsulating the Fine Details of Soyinka’s Big Picture**

Wole Soyinka is far larger than the portrait I have provided here in my allusive biographical sketch about his life and works, as my main object is to develop a different poetics on Soyinka’s theatre, founded on the poststructuralism of Roland Barthes. This narrow but specialist theoretical focus, blended into my explication of liminality and Soyinka’s mythical dramatic idiom, the fourth stage will not diminish the imbricated profiles of Soyinka as a man of letters, a radical social, even political voice, and an inventive mythocentric dramatist. On the contrary, although I have contained him within the narrow confines of this study, my thesis covers the essential Soyinka whose politics, playwriting and theatre productions are firmly established on the global stage. My portrait excludes Soyinka’s prominence as a celebrated poet and novelist, his valuable apprenticeship in London at the Royal Court Theatre at the beginning

of his career and the theatre companies he formed and ran in Nigeria; the revues of his street theatre, a number of which are co-creations with others, which have become legendary companions to his major plays; his musicology which has resulted in a number of Long Playing records; his adventures as a filmmaker, for instance, his *Blues for A Prodigal* (1984), and the conversion of some of his plays into films, particularly, the Interlink's film version of *Kongi's Harvest* which was released in 1970 and the recent biopic, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (2016); his career as a maverick politician and his monumental prison diary, *The Man Died* (1972). I have also excluded the several interviews that Soyinka gave. These are important tributaries to a deeper and broader reader on Soyinka. However, they only amplify the quintessential Soyinka that I have drawn rather elusively.

More importantly, to my knowledge, the elucidation of Soyinka's obscure "fourth stage" as the normative practice of his theatre is rarely undertaken as I have attempted. I have defined Soyinka's theatre not by its politics or personae as most of his principal scholars do, but by its singular distinction as a liminal fictive world in which myth, ritual, and postcoloniality consort as cultural variants of traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism. I have settled the compass of Soyinka's fictive world on the performative exigencies of his "fourth stage". Arguably, by discounting the generic proportions of Soyinka's theatre, my work will miss the particularities of Soyinka's contribution to issues of genre as affect, in particular, tragedy, comedy and satire. However, these are provinces covered literally by several excellent works on Soyinka. Moreover, whilst not treating tragedy as a formal genre, I will be dealing with certain tragic vistas in Soyinka's theatre throughout this study.

I have watched a couple of performances of Soyinka's plays, and I have directed one myself. However, this cannot make up for the absence of direct reviews of any actual performance of Soyinka's plays as part of this study. This is a critical hole which I intend to close by enlarging in each Chapter on how the subtexts of Soyinka's plays foretell their staging, principally, as modes of festivals and carnivals in which what Victor Turner describes as "culture's "subjunctive" mood" predominates (Turner, 1984:20). The interculturalism and

intermediality that this sometimes supposes will be crucial affects that relate the staging to performers and spectators almost equally. In effect, perhaps, staging Soyinka's plays requires similar sensibilities as for curating an event – the choreography of the manifold parts which make up the *mise-en-scène*.

I have limited the typologies which subsist in current scholarship on Soyinka to Afrocentric, Eurocentric and structuralist. I have not given ample examples of each typology, privileging instead the texts and authors which stand for each typology. There is brevity in my discussion of structuralism and post-structuralism as it is not their history or practitioners that are of main concern to my study but the concrete literary and cultural notions that they assume and how these can be pursued in my study. My focus has been exclusively directed to the singular distinction of liminality as an elemental aspect of Soyinka's fictive cosmos.

Moreover, by adopting Barthes as my fieldstone, I have built this study around the characters in my exemplar plays, allowing Soyinka to recede into the small print of his text, with the "lifelikeness" of his fictive worlds and their iconic characters occupying the forestage. Drama as a form of lifelike reality is, historically, an exceptional lightning rod as all the commentaries on mimesis from Plato to Michael Taussig (1993) establish. Although this narrows theory down to a singular subject, it is arguably a specialist way of dealing with wider issues of traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism, metamodernism and postcolonialism in Soyinka's theatre. There are rather rare discussions of, particularly, postmodernism and metamodernism in current scholarship on Soyinka. Moreover, my study does not include the placement of Soyinka alongside other major African or European dramatists and theatre innovators as we find in works dealing with genres and adaptations as applicable to Soyinka. This is part of ensuring that this study is manageable within the research timescale and bound to the scope tightly enough to make it a unique study of the liminal world of Soyinka's theatre.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Death, Liminality and Postcolonial Identity

#### *The Road and Death and The King's Horseman*

##### **Towards an Examination of Professor & Elesin Oba**

A lot has been written in the critical press about **The Road** (1965, re-published in a collection of five plays by Soyinka in 1973, the version for all my page references here) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975, which I will refer to as *DKH* in this Chapter, with page references to the 2009 edition). The significant theses so far include the profundity of Soyinka's mythic imagination, his poetic amplitude, and the paradoxical portraiture of cultural archetypes sewn into the script of both plays (Moore, 1978; Jones, 1988; Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996; Jeyifo, 2001; Amkpa, 2004; McNulty, 2011). Within these theses, *The Road* becomes a tragic meme of the death cult of the Yoruba Agemo festival whilst *DKH* is a dramatised autopsy of the collapse of the biopolitics of the Yoruba Oyo kingdom when the ritual suicide of the King's Horseman was averted by the British District Officer in 1945, mistakenly stated by Soyinka as 1946.

These are important templates for ploughing issues of genre, language, and historiography and identity politics in *The Road* and *DKH*. However, they fail to achieve a thoroughgoing catechisation (or examination) of the two central identities in both plays - Professor (in *The Road*) and Elesin Oba (in *DKH*) - as Soyinka's problematisation of cultural protagonists as wishful postcolonial thinkers whose originality and literality, *contradicting* the traditions prevailing in their world, lead to a tragic impasse for them and their communities. In this Chapter, I will argue that myth and ritual are the envelope for the profound liminality that permeates their acts of self-iteration, and Death (as a form of metaphysics or traditionalism) seals this envelope in a way that binds their communities to self-asphyxiating forms of postcoloniality. As a result, postcoloniality becomes a construct reared, arguably, on the restrictive discourse of power and knowledge inducted within the acts of Professor and Elesin.

This is why I will divert briefly into the polemics of Michel Foucault (1998), the French postmodernist whose notions of power and its politics rest on the concert of cultural idealities which assail the traditional bases of power in social actors and structures. As such, in the sections below, I attempt a critical scrutiny of death as a ritual of power and alienation in the acts of Professor and Elesin Oba; death as a form of postcolonial discourse in the communities encountered in both plays; and death as a trope of Soyinka's "fourth stage" – as the embodied subjectivity of disembodied stage characters. These distinctions overlap and lead me to conclude, in the final section, that Soyinka's politicisation of death is a critical component of the divergent, even ambivalent notions of postcoloniality in both plays. Moreover, as I have argued in my Introduction on performativity, the mechanics of Soyinka's craft in these two plays can be taken as staging modalities premised on the ritualisation of the performance space.

### **Death as a factor of ritual power and alienation in the acts of Professor and Elesin Oba**

*The Road* is a rather slender story about a community of layabouts, superintended by Professor, a renegade Christian, fraudster and a consummate forger, despite the density of its symbols and imagery. There is a retail shop of motor spare parts salvaged from road accidents and managed at various times by the devotees of Professor and on his approval. Most of them are ex-road workers – private haulers, cab and truck drivers – living in the crooks and crannies of society on account of their criminality and unfitness for work. Like their mentor, they scout the road for crashes and plunder crash sites and corpses. On occasions, they "scam" the road and create crashes by removing road safety signs or planting dangerous counter-safety signs. In their spare time, they double as ritualists, political thugs and police informants. Although they are far away from main society, yet they are its familiar faces and voices. Their marginality is merely a contrivance of space – the roadside where they live and work is intricately woven into the rhetoric, politics and rituals of everyday life in the postcolonial society.

The whole ambience of *The Road* is brocaded in death – Murano, the domestic of Professor, is a priest of Agemo. The Agemo cult is essentially part

of the Yoruba tradition of ancestor-worship in which the essence of dying/death is conceived as mere dissolution of the flesh; the actual person transcends death, continues to dwell in the collective consciousness as an ancestral demiurge, and visits the living space in venerated masques on designated days of the ritual calendar (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1996; Balme, 1999). In Ijebu, the Agemo troupes are in season in June and July and their visitation peaks at Ijebu-Ode, the recognised capital of the Ijebu kingdom.

There are various types of Agemo masques, but one in particular is the basis of *The Road* – a performer, concealed by a matted enclosure, whirling round until, unnoticed by the spectators, he slips out of the enclosure, disappears into the cult-house, leaving behind merely the collapsed pile of raffia (Layiwola, 2000). Murano is that performer but the road lies in wait for him as his performance spins into the path of Kotonu's cab as Kotonu and his mates are venerating Ogun, the patron-deity of road workers and those who deal in ironmongery such as Professor. Kotonu hits Murano and, to avoid being arrested for dangerous driving, sneaks into Murano's enclosure and vanishes with the evidence of his crime into the roadside shack maintained by Professor. Professor nurses Murano back to health but he limps and he is mute, and retains the persona of a retarded, shadowy and wraith-like help in Professor's highly-controlled and manipulated camp. Throughout the play, death then becomes an instrument of power (of domination and control) and alienation (of estrangement from society and othering) in the hands of Professor. Repeatedly, he ritualises dying and death in a number of symbolic acts and finally is accidentally knifed to death by Say Tokyo Kid, an estranged lieutenant and captain of thugs, in a final scene in which his nemesis appears to have caught up with him.

Death is the very essence of Professor - he slumbers in the churchyard and is on a mystical quest for an enigma he calls the "Word". He haunts church graves and road crashes for this enigma and, in-between, directs and controls the affairs of the shack in a subterranean fashion - forging driving licenses, faking road traffic accident reports, and as a mind-bender, mystifying his rootless devotees by the mumbo-jumbo of cultic religion:

PROF. [he enters in a high state of excitement, muttering to himself.]: Almost a miracle ... dawn provides the greatest miracles but this ... in this dawn has exceeded its promise. In the strangest of places ... God God God but there is a mystery in everything. A new discovery every hour – I am used to that, but that I should be led to where this was hidden (**referring to the road-sign which he has uprooted, bearing the one word, "BEND"**), sprouted in secret for heaven knows how long ... for there was no doubt about it, this word was growing, it was growing from earth until I plucked it ... (p. 157)

In a revealing exchange with Samson, one of the touts, he declares:

My bed is among the dead, and when the road raises a victory cry to break my sleep I hurry to a disgruntled swarm of souls full of spite for their rejected bodies. It is a market of stale meat, noisy with flies and quarrelsome with old women. The place I speak of is not far from here, if you wish to come ... you shall be shown this truth of my endeavours –

SAMSON.: No thank you very much. I don't willingly seek out unpleasant sights.

PROF.: You are afraid? There are dangers in the Quest I know, but the Word may be found companion not to life, but Death. (p. 159)

Through this air of the esoteric, linked to the imagery of dying and death, Professor becomes a dreaded presence for Samson and all the other touts and drivers in the commune. By personifying death (as in "Death") and linking Death to "dangers in the Quest", which he is pursuing, and enabling his devotees to grasp the "Word", which he alone possesses, not as a companion to life but Death, Professor inscrutably invests in his own presence the dreaded persona and power of Death. To deepen his effects upon his community, whose association with Christian liturgy and its parallels in the

Agemo ritual will certainly invoke reminiscences, Professor interjects the crucifixion of the Christ as a metaphor into his own morbid narrative of a simple road crash:

PROF.: Three souls you know, fled up that tree. You would think, to see it that the motor-car had tried to clamber after them. Oh there was such an angry buzz but the matter was beyond repair. They died, all three of them crucified on rigid branches. I found this word (**referring to the road-sign which he has uprooted, bearing the one word, "BEND"**) growing where their blood had spread and sunk along plough scouring of the wheel. Now tell me you who sit above it all (**referring to SAMSON, the lead tout**), do you think my sleep was broken over nothing, over a meaningless event? (p. 159)

*The Road* dramatises a series of "meaningless" events in which the ritual of death and dying in road crashes is initiated, witnessed and certified by Professor and his tramps. Whilst they find the resources to recollect and role-play these tragedies as evidence of their own cultural propensities for the mysterious and the abstruse, the declension of their society and the rise of illogical protagonists such as Professor who emerge from the greying social landscape as wishful thinkers and wasteful leaders, these practitioners of the road transmute easily from living as victims of the corruptive social order into lords of the ensuing social disorder.

Tragic accidents occur on the road leading to mass burials in the Church cemetery, but these physical accidents are not half as traumatic as the accidents of mind and will which we notice in the men of *The Road* who live off the road as drivers, touts, thugs and vendors of stolen spare parts. These men alter not just because they indulge in hallucinogenic drugs or are smeared in the blood of road traffic accident victims but because the road in and out of their lives is bent, broken and pot-holed by a weird admixture of leitmotifs – seedy local politics, empty rhetoric of personal freedom and the confused strands of aberrant Christianity and traditional mythologies, especially, those of Ogun and Agemo. As they attend Professor to plunder crash sites, or fawn on him to obtain forged driving licences and fake accident

reports, or simply idle away the day in his shack in the shadows of Ogun and Agemo, they steadily grow into members in a club of Death. But this is not common Death, it is Professor's ritual of power over their life and his practised art of alienation in which these layabouts and their users in the open society are drawn away from regular society into a fraternity of road ritualists, and manipulated against one another. So for instance, Murano, the ex-Agemo survives a road crash and becomes the virtual prisoner of Professor:

KOTONU: If I may ask, Professor, where did you find Murano?

PROF.: Neglected in the back of a hearse. And dying. Moaned like a dog whose legs have been broken by a motor car. I took him – somewhere – looked after him till he was well again.

KOTONU: And you set him to tap wine for you? (p. 186)

Never allowed to return to open society again, Murano is alienated from kith and kin, subsumed in the death-craft of Professor and misused as a demiurge to instil fear of the occult in the commune. Kotonu and others have all been sequestered from the open society, dragged into the underworld where they live in dread of Professor because he has the power of life and death over them nearly, on account of his knowledge and evidence of their criminality and deviancy. It is in this sense that for Kotonu, the fatalistic ex-driver, Professor, the real “Grim Reaper” has issued him a way out of the road as a driver, but enrolled him back on the road as a scavenger of road wreckages. He is alienated from his champion motor tout, Samson, because he is now on “a business trip” with Professor, managing his “Aksident Store”.

Although in a corner of the shack where Professor maintains his cultic authority, there is a spider's web occasionally without its inhabitant, this imagery fails to warn the commune of the death-trap that Professor represents. Samson spots this and warns his closest mate, Kotonu, and worries over him, but to no avail. Now that Sergeant Burma who keeps the “Aksident Store” where road spoils are kept has died, the office is turned over to Kotonu. As he recalls:

Sergeant Burma was never moved by these accidents. He told me himself how once he was stripping down a crash and found that the driver was an old comrade from the front. He took him to the mortuary but first he stopped to remove all the tyres. (p. 167)

And Kotonu adds, tellingly:

You know, Professor is a bit like Sergeant Burma. He was moving round those corpses as if they didn't exist. All he cared about was re-planting that sign-post. To see him you would think he was Adam re-planting the Tree of Life. (p. 167)

Other characters external to the shack soon come wandering in: Say Toyo Kid, the captain of a pack of thugs; Chief-in-Town, the local politician who hires thugs to foil opposition and for body-guarding; and Particulars Joe, the corrupt policeman who hob-nobs with criminals to enhance his detective role and for a suitable bribe – cache of drugs or cash alone – will overlook criminality. Hovering over them is the spectre of Professor who they regard at different times as a mystic, a fraudster and a protector. They know "The man is a menace. Pulling up road-signs and talking all that mumbo-jumbo" (p. 176) but they hang about him like moths. Additionally, customers furtively stop at the "Aksident Store" for motor spare parts they know too well are stolen from road crashes and bear the scourge of death. Kotonu aptly describes the shack as both "the road" and "the spider" (p. 178) – the place that lures unsuspecting victims to their death – death as follows road crashes; death as in the death of caring relationships (for instance, between Samson and Kotonu) and death as in the collective death of a community broken by crime, wilful neglect of civic values, empty religion and chaotic politics. In mock-irony, Professor (as Death) states dryly: "It is lucky for you that I watch over you, over all of you" (p. 180).

But the shack is not merely infested with these social rejects; it reeks with the antinomies of Agemo and Ogun. Agemo is a masque of death, of life dissolving into nothingness. The Agemo spirit-bearer (the

impersonator/performer) initiates the disjunction between life and death, dwells momentarily in the gap between both realms and then vanishes into thin air, leaving nothing but a trail of grass. There is no slaughter of any animal, no blood-letting sacrifice. This bloodless ritual performance is invested with meaning only insofar as the community apprehends death not as closure but as an aperture through which life of a different and perhaps better kind emerges. Agemo is a cleansing rite.

Contrastively, Ogun is a blood-letting demiurge. He represents creativity and audacity in the myth that narrates his passage from the primal ether into the dense and impenetrable foliage of terra firma, forging from iron ore the implement for his breakthrough, and celebrating the conquest by spilling blood. Unlike Agemo, the death ritual performed by the Ogun mask accentuates the destructive essence of death and how it inconceivably energises the will to exist – to dare to live, to surmount the abyss of non-being – in its adherents. These rituals are mediated in both plays by the ambivalence of the ritual heroes to the cultural norms embedded within the scope of the prescribed social rituals.

For instance, in *The Road*, adjoining a misconceived application of Christian symbolism to his virtuoso embodiment of the traits of Agemo and Ogun, Professor mutates into a formidable persona whose adopted politics, rhetoric and symbols confuse his community as much as us and replay in a telling manner the ambiguities of domination which help such cultural protagonists to be both loathed and loved. Let us remember that Professor's first disciple is Murano – the limping mute, ex-Agemo spirit-bearer – who now taps wine for him. Let us remember that wine is the sacred beverage of Ogun. In *The Road*, in a chaotic scene proximate to the tail-end, and to clarify the confusing assemblage of ritual and mythic motifs in which this play drenches, Murano meets his “death” during his Agemo phase under the wheels of Kotonu, leading the drivers' cortege of road ritualists, celebrating their patron-deity Ogun. Road ritualists are road workers – traders in metal and general ironmongery plying the road in contraptions of steel – who subscribe to the Ogun myth that the road must be pacified by ritual slaughter of a dog and libation (palm wine) in homage to Ogun for accident-free passage and career.

These complications of mixed registers of death – the Crucifixion with its implications for treachery and atoning death, Agemo and the mysterious dissolution of the flesh, and Ogun and his bloodletting orgy - poison the relationships in the commune which Professor exploits to the hilt. For instance, in order to boost his own esoteric profile, he reinforces the myth of other-world-ness surrounding Murano in his exchanges with Samson and Salubi:

PROF.: (referring to Murano) Deep. Silent but deep. Oh my friend, beware the pity of those that have no tongue for they have been proclaimed sole guardians of the Word. They have slept beyond the portals of secrets. They have pierced the guard of eternity and unearthed the Word, a golden nugget on the tongue. And so their tongue hangs heavy and they are forever silenced. Do you mean that you do not see that Murano has one leg longer than the other? ... When a man has one leg in each world, his legs are never the same. The big toe of Murano's foot - the left one of course – rests on the slumbering chrysalis of the Word. When that crust cracks my friend – you and I, that is the moment we await. That is the moment of our rehabilitation. When that crust cracks ... (pp. 186-187).

When Samson suggests snooping on Murano to discover why he disappears the whole day to tap wine for Professor, the stout warning follows:

PROF.: [sharply.]: You are tired of life perhaps? ... Those who are not equipped for strange sights – fools like you – go mad or blind when their curiosity is pursued. First find the Word. It is not enough to follow Murano at dawn and spy on him like a vulgar housewife. Find the Word. (p. 187)

As he hides Murano from open view and completely inverts his identity to suit the myth of a "living dead", Professor's power over the lives of others escalates and his conduct towards them becomes more dogmatic and demeaning. He refers to them as "vermin", "god-forsaken Judases" (191),

"carrion" and people who cannot find the Word or unravel the "Quest" because they always return to the shack "empty-handed and empty-minded" (p. 195). He uses funeral processions to drill the dread of death into the commune and bends the mind of his hearers to take fatal road crashes as occasions when the "Word" and the "Quest" collide and the road becomes the metaphor for Ogun, the destructive essence, and the dangerous mystical path, as in Agemo, towards self-knowledge. Using the Church with all its symbolism of the ritual sacrifice of the Christ as the foreground of his shack, and the graves in the churchyard as his backyard, Professor sets the final festive gathering of his companions on course by a mock-ironic and dingy eulogy:

PROF.: If you think I do this from the kindness of my heart you are fools. But you are no fools, so you must be liars. It is true I demand little from you, just your presence at evening communion, and the knowledge you afford me that your deaths will have no meaning. Well look at you, battered in pieces and I ask no explanation. I let you serve two masters, three, four, five, a hundred if you wish. But understand that I would live as hopefully among cattle, among hogs, among rams if it were Ramadan, I would live as hopefully if you were ant-heaps destined to be crushed underfoot... Remember my warning...If my enemies trouble me I shall counter with a resurrection. Capital R. I shall set up shop in full opposition – I have the advantage (p. 221).

This is premonition uncoiling. Tragically, and quite uninvited, as the libation flows freely, Murano reverts to his Agemo phase, and the premonition of ritual death descends on the party. As the Agemo dance intensifies, the horror of such a sacred moment when a demiurge visits and the profane reality of a party of social rejects, such as Professor and his cast, unwind into a deathly assault – the knifing of Professor by Say Tokyo Kid. The Ogun mask, represented by the dirging drivers and boorish machete-wielding thugs, fronted by Kotonu and Say Tokyo Kid, requires the slaughter of a dog. That dog, symbolically, is Professor, the Death caricature. But the frenetic scene is also overtaken by Agemo's spinning mask. The "Word" and the "Quest" tragically collide symbolically. The Agemo (Murano) spins and sinks into

nothingness whilst Professor's strength falters and concludes in "a vague gesture of the hand, like a benediction" (p. 228), so that even in dying, he possesses a summary of his own arcane powers, haranguing his disciples:

Be even like the road itself. Flatten your bellies with the hunger of an unpropitious day, power your hands with the knowledge of death... Be the road. Coil yourself in dreams, lay flat in treachery and deceit and at the moment of a trusting step, rear your head and strike the traveller in his confidence, swallow him whole or break him on the earth" (p. 228).

The synchrony of the masques of Ogun and Agemo and the layered references to a crude, reconditioned version of Church liturgy and theology in *The Road* would appear to be the ambulant device that Professor employs both to characterise his own world (the commune where he rules) as a parallel of the external world in which the pitfalls of society trap nearly everyone in some abject act of depersonalisation; and to desecrate the ritual significance of the cultic traditions and syncretic Christianity that is central to the worldviews of his surroundings by parading himself as a priest whose liturgical role in the life of the commune is invested in ridiculing his devotees, exploiting their vulnerability and profaning their sensibilities. As a dash between Ogun and Agemo, Professor inhabits that hiatus where death clads the living in a fixed state of unreality/incorporeality.

Elesin Oba in *DKH* has a similarly powerful death-clad as he announces in the prime of his life: "Death came calling / Who does not know his rasp of reeds?" (p. 10). He is the death that stalks everyone else in the play. Historically, Elesin, or, in its full titular premiss, Olokun Esin, is one of the chiefs of Alaafin, the King of Oyo, an ancient Yoruba empire which slowly diminished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Muslim jihadists pressed from the northern parts of Nigeria towards the south, and British colonialism gained territories across West Africa, pushing from the coast into the hinterland. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, local customs and traditions had become diluted by the influence of Christianity and Islam, as much as by the notions of governance imported by the Colonial Administration - however, a radial set of traditional customs still

held sway. It is in this cluster of customs that Elesin manages the stables of Alaafin as the King's Horseman and this office allows him unusual privileges of access to the kingdom's commonwealth during his tenure. This is a hereditary chieftaincy, it is an office that belongs solely to his family and is passed down to the first-born son down the generations. However, when the king dies Elesin must commit ritual suicide on a designated day as part of the funerary rites associated with the demise of the Alaafin by custom and tradition. This ensures a successful succession and sustains the security of the kingdom.

Soyinka's *DKH* is his attempt to recast the personal tragic story of a particular Elesin, one Chief Jinadu who was prevented from carrying out this obligatory ritual suicide by the British Colonial District Officer, Captain J.A. MacKenzie in January 1945 as it did not fit into the coloniser's cast of values. However, whilst Jinadu was in custody, his son Murana, stepped into his father's shoes and killed himself to remove the stain on their family's escutcheon and observe the ritual pact between the deceased Alaafin and his ill-fated Elesin. In line with his postulations in "Drama and the African Worldview" and "The Fourth Stage" in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Soyinka re-invents this story as an illustration of his own poetics on ritual saviours as promethean figures enfeebled by the impassability of the gulf between their sense of mission and the prevailing worldview of their society (such as we find in, for instance, *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958), *The Strong Breed* (1964), *The Road* (1965) and *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973)), and embroiders it with his own peculiar penchant for mysticism, the lyricism of his poetic diction and the eroticism that often attends such mythologies.

However, the entire capsule is death-laden or, in Soyinka's words, "the play's threnodic essence" is a matter of death as transition, death as the in-between of life and hereafter, and as a metaphysical construct (Soyinka, 2009:3). *DKH* dramatises the intervention of the British Colonial District Officer as an incalculable assault on the freedom of the colonised to act in consonance with their Yoruba worldview. For Soyinka, this is not the real catastrophe that springs Elesin's tragedy. According to Soyinka, "The Colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe

of the Yoruba mind – the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition. *Death and the King's Horseman* can be fully realised only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition" (Soyinka, 2009:4).

A number of studies have engaged in controversy over Soyinka's seemingly downgrading to a non-event the withering effects of colonialism on the sovereignty of the Oyo kingdom by his normative statement that the colonial factor is a mere catalytic incident, seeing, instead, the King's Horseman as engulfed mainly in a puerile war of wills (his own personal and liberal volition versus the quaint and methodical metaphysics of his society) (Okpewho, 1983; Jeyifo, 1985; Appiah, 1992; Crow and Banfield, 1996; George, 2003). I suppose Soyinka's statement is a diversionary quip, his missionary insertion of the colonial administration in the narrative depths of this play makes a different case. However, the large element that I find concerning here is the toga of death that cloaks Elesin and disrupts and disrobes the politics and rhetoric of power in all quarters in this play, disguised as it were within the vagaries of myth and ritual. In the opening scene, Elesin's companion, Olohun-Iyo (Praise-Singer) is in a jovial even if sometimes dark mood, to create a psychological climate conducive for the ritual suicide of his friend and patron, Elesin. Both men have been great friends who have savoured together the juice of royal life. Their "enormous vitality" and "infectious enjoyment of life" (p. 7) are poured into poetic seesaws, solecisms, riddles and plain prose.

This would not have been the case with the historical Elesin. He would have been customarily isolated in some cult-house (the Yoruba Osugbo) and prepared ritually and contemplatively for his own suicide, technically, through the ingestion of poison. Held in voluntary custody as it were, his mind would dwell on the archives of his own lineage and be ritually summoned to the abyss – the passage of transition – where he exits the known world (dies voluntarily to diurnal realities) and enters into the nocturnal exigencies induced by the ritual potion he has ingested until he expires quietly in the hushed surroundings of the cult-house. This sets him apart from others and launches him into the pantheon of his ancestors because his dying and death occur in that virginal setting where the uninitiated is prohibited and the lore of ancient

traditions is endorsed. His real power on the life of his community is in full effect immediately after his demise. The community erupts into a festive celebration of the successful transfer of the Alaafin and his Horseman into the domain of watchful ancestors. The world as known and enjoyed has been preserved against the vagaries of death and, ultimately, dissolution. Masques process from the cult-house to the main square, bequeathing blessings on all and sundry and gyrating to festal drums and ritual chants, serenading several ancestors, and deifying them and installing them afresh in the collective consciousness as tribal gods. Thus Death – the "threnodic essence" – becomes a communal ritual of power and alienation in the acts of the historical Elesin.

In *DKH*, the process is fundamentally reversed. The fulsome effect of Elesin's ritual death is felt before the suicide takes place. In anticipation of his dying and death, Elesin commences the ritual as a kind of carnival in which he as the Death-figure roams the precincts, completely undisguised, inviting acknowledgement and celebration of his impending death as a form of hero-sacrifice. He takes on the mantle of a Prometheus, or Ogun, daring to cross the abyss with deadly consequences for himself but potent benefits for his community. Therefore, accompanied by Praise-Singer, he bursts on the market-place – 'the long-suffering home of my spirit' (p. 7), he says – ostensibly to bid farewell to the public that is closest to his heart, the public of women, stall-holders and itinerant merchants who by tradition often lavish their stores on him in recognition of his status as the man destined to die with the king to bring prosperity to the commonwealth.

Praise Singer has premonitions about this valedictory act. He reminds Elesin to have full view of the communal obligation he must perform to keep Oyo from ruin. Public duty is, to him, above transient personal volitions. Not that Elesin is alien to this view but he is a sensuous soul who is as loyal to the fixed customs of his society as to the fixation of his mind on a life lived to the hilt. "This night", he muses, "I'll lay my head upon their lap [**the women's lap**] and go to sleep. This night I'll touch my feet with their feet in a dance that is no longer of this earth..." (p. 8). Death grants him power as a warranty for the survival of the race – the link between the dead, the living and the unborn. For

Praise-Singer, the women might weaken Elesin's resolve to achieve his goal; for Elesin they can only speed him up to it. It is death that summons the market women and virgins to lavish their wares on him.

Each man's insight is a reflection on the dynamics of their very society in relation to himself. Praise-Singer is the raconteur who stands as guardian of traditions because they are the best parts of his profession. For Elesin, even traditions must augment his role, must allow him the final wish on his heart. Iyaloja explains: "Only the curses of the departed are to be feared. The claims of one whose foot is on the threshold of their abode surpasses even the claims of blood. It is impiety even to place hindrances in their ways" (p. 22). In one stroke, by exercising the power that comes with Death, Elesin demands the pleasure of the company of a young woman already betrothed to the son of Iyaloja. She hands her over to Elesin for a valedictory sexual relationship to commemorate his continuing ritual of passage from life to death.

Elesin's impending ritual death has grave results in the colonial bureaucracy too. The reaction to his foreboding act causes tension among the Pilkings, their steward Joseph and Amusa, the native police sergeant. Here, the idea of self-sacrificial death is underlined only by reference to acts which expand or defend the British Empire or support Christian beliefs. Outside such contexts, self-sacrificial death is both marginal and superficial. Hence the Pilkings regard African masquerade dresses as an artifice, tawdry beside the British soldier's armour or coat-of-arms. They dismiss the "morbid" restraints and premonitions of Joseph and Amusa as exaggerations, tinsels beside the heroism and bravura of British convoys sailing dangerous seas. It is not that honour is not a set of rituals, even for the Pilkings, but such rituals must be ceremonies like the masque in honour of H.R.H. the Prince, the commissioning of warships, the unfurling of the Union Jack in which living is invested with the aura of a-thing-in-itself and of-itself rather than a-thing-beyond-itself – the hazy, unscientific and pseudo-rational "numinous passage" of the dead, the living and the unborn which the Yoruba people like to espouse.

In an ironic way, despite their air of superiority, Death captures the mind of the Pilkings too, insinuates their racism and exposes their double standard. Elesin as “Death” not only has the power to demand recognition, even where he is physically absent the ubiquity of his profile as a ritual saviour is highly divisive and alienating. As Simon Pilkings will soon discover, Elesin is a topical storm between him and the Resident. The Resident emerges as a person who believes that the end justifies the means – cunning rather than cleverness, deviousness rather than straight-forwardness is the mark of this diplomat. He tells Simon: “Nose to the ground Pilkings, nose to the ground. If we all let these little things slip past us where would the empire be, eh?” (p. 51). When Simon suggests that he should give a truthful report of the impending unrest in the native community to H.R.H. the Prince, the Resident is simply appalled at the District Officer’s naivety.

Simon is, however, not quite naive. He rejects the deployment of a detachment of soldiers, preferring to merely detain the suicidal Elesin overnight in a disused cellar "where the slaves were stored before being taken down to the coast" but which now stores "broken furniture" (p. 64), an apt irony for Elesin, a native degraded both by colonialism and his own desperation for self-gratification – the catalyst that interrupts his ritual of self-immolation. Whilst Simon is bravely fulfilling his charge as the keeper of order in His Majesty's colony, Elesin languishes overnight in detention, relegating the order of Oyo to the rioting crowd of market women protesting his incarceration and the looming collapse of their traditional world. If Simon's officialdom first, inadvertently, breaks Elesin's will, his later departure from red-tape by granting ready access to the detainee breaks the pact between Elesin and his retinue as they deride him harshly as a failed custodian of their ancient lore.

In a role possibly dramatically parallel to that of Iyaloja, Simon's wife, Jane, through her urgings, and sometimes through her modest criticisms, thrusts Simon into his two consequential actions in this play – the prevention of Elesin’s ritual suicide and the eventual detention of the Horseman. Amusa provides intelligence information which, coupled with his misgivings about the deathly *egungun* mask, heightens the tension between Simon and Jane on

the one hand, and the Resident and Simon on the other. Under such pressure, Simon's efforts to halt the ritual and to forestall the consequent rioting cannot but produce tragic results for both the colonial bureaucracy and the native feudal hierarchy. Elesin becomes the pivot of the ensuing crisis of confidence that rocks both institutions.

This crisis becomes intellectual rather than physical when Olunde, Elesin's Western-educated heir and fresh from England, meets Jane. The propriety of ideas about heroism, integrity, justice, order, self-sacrificial death is thrown into the contest as Elesin's heir and the District Officer's spouse strive to hack into each other's mental system and duel – verbally - to show the consequences of the operation of these ideas for two different even if mutually compatible metaphysical constructs – Yoruba and English, the colonised and the coloniser, the West and the Other. Tragically, this intellectual crisis alienates both and ends in Olunde's suicide to assert not just family honour but also racial pride. Iyaloja and her retinue carry the corpse of Olunde to the captive Elesin in a scene that fills his cell with his disgrace and dethronement and drives him to his suicide in front of the women and the colonial authorities.

However, divested of its ritual significance, Elesin's death becomes merely a mockery of his ancient office. Ironically, it still has some putative symbolic power: it has endangered tradition, it has corroded the modernity of the colonial space but more – in the womb of his surviving bride stirs the seed he chooses to plant the night before his dramatic fall. So Iyaloja intones: "Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn" (p. 84). In death, as in life, he hovers over all the past, the present and the future. Iyaloja gives voice to the psychic dilemma the community faces even with the unborn: "The fruit of such a union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joined spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passage ...Elesin!" (p. 23). Perhaps, herein lies the canonical authority of Elesin as "Death" - the timeless liminality that permeates his community.

Dying and death are imbued with ritual significance in every culture as sociologists, particularly, Durkheim (1915), Malinowski (1944) and Hertz

(1907/1960), have shown. I have argued in my Introduction how the very concept of liminality imports the notion of transition and Victor Turner (1969) likens it "to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner, 1969:95). Relying on Van Gennep's (1960) thesis, arguably, impending death symbolically separates Professor and Elesin from others, they dwell momentarily in the cultural (mythic, ritualistic) hiatus created by this separation, until they actually die and then achieve a new social status in the collective consciousness of their community. Jenny Hockey (2013) describes liminal entities as "marginal beings who "access the power of the weak" to offer an oblique, critical perspective on the familiar world" (p. 285).

This is the class to which Professor and Elesin belong in their ability to ritualise death as a factor of power and domination in their different worlds. However, this is a kind of power that drains away from its holder rather quickly as we see in the tragic demise of Professor and Elesin whose hold on their society slips in the abyss of the uncertainties and irrationalities that they create in their effort to surmount the gulf between their own social practice and the inflexible cultural idealities of their surroundings.

In the end, the culmination of their acts defines the struggle they have in exploring their own identity – their own existence – as living individuals criss-crossing and challenging the existence of their community whose force inheres in traditional rituals and rules. It is this existential torque which shreds up the fabric of the society we find in *The Road* and *DKH* because, in Foucauldian terms, their kind of power is actually everywhere, constituted in the regimes of knowledge subsisting in the climate they create and dominate. Ralph-Bowman (1983) and Katrak (1986) raised the tragic nomenclature of Soyinka's theatre as explorations beyond Aristotelian models of theatre. In my view, in *The Road* and *DKH*, particularly, it is this existential torque that heightens the tragic impulse. The performative tour de force, imbricated, for instance, in Soyinka's dramatic meta-diction, the fourth stage, that intensifies the tragic uncertainties and irrationalities of Professor and Elesin is actually based on this torque in which power drains away from these ritual heroes from the very start and locates new recesses in the shadowy but effective

underlings which surround them, notably the touts and thugs around Professor and the market women, Praise-Singer and the colonial bureaucracy around Elesin.

But first, the arguments of Foucault (1998) which I summarise in three ways: people everywhere are not just dominated by some power but they are exercising power and resisting power in diverse ways; power resides in "regimes of truth" or accepted forms and norms of knowledge; and power infers social discipline and conformity. Foucault's thesis upturns the traditional take on power as resident solely in social agency and structure and as mainly coercive and corruptive. In his study of the administrative governance of prisons and schools, and the control of populations through norms of sexuality, Foucault hits on what he terms "bio-power" – a discursive practice or knowledge regime which defines what forms of conduct and social relations society prescribes as normative or deviant. As society is largely a body of loose and incipient sets of social relations, this discursive practice is in a constant state of flux. Power, therefore, and the norms which ensure its diverse and discursive character constitute social agents and structures, and possess in-built strictures on their own expansiveness as a cultural phenomenon.

In other words, people or groups who wield power through domination or coercion are soon confronted by the "episodic" nature of power. As I intimated in my introductory comments on Foucault in this Chapter, this power illustrates a kind of sovereignty that is dispersible and pervasive, power everywhere and emerging from everywhere beyond agential or structural control (Foucault, 1998:63). This episodic inversion of power, this metapower, produces both the vibrancy and conflict in social relations as it all the time undercuts the superficial stability of such relations. In other words, the underlying torque that governs social relations in *The Road* and *DKH* is the resultant flux and negotiation of the "regimes of truth" by Professor and Elesin, on the one hand, and the crowd they have to pull to their side in order to maintain any sense of equilibrium in their world. Foucault employs the dualism of "power/knowledge" to qualify his view that power is a nexus of accepted forms of knowledge, the forms of social 'truth':

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991).

Arguably, these “general politics” and “regimes of truth” become the margins that permit and limit options for action not just by protagonists such as Professor and Elesin but by the whole society whose capacities to dispute or re-affirm such margins often tragically produce absurd fallouts such as we see both in the death of Professor and Elesin and the deathly disruption of the society that is their habitat. As Foucault states:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1991:194).

In *The Road*, for instance, death is constructed as a kind of social truth inherent in the Agemo ritual where the performer spins and then disappears into thin air, leaving the collapsed raffia as the exceptional trail of his own demise (Lynch & Roberts, 2010; Asante & Abarry, 1996; Drewal, 1992). In *DKH*, death as a social truth is woven into the tradition of ritual suicide of the King's Horseman in service of the continuity of law and order and the overall stability of the Oyo (Yoruba) kingdom in which Elesin (the King's Horseman) is an influential political and cultural figure. This construct of social discipline and conformity is part and parcel of the matrices of postcolonialism indented into the acts of Professor and Elesin, as much as into the social fabric of their

society. The coercive and regulatory nature of these rituals is naturally concealed in the outward willingness of Professor and Elesin to play along with the symbols and idealities of their contemporary society whilst in both plays the existential inward struggle they face is played out in the performative torque of the clash between their personal volitions and the superficial inflexibility of the communal structures of truth embedded in their society and the strictures they sprout.

Arguably, as Foucault's approach to power illustrates, this kind of bio-power and the clashes it sponsors transcend politics and transmute into a personalised, socialised and embodied phenomenon in which the factors of agency and structure – traditionally associated with the perpetuation of power – are delimited in favour of the somewhat more elusive notions of dispersed and discursive power. The prosaic acts of Professor and Elesin, ordained to question and outflank the socialised norms and constraints within their society, produce unintended tragic consequences because in true Foucauldian fashion they assault the communal power in which they are active participants, not in quest of some "absolute truth" but rather, unknowingly, in a manner of "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991:75). It is in this manner that they become both the perpetrators and victims of bio-power as they are snared in acts which seemingly seek to "evade, subvert or contest strategies of power" (Gaventa 2003:3). To cite Foucault again:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart (Foucault 1998b: 100-1).

In other words, the discourse of power and knowledge, illustrated particularly in the acts of Professor and Elesin, institutes both the exercise of power and the challenges/resistances that affront it. As we will discover later, this ideation of power is manifested in different ways by other key characters of Soyinka, as we encounter them through the lens of modernism (Chapter 2), postmodernism (Chapter 3) and metamodernism (Chapter 4). They trail the burden of myth and ritual, and the liminality inherent in the postcolonial discourses in Soyinka's theatre. Suffice to say here that in *The Road* (1965), an example from early Soyinka and in *DKH* (1975/2009), ten years later, the uneasy assemblage of motley leitmotifs on the aberrancy of power and the deviancy of its holders and resisters is a prescient dramaturgical register and grammar in Soyinka's fictive worlds. Can this kind of authorial continuity of multivocality be sighted in Soyinka's handling of postcoloniality? This is what I pursue in the next Section.

#### **Death as a form of postcolonial discourse in the communities in *The Road* and *DKH***

I have argued in my Introduction that Soyinka resists the classification of the contact between the West and Africa as simply a match between two different civilisations or the clash of cultures, popularised by Huntington's thesis of civilisational clash (Huntington, 1996). This is the context for his controversial commentary that in *DKH*, colonialism is not the mainspring of Elesin's tragedy, but is rather a mere “catalytic incident” (Soyinka, 2009:4). Whilst this lays him open to the charge of vitiating, if not entirely ignoring the colonial impulses intruding on and distorting the cultural authenticity of the colonised, he escapes any serious assault on the legitimacy of his position that the binary and Manichean approximations of the West as “rational”, “ordered” and “technological/scientific” and the Orient as “ritualistic”, “mythic” and “traditional”, as presented in *Orientalism* and *Negritude*, for instance, are shibboleths and a trivialisation of the uniqueness of all human cultures. So, he writes:

To Descartes' “I think, therefore, I am”, they responded on behalf of the black man: “I feel, therefore I am”. Rationalism is essentially European, they claimed; the black man is emotive and intuitive. He

is not a man of technology, but a man of the dance, of rhythm and song. (Soyinka, 1988:180).

Arguably, Soyinka's ulterior motive is to critique the racial theories argued by Negritude as sterile and monolithic and sift them from theories of culture in which humanity's shared history of creativity and catastrophes across all cultures is the central quest. If his schema appears autodidactic, it is not in its essence a simplification of the differences between cultures. As he observes:

The serious divergences between a traditional African approach to drama and the European ... will be found more accurately in what is a recognisable Western cast of mind, a compartmentalising habit of thought which periodically selects aspects of human emotion, phenomenal observations, metaphysical intuitions and even scientific deductions and turns them into separatist myths... It is representative of the essential differences between two worldviews, a difference between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by period dialectics. (Soyinka, 1976:37-38)

Overall, as I have illustrated in my Introduction, this approach of Soyinka to postcolonialism is not in itself unproblematic, although it has attracted broad responses from the political Right and Left. As a result, the ambiguities and complexities in his fictive worlds have been particularly attacked as either elitist, Eurocentric and obscurantist or serenaded as epitomes of humanist and Universalist creative art but peculiarly endowed with African (Yoruba) sensibilities. In *The Road* and *DKH*, these ambiguities and complexities both as structural referents and background material not only subsist in the craft and content of these plays but also in the epistemic notions of "Death" as a form of postcolonial discourse. Whilst I applaud Soyinka's worldview, I think it is possibly parochial and nearly defaults into a sense of an African identity, even metaphysics completely detached from the thought-streams (or "period dialectics") of European discourse. I would argue that a broader postcolonial discourse, evidenced generally in the works of Homi Bhabha, for instance,

addresses Soyinka's concerns better. I have pointed out in my Introduction that Bhabha's (2012) notions of "hybridity", "mimicry" and "ambivalence", in particular, can be applied to the composite tropes of rejection, resistance and adaptation of the postcolonial cultural universe – the kind of universe inhabited by Professor and Elesin and others. These notions throw a sharper relief on their critical and problematic engagement with their surroundings.

In Bhabha's argumentations, "hybridity", "mimicry" and "ambivalence" describe how postcoloniality subverts in literal and contradictory ways the morality and authority of the imperial discourse of power and knowledge. The Eurocentric "linear narrative of the nation", especially, its "holism of culture and community" and a "fixed horizontal nation-space" (Bhabha, 1994: 3, 145) becomes inapplicable as the postcolonial state, unlike the colonial metropolis, is a patchwork of pre-colonial hegemonies strung together to satisfy the capitalist modes of production of the Empire (Van Sertima & Williams, 1987; Conteh-Morgan & Dixon-Fyle, 1999). With the unwinding of the colonial bureaucracy, these hegemonies begin to assert their territorial claims against one another within the postcolonial state to regain their separate pre-colonial sovereignties.

This fissile trait of emergent ex-colonies as independent nation-states presents a continuous liminal phase in nation-building for, particularly, ex-colonies in Africa (Childs, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002, 2006 and 2013; McLeod, 2000; Jefferess, 2008). Postcoloniality is, therefore, the interstitial space between the intrusion of the colonial agency and the recreation/rebirth of a new fixed postcolonial identity which is often marked by cultural and social processes engendering disorientation and disturbance as crucial indentations of the new nation-state. As Balme (1999) observes, ritual in Soyinka's drama is a "theatrical metaphor for a social and spiritual state where old traditions are no longer completely intact. This metaphor of interrupted transition is, it would seem, particularly relevant for postcolonial societies which are themselves involved in difficult processes of cultural and social transition" (Balme, 1999: 79-80).

The question then arises: how does Death as a ritual and cultural mask become a singular device in conveying the liminality that inheres in postcoloniality in *The Road* and *DKH*?

In *The Road*, as Eldred Durosimi Jones aptly observes, all the characters face “a whole range of challenging roles ... The layabouts alternate as symbols of a purposeless existence” (Jones, 1988:87). Professor rejects Christianity but he continues to search for the meaning of life on the basis of an amalgamation of mystical concepts drawn from Christianity and the contrary mythologies of Agemo and Ogun. He is “a tall figure in Victorian outfit – tails, top-hat etc., all thread-bare and shiny at the lapels from much ironing” (p. 156) but he is also a contemporary man whose mind brims with the customs of his own times. His behaviour is mostly irrational and unpredictable – he steals from the Church, he steals from his crew and he steals from the dead. He makes a living off the road by asserting himself as an authority on its deadliness, yet he resists official authority (of the police and his Bishop) and interferes disastrously in the rites of Agemo. He trades in death but hates to hear the word mentioned. He displays a level of affective resistance to official corruption but finds creative ways to accept bribes from his own crew to forge driving licences or hide a crime. He makes himself out as one in relentless pursuit of the Word, but when it suits him, he distracts himself from the object and berates his crew: “Do you think I spend every living moment looking for that? What do you think I am – a madman?” (p. 188).

In the occlusions of his mind, Professor is hankering after the certain portraiture of the European man of letters, steeped in the Victorians' obsession with physical appearance and public forms of ethical conduct – the idea that a man's attire reveals his social status and his outward pursuit of moral ideals is a necessary adjunct to a private domain of debased values (Brantlinger and Thesing, 2008; Brantlinger, 2009). So, on the one hand, whilst he rejects and resists the Church and its orthodoxy as forms of cultural impedimenta – dying to them as it were – Professor's real life mimics the world of the coloniser, on the other. He is not the pure, untouched, unaffected native – he is a hybrid in a world in which hybridity is the imperative of the day, owing to the disruption and disorientation engendered by colonialism. Professor, the

supposed native, is dead and walks about as Death, effecting the demise of his own cultural identity in plural acts of ambivalence and social incongruity. His probable streak of insanity is actually the illogic of building an external façade of a disciplined and moral life to conceal the interiority of a social landscape riddled with chaotic values and a crumbling moral order.

Professor is so tightly drawn that this hypocrisy, contending fiercely with his ethical thrusts, actually confuses the line between his truth and falsity, his make-believe and material intentions. By achieving what is in all but name the “Victorian compromise” of double standard, of an exterior façade that is clean and tidy in order to shield the inner life of moral dissolution and turpitude (Wilson, 2003; Canclini, 1995), Professor acts out the ambivalences that form his postcolonial identity. In his routines of dying to the norms of mainstream society, and portraying death as a release from the absurd fixities of this society, he creates multiple self-identities – shaman, erudite scholar, social activist, masonic ritualist and helper of the downtrodden - through which he commands the reverence of his crew and seems to champion their cause.

This ambiguity – this ritual process of death involving the hidden self and the double self – characterises *The Road*. The Church is not what it seems – despite the stained glass and other objets d'art, for instance, “the bronze eagle on whose outstretched wings rests a huge tome” (p. 162) – its ornate façade conceals the crudities of its officials. The road leads nowhere but to mass burials. The touts look like normal people but they are dangerous deviants. Until the thugs and the touts begin to rehearse the sordid details of their lives and their society in flashbacks and role-playing, their society appears tranquil and ordered. Also, despite its nondescript features, Professor's shack is a den of vagrants and miscreants.

This archaeology of *The Road* confers on the characters a mixture of quaintness and modernity – the tussle between reality and irreality. The Church is a legacy of colonialism but it is being suitably adapted to fit the necessities of the local community for mass burials, and its rituals of sanctifying the dead are not too dissimilar to the mythologies of Agemo and Ogun. The road is also an accrual from the colonial era, now it is “modernised”

to serve the community's methods of death. The touts, particularly, Sergeant Burma and Say Tokyo Kid are home-grown cowboys, they are not the brigands before the colonial era – they have adopted the argot, stock-in-trade and metier of brigands of the colonial Metropole. Chief-in-Town, the local politician, venal and violent to the hilt, is an adapted limb of the coloniser's notion of democratic governance. Murano, the disused Agemo is a casualty in three senses: casualty of a road traffic accident, casualty of a society whose justice system is in disarray and casualty of a postcolonial space that easily compromises his priestly role. Moreover, there is a new "epiphany" when Say Tokyo Kid wrestles with Agemo and Salubi slips him a knife to finish off *egungun* (the ancestral deity) - that moment of sacrilege is the emergence of natives who bear the impudence of aliens against their own culture. Death lurks in all – in their hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence – suggesting a postcolonial world in which liminality is the deepest affect.

The same can be claimed for *DKH*. The postcolonial cultural universe of Oyo has changed the calculus of the momentousness of ancient traditions and customs. Unbeknown to Praise-Singer and Iyaloja, they are the advance party of mourners, witnessing first-hand the agonising death-throes of their communal ritual:

Death came calling  
Who does not know his rasp of reeds?  
A twilight whisper in the leaves before  
The great Araba falls? Did you hear it?  
Not I! swears the farmer. He snaps  
His fingers round his head, abandons  
A hard-worn harvest and begins  
A rapid dialogue with his legs. (p. 10)

It was not Elesin that brought Death to the ways of his forbears; it came with colonialism, as Europe's civilising mission – the promised enlightenment of the Victorian era – “a twilight whisper in the leaves before the great Araba falls”! Elesin does not know it but now he has been inflicted by Death, he is impaled and becomes the very thing that has struck him. He becomes Death. And this

is how he digests the contact with the colonial authority during the time of his traditional sequestration for his ritual death:

My powers deserted me. My charms, my spells, even my voice lacked strength when I made to summon the power that would lead me over the last measure of earth into the land of the fleshless. You saw it, Iyaloja. You saw me struggle to retrieve my will from the power of the stranger whose shadow fell across the doorway and left me floundering and blundering in a maze I had never before encountered. My senses were numbed when the touch of cold iron came upon my wrists. I could do nothing to save myself. (p. 74)

However, it is not the manacles of the colonial administration that break Elesin's conviction – it is his own self-adaptation to the dilution and corrosion that colonialism impels for the traditions of his forbears which he captures in an epigram: “My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought – that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger's intervention” (p. 76). In the runnels of his mind, in his own unconscious, the paths of Europe's idiom and neurosis of modernity find no rejection or resistance and quietly lay waiting for their victim's approach. When he bursts upon the market, instead of sitting on a contemplative stool in the house of Osugbo (the cult-house), transfixed on the obligatory ritual itinerary, Elesin adapts himself to the alien will of self-indulgence before self-sacrifice. He receives warnings from Praise-Singer and Iyaloja to no avail:

PRAISE-SINGER: They (**the women**) love to spoil you but beware.  
The hands of women also weaken the unwary...  
The gourd you bear is not for shirking  
The gourd is not for setting down  
At the first crossroad or wayside grove  
Only one river may know its contents. (pp. 8, 16-17)

IYALOJA: ...Today is your day and the whole world is yours. Still, even those who leave town to make a new dwelling elsewhere like

to be remembered by what they leave behind...We know you for a man of honour. You are not one who eats and leaves nothing on his plate for children. Did you not say it yourself? Not one who blights the happiness of others for a moment's pleasure. (p. 20)

Riding on his cultural warranty that a man destined to die with the king should not be denied the privileges of the commonwealth, he springs upon himself the ambiguity and incongruity of "modernity" – the Greek deity's fabled eros, the European construct of eroticism as a constituent of self-immolation. As he drops his gaze from the Olympus of his forbears, in one moment of feebleness, his eyes catch a "rise of buttocks... thighs whose ripples shamed the river's coils ... (and eyes like) new-laid eggs glowing in the dark" (p. 19) amongst the market crowd. This compelling affectiveness staggers him:

All you who stand before the spirit that dares  
The opening of the last door of passage,  
Dare to rid my going of regrets! My wish  
Transcends the blotting out of thought  
In one mere moment's tremor of the senses.  
Do me credit. And do me honour.  
I am girded for the route beyond  
Burdens of waste and longing.  
Then let me travel light. Let  
Seed that will not serve the stomach  
On the way remain behind. Let it take root  
In the earth of my choice, in this earth  
I leave behind. (p. 21)

Stumbled by the market virgin and the ensuing matrimonial rites, Elesin's delay costs him the sacred moment for his ritual death as Eros seals his fate indelibly by the intervention of the colonial authorities who whisk him into their "protective" custody. There, Elesin offers Simon Pilkings, the British District Officer, a lesson in social anthropology:

You are waiting for dawn, white man. I hear you saying to yourself: only so many hours until dawn and then the danger is over. All I must do is to keep him alive tonight. You don't quite understand it all but you know that tonight is when what ought to be must be brought about. I shall ease your mind even more, ghostly one. It is not an entire night but a moment of the night, and that moment is past. (p. 68)

In a sense, metaphysically, Death stalks Elesin from behind the colonial adjustment to native rule and before he recognises the need to reject or resist it. Without knowing it, his passivity is a badge of his hybridity, and his accommodation of Eros is his surrender to Europe's "civilising" mission. Contrast this with Iyaloja's stout rejection of Elesin's accommodation:

You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left overs. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter... (pp. 74-75).

She further stiffens her rejection by resisting the colonial authority. Addressing Pilkings:

White one, you have a king here, a visitor from your land. We know of his presence here. Tell me, were he to die would you leave his spirit roaming restlessly on the surface of earth? Would you bury him here among those you consider less than human? In your land have you no ceremonies of the dead? (p. 78).

A far bitter sting is laid in Praise-Singer's rejection of Elesin's failure:

Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and

crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness – you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future. Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin. (pp. 82-83)

Arguably, whilst Elesin's pursuit of the death ritual sets him apart in the postcolonial space as an agency of tradition, his failure to rise to the plate signals the death of that tradition and makes him overwhelmingly the native tool conscripted by the colonial authority to dismantle the fabric of the world of the colonised. Even if the thesis of Frantz Fanon (1986), that the mental universe of the postcolonial leader rests on the cultural pivot of the ex-colonial master, cannot be completely pressed against Elesin, in his repressed unconscious, he satisfies the criteria of “black skin, white mask” – the national elite whose unresisting accommodation of the fine details of colonialism lures them into surrendering their nation-state to the immoderate influence of their ex-colonial overlords. Elesin's hybridity and mimicry distinguish his credentials as a change agent but forestall him from going beyond the constraints of the new identity defined for him by the West. However, even with Olunde, contradicting the norms of his Western education by taking his own life in satisfaction of tradition, Iyaloja and Praise-Singer have only Pyrrhic victory: their world has gravely tumbled in the void of strangers. The dilemma of their liminal threshold is real and substantial:

PRAISE-SINGER: There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter? (p. 9)

Death as a form of postcolonial discourse in the communities encountered in *The Road* and *DKH* argues the precarity of these communities and forms of affective resistance that fail to stem their slippage into the cultural wilderness where various attempts of national/communal retrieval meet with the

challenges of the legacy of colonialism. In effect, people like Professor and Elesin – cultural figures, more or less – are essentially precariats, leaders and victims of postcoloniality. They characterise the confluences of the disparate treatments of postcoloniality in Soyinka's fictive worlds as the subterranean dynamic twisting the cultural landscape; they dramatise the subsisting politics of the leading lights of the postcolonial state as overshadowed by multiple self-identities, and are the human challengers daring to cross the chthonic realm defined by myth, ritual and liminality. The deathly clad of that chthonic realm forms the basis of my discussion in the next Section that Death is a significant theatrical formula in Soyinka's "fourth stage".

### **Death as a Trope of Soyinka's "Fourth Stage"**

Arguably, "The Fourth Stage" is Soyinka's most profound statement on the ritual formularies of African theatre. However, substantial support for this essay is found in "Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype" (shortened to "The Ritual Archetype" here) and "Drama and the African Worldview". These essays are contained in his book, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). In "The Ritual Archetype", Soyinka enquires into the passage rites of hero-gods in Universalist terms as "a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonise with his environment, physical, social and psychic" (Soyinka, 1976:1). These gods are symbols of territories and ideals which man seeks to create, cross or conquer through the viaducts of rituals. The rituals help him to access that elusive space in which notions of his own being and non-being are not merely speculated but challenged and concretised. That space of deities and idealities, configured in seasonal rites, is Soyinka's "chthonic realm, a storehouse for creative and destructive essences" which requires "a challenger, a human representative to breach it periodically on behalf of the well-being of the community" (Soyinka, 1976:2-3).

This existential daring assault by the challenger (the chthonic individual or hero-god) is a grim risk to the hero-god as well as to the community because what is at stake is not the mere well-being of the individual or community but, according to Soyinka, the very notion of "cosmic totality", those "territories of "essence-ideal" around whose edges man fearfully skirts" (Soyinka, 1976:1). Death and destruction await both the death-defying hero-god and his

community in their separate and conjoined destiny as they seek to access those elusive territories even as they unleash their creative energies in service of their deity or humanity. Soyinka plunders the Yoruba pantheon to illustrate these notions through the acts/rites of Sango, Obatala and Ogun. These archetypes are chthonic inhabitants of territories which are parallel and yet membranous – “the world of the ancestor, the living and the unborn, and the “fourth space”, the dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality” (Soyinka, 1976:26). In Soyinka's terms, the fourth space “houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will” (Soyinka, 1976:26). The archetypal occupants – in unremitting transition - embody aesthetic characteristics and parameters of morality in which “the ritual arena of confrontation” bequeaths a framework to traditional society to stage “its social questions” and articulate “its moralities” (Soyinka, 1976:2). Every performance becomes a “multi-level experience of the mystical and the mundane” (Soyinka, 1976:2).

For Soyinka, man and god hanker after cosmic totality in order to achieve a sense of completeness which was riven when Atunda, the domestic slave of the original Primogenitor or Orisa-Nla (Highest God), rebelled against his master and rolled a boulder upon him. The primogenitor disintegrated into a thousand deities and disappeared into the abyss. Ogun, Soyinka's “master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity...representing the knowledge-seeking instinct...[then harnessed] the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man” (Soyinka, 1976:27). This destruction of the original godhead which creates a multitude of divinities is central to the imagery of death in the fourth stage/space as a chasm of colliding worlds where fragmentation does not end in mere dissolution but springs into different life forms: “The fragmentation of the original godhead...[is] fundamental to man's resolution of the experience of birth and the disintegration of consciousness in death” (Soyinka, 1976:28).

In Ogun, contrasted with Sango (god of Thunder and retributive justice) and Obatala (the saintly, rational moulder) man experiences the Promethean instinct as the warrior god becomes the explorer of the primordial abyss and

lives through “the process of literally being torn asunder in cosmic winds, of rescuing himself from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harnessing the untouched part of himself, the will...” (Soyinka, 1976:30). In metaphysical terms, Ogun invests this promethean will in those protagonists whose instinct for self-sacrifice for the renewal of their community is the primal resurgent focus of their life: “It is as a paradigm of this experience of dissolution and re-integration that the actor in the ritual of archetypes can be understood”, states Soyinka (Soyinka, 1976:30). Their struggle is cosmic, their death is self-willed, their hubris is not some Achilleic heel but the willingness to dare the abyss and emerge splintered beyond self-recognition into a variety of new identities, alien to the world they have challenged, crossed or created: “The community emerges from ritual experience “charged with new strength for action” because of the protagonist's Promethean raid on the durable resources of the transitional realm; immersed within it, he is enabled emphatically to transmit its essence to the choric participants of the rites – the community” (Soyinka, 1976:33). This construct or continuum of deity-humanity, cosmic-communal, creation-destruction all becomes even more engrossing in “Drama and the African Worldview”.

For instance, Soyinka details the choric participants in the passage rites of hero-gods as companionable characters who surround the chthonic individual with their verbal assent or dissent but experience vicariously the nodal tensions in the acts/rites of the hero-god. They are both the community and the audience, they aid in constructing the ritual space as the very womb of birth and death:

The so-called audience is itself an integral part of that arena of conflict; it contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its choric reality which must first be conjured up and established, defining and investing the arena...The drama would be non-existent except within and against this symbolic representation of earth and cosmos, except within this communal compact whose choric essence supplies the collective energy for the challenger of the chthonic realms (Soyinka, 1976:39).

The cumulative impact of the tensions unfolding within the arena of conflict – the ritual space, the modern stage – is the tangible anxiety of the community and the audience about the protagonist's probable dreadful failure of will as he traverses the symbolic abyss. The stage becomes, in Soyinka's word, a microcosmos – “Entering that microcosmos involves a loss of individuation, a self-submergence in universal essence. It is an act undertaken on behalf of the community, and the welfare of that protagonist is inseparable from that of the total community” (Soyinka, 1976:42). The “loss of individuation”, the “self-submergence” are clarifying approximations of the state of being and non-being that the chthonic individual and his cast undergo in their collision with the forces interrupting the harmony and balance of their world – “... so, for this purpose, the stage becomes the affective, rational and intuitive milieu of the total communal experience, historic, race-formative, cosmogonic... There are no reserved spaces for the protagonists, for his very act of representational being is defined in turn by nothing less than the infinite cosmos within which the origin of the community and its contemporaneous experience of being is firmly embedded” (Soyinka, 1976:43).

Embedded in the flesh of their culture and myth, their shared history and destiny, the protagonists and the audience share the arena of conflict as that one space where their different views of the world collide, where death haunts their creativity, and destruction promises some sort of re-birth: “The action has been undertaken both on the practical and on the symbolic level of protagonist for the community. The actor in ritual drama...prepares mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin, experiences the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and being” (Soyinka, 1976:30).

Myth as a collective archive of memories, hero-gods as chthonic individuals, ritual drama as man's access to the elusive space of being and non-being and death as a passage rite to re-birth via the membranous worlds of the ancestor, the living, the unborn and the abyss of transition/transformation are the substantial elements that sustain the dramatic idiom and praxis disclosed in Soyinka's “fourth stage”. These fabrics in which Soyinka robes ritual drama, particularly, the acts and rites associated with Ogun, “the Yoruba god of

creativity, guardian of the road and god of metallic lore and artistry” (Soyinka, 1976:140), inform more specifically and quite profoundly the aesthetics and morality of his own theatre. The deployment of myth and ritual in Soyinka’s theatre shapes its multivocality, its polysemy and polyvalent bearings, and attribute to Soyinka's theatre what he sets forth in "The Fourth Stage" for Yoruba tragedy: “[it] plunges straight into the “chthonic realm”, the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming” (Soyinka, 1976:142).

The chthonic realm, as a kind of traditionalism, therefore, becomes the very grammar of Soyinka’s theatre, in a number of ways – it sustains the foreboding carnival in such plays as *The Road* and *DKH*; it stages the neuroses of the ritual heroes as overlapping with the seemingly non-negotiable cultural practices of their society; and it supplants the “efficacy” of ritual with the “theatricality” of the mundanity of the ritual heroes. There have been several commentaries on *The Road* and *DKH* as exemplars of the tragic art that Soyinka has defined in relation to African drama and theatre, in contrast to European (Aristotelian) models of tragedy (Gibbs, 1980; Gibbs and Lindfors, 1993; Jeyifo, 2001). Soyinka has, arguably, constructed a tragic tetraplex from the ritual ceremonies of Sango, Obatala and Ogun. However, beyond simply affixing this tetraplex to both plays, as most commentaries have done, I have striven to illustrate *The Road* and *DKH* as clearly exemplifying the denominative categories of Soyinka's “fourth stage” in terms of the mythic and social specificities of death as the main warrant for the liminality and postcoloniality discoverable in both plays. As such, the “fourth stage” becomes a functional staging modality of the embodied subjectivity of disembodied stage characters.

Take *The Road*, firstly: the rites and acts of Agemo and Ogun are invested in Murano and Professor. Both chthonic individuals are situated within the gulf of transition/transformation – hovering mostly between life and death. The Agemo dance and the ritual act of the layabouts celebrating Ogun are the semiotic valves through which these characters are embodied as cultural figures. At the same time, within that arena of conflict - the deathly road and the death-laden den of Professor dressed in the paraphernalia of a shrine and

competing with the Christian Church in the background – the nuances of the emptiness of life stage these characters and their retinue as disembodied individuals. They are unreal, subterranean figures whose personhood has been hollowed out by the road and washed out by their reiterative acts of self-submergence in the mythic propulsions of Agemo and Ogun, attempting the gulf of transition from the mythic to the mundane, and reaching beyond the human to the divine essence. This attempt bewilders them and as Agemo symbolises the passage of flesh into nothingness, *The Road* reaches its climax when Professor sinks into nothingness, his replete self-identities expire and even his mute sidekick, Murano, disappears into the twilight at the end of the play. In our imagination, we wonder what will become of them in a later metamorphosis, as death transcends a mere dissolution of the flesh and is a passage to another self-identity. In this traditionalism, “It is as a paradigm of this experience of dissolution and re-integration that the actor in the ritual of archetypes can be understood”, argues Soyinka (Soyinka, 1976:30).

In a conversation with Ketu Katrak, Soyinka explains his use of the Agemo leitmotif:

Some Agemo are just like any other egungun masquerade. There are some others who dance within mats rolled around their bodies. The human being, the form is there (inside the mats). After a while this form dances, dances into a terrific whirl and then it just collapses. There is absolutely nothing inside the mat. So I used it (Agemo) to symbolise the passage of flesh into nothingness. It is actually a kind of illusion but it's done in the open, in the courtyard, and suddenly one sees that there is nothing, just a fold of mats collapsed. What had body shape, before, has become fibre. So I used Agemo in that sense as illusion (Katrak, 1986:68).

In a different way, this illusionary occlusion of Professor and Murano affects Elesin and his heir, Olunde, in *DKH*. The reiterative acts of Elesin – his ceaseless self-driven acts of crossing the rigours of his court role with his own liberal schema for life and progeny – are at odds with a moment in the history of his race when such acts are now mundane and must be curtailed by ritual

abstinence and frugality. However, the theatricality of *DKH* actually rests on the play's notion that Elesin is on a cultural canvas, a Yoruba mythic stage which negates his performance and invites censure from Iyaloja and Praise-Singer, and the rest of the retinue, even as they seek to accommodate his open abuse of the court system as a gesture of their own overriding bond to the fidelity of their culture.

In the end, Elesin breaches the abyss of transition almost involuntarily, his death no longer a warranty for the survival of his race but an empty and shallow token of the traditions of his people. As he dies, the stage is finally crowded, not with his fanciers or trustees but with mourners of a shattered cosmos and censors whose role of expurgating acts that they consider offensive or threatening to the homogeneity of their own cultural space remains awkwardly unfulfilled. Their tireless accommodation of Elesin in order to effect the harmony of their world as he crosses the abyss of transition concludes in the untimely death of his heir. Death has struck not just the current totem of their idealised world but, in the death of Olunde, their future has vanished as well – the cosmogony of the race is irretrievably shattered. Olunde as a chthonic individual lives his life on stage in the shadow of his father, duels with the colonial apparatus and plunges into the cauldron of the fierce collision of tradition and modernity, only to die out of season. He is not a hero, in the stage-sense of that word, like his father, he is an anti-hero, a stooge or stub for the real thing that is so gravely missing: the real horseman forfeiting his life in prime time for the cosmogony of his race.

In short, the mythic '*sens*' of *The Road* and *DKH* consists in the contradiction between the performance of the identities as real people caught in the fog of history and the play's stupendous joke at their expense that they are mere ornamental fobs connecting the membranous worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn through a dysfunctional rite of passage across the disordered realm of colonialism and postcolonialism. This has the effect of both absorbing us into the unfolding narration of the mundanity of the ritual heroes whilst at the same time alienating us from the world that limits their vision and scuppers their will. In *The Road*, the promise of dawn as the scene opens slowly fades into the façade of Professor's shack, the cryptic presence of the road, traced

out in the spider's web in a corner of the shack, the ghoulish churchyard and the "Aksident" store laden with blood-smearred vehicle spare parts. The people that crisscross these territories are not incarnations of demarcated lives, but parallel lives, sandwiched between the twilight of anxiety and anticipation; hope and despair. Similarly, in *DKH*, the stage furniture of the marketplace and all its mirth and celebratory crowds competing with the haunting, motley paraphernalia of colonial hegemony – the royal ball, the stuffy bureaucracy oiled by diplomatic chicanery and racial snobbery and the District Officer's official residence with a cellar previously used for storing slaves but now housing disused furniture – are physical markers of the jaunting shifts between mirth and melancholy, hope and despair, reality and irreality, and the cosmic and the crass.

In both *The Road* and *DKH*, I sense we are confronted by an over-stretched cavalcade of stagey characters for which the fourth stage is not merely a dialectical motif but, more compellingly and actually irrationally, becomes the very logic of their theatrical presences. It is in this juncture of what is real in the life of these characters **and** made unreal by the dramatic mode at work – the fourth stage – that we encounter both the profundity that shapes their identities and the mundanity that undercuts their ultimate significance as history-shapers and cultural figures in a postcolonial space riddled with ambivalence and ambiguity. This construct, in my view, links arguably to the performative criteria of Soyinka's "fourth stage" as a form of theatrical idiom, "[its] reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains", to borrow Judith Butler's phrase (Butler, 1993:2).

Butler's notions of performativity have endured probing criticisms, particularly, on account of the way she appears to conflate the concept of the subject as a unitary individual; her seeming minimalisation of the social space in which the subject performs; and her lack of specificity of the extraneous contingencies – such as class and race – which are hegemony in their own right and bear formative controls on the constructed nature of identity (Lloyd, 1999; Brickell, 2005). However, her delineation of performativity in which "sex" or gender "not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of

productive power, the power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the bodies it controls” is the kind of performativity I sight in Soyinka's fourth stage conundrum (Butler, 1993:3).

At its core, Soyinka's praxis frames the myth of Ogun, essentially, as a norm that explains the creative-destructive essences which plague mankind and are typically embodied in chthonic heroes. Albeit, these essences are not mere substrates, they are inseparably the active norms which form the identities we find in *The Road* and *DKH* and the regulatory practices which specify the limits and margins of the acts/rites embodied in the subjectivity of those identities. Accordingly, the identities/bodies are not static, they are dynamic because they are constantly reacting to and acting upon those prevailing norms – the complex customs of traditional societies impacted by European culture. This reiterative process is the continuing force that creates the ambiguities and open-endedness that inform the personas of Professor and Elesin, and to a large extent those of other characters in both plays as social actors engaged in a battle of wills with their society and on a cosmic, rather than a communal scale.

Death, as a state of nothingness, then becomes the ideal construct through which these personas emerge as failed standard bearers for their society – they have dared the gulf of transition and failed. Whilst they act within the norms of their society, they also destabilise these norms and arouse our suspicions that they pose possibilities for the transformation of those norms. They appear to fail, not because they cannot quite comply with the norms but because the regulatory force implied in those norms eventually opens up an unbridgeable gulf, the abyss of transition, into which they tumble without redress. However, the total pessimism (the disembodied hopes) that this failure of will springs upon the society (or even the audience) is piquantly annealed by the glimpses of re-materialisation and re-articulation of the possibilities of cosmic renewal in the embodied subjectivity of the chthonic heroes.

Death as a trope of Soyinka's “Fourth Stage” is a schema that deepens our understanding of the performative ambience in certain other plays of Soyinka,

such as *The Strong Breed* (1964), *Madmen and Specialists* (1970), and *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973). In *The Strong Breed*, Eman's ritual death is a vain substitute for the customary death of the village idiot, Ifada. The substitutionary power of Eman's death as a cosmic Christ-figure is compromised because it occurs in aberration of the traditions of the village. In *Madmen and Specialists*, the Old Man dies from a single shot from the pistol of his heir-presumptive, Dr. Bero. Cannibalism as a practice of war and its intricate complexities in local lore appears to have fallen but its irreducible truths about the consequences of war and the gross inhumanity in the corruptive rites of a police state survive in the persona of Dr. Bero. The death of Pentheus in *The Bacchae of Euripides* ends the play on a festal communion of wine and blood, attended by enslaved buccaneers and royal bacchanals in an orgy that marks the end of one tyranny and the issuance of a new order bathed in blood. Whether as a play on the freakishness of agency or the frenetic norms of a destabilising social structure, death is more than a metaphor for the liminal attributes of the fictive world in these plays. It is the staging facility, the very theatrical appurtenance in which both the chthonic hero and the chthonic realm find some concrete materialisation.

### **The Politics of Death and the Ritualisation of the Performance Space**

Death is webbed in mythology across all cultures. Soyinka's particular variant, sourced in the mythology of Ogun, is his glossed artistic temperament, part of his own political ideology as I have described in my Introduction and, in several of his plays, the modality of his vision and dramaturgy. In his portraiture of Ogun, Soyinka seems to follow a Freudian psychology - the creative-destructive essences attributed to Ogun suppose that humans have an instinct for life – Freud's libido/Eros – and a competing instinct for death which the characters deploy in risk-taking and self-destructive acts (Freud, 1920). Both in *The Road* and *DKH*, society is fractured along these competing axes and the politics of Professor and Elesin are subtended to the underlying postcolonial discourse in which emerging nation-states are trapped in liminality owing to diverse and continuing tensions between their precolonial past and their postcolonial present.

Myth, as a world of people whose behaviours represent significant actions, capable of modelling the tensions in the human world, aids Soyinka in pre-figuring these tensions as the acts and rites of chthonic individuals who construct their own identities against the prevailing norms and traditions of their society. They dare to bridge the gulf between their persona and the priorities of their community in, unbeknown to them, a struggle for cosmic wholeness. Their death and the disintegration of their society specify a type of politics in which postcoloniality breeds those conditions which tie ex-colonies to perpetual irruptions of instabilities in their cultural and social milieu. However, actually, this politics of death is an essentialism describing the multifaceted nature of power and knowledge and the discourses or regimes which undergird them. I have applied the notions of Michel Foucault earlier to the bio politics encoded in *The Road* and *DKH*.

The theatre in all of this is the ritualisation of the physical performance space. If we turn to Victor Turner's study of Ndembu rites of passage, he assigns agency and structure to these rites and points up their multivocality (Turner, 1967). Rituals are symbolic, communicative and functional events in which society invests a certain aesthetic and moral weight:

Ritual, in tribal society, represents not an obsessional concern with repetitive acts, but an immense orchestration of genres in all available sensory codes: speech, music, singing; the presentation of elaborately worked objects, such as masks, wall-paintings, body-paintings; sculptured forms; complex, many-tiered shrines; costumes; dance forms with complex grammars and vocabularies of bodily movements, gestures and facial expressions (Turner, 1987:106).

Arguably, it is improbable to stage *The Road* and *DKH* in the absence of these multi-semiotic apparati. As Soyinka suggests:

The actor in ritual drama (...) becomes the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering sounds which he barely comprehends but which

are reflections of the awesome glimpse of that transitional gulf (Soyinka, 1976:30).

The actor becomes the vehicle of the ritual elements unfolding on stage, representing the drama of chthonic proportions, translating into flesh the arcane bones of mythic materiality. For instance, *The Road*, as I have illustrated in this Chapter, is structured around the polarities of Ogun and Agemo. The Agemo dance is not a mere theatrical metaphor, it represents the physical performance space itself as the momentous place of transition between life and death:

The dance is the movement of transition; it is used in the play as a visual suspension of death – in much the same way as Murano, the mute, is a dramatic embodiment of this suspension. He functions as an arrest of time, or death, since it was in his "Agemo" phase that the lorry knocked him down (Soyinka, 1973:149).

As for *DKH*, Soyinka suggests that it can only be fully realised on stage “through an evocation of music from the abyss” (Soyinka, 1975:4). The cadences of Elesin's poetry, his leaping from stall to street and back to stall in the marketplace, the bacchanal frissons that attend Elesin's transitioning acts and the elegiac cantors (Iyaloja, Praise-Singer, the market women, etc.) at the end of the play mark out *DKH* as a ritual dressage of foremost quality. As Soyinka theorises:

To act, the Promethean instinct of rebellion, channels anguish into a creative purpose which releases man from a totally destructive despair, releasing from within him the most energetic, deeply combative inventions which, without usurping the territory of the infernal gulf, bridges it with visionary hopes (Soyinka, 1976:146).

Balme (1999) has noted how Soyinka structures ritual in his plays, in part to disrupt our logical expectations, in part to curtail them, and in part to articulate an interrupted rite in which the premature rupture or suspension of the ritual action creates its own crisis for us and the characters:

One result of such ruptures is that the figures carrying out the ritual remain suspended in a state of liminality or anti-structure. This state of *ritus interruptus*, as it were, provides the author with the opportunity of exploring on stage the psychic 'abyss' caused by suspended liminality... *Ritus interruptus* (serves) as a theatrical metaphor for a social and spiritual state where old traditions are no longer completely intact. (Balme, 1999: 79-80).

I have crossed earlier beyond Balme's apt observation: arguably, the ritualisation of the performance space in *The Road* and *DKH* is a technique that subsists in the performative criteria of Soyinka's fourth stage. My Butlerian/Foucauldian thesis appropriates the acts and rites transmitted by Professor and Elesin, in particular, as a large proportion of the performativity – the reiterative construction of identity – inscribed in both plays. Performativity - the ways that people in both plays construct their personhood as aberrations or affirmations of the norms of their society – inclines me to a view of both plays as representing the complex ways in which the performance of self in everyday life is a negotiating trick to influence the processual nature of reality (Goffman, 1959; Bauman, 1990). In the end, the social construction of reality we encounter in *The Road* and *DKH* seems to re-assert Soyinka's point that:

The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies and uncertainties, employing the same masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition (Soyinka, 1976:148).

In this chapter, I have focused specifically on how Death, as an example of traditionalism, informs the postcoloniality of the liminal world in *The Road* and *DKH* as an important attribute of Soyinka's "fourth stage". I will now move on to modernism in Chapter 2, re-evaluating its historicism and how it connotes both liminality and postcoloniality in Soyinka's theatre.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Modernism and Liminality**

#### ***A Dance of the Forests and Kongi's Harvest***

##### **A Foreword for A Dystopic Vision of Society**

This Chapter argues that the watermarks of modernism evince liminality; that modernism and liminality become the chassis of Soyinka's dramaturgy in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*. I also explore his "fourth stage" approach to dramatic practice as illustrating the performative sensibilities of his art. Accordingly, in this Chapter, I will examine some of the watermarks of modernism with particular reference to colonialism and post-colonialism. I will link these watermarks to the central thesis of Victor Turner's concept of liminality. On the basis of the modernist attributes of both plays and the liminal world we find, I explore the cultural conflation of myth and ritual in both plays as pinpointing the vagaries of existence and the vacuity of postcoloniality in the overwhelming crises of identity of the main characters. The staging of these crises as topical elements of Soyinka's "fourth stage" idiom of dramatic practice will be described and my conclusion suggests that the ambivalence and opacity that we find in the liminal cosmos of Soyinka's theatre intimate a dystopic vision of society.

##### **Colonialism, postcolonialism and the modernist chimaera**

Modernism has been described as a conflicted literary concept; it can refer to a particular cultural historical period; or a literary style or genre, or a combination of these. As a result, there have been varying inflections, such as neo-modernism, paleo-modernism, post-modernism and meta-modernism (Bradbury and McFarlane, 1976). In effect, these are references to modernism as a complex of "modernisms". Although it is generally agreed that modernist art "is experimental, formally complex, elliptical, contains elements of decreation as well as creation, and tends to associate notions of the artist's freedom from realism, materialism, traditional genre and form, with notions of cultural apocalypse and disaster" (Bradbury, in Childs and Fowler, 2006:145), the list of literary authors usually cited for these pointers varies from James, Conrad, Proust, Mann, Gide, Kafka, Svevo, Joyce, Musil, Faulkner in fiction,

to Strindberg, Pirandello, Wedekind, Brecht in drama, and Mallarme, Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Rilke, Apollinaire, Stevens in poetry (Bradbury, 2006). These are authors of very different artistic practices, reflecting different traditions within modernism. It has also been noted that such a list panders to a modernism that is predominantly “white, male, heterosexist, Euro-American” (Childs, 2008:13), and excludes alternative modernisms, principally, in “the regeneration of a tired Western artistic tradition by other cultures: African, African-American, Asian, Chinese, and, more generally, diasporic” (Childs, 2008:14). For Childs, modernism is, principally, an international art term which is “most particularly noted for its experimentation, its complexity, its formalism and for its attempt to create a “tradition of the new”. (Childs, 2008:15) It is this internationalism that I attach to Soyinka’s modernism in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi’s Harvest*.

Additionally, I will argue that as Euro-American modernisms developed in response to scientific, imperial and social forces shaping both continents, diasporic modernisms - whether of the varieties addressed as “black modernism” by Simon Gikandi (Gikandi, 1997) or Elleke Boehmer’s “expanded picture of a globalized and constellated modernism” (Boehmer, 2002:175) in the experimental writings of post-colonial authors – were, equally, responses to colonialism and post-colonialism. In Childs’ view, the forces shaping Euro-America produced “individual and collective crises, especially, spiritual, which issued in a new literature that was rebellious, questioning, doubtful and introspective but confident and even aggressive in its aesthetic conviction” (Childs, 2008:20). Arguably, most varieties of modernist writing in post-colonial contexts bear the scars of similar crises and are distinguished by a similar literature (Olaniyan, 1995). One can borrow Olaniyan’s paradigms to characterise these crises as “the all-consuming quest for the manufacture of postimperial dramatic subjectivity” (Olaniyan, 1995:4). He furnishes three paradigms: a Eurocentric discourse, “distinguished by its prejudiced representation of black cultural forms; an anticolonialist, Afrocentric counter discourse preoccupied with subverting the Eurocentric and registering cultural autonomy; and a budding, liminal, interstitial discourse that aims at once to be both anticolonialist and post-Afrocentric” (Olaniyan, 1995:4).

Although Olaniyan's work is not interiorly concerned with modernism and its main vision relates to the crises of cultural identity that proliferate these paradigms, the cogency of his arguments suggests that there is a particular social and aesthetic conviction that is "rebellious, questioning, doubtful and introspective" in the African and African-American authors he selected to demonstrate the validity of these paradigms – a list which is headed by Soyinka. Olaniyan's fluency in negotiating the complexities of Soyinka's appropriation of cultural source materials in Yoruba mythology and colonial history to formulate what he titles Soyinka's project of "race retrieval" and "cultural self-apprehension" is certainly helpful in understanding modernism in Soyinka's body of works. Additionally, his formulation of Soyinka's "project" as "a budding, liminal, interstitial discourse that aims at once to be both anticolonialist and post-Afrocentric" (Olaniyan, 1995:4), is a handy paradox for grappling with the complex images of postcoloniality in Soyinka's theatre. However, there are perspectival limitations, such as his over-representation of Soyinka's "project" as broadly an open-ended dash, if not clash, between the strictures of colonial history and the structures of postcolonial societies.

The challenge that faces Olaniyan is similar to the contradictions of modernism in representing colonialism and postcolonialism. For some, modernism supports colonialism and the construction of the colonised space and subject as inferior to the European metropolis and the European coloniser. For others, modernism is largely the whip that trounces colonialism and aids the transformation of the colonised space into some extended province of European modernity and the colonised subject into a Eurocentric "Other" (Booth and Rigby, 2000). In both assessments, Couze Venn voices a critical concern: "The colonized becomes the object through which Western "man" absolves and resolves himself. The conquest and mastery of otherness binds the one and the other, unites being into humanity" (Venn, 1996:42). Alterity – difference and "otherness" – as the constitutive grand narrative of the contact and clash between usually White empire builders and non-White indigenous populations became both a political and social attitude in modernist writings from the Empire, particularly, the British Empire resulting in contrasting voices for and against colonialism, even within singular texts (Begam and Moses, 2007).

The surrogate powers of the Empire to transmute native cultures and force political change have been played up and down in several forms of historiography on the themes of modernism and Empire. Stephen Selmon's remark that modernism is "unthinkable had it not been for the assimilative power of Empire to appropriate the cultural work of a heterogeneous world "out there" and to reproduce it for its own social and discursive ends" is an example of such a theme (Selmon, 1991). Another theme is that of diasporic modernism, argued as the art of resistances against colonialism, as a "sustaining narrative of anti-colonial struggle" (Iris Zavala's (1993) phraseology) describing the arguably unequal but mutual cultural acquisitiveness of the Empire and its colonies. This is a theme that is captured in Edward Said's concept of the "voyage in": "the conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalised or suppressed or forgotten histories" (Said, 1993:260). In my view, this theme provides another valid angle on Soyinka's modernism in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*. Arguably, as I will demonstrate later in my analyses of these plays, there is a certain syncretic fusion, a "mulatto" enrichment of the principals of Soyinka's "fourth stage" with the aesthetic innovations redolent of modernist traditions in Europe.

If modernism has a turbulent relationship with colonialism, its incorporation of postcolonialism as a social and cultural dynamic is not less problematic. As a form of cultural hegemony, through the institutionalisation of the coloniser's language, the hybridisation of self in the processes of cultural denigration and place dislocation through migration to the European metropolis or the forfeiture of the colonial space for White settlers, colonialism and, its contemporaneous companion, postcolonialism effectively create subjugated, colonised identities. The complications are several: on the one hand, the postcolonial dynamic promotes European models of nationalism, national identity and the nation-state, often seen both in organised resistances to colonialism and the chaotic grassroots emancipatory movements within colonial territories; on the other, there is a rejection of the coloniser's models in favour of re-configured resurrections of autochthonous structures of sociality and art practices. Patrick Williams (2000) stamps this as the

“assertion of absolute modernness and great ancientness” (Williams, 2000:33). Williams’ statement refers to the ways in which the expression of the virginal properties of the cultural practices of the colonised happens simultaneously with their de-culturation by the processes of colonialism and postcolonialism. Whilst the balance of power between the “centre” (the European metropolis) and the “periphery” (the colonised nations) rarely changes, in view of the global command of the Empire’s capitalism and its unrelenting stranglehold on the economies of the colonies, the marginality of the colonised continues even with the birth of the new nation-state, the independent state. The main outcome is captured in *The Empire Writes Back*:

In pushing the colonial world to the margins of experience the “centre” pushed consciousness beyond the point at which monocentrism in all spheres of thought could be accepted without question. In other words, the alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial to the “margin” turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which all experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic and multifarious. Marginality thus became an unprecedented source of creative energy. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002:12).

Perhaps, the most outstanding aspect of this outcome is the emergence of a brand of postcolonial literature – the “Black writing” model, deploying the term of Ashcroft et al., completely characterised by race and ethnicity and drawing upon the political and economic injustices experienced, particularly, within the Black diasporas of Africans, African-Americans and African-Caribbeans. Popular and instructive as this model of modernism is, its beginnings in confronting European racialised critiques – the thesis of White supremacy - with similar Black models, for instance, the Negritude movement, straps it mainly to the cultural masthead of European “hegemony” discourse. This similitude of purpose attracts Soyinka’s well-known critical judgement: “Negritude, having laid its cornerstone on a European intellectual tradition, however, bravely it tried to reverse its concepts (leaving its tenets untouched),

was a foundling deserving to be drawn into, nay, even considered a case for benign adoption by European ideological interests” (Soyinka, 1976:134).

In other words, Afrocentrism as a form of modernism (as Negritude) is a mere alloy of Eurocentrism, a weak foil for the continuing European ideological interests in their ex-colonies. Soyinka’s alternative ideality, configured in his abstruse, polyvalent and numinous “fourth stage” script conceives Afrocentrism in far more nuanced terms and enables him to plumb the inexactitudes of the relationships between modernism and postcolonialism. Whilst, understandably, Soyinka (1966, 1976, 1988) will probably offer a duel with Maxwell’s (1965) analytic framework that the postcolonial author aims to “subdue” the exotica of indigenous life in their use of the language of the coloniser, instead of their own indigenous tongue, other bits of Maxwell’s view about the disjunction and displacement of the primary languages of the colonised by the simultaneous processes of colonialism and postcolonialism will readily highlight why Soyinka’s polyvalent Afrocentrism is founded on polysemy and the compound ingredients of African (Yoruba) mythology and ritual. To cite Ashcroft et al. again:

(W)here indigenous peoples were colonized on their own territories, writers were not forced to adapt to a different language and climate, but had their own ancient and sophisticated responses to them marginalized by the world-view which was implicated in the acquisition of English. Whether English actually supplanted the writer’s mother tongue or simply offered an alternative medium which guaranteed a wider readership, its use caused a disjunction between the apprehension of, and communication about, the world. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002:24).

Modernism, and its variegated inflections, furnishes Soyinka with the kind of blunt but comprehensive tool for navigating the immense “marginalia” of the social conditions of colonialism and postcolonialism as mainstream responses – attitudes, beliefs, social systems – of colonised and de-colonised societies in his dramatic corpus. The imagism, ellipsis, irony, metonymy and allegory which form the basis of Soyinka’s polysemy and freight his humanistic social

vision perhaps recall one of Olaniyan's (1995:4) postcolonial paradigms of cultural identity and difference: the "performative, self-critical model that conceives identity as open, interculturally negotiable, and always in the making – a process". I have exemplified this model as the "performative self" in my Introduction as a concrete subject in Soyinka's dramaturgy. It has allowed Soyinka to avoid the straight-jacket of postcolonial projects of "pre-colonial cultural recuperation" familiar of a kind of Afrocentrism distinguished by the troika of Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (Chinweizu et al., 1980) and its discernible substrates in Ngugi's (1986) pitch for the adoption of African languages as the postcolonial author's chief medium. In contrast to this Afrocentrism is Olaniyan's label of "post-Afrocentric" for Soyinka, an attempt describing what I will argue is a peculiar and intuitive postcolonial syncretistic adoption of precolonial and postcolonial views and attitudes by his characters. This insinuates a visible level of hybridity in Soyinka's theatre.

In my Introduction, I have argued that Bhabha's postcolonial theory appears to suit Soyinka's portrayal of postcoloniality in his plays. I will add here that, in particular, postcolonial hybridity is a kind of self-identity that Soyinka's chthonic individuals construct in order to challenge and transcend the imperial-colonial dialectic. These characters, therefore, appear unstable and unsettled compared, for instance, to those of Ngugi and Mugo (in their play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, 1976) and Femi Osofisan (in *Morountodun and Other Plays*, 1982) whose Marxist interpretation of coloniality and postcoloniality often produce characters with a settled and self-resolved social vision. The usefulness of postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon (1986, 1988, 2001; Gibson, 2003) and Albert Memmi (1965) whose works piercingly deconstruct the processes of colonialism and the forms of de-colonisation which can upturn the power imbalances between the colonised and the coloniser is not lost on Soyinka. However, Soyinka's reservations about totalising narratives which postcolonial authors sometimes pursue to define themselves ideologically have turned him into something of an ideological recluse whose modernism is radical, especially, in terms of the universal categories of his humanistic social vision and the elaborate aesthetic innovations discoverable in his dramatic corpus. I will argue that the kind of social logic and predictability that sustains, for instance, the plays of Ngugi

and Osofisan is aberrated in Soyinka's modernism by the unrelenting liminality of the world of his characters (Igweonu, 2011; Banham & Osofisan, 2014).

### **Modernism and Liminality – In search of interchangeabilities**

Liminality “conveys irreconcilable conflicts of identity, brief glimpses of threshold states, and potential social structures and identities. A resolution to these conflicts is seldom offered; they reveal merely what the anthropologist Victor Turner describes as ‘an instant of pure potentiality when everything [...] trembles in the balance’” (*Ritual to Theatre* 44). (Drewery, 2011:1)

My historiography of modernism so far implies a basic plot: “irreconcilable conflicts of identity, brief glimpses of threshold states, and potential social structures and identities”. In other words, I have historicised modernism largely as a valve through which the constituent elements of liminality find a passage way, instead of a barricade. In both its aesthetics and thematic concerns, modernism questions the boundaries between the European self and its Other, quests into the interstices of the contradictory portraiture of modernity, coloniality and postcoloniality in Western discourses, and arraigns the grand narratives of Empire as a form of colloquy on the cultural transitions that shape the “centre” and its colonial outposts (Bradbury and McFarlane, 1976; Childs and Fowler, 2006). In these tones, Victor Turner’s “threshold” people – characters in ritual episodes who are halfway between what they were and what they were aiming to become at the end of the ritual act - captures the interminable sense of passage that modernism as a cultural and literary construct occupies.

In the works of Turner and others, liminal periods take on different poses: hierarchical structures are dissolved or temporarily suspended; established traditions are contested; the cause-effect logic of natural history is disrupted, and the future is no longer something anticipated or predictable but is webbed into a fluid but complex, contradictory and permeable structure of rationality. (Turner, 1967; Thomassen, 2006, 2009). In a similar trajectory to modernism, liminality becomes a period of intense scrutiny of received wisdom in which existing rules of thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are unscrewed,

melted down and discarded as the very structure of society itself is shaken loose. In my view, this agonistic state is captured by Turner's concept of "communitas". As he describes it: communitas "breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority' (Turner, 1969:128). In effect, the interlock of Empire and modernism arguably creates the various forms of anti-structure that anticolonial resistances and postcolonial literatures objectify.

There have been variant renderings of liminality as a social concept, and its suggestiveness in describing several types of sociality in spatial and temporal dimensions has been applied to different categories of liminal experiences which involve a visible collapse of order (Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra, 2009; Szokolczai, 2009). The "axial age" of Karl Jaspers, cited by Thomassen (2009:19-20) is, perhaps, the most pointed axiom on liminality as a disruption of conventional order. This is the historical phase in-between two structured worldviews, a phase where the questioning radicalism of the subject becomes the very object of enquiry, the lessening of orthodoxy, the loosening of hierarchies and the concomitant upheaval that results in significant social change. In this way, society enters a wasteland of permanent liminality in which "societies can be stuck for a long time in a state where the previous unity was broken, and yet the schismatic components are forced to stay together, producing an unpleasant, violent, harrowing, truly miserable existence" (Szokolczai, 2009). In other words, a decentred sociology is afoot in liminality, recalling the specificities of modernist texts in which opaque and obscure layers of meaning become only intelligible when accounted for by the disorientating, contrapuntal and asymmetrical symbolism inscribed in their textuality.

In particular, in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*, through the lens of liminality myth is inverted as a function of history, rationality, metaphor and mise-en-scène. And ritual is approximated as a function of dramaturgy and an index of narratology and semiology. In the innards of liminality, the concurrent ideologies and practices of modernism are implicated in the asymmetrical relations of power between the coloniser and the colonised in different political contexts, and postcolonial literature and drama from various

parts of the dissolved but “unresolved” European Empire, such as Soyinka’s, have refracted these relations as the continuing legacy of Empire. Although, I have been brief here on the confluences of modernism and liminality, the outline I have provided is still adequate for grabbing the self-reflexive social worlds that are the fine colophon of Soyinka’s symbolic-aesthetic cosmos.

### **Modernist Propensities in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi’s Harvest***

*A Dance* had its premiere in October 1960 to coincide with the Nigerian Independence Celebrations. The central motif is abstracted from the annual Yoruba Egungun rite that allows ancestors into the social polity of their progenies (Ellis, 1894; Adepegba, 1984). The rite involves masks depicting different norms and traditions, guilds, cults and consortia representing the broad phalanx of the social classes in society. They are usually clothed in obvious eidetic imagery that is ambiguously otherworldly and earthy as they collect in the public square via marked routes to re-connect the living to the ancient psaltery of their forbears. They re-enact socio-political grievances, celebrate communality, and gleefully skewer several facets of contemporary life. The Egungun masks, surnamed “Ara Orun” by the Yoruba people (which translates approximately as “Extra Terrestrial Visitants”, “Underworld Presences”, or “Blue’s Heralds”), perform extravagant acts from their pantheon of ancestral protagonists and anti-heroes and supply some cultural spectacle rich in satire, comical mimicry, magical feats, and deadly mayhem. The annual Egungun season amongst the Yoruba is notorious for its riotous spectacle as much as renowned for its solemnity as a ritual cavalcade. The importance of Yoruba egungun festivals developing modern Yoruba theatre has been noted by several scholars (Ogunba, 1968; Adedeji, 1969; Jeyifo, 1988, 2001; Badejo, 1988).

*A Dance* is peopled by a scrambled gang of half-witted contemporary regular citizens mixed into half-grade civil servants and politicians, malignant plaintiffs from the Underworld, bellicose forest gnomes, historical court spoofs, and mutilated personas familiar of hallucinations. Consequently, the chronology and choreography of their lives remain disorienting and disturbed as they attempt to re-enact the apical moments of their existences in a real, self-existent social topography overlaid with the boundaries and claims of the

worlds of the past, the dead, the unborn and the chthonic realm which, in this play, is the hallucinatory world of the forest gnomes. The real sociality of normal citizens, bureaucratic civil servants and elitist officials fades in and out of the irreality of the landscape and lacuna of the social worlds of their forest neighbours, morbid visitants and hollow historical courtiers and their claims to be heard, vindicated and even compensated for the injustice or misrule they have borne. *A Dance* follows both the Egungun myth trail and performative ritual by syncopating dance, mime, spectacle and action into one long erratic but continuous piece of unravelling the grievances and idealisms of the characters, their feigned solemnity and elitism, and the vacuity of their visionary schemes. Much of this is admitted in the prologue by Aroni, the Lamé One whose testimony inks the eccentric connections between all the characters, the embroidery of myth and ritual in their relationships, and the violent futility that dogs their idealistic conception of history and their role in it.

*A Dance* embraces four different social topographies – the local terrain of the human community, enveloped by and intersecting with the Undergrowth peopled by forest gnomes, the Underworld of the restless Dead and the chthonic realm of belligerent forces. The play dramatises “the gathering of the tribes” and the launch of a communal totem, inspired by the expiry of colonialism, to mark the arrival of a newly independent nation by the human community. According to Adenebi, the nouveau bureaucrat, the project was to “Find the scattered sons of our proud ancestors. The builders of empires. The descendants of our nobility... Let them symbolize all that is noble in our nation. Let them be our historical link for the season of rejoicing. Warriors. Sages. Conquerors. Builders. Philosophers. Mystics. Let us assemble them round the totem of the nation and we will drink from their resurrected glory.” (p. 31)

In a sustained element of fantasy and magical realism, the new Establishment requests their forest neighbours to procure for them certain illustrious ancestors. However, their pious project soon runs aground, caught in the conspiracy of Forest Head and his sidekick, Aroni, who extrude from the earth “two spirits of the restless dead”, conjure an endless tapestry of accusatory but hypnotic hallucinatory spirits, and a flashback reminding the hypnotised

humans of the rapacious kingdom of Mata Kharibu in which they were active accomplices in an erstwhile life cycle. The “two spirits of the restless dead” – a fat Dead Man in a mouldy warrior’s suit and an expecting Dead Woman – had their mind set on vengeance to redress the wrongs purportedly borne in their erstwhile lives. Their entrance sets off several chain reactions: the festering underbelly of the humans’ social life, the feisty relationships between forest gnomes, the unmanageable animosities of the Dead, and the shady shenanigans of ancestral deities. But these are not separate planes of action, instead each one is a subset of the other, making *A Dance* a series of plays-within-a-play.

The first play level describes the corruptive malaise creeping upon the new nation through the acts of the new bureaucracy. It exposes Adenebi’s perfunctory approach to his role as councillor and flays the Old Man’s political expediency in occluding the grievances of the restless dead, and forcing them away from public view. The ignominious path of the new élites such as Rola, into murderous prostitution, and Demoke, the carver into self-centred careerism, occasioning the death of his understudy, Oremole is laid out; there is a hint of nepotism in the award of the contract for the national totem to Demoke by the council led by his parent, Old Man, and the rustic sycophancy of Agboreko, Elder of the Sealed Lip for whom the new public office demands both the airs of esoteric wisdom, evocative of traditional courtiers, and the jolly jostling of a half-literate for a secure position in the emerging postcolonial Order completes this hint with a chilling effect. But the universe of the forest is also disorderly and mutinous. The top gnome, Forest Head, is prowling around in human flesh as Obaneji, in an attempt to improve his knowledge of the delinquencies of his human neighbours, lure them deep into the bowels of the Undergrowth, and confront them with their predilection for reprehensible and lethal acts, towards some sort of expiation and catharsis. However, as he admits freely afterwards:

The foolishness of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden – to pierce the

encrustation of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness - knowing full well, it is all futility. (p. 71)

Albeit his serene philosophy of futility only grows on him gradually, his whole scheme is actually suspect from the outset, and a concealment of his own ineffectual and possibly implicating association with humans. He appears to be presiding over a collapsing order as mutineers in his world are defying his weakening hegemony. Aroni, chiding Murete – a gnome ill-treated by everyone despite his role as the official “ears of state”, some sort of double agent for both the humans and the gnomes – is rather revelatory: “Today, when Forest Head needed you all. You meant to desert him.” (p. 12) In truth, Aroni’s fidelity to his chief is indisputable, however, his trustworthiness is compromised by his prejudice against his human neighbours even before the play begins:

They asked us for ancestors, for illustrious ancestors, and I said to Forest Head, let me answer their request. And I sent two spirits of the restless dead... Their choice was no accident. In previous life they were linked in violence and blood with four of the living generation... When the guests had broken the surface of earth, I sat and watched what the living would do. They drove them out. So I took them under my wing. They became my guests and the Forests consented to dance for them... It was not as dignified a dance as it should be. (p. 5)

His machinery for bringing the humans to judgement may be entertaining but his machinations are quickly exploited by two competing ancestral deities – Eshuoro and Ogun: “Eshuoro is the wayward flesh of Oro – Oro whose agency serves much of the bestial human, whom they invoke for terror. Ogun, they deify, for his playground is the battle field, but he loves the anvil and protects all carvers, smiths, and all workers in iron.” (p. 5) The trouble between these two siblings and rather clownish figures in the play is another important motif, complicating the disorientation and disorder engulfing the human world and the forest. They conceive the human world as a kind of chessboard on which they move their individual pawns. They are the hands of

fate behind the decisions of the humans, particularly, Demoke (the carver, and therefore, Ogun's pawn) and Oremole whom we never meet but overhear so much about. In a confessional reminiscence, Demoke supplies some epitaph for Oremole:

I plucked him down!  
Demoke's head is no woman's cloth, spread  
To receive wood shavings from a carpenter.  
Down, down I plucked him, screaming on Oro,  
Before he made hard obeisance to his earth,  
My axe was executioner at Oro's neck. Alone,  
Alone I cut the strands that mocked me, till head  
And boastful slave lay side by side, and I  
Demoke, sat in the shoulders of the tree,  
My spirit set free and singing, my hands  
My father's hands possessed by demons of blood... (p. 27)

However, Oremole is no ordinary subordinate; he is the chess piece of Eshuoro and his death spirals the conflict between Eshuoro and Ogun. Raging against the totem that is the centrepiece of the gathering of the tribes, Eshuoro declares hostilities:

The totem, my final insult. The final taunt from the human pigs. The tree that is marked down for Oro, the tree from which my follower fell to his death, foully or by accident, I have still to discover when we meet at the very next wailing. But my body was stripped by the impious hands of Demoke, Ogun's favoured slave of the forge. My head was hacked off by his axe. Trampled, sweated on, bled on, my body's shame pointed at the sky by the adze of Demoke, will I let this day pass without vengeance claimed blood for sap? (p. 43)

But Demoke is already in the protective custody of Ogun who asserts:

I'll not desert him.  
The crime, if crime it was, lies on my head.

My instrument he was, plucking out Oremole  
Worshipper of Oro, slayer of my disciples.  
I set his hand to the act. I killed  
The proud one, who would not bow araba's head...  
Forest Father, masquerading as a human,  
Bringing them to judgement, I'll not desert  
My servant. (p. 28)

As the spat between the divinities continues to simmer, and entangles humans and gnomes, the case of the restless dead effectively becomes the *casus belli* between the humans and the gnomes. Through an evocative ritual, Aroni revives the court of Mata Kharibu, a narcissistic despot who had lived approximately 800 years before in the tribe's kiln of folklore and legends. Kharibu is apparently the ancient version of Old Man, the new helmsman at the postcolonial fort. Demoke is his verger, as Court Poet. Rola is his trophy wife as Madame Tortoise. Adenebi is his crooked court Historian, and Agboreko sounds off in the speech acts of Kharibu's ingratiating Soothsayer. The Dead Man, presently named as Mulieru, lived before as the captain of Kharibu's hosts, the Warrior that refused him his narcissistic supply by disobeying his edict to march upon the king from whom Madame Tortoise was seduced. For his sedition and resistance to the improprieties of Madame Tortoise, he earned enslavement for himself and his entire company. Mulieru's pregnant wife in Kharibu's court is the Dead Woman, and sheer grist for the mill of Madame Tortoise. The flashback links the living and the dead into a cult of savagery, exploitation and dissolution. As the court Historian tells him, even Mulieru's brave act of resistance becomes smudged with hypocrisy and futility in the end:

Don't flatter yourself. Every blade of grass that has allowed its own contamination can be burnt out. This thing cannot last. It is unheard of. In a thousand years it will be unheard of. Nations live by strength; nothing else has meaning. You only throw your life away uselessly. (p. 50)

As tension mounts and spreads across the situational playlets in *A Dance*, it eventually coalesces in another ritual act, the grand spectacle. This is the actual “dance of the forests” and it bundles up all the myth threads and characters in an extravagant theatre of mime and music, masks and dances, oracular baloney and incantatory symphony. The whole energy of the play is revved up by the devilish admixture of trance, sortilege and channelling in which various forest spirits predict a turbulent future for the humans, the expecting Dead Woman now has a child but only a Half-Child and its custody becomes a fierce contest between Ogun and Eshuoro. They both lose and Aroni ends up herding Dead Woman and Half-Child into the Undergrowth. As this “phantasmagoria of protagonists” (p. 45) clears up, the forest vanishes along with all its people and places, and the humans begin their journey again towards an indeterminate future.

The whole world of *A Dance* proliferates with myths and rituals; they are the vegetation that supplies the thematic kernels and furrows for the myriad layers of signs, symbols and speculative introspection that we encounter in the play. In this connection, the Yoruba Egungun myth ritual is central to the manifold sociality of *A Dance*, it is the pod from which Soyinka disperses the complex tones of reparative justice that the play enshrines by dramatising the social and psychological needs of the victims and their offenders, and involving every part of the community in a collective approach towards taking responsibility for their different but interconnected roles. It seems an orderly postcolonial state cannot emerge until guilt has been expiated as part of a process of constructing a social system in which offences are accounted for, not as against the state, but against an individual or community; and dialogue is necessary between victims and offenders whose roles include confronting their own crime and wrongdoing for cathartic reasons at least, and self-knowledge and recovery at best. Through role doubling, iconoclasm, and the truncation of linear (historical) time into the twilight and timelessness of mythography, *A Dance*, therefore, complexly plumbs the ambivalent, contradictory, indeterminate and constant flux of ideas on the instability of the emerging postcolonial order, the self-centred motives of the new statesmen, and a future darkened by uprooted social values.

In *A Dance*, we come across the following myths: the myth of the returning dead who are restless in the Underworld because of their grievances; the myth of the undergrowth as the social domain of forest people, often irksome tricksters and daemons; the myth of ancestral deities, particularly, the Devil or Malignant Trickster (Eshuoro) and the Inventive-Destructive demiurge associated with war (Ogun) acting as Interferers or gods of fate often in the manner of spectral subterranean deus ex machina in the affairs of the heroes and anti-heroes of society; the myth of reincarnation; the myth of reified totems with apical communal significances; the myth of hallucinatory worlds as part of the tribal psyche; the myth of Narcissus; and the myth of Abiku or the changeling that inhabits the lacuna between the living, the dead and the unborn. Dead Man and Dead Woman are homeless and rootless; they are social vagrants whose lives have been hollowed out by their historical and cultural circumstances. Historically, they are victims of the oppressive narcissism of Mata Kharibu and the wanton neglect of the new leaders emerging at the dawn of Independence. Culturally, they are slaves to the expiatory rites of their society in which justice is not strictly victim-centred but a bargaining between different levels of wrongs and accountability.

Conceptually, the Undergrowth is a metonymy for the underbelly of society, a parallel universe in which forest gnomes take part in the excesses of their human neighbours whilst equally strenuously attempting some social distance from them. They are all at once human and non-human, accommodating human norms and rejecting them in the same breath as fossilised examples of truncated sociality. Their ability to conjure spirits, meddle in channelling the hidden voices of victims of cruelty and dehumanisation aloud to their offenders, as much as posing ambivalent inklings of the future of society in their expiatory rites underline both their dramaturgical relevance and cultural propensities. They emphasise the ambiguities in the cultural domain about the exact point of locus of control in people's everyday life. Whilst **A Dance** seems overweighed with a conceptualisation of the humans' locus of control as external (meaning they act in the belief that their decisions and life are controlled by factors outside of their influence), it nevertheless problematises this as a social device by which the humans attempt to escape accountability. They are forced back to the path of self-knowledge and self-recovery by an

underlying attributional motif in the grand spectacle when the “forests” dance, and the humans are confronted with their past and access a preview of the consequent sombre future.

The myth of reincarnation deepens the humans’ anxieties about their future and the “game” in which the Half-Child (predicated on the myth of Abiku or the changeling) is tossed around specifies the ramifications of this myth. The past, the present and the future are all mysteriously interlocked and inseparable, requiring a balanced, sensible negotiation of incompatible outcomes. The Half-Child, the Triplets and the “nature” spirits (of the Palm, Darkness, Precious Stones, Pachyderms, Rivers, Waters and the Sun) convey repetitively the tautness of these dynamics of redemption and destruction; hope and despair; light and darkness; and the overwhelming environment of uncertainty and randomness. Conceivably most of this can only achieve distinct irreality – their trance-like effect – by relying on the cultural association of this kind of world with hallucination and mediumship (Firth, 1969). Deliberately, the social world of the humans is overlaid with the myth of hallucinatory worlds as part of the tribal psyche. In this dark, cavernous wombless time, the humans both escape from reality (as they are forcefully masked by Forest Father) and yet confront it, as their inner sight peers into history and encounters their former and possible future lives.

Old Man: Demoke, we made sacrifice and demanded the path of expiation...

Demoke: Expiation? We three who lived many lives in this one night, have we not done enough? Have we not felt enough for the memory of our remaining lives?

Old Man: What manner of a night was it? Can you tell us that? In this wilderness, was there a kernel of light?

...

Demoke: Not any more. It was the same lightning that seared us through the head. (p. 74)

The indeterminacy of their hallucinations leads to self-introspection and a vague realisation that the future is both ahead and behind them. The myth of

reified totems with apical communal significances relates concretely to this kind of cultural landscape in which the effects of dawn are very becoming of those of dusk. At the end, the totem is celebrated, its carver mounts it until he disappears from view, the Trickster/Jester figure (Eshuoro) emerges and sets fire to the totem, Demoke crashes down but only into the embrace of his patron, Ogun. Then there is blackout! This pervading ambiguity and unresolved tension in the imagery and metaphor surrounding the actions of the personas is a necessary adjunct to the in-betweenness that is so commonplace in the cultural ambience of **A Dance**. It is the ferment for the narcissistic despotism of Mata Kharibu who, in subtle shades of meaning, recalls the psychological threads in the myth of Narcissus. Kharibu's actions depict brazenness, magical thinking, conceit, spite, manipulation, and an engrossing culture of entitlement and absence of social boundaries which are the hallmarks of people with this kind of personality disorder. In a sense, the metaphor or myth of Abiku, the changeling that inhabits the lacuna between the living, the dead and the unborn, is pre-eminently applicable to the cultural finitude of *A Dance*. Myth is metaphor for the glimpsing of variant realities couched in extemporaneous history, differentiated rationality, and the stylistic *mise-en-scène* and interior layering of the lives of the characters as well as their ceaselessly altering localities.

The multiplicity of rituals in *A Dance* backs up the variegated uses of myth in the play. A rough account of ritual acts in *A Dance* will include: the ritual invocation of the dead and mediumship (p. 45, p. 60); purgation of evil / evil spirits by stylised dramatisation of the malignancy to be purged (pp. 46 – 57); ritualised containment of a feared or actual outbreak of a dreaded outcome (pp. 60 – 70); the ritual of hollowing out unwelcome realities in the dead of night through cultic ceremonies (pp. 60 – 70); the ritual of masquerades converting into other beings through magic realism (pp. 60 – 70); the ritual of concurrency or parallel lives in which people morph into fatalistic roles and carry out symbolic-aesthetic rites assigned by the agency of fate beyond normal social boundaries (pp. 26 – 27); and the ritual of divination and enchantment (pp. 36 – 38). Each ritual furthers the narrative, amplifies meaning and suggests, in performative signs and symbols, the overriding

concerns of the play around the questions of reparative justice, historical fallacy and culture change (Fischer, 1970; Geertz, 1973).

The questions we are confronted with include: Are victims and wrongdoers logically and mutually accountable for the course of suffering and the causes of pain? Do both need recovery, rehabilitation and redress? At whose expense are the norms of justice? Does tyranny occur because a tyrant is born, or does a tyrant emerge because the social conditions permit? Is the future a consequence of the past, or is the present a hostage of the past? Is the corruption inherent in the emerging postcolonial order a condition of feudalism or of colonialism, or is it the unintended consequence of the attenuation of traditional way of life by a foreign hegemony? In what ways does the autochthonous culture undermine the colonial culture? Why does the postcolonial bureaucrat resort to pre-colonial culture in order to resolve his anxieties about changing social values and historical uncertainties?

In many ways, these rituals do not only undercut our certainties but they are also dramaturgical approximations intended to amplify the multiple narratives explicated in the speech acts of the personas and the metamorphosis of significances laid into their symbolic-aesthetic actions. Liminality pervades the flux in the social and cultural identity of the personas and is spatially dramatised in the ease with which the zones of the living, the dead, the unborn and the chthonic realm are inhabited by all the personas at different times. In this way, as I demonstrate later, scenography becomes mythography and vice versa, supplying a discourse on postcoloniality which puts **A Dance** high up in the shelf of works of that period reflective of the natal ironies of emerging nation-states across the West African coast (Banham et al., 1999; Banham, Gibbs, and Osofisan, 2001).

In sum, postcoloniality in *A Dance* is argued in the psychological portrayal of the anxieties of ordinary citizens, transitional bureaucrats and political elites as the colonisers depart, seemingly apprehensive that the enforced unity of the competing tribes and the “normalcy” of the colonial times will end in a return to pre-colonial strife, indignities and injustices. This is one way of seeing the request of the humans for unifying ancestors capable of lifting their gaze to the

challenges and benefits of nation-building comparable to the imagined civilisation of the metropolis of the departing colonial power. In the frantic search for illustrious ancestors there is a hidden, unstated but operative and dramatised sense of social, if not ethnic inferiority of the colonised people, compared to the regimen of the departing colonisers. However, even this thrust to project the civilisation of the colonised as comparable to, or better than the coloniser's is jeopardised by a sacral belief in the outworking of fate premised on tribal or ancestral angst hanging over from pre-colonial days, and introducing indignities and injustices that were not investigated and compensated during the colonial phase. Unfortunately, the absence of the coloniser in the gathering of the tribes removes the supposedly objective Umpire in the settlement of grievances although the need for a foreign control of the social tumours remains, and the band of forest and ancestral deities supplies this. All of this ends in one singular act: the dramatisation of the complete ineffectiveness of the emergent postcolonial bureaucracy.

No-one has seriously criticised Soyinka for this despairing candour about the inherently, nearly deterministic, gloomy world of postcolonial Africa. At a time when postcolonial discourse is framed on the one hand by the unproblematised nativism of the negritudinists (typified by Léon Damas, Leopold Cedar Senghor and Aimé Césaire) and the idealised overthrow of feudalism and (neo) colonial hegemony by socialism/communism (typified by Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral and Walter Rodney), on the other, the postcoloniality we find in *A Dance* is certainly controversial but far more historically valid (Césaire, 2000; Filostrat, 2008; Ojo-Ade, 2010). And the unilinear and nearly uniform history of postcolonial Africa seems to have carried the argument perhaps much more ably so far. However, I will argue that what arms Soyinka so well against the charge of nativism in his apparent buoyant deployment of traditional mores and norms, and his modernist subordination of hope to despair, and celebration to catastrophe at Independence is the ample liminality in *A Dance*, and the criteria of his craft, especially, his iconoclasm and inverted historicism.

Liminality imbues *A Dance* at sundry levels but, particularly, in the way Soyinka invests most of the characters in the typical behaviour of “threshold”

people. *A Dance* seems to present across all its seams a range of people undergoing individual rites of passage in the communality of their shared history. They are all in the process of becoming, leaving something behind and going somewhere but never really arriving. Everything appears transitional; they are on a long unravelling journey in which everyday certitudes are replaced by anxieties and distress, and a desperate probing for meaning and value. As a result, their sociality is one long continuous experience of social indeterminacy, living in social zones which are inexplicably unmanageable and morphing uncontrollably. At one end, they are representative of people migrating from one world to another, looking for their roots. However, even though they may be representative, they are more than archetypes, they are specific presences bounded as much by a particular history as by a universal (that is, common) fate. For this reason, they appear to struggle in the dim light of their own contradictions and fail to make the daylight that others seem to be suggesting is right at the end of their nose. Inevitably, chaos, disorientation and disturbance become the fixed terms of their social discourse as they tramp through borderless zones of temporal and spatial dimensions in which they are free to come and go at will.

In its pithy idioms, priestly dialect, prosaic dialogue and poetic oracles, *A Dance* inflates the language and actions of the characters as properties derived from their specific localities which are often here and there, hither and thither, with their thoughts and action appearing disparate rather than discrete, and negotiating beyond the present “beyond”. There is no unity of plot, place or time. The dramatic logic is sourced in irony and parody and the best of this is displayed when the forests dance (pp. 60 – 70). A quick performance analysis shows that Soyinka deploys three main staging techniques for conveying liminality and postcoloniality in *A Dance*. I have cited role doubling and play-within-a-play. The third technique is his “fourth stage” dramatic practice which I will deal with in a separate section, following my analysis of *Kongi’s Harvest*.

## **The Looking Glass of Kongi's Harvest**

*Kongi's Harvest* was written in 1965 and premiered in Dakar, Senegal, at the first Negro Arts Festival in April 1966. It was published in 1967 and adapted as a film of the same title, directed by Ossie Davis, in 1973. The play opens with "Hemlock", a prologue, and a give-away title for the scene in which we meet Danlola, the Oba or monarch of Isma, a postcolonial state, as a public detainee, grieving his loss of status in the transition that ended colonialism but brought a civilian dictatorship to life, headed by Kongi. Danlola and his retinue are the official opposition to Kongi who has detained them for over a year, intent on gaining a conclusive public humiliation of the traditional authority at the annual New Yam festival. The state's celebration of Independence Day coincides with this old festival, over which Danlola in his pre-colonial role would have presided, and presents the unique occasion for Kongi's triumphalism as the absolute ruler of Isma. Whilst intimidating Danlola to accede to the state's request for the public abrogation of his pre-colonial rites and rights, Kongi uncovers the mutiny of the unofficial opposition headed by Daodu, a scion of Danlola and his designated heir, who has found an ally in Kongi's ex-mistress, Segi. Segi's father, unnamed, is at the heart of a plot to assassinate Kongi and relieve the country of his demagoguery during the New Yam festival, apparently, taking advantage of the cover of festivities. However, Kongi arrests Segi's father and other ringleaders and they are condemned to death, awaiting execution as part of the Independence Day celebrations.

All of this unbeknown to Danlola who, initially, refuses to surrender his role but in later negotiations over limited amnesty for the plotters, accepts this as a national duty, with him and his retinue bewailing their own official loss of power and identity. However, the amnesty never happened – some of the plotters had attempted to break jail to sneak upon Kongi during the festivities but were apprehended and summarily executed on the eve of the celebrations. The festivities proceeded to plan, Kongi and his new court were on the dais and Oba Danlola duly submitted to the national leader. However, as Danlola's submission was being celebrated by the whole nation, Segi intervened and offered a lidded salver to Kongi. When the lid flipped open, it revealed the severed head of an old man, presumably, Segi's father's. In traditional terms, this act is a gross violation of the norms of the race and

predicts doom. The celebration ends in mayhem and melee: “In the ensuing scramble, no one is left but Kongi and the head, Kongi’s mouth wide open in speechless terror”. (Soyinka, 2009:132) Then “blackout”! We glean important marginalia in “Hangover”, the prologue that follows: Kongi’s Organising Secretary is on the run, the state apparatus is set to vent its spleen on every form of opposition, and Oba Danlola and his retinue are near international borders, to seek asylum abroad, but then turn back, returning to Isma only to enter into a rattling prison cage that seems to cover the whole land.

Commentaries on this play have largely focused on its historicity and satirical ferocity on emerging dictatorships across the African continent in the 1960s. According to some, *Kongi* is based on the misrule of Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) and Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Malawi) (Gibbs, 1986). For instance, Gugler (1997) states that:

When *Kongi's Harvest* was first performed in Nigeria in 1965, there was no doubt as to its relevance to contemporary Ghana. The rule of Kwame Nkrumah had degenerated over the years and exhibited the very traits castigated by Soyinka: the personality cult of the Supreme Leader, the manipulation of the population, the repression of the opposition, economic mismanagement, and corruption. If Nkrumah had become the Redeemer, Kongi poses as if he were Jesus Christ and is about to replace him on the calendar. Two features, rarely found in dictatorships, then or since, related the play specifically to Nkrumah. In the play, Kongi and his advisors are clearly modeled on Nkrumah, his political pseudo-science of Consciencism, and the ghost writers he is reputed to have employed. And the focus of opposition to his rule was indeed a traditional kingdom, the famous Ashanti (Gugler, 1997:35).

Soyinka has not completely refuted this historical reading of the play but has also broadened it to satisfy his own outrage against all forms of dictatorships. In the programme notes for the play's 1969 production, he asserts that:

The play is not about Kongi, it is about Kongism. Therefore, while it has been suggested with some justification that there are resemblances between the character of Kongi and that of ex-President Nkrumah - the play was indeed first presented in December, 1965, while Nkrumah was still in power - it must be emphasized that Kongism has never been dethroned in Black Africa (Gibbs 1986:97).

To my mind, this is only half of the story – Kongism indeed gets a great drubbing but the compass of this play is a wholesale castigation of the postcolonial society as marooned in outmoded pre-colonial hierarchies and moribund in replacement autocracies, propped up by citizens incapably navigating the complexities of the legacies of colonial rule. Arguably, these are the reasons why dictatorships seem to flourish in Africa. The focus for me, therefore, is not on Kongism but on the people and politics that breed and support it. The contrarities that this state of affairs promotes are garbed in festivity and spectacle.

However, although there is festivity and spectacle, the mood music is revealed in the deadly earnestness of the prologue title, “Hemlock”. Indeed, a pervasive sense of collective tragedy, of a race steeped in hindering lore and mythology, of a people lost in the wild byways of their colonial past is like a heavy fog lifted only occasionally by the optimism and dynamism of Segi – the social prostitute – and Daodu – the accidental visionary. In a great mode of irony, despite his acerbic criticisms of Kongi, the monarch and his hangers-on are constructed as pre-colonial autocrats whose excesses have become modernised and re-institutionalised within the warp and weft of postcolonial power by Kongi. In the new economy of power, there is no room for two rival autocracies in the apparatus of state, and Danlola’s songs about the grandness of his heritage and the sacredness of his stool end up as dirges for a vanishing, if not forgotten, vision of pre-colonial Isma:

Don't pound the king's yam  
In a small mortar  
Don't pound the king's yam

In a small mortar  
Small as the spice is  
It cannot be swallowed whole  
A shilling's vegetable must appease  
A half-penny spice. (p. 62)

Meanwhile, Kongi, in his mountain retreat has detached himself from quotidian Isma, surrounded by “a conclave of modern patriarchs” (p. 71), he is reframing the institutions of state to suit his own portraiture as the Leader-Redeemer whose word is law, and Isma is his oyster alone. He has buildings, factories and dams named after him and has adopted a grand but vacuous ideology of “positive scientificism” (p. 71). In his retreat, he practises and fosters his demagoguery and megalomania, and boosts his personality cult with a range of messianic labels – “A Saint at Twilight”, “The Spirit of the Harvest”, “The Face of Benevolence”, and “The Giver of Life”. As a result, the festival is now the year of Kongi's Harvest (KH) and everything dates from it as BKH or AKH. His Organising Secretary and two secret service agents are the valve between him and the citizenry – they mould opinion, spy on dissidents, organise militias and micro-manage political events to suit the agenda of the Leader-Redeemer. Their “dark arts” are steeped in violence, subterfuge, brainwashing and bribery.

Nevertheless, in Segi and Daodu, they meet their unexpected match. Segi, ex-mistress of Kongi, runs a popular bar which has become anonymously the hub of the plot against Kongi. She is a two-dimensional character, intended as a mere foil to Daodu. Everything about her is deliberately sketchy, shadowy and seamy. Her new love is Daodu, son of the junior Oba Sarumi and the heir-apparent to Danlola. Daodu hangs around Segi whilst running clandestine messages between Kongi and Danlola towards persuading Danlola to capitulate to Kongi's ultimatum of public surrender, as a subterfuge for the overthrow of Kongi. Daodu has established a farm collective in the spirit of Kongi's ideology and participates in the state's controlled economy, winning the national competition of the biggest yam produce. This earns him an important platform in the state celebration which he intends to use as a war rally against Kongi – by calling imprecations, “On all who fashion chains, on

farmers of terror, on builders of walls, on all who guard against the night but breed darkness by day, on all whose feet are heavy and yet stand upon the world..." (p. 99). In the scheme of things, this rather trite "revolutionary" impulse is soon smothered by Segi's demand that the speech should be a "sermon on life...love..." (p. 99). The exchange that follows between these lovers reveals the tension in their vision:

Daodu (with violent anger):

Love? Love? You who gave love, how were you requited?

Segi (rises):

My eyes were open to what I did. Kongi was a great man, and I loved him.

Daodu:

What will I say then? What can one say on life against the batteries and the microphones and the insistence of one indefatigable madman? What is there strong enough about just living and loving? What!

Segi:

It will be enough that you erect a pulpit against him, even for one moment.

Daodu (resignedly):

I hate to be a mere antithesis to your Messiah of Pain.

(p. 99)

The mayhem caused by Segi's bloody platter probably sweeps both lovers into oblivion as we hear nothing of them when Kongi's Organising Secretary and Oba Danlola re-emerge in the epilogue, "Hangover", with tales of Kongi's survival and the commencement of the purge of his adversaries. It subverts our expectation of poetic justice and strengthens the feeling of uncertainty and imprecision we notice in the camps of Oba Danlola and Kongi. In short, as we see in the narrative of this play, whether we are dealing with Kongi and his

apparatus, or Oba Danlola and his retinue, or Segi and Daodu and the nameless faces assisting them to resist Kongi, Soyinka's thesis of modernism and liminality in this play rests on the intricate network of people shifting through certain conflicting cultural registers and adopting identities that illustrate the national, ethnic and personal crises they are sifting through.

Kongi and his apparatus represent the modern bureaucracy, the legacy of Independence, those who took over the colonial machinery and are adapting it to entrench themselves in political office. They are the new elite, educated in the coloniser's language and culture and striving to establish a nation-state, independent of the formal controls of the ex-colonial power. The national flag and national anthem become important totems of the emerging national identity which the main state institutions – civil, regulatory, and policing - seek to reinforce in opposition to the psychic-communal pre-colonial identity championed by Danlola and his retinue. In simplistic terms, Kongi's apparent Eurocentric (elite) culture is a register of power and identity constructed as part of the colonial adventure and, although the colonialists have departed, they have left a version of themselves behind in Kongi and his apparatus. The new independent state is a continuation of the colonial bureaucracy.

Accordingly, Danlola's Afrocentric affront on the national flag and the national anthem in "Hemlock" is a local, gestural resistance against the emerging national identity structured by colonialism. Danlola's camp, by repeatedly reiterating their pre-colonial rites and rights, are not exactly calling for a return to precoloniality (some "pre-colonial cultural recuperation"), their message is far more nuanced: they are seeking a space in the new order for their own way of life in a manner of "live and let live". In other words, Danlola and his retinue are resisting the re-imposition or continuity of the monocentricity that colonialism imposed upon the colonised in which the imperial metropolis was the absolute "centre" and the colony was the abject "periphery". Kongi is perceived as reiterating this monocentricity through his nationalistic agenda, one in which everything defers to the new centre and all power and privilege find therein their total expression.

Danlola, therefore, is Soyinka's metonymy for localism against Kongi's nationalism; he represents, in a fashion, something of the extant folk culture which is resisting its own marginalisation in the new dispensation. As for Segi and Daodu, they represent a subculture within the elite culture, in search of a middle ground in which the politics of the centre is bent towards catering for the marginalised. Segi's beer club's bonhomie and Daodu's collectivised farm are visible experiments in this direction – both of them sound communitarian and populist but the complexion of their politics is principally elitist and recondite. The interweaving levels of crises in *Kongi* are bound up with the fractures in the relationships between these groups as they compete for dominance in their society post-Independence, as opposed to collaborating to construct a national identity resisting postcoloniality.

I disagree with Soyinka that *Kongi* is about Kongism, I think that is essentially Soyinka's method of bolstering his authorial profile as a political activist. Whilst, arguably, he wrote this play to satirise the dictators of his time, the inner paths of the play strenuously lead to a far more fundamental characterisation of the cultural polity post-Independence as bizarre, blundering and broken. Some strong images predominate and alternate – the iron cage that descends recurrently over the stage, the location of Kongi's retreat in a seemingly hermetically-sealed mountain recess, the iconic sarcophagus recess of Kongi's thinkers, the use of funerary rites and dirges, the manic dances, and the intermediality of urban night life in high life music, rock and roll mixed into folk ballads of ritual recitalists, etc. – to emphasise a rapid, even eruptive, succession of personas and events that are largely dizzying, elliptical and allegorical. Soyinka manipulates our understanding of a society in crisis by creating and de-creating characters such as Danlola, Kongi, the Organising Secretary, the Aweris (Kongi's reclusive and factional ghost writers, sycophants, mystics and thinkers), and Segi and Daodu as metaphors of malaise, innocence, naivety, idealism, hybridity and marginality. The contrariety in these metaphors is probably best summed up in the stage directions that close the bacchanal feast of Kongi's New Yam:

The rhythm of pounding emerges triumphant; the dance grows frenzied. Above it all on the dais, Kongi, getting progressively

inspired harangues his audience in word drowned in the bacchanal. He exhorts, declaims, reviles, cajoles, damns, curses, vilifies, excommunicates, execrates until he is a demonic mass of sweat and foam at the lips. Segi returns, disappears into the arena of pestles. A copper salver is raised suddenly high; it passes from hands to hands above the women's heads; they dance with it on their heads; it is thrown from one to the other until at last it reaches Kongi's table and Segi throws open the lid. In it the head of an old man. In the ensuing scramble, no one is left but Kongi and the head, Kongi's mouth wide open in speechless terror. A sudden blackout on both. (pp. 131-132)

*Kongi's Harvest* is an open statement on the liminal environment in which the postcolonial state and its people struggle to find any proper footing in the slippery mud of their own earth. This is a type of "black modernism", dramatising the "individual and collective crises" of the postcolonial state, "questioning, doubtful and introspective but confident and even aggressive in its aesthetic conviction" (Childs, 2008:20).

### **Misanthropic Imagism – A Trope of the Fourth Stage**

Imagism was a movement in early 20<sup>th</sup> century which contributed significantly to modernism, particularly, in the works of Ezra Pound and James Joyce (Blakeney, 2002). Imagism favoured precision of imagery and clarity of language through the use of crisp visual images (Brooker, 1996; Vassiliki, Goldman and Taxidou, 1998). In my analysis, this is Soyinka's territory in *A Dance* and *Kongi*. However, in view of liminality and postcoloniality, the refined images we find in these plays are imbued with misanthropy.

Berry (1980) argues that in *Kongi's Harvest*, "Soyinka sets us on a number of scents, which pursued, lead in no single direction. We are led into every briar patch in the area, along widely divergent and mutually exclusive paths, and end by running in very small, perplexed circles" (Berry, 1980:88). Berry's perplexity here can be applied to any number of Soyinka's plays. Generically, staging Soyinka's plays can be arduous on three levels: 1) Soyinka regularly shifts the grammar of his plays between verse and prose, and his language is

so infinitely carved that meaning often becomes incorporeal, detached, ambivalent, sonorous and, occasionally, sterile; 2) there is often a huge technical demand as Soyinka artistically mounts the key vectors of his plays upon the ample scenography afforded by the stage; and 3) Soyinka's imagery is relentlessly sourced in the ritualised articulation of his own mythic mentation (his mythography). Given these conditions, the depth of Soyinka's dramatic idiom in the praxis of the "fourth stage" adds other complexities, such as the necessity to find the mean between the fluid and florid spectacle of festival and rite, and the steady, sedate outworking of the psychological and social pressures behind the relationships unfolding on stage. What all of this leads to, at least, in *A Dance* and *Kongi* is a multiverse deftly constructed in misanthropic imagism.

Take the humans in *A Dance*: they are concocted as foils to one another as much as to the forest sprites who, in their own universe, are nothing more than shadows of the humans they have tricked into the undergrowth. There is no real contrast between them and the humans, as between Good and Evil, until the sprites conjure up the past lives of the humans. The absence of a similar past for the sprites therefore amplifies the ensuing sense of social misfortune and cultural collapse that engulfs the humans. Soyinka relies maximally on the semiosis of the stage to fix signs and codes, sudden transitions and unexpected reversals of stage directions to carefully prepare and project this collapse of society. The frames of rites, myths and festivals distend the stage towards actors who can immerse themselves in the rhapsody on stage and still be able to retract very quickly into the quotidian social routines that they must play to keep their role in textual focus. The stage as social space for working out the relationships between the performers doubles into a space for sheer spectacle. This openness creates artistic freedom and at the same time controls the focus of the play tightly on the authority of the text, as the spectacle is subservient to the overall voice of the text. This is the case because the spectacle flows from the author's stage directions (the secondary text) in support of the exchanges (the primary text) and social relations between the personas. Soyinka, therefore, manipulates the sign system that the stage affords to lend weight to the web of social relations unveiled in the transactions of the stage characters.

There is a comparable analogy in *Kongi* as well. Tension oscillates between three seemingly opposed camps – Kongi's, Danlola's and the axis of Segi-Daodu's. However, essentially, they are all tarred as shady, feckless and self-serving entities, bickering over the spoils of power left behind by the colonial master. Kongi and Danlola are threads of the same cloth – both impress upon their separate retainers the grandeur of their self-importance. The stage is deployed as a device to underscore the multiple reiterations of this grandeur which has spiritual connotations for Danlola – hence, the ritual and myth of the New Yam - and social ones for Kongi – hence, his nationalistic fervour. The personas undergo different artistic metamorphoses determined by the ideations of the stage as sarcophagus, iron cage, rustic palace, high life bar, a public ceremonial ground and a hard shoulder. These images clearly situate the postimperial account of the new nation-state as chaotic and disordered.

Consequently, there is constantly a self on stage that is iterated and reiterated as a performing body, responding to the manifold usages of the stage, as well as deploying the stage as an element of its own constitution. For instance, Kongi and Danlola juxtapose their precolonial and postcolonial roles constantly by using the stage as a device for authenticating these roles, switching back and forth in the narratives that actually mock their authenticity and self-identities. Perhaps, we see this more manifestly in *A Dance* because of its gnomic dynamic but the interminable processes of social and historical crises which the body performs on stage are strongly marked out for us in both plays by the varied modalities of staging the embodied subjectivity of the actor's will. Through role doubling, and the heuristic acts of the main characters, the social actor instantiates himself reiteratively on stage both as some mythic archetype as well as a plain historical individual, shaped by quotidian exigencies. Through the imagery and symbolism that the stage endows the self, these two plays present overwhelmingly a misanthropic view of Soyinka's "chthonic realm, the area of the really dark forces, the really dark spirits ... the area of stress of the human will" (Soyinka, 1976:89) in a way that substantiates the liminal nature of the characters' postcolonial world. In these images, the variant visual themes which the performative self constructs

become the necessary window into the dark, unsettled future awaiting the characters.

In the cultural registers of both plays, the modernist trope of a “rebellious, questioning, doubtful and introspective but confident and even aggressive aesthetic conviction” sculpts for us a postcolonial landscape marred by the excesses of the social actor who constantly tilts between a disturbing past, a dissonant present and the prescience of a disruptive future. The stage is manipulated into a “liminal, interstitial discourse” in which a continuing kinesis places the actor as well as the audience or society in the interminable consequences of the actor’s will:

The so-called audience is itself an integral part of that arena of conflict; it contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its choric reality which must first be conjured up and established, defining and investing the arena... (Soyinka, 1976:39)

As a result, there is no closure or resolution, we are all caught up in the interstitial space, and the possible cathartic moments in the actor’s will are converted into kenosis, the subjective “emptying out” of the rationalities underpinning the actor’s will and the audience’s or society’s complicit participation in the act itself, suggesting a continuing liminal phase.

All of this is braced upon Soyinka’s craft. For instance, *A Dance* is replete with substituted identities and role-doubling; the forest is essentially the crossroads from the Earth to the Underworld, from the Underworld to the Undergrowth, and from the Undergrowth to the chthonic realm of the Unborn. There is ample use of cultic symbolism, especially, in the divinatory chants and the choral symphony of the “nature” spirits. Iconic characterisation is found in the role of Ogun and Eshuro; the prescience, quietism and authoritative stature of Forest Head insinuates his status as Obatala and Sovereign; Aroni is his doppelgänger, a phonic device in the fashion of His Master’s Voice; Murete is the “Ears of State” and a double-crossing agent; Old Man is the populist politician; Agboreko behaves to type as a conniving and conning Soothsayer; Demoke is the free-willed iconoclastic artist; Rola is the voluptuous courtesan;

Mata Kharibu is the sadistic and narcissistic despot; and there are others of less outward recognition. They are all bled into the metaphoric and eidetic imagery afforded by the masked rites of the Egungun tradition amongst the Yoruba.

Moreover, they are dispersed into *A Dance* within the technique of play-within-a-play which, in this instance, is a conglomeration of plays-within-a-play. Soyinka touches off his iconic characters with a blend of subtle iconoclasm and inversion of linear logic. Ogun and Eshuoro appear in part as clowning figures. Forest Head loses some of his esteem by “masquerading as a human”. (p. 28). The dead retain not so much the dread that humans naturally have for them, but their oddity and complicity in the shambles of the living. If we are expecting a linear logic of right over wrong, hope over despair and light over darkness, this convention is inverted and ambiguities abound. The complications of a parallel universe in which humans and non-humans are venal, the dead are tramping about clueless in a disordered world, similar to the affliction of the living, and ancestral deities are caught in petty mischiefs, not too remote from those of their adherents, tauten the tensions in *A Dance*. Such is the complexity of the jumbled layers of myth and ritual that a large part of stage directions has to be relied on to simplify meaning and guide us and the characters into the social labyrinth of the play. To cite a few examples, my amplification in bold type:

[Obaneji, who is Forest Head in disguise] takes Demoke by the hand and leads him firmly away, Rola in tow. The two creatures [Dead Man and Dead Woman] stop [pursuing the humans]. They want to go after, but the noise which they have just heard is increasing [led by Demoke’s father, the Old Man, to drive away the two creatures whom they had previously declared personae non gratae]. They [the two creatures] turn and go out the way they came [to mislead the audience that they have dropped their suit. However, throughout the play there is a game between the Dead Pair and the humans as they swap roles of hunter and quarry]. (p. 11)

[To hunt down the Dead Pair, Demoke's father, Old Man, requests that the forest be fumigated. A smoky jalopy, the Chimney of Ereko, is commandeered. As it is being driven recklessly into the forest, a beater raises the alarm: The Chimney of Ereko! The Chimney of Ereko!] The cry is taken up. Within seconds they have all panicked. They scatter in every direction. Adenebi is knocked down. As he attempts to rise he is knocked down again and trampled by flying feet. Agboreko and the Old Man stand their ground for a while, but Agboreko eventually yields, shouting what is probably a fitting proverb to the Old Man before making a not very dignified exit, but nothing is heard for the roar of the lorry and the panic of the crowd...A slow rumble of scattered voices, and the forest creatures pass through, from the direction of the lorry, coming straight down and turning right and left. They all hold leaves to their noses, and grumble all the way. Some sniff in disgust, others spit, all stop their noses, disapproving strongly of the petrol fumes. Adenebi tries to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. Some fan their faces, and one has encased his head completely in a clay pot. They are all assortments of forest spirits, from olobiribiti, who rolls himself like a ball, to the two-headed purubororo, whose four horns belch continuous smoke) (pp. 38-39).

Soyinka supplies more detailed stage directions and ascriptions to assist in the unravelling of the experiences of his characters in other parts of the play (see, for instance, pp. 57, 64, 66, 70, 71, and 72). Similar examples can be found in *Kongi's Harvest*:

A roll of drums such as accompanies a national anthem. Presumably the audience will rise. The curtain rises with them. Grouped solemnly behind it are Oba Danlola, Wuraola his favourite wife, his Ogbo Aweri, Dende, and Danlola's retinue of drummers and buglers. (p. 61)

[Superintendent] looks down and sees for the first time what (Oba) Danlola has used for a wrapper under his "agbada". Looks rapidly

up at a flagpole in the middle of the yard and back again to Danlola's legs. "Kabiyesi, [Your Majesty] is that not our national flag?"

Danlola: Did you not deprive me of my national trousers?

Superintendent: Yes, to keep you from escaping.

Danlola: The nude shanks of a king

Is not a sight for children –

It will blind them. p. 64

**Drummer:** This is the last

That we shall dance together

They say we took too much silk

For the royal canopy

But the dead will witness

We never ate the silkworm. (p. 66)

**Danlola** (comes forward, dancing softly.):

This is the last our feet shall touch together

We thought the tune

Obedied us to the soul

But the drums are newly shaped

And stiff arms strain

On stubborn crooks, so

Delve with the left foot

For ill-luck; with the left

Again for ill-luck; once more

With the left alone, for disaster

Is the only certainty we know.

[Stage directions: The bugles join in royal cadences, the two kings dance slowly, mournful steps, accompanied by their retinue. Coming down on the scene, a cage of prison bars separating Danlola from Sarumi and the other visitors who go out backwards herded off by the Superintendent.] p.69

These secondary texts suggest various stage props and a kind of architecture that supports the overall ambience of liminality in both plays. The juxtaposition of multiple settings and truncated storylines in which events happen in succession and simultaneously give us symbolic spaces on stage that the characters fill not just with words but also with mimicry and dance. Temporal frames are created by allusions to time in stage directions and conversations between characters, with events happening at dusk presaging gloom and despair. Characterisation is mostly figural in both plays, relying more on the disclosures and self-descriptions by the characters, and less on explicit authorial commentary. The concept of poetic justice is absent in both plays, although the eponymous hero, Kongi, can be argued to have met some sort of “justice” by the disaster that concludes his anniversary jamboree. However, Soyinka seems bent on open dramas with the stage set shattering realism constantly and the storyline sped up through ellipsis.

In *A Dance*, particularly, the poetic and rhetorical styles of dialogue convey the blurred boundaries between myth and “history”. In *Kongi*, the mix is used to define the rustic but ornate language of Danlola and his court, and the demagogic speech-acts of Kongi and his bureaucrats. Overall, in the arc of numerous acts in both plays, I can deduce an outline of Freytag’s pyramid – exposition, complicating action, climax, falling action and catastrophe (Price, 1908; Clark, 1918). Arguably, in their totality, these two plays illustrate a modernist application of liminality in Soyinka’s dramatic works.

### **Modernism as Dystopia**

Every work of art is a cultural product. However, culture appears intensified in works by playwrights such as Soyinka where it becomes the symbolic-aesthetic ground from which protrudes a liminal cosmos distended by such seminal constructs as the self-reflexive and yet extroverted nature of human experience, the inexactitude of the operation of structure and agency, and the unbidden complications of a non-linear reality. These are the brackets of irreconcilable conflicts of identity, the threshold states, the fractured social structures and flawed identities in *A Dance* and *Kongi*. They found a dystopic world in which concrete details are left abstruse, imprecise, or indeterminate. Consequently, *A Dance* and *Kongi’s Harvest* cast our immediate frame of

reference as mainly unreal, at least, if subjected to the rigour of scrutiny afforded by liminality. This appears to be the function of culture in Soyinka's theatre, to hollow out our sociality as disjointed pieces of self-knowledge, co-mingling within our processes and points of connections with the material world. Our location appears to be in the areal interstices between dusk and dawn, between the Self and the Other, and then beyond any fixed categories. This raises critical problems about Soyinka's modernism: all the expense of misanthropic imagism and magical realism suffuses the stage in vortices of meaning but the vertices of his art in ritualised articulation of meaning intimate a dystopic vision of society.

Arguably, the concert of modernist aesthetics wrapped around the principals of Soyinka's "fourth stage" leaves us feeling greatly entertained. However, the pessimistic views of an irredeemable society, and the probability of a grim future in which present-day problems in society have burgeoned beyond control, challenge Soyinka's own assertion that: "The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society *and* as the voice of vision in his own time" (Soyinka, 1967:11). An exhaustive "record of the mores and experience" of the postcolonial society in *A Dance and Kongi's Harvest* is undeniable, however, the "voice of vision" is muted by the unrelenting ambiguity and disorientation that cloaks this world.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Postmodernism and Liminality

#### *A Play of Giants and The Beatification of Area Boy*

#### **Finding Postmodernism in Postcolonialism**

*A Play of Giants* had its world premiere at the Yale Repertory Theater in 1984. It was published the same year. It parodies the tomfooleries of certain dictators in Africa. *The Beatification of Area Boy* had its world premiere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds in 1994 and was published in 1995. It parodies the slum-life in the backstreets of Lagos (Nigeria) and how this cuts into the crime life of the political class. This Chapter explores the interjunction between postmodernism, myth and ritual in Soyinka's theatre and connects it to postcolonialism. I will attempt to underscore my analyses with the theories of abjection by Julia Kristeva, Subject-Object categories of self-reflexivity and self-representation by Michel Foucault, and "otherness" (alterity) by Emmanuel Levinas.

Arguably, the terms "postmodernism" and "post postmodernism" or "metamodernism", "postmodernity" and "metamodernity", and other associated derivatives are all problematic both in terms of their complex historiographies and paradigmatic cultural relativism. They are used with a great deal of slippage and have shifting meanings within the sociology of culture in general, and in critical theory and philosophy (Sim, 2011:5; Bogue, 2002:98-99; Hutcheon, 2002:25; Jameson, 1984:78; Bertens and Natoli, 2002: xii). It is also the case that, in theory, attempts to connect them to particular literary movements and aesthetic styles have been challenged, with some theorists claiming that the literature and drama of diverse authors such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T.S. Elliot, Laurence Sterne, Miguel de Cervantes and even William Shakespeare exhibited postmodern propensities (Hassan, 1987; Caughie, 1991; Moody, 1994:233; Pierce and Voogd, 1996). However, whilst it is possible to construct a postmodernist aesthetics on the basis of these or other works, I will argue that there are three main approaches to postmodernism/postmodernity as a cultural condition and aesthetic form: (1) the historical approach which breaks European history into three distinct

phases – the pre-modern (everything before the Industrial Revolution), the modern (everything subsequent to the Industrial Revolution and until the end of the Second World War in 1945) and the postmodern (everything since 1945); (2) the conceptual approach which treats modernism/modernity and the subsequent “post” prefixes as diffused cultural concepts; and (3) my favoured model in this study, the ideological approach which is essentially part of the discourse on the ontology and epistemology of what is modern, and what is postmodern. All the three approaches overlap even when the argumentations are sharply polemical and contradictory.

This overlap is sometimes attended by an altogether different controversy – eurocentrism or the application of European cultural and literary concepts to non-European societies (Cornel, 1993; Dussel, 1993). Albeit, non-European societies have their own pre-modern, modern and post-modern historical stages, these will obviously be qualitatively different in style and form to European culture and history, on the same timeline (Rengger and Mark, 1992; Shohat and Stam, 1994; Dirlik, 1999). As Martin Banham (2016) states:

It is not possible to talk of much African theatre as if it fell into discrete historical or national patterns...It is also important not to divide the theatre into “traditional” and “modern,” as the contemporary literary theatre - predominantly written and performed in English, French, and Portuguese - exists alongside festivals, rituals, cultural performances, and popular indigenous theatre. The richness of theatre in Africa lies very much in the interaction of all these aspects of performance (see Encyclopaedia Britannica, at <https://www.britannica.com/art/African-theatre-art>; retrieved 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2016)

Perhaps, this is one reason why there are no full-blown studies of Soyinka as a postmodernist playwright, although there are oblique references to his postmodernism in the critical and even metacritical parlance of scholars such as Biodun Jeyifo (1996, 2004, 2010), Wale Oyedele (2004), Christopher Anyokwu (2012) and William Haney (1990). However, it has been argued that African literary playwrights are usually products of Western education and

reflect and contribute to Western modes of discourse and literary development in their works (Chinweizu et al., 1980; Ngugi, 1986). This acutely applies to Soyinka whose universe of intellection draws equally from European and African methods of discourse. Moreover, arguably, modernism and postmodernism apply to the African cultural landscape through the processes of colonialism and postcolonialism, and, in particular, the exemplar plays which are the focus of this chapter, appear constructed on both the literary formulae and cultural accretions typical of postmodernism. As Hutcheon (1988) notes, the notions of self-referentiality, self-reflexivity, intertextuality, pastiche, temporal distortion, maximalism, minimalism, fabulation, poioumena, paranoia, magic realism and technoculture are important parameters in postmodern drama and theatre. In the next section, I will examine the label “postmodern drama and theatre” in some detail.

### **Contours of the Postmodern Drama and Theatre**

The ascription “postmodern drama and theatre” is highly contested. Whilst some theorists have seen it as emerging from the cultural and critical discourse on postmodernism in general, others have rejected the notion as too loose and imprecise (Birringer, 1991; Fuchs, 1996; Pizzato, 1998; Lehmann, 2006; Mason, 2007). For the current study, the canonical poetics and politics of postmodernism constructed by Linda Hutcheon (1988, 1989) as a concrete and discursive model of identifying the cultural and aesthetic parameters of postmodern literature are my set-off point for identifying the nature of postmodern drama and theatre. As Hutcheon observes, a majority of postmodern texts appear to excel in the use of irony, playfulness, black humour and parody to present a view of reality that is deliberately and provocatively biased, incomplete and partial. This intensely self-reflexive construction of reality is covered by Hutcheon’s term “historiographic metafiction”, a kind of historicism in which truth is both “falsified” as essentially the subjective account of a particular witness, and “reconstructed” as the verifiable contextual basis for a particular historical purpose. As she asserts: “To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact, to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it” (Hutcheon, 1988:126).

Hutcheon draws on Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and Lyotard in order to construct her important politics and poetics on postmodernism. She borrowed from Derrida the technique of “deconstruction” which seeks to uncover the binaries upon which particular texts are based. Such binaries, for instance, signifier/signified; sensible/intelligible; writing/speech; passivity/activity, and so on, are opposed concepts which form a kind of double coding that needs to be separated and unpacked individually and almost autonomously in order to discover their inner meanings. From Foucault, she relies on a form of discourse analysis in which language is the important tool for investigating the complex power relationships in society. Barthes’s semiology furnishes her with an account of how language is “a social institution and a system of values” (Barthes, cited by Doyle and Floyd, 1973:145) subject to the creative re-rendering of the author. Writing, therefore, creates an object that can stand apart from its own author because “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture,” (Barthes, 1977:146) rather than the individual experience or ideology of its author. It is in this sense that Barthes proclaims “the death of the author”, explaining that “a text’s unity lies not in its origins,” or its creator, “but in its destination,” or its reader or audience (Barthes, 1977:148).

In this way, the text encompasses, within its own layers, innumerable levels of meaning which depend upon the reader/audience for their articulation and prioritization. This self-referential basis of the text breeds intertextuality and hyper reality and links directly to Lyotard’s (1984:15) argument that postmodernism emphasises *petits récits*, or “localized” narratives, in which there is a “multiplicity of theoretical standpoints.” These borrowings assist Hutcheon to found a poetics of postmodern literature on the parodical properties of language. To cite Hutcheon at length:

In challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative, postmodern fiction does not disconnect itself from history or the world. It foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the process by which we represent ourselves and our world to

ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We *can* try to avoid fixing our notion of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural. We can also study how representation legitimizes and privileges certain kinds of knowledge including certain kinds of historical knowledge. (Hutcheon, 1988:23)

The consequence of all of this is what Hutcheon characterises as “historiographic metafiction”:

Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference. (Hutcheon, 1989:93)

Accordingly, Hutcheon remarks that “postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts the very concepts it challenges” (Hutcheon, 1988:3). Through parody the postmodern text becomes a tool for critiquing a number of thematic and aesthetic assumptions: 1) (à la Barthes) the authorial originality and the givenness of the author’s proprietary role in the possible meanings of the text; 2) (à la Derrida) reality as a linear, lineal and self-autonomous social construct; 3) (à la Foucault) the governmentality in which the capitalist principles of ownership and commoditisation determine the creation and consumption (mass access, critical reception, modes of reading or performance, etc.) of the text; 4) (à la Lyotard) the multiple standpoints of meaning or identity which subvert the temporal naturalness of the text, de-naturalising it and elevating its artificiality; 5) history as an objective approach to truth (this is turned on its head through pastiche and fabulation into metahistory); 6) the possible apolitical and ahistorical status of the text (this is denied and, through maximalism and minimalism, there is an incipient argument against the notion of a neutral or non-ideological text); and, finally, 7) the autonomy of the text and its creator as the regulators of meaning, separate from either a mass audience/readership, re-performances, etc..

Hutcheon's thesis of postmodern poetics has been challenged, for instance by Stephen Baker (2000), as limited to an exclusive literary genre denoted by "historiographic metafiction" to the exclusion of other postmodern forms (Baker, 2000:5). I do not think this is the case, and Baker is reading Hutcheon rather narrowly. However, whilst I accept the appropriateness of Hutcheon's model, including her semantic treatment of the notion of postmodernity contra postmodernism, I would argue here that both in her politics and poetics of postmodernism she fails to acknowledge the liminal characteristics of the postmodern era and the postmodern condition which are, actually, both culturally and historically, the very templates of postmodernity and postmodernism (d'Haen, Bertens, and Bertens, 1994; Taylor and Winquist, 2003). It is the case that the universal liminality heralded by the Second World War and its conclusion in 1945 (Szakolczai, 2003; Broadhurst, 1999) is the continuing foreground of postmodernism, and I would argue that where the theatrical space is dominated by liminality, the consequences will include the fragmentation of time and reality, unpredictability of character and action, and the uncontrolled chaos and artificiality which are the constant elements and methods of postmodern drama and theatre. And, furthermore, as Homi Bhabha argues, imperialism and postcolonialism are weighty contributors to the liminality of the postmodern condition (Bhabha, 2012).

In short, since 1945, beginning in Europe and the US, a paradigm shift occurred both historically and culturally, in which the pre-Second World War sense of modernity – human progress as a unilinear concept, society as a nearly homogenous script of the governing and labouring classes, and international relations as a set of self-apparent consensual principles – ruptured completely into liminal phases. By implication, the phenomenon represented by the Second World War and other nodal historical events ruptured the "normative structure" of the world (as known) and led to an "anti-structure" containing potential alternatives. As Brian Sutton-Smith (1972) notes:

The normative structure represents the working equilibrium; the anti-structure represents the latent system of potential alternatives

from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the proto-structural system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. (Sutton-Smith, 1972: 18-19)

If I could combine Hutcheon with Sutton-Smith, I would argue the postmodern sensibility of the dramatic text is a self-conscious experimental approach to play production, determined to challenge and subvert our traditional notion of reality as a fixed, objective and homogeneous social truth. Such a text is conceived in the glare of several types of art and media forms, creating a production with a pastiche-feel, and a kind of intertextuality reflecting the heterogeneity of cultural forms in real practice, without regard for the artificial division of culture into “highbrow” and popular forms (Lyotard, 1979/1984; Jameson, 1984; Nicol, 2009). The text then deliberately fractures our notions of plot, action and character into fragmented, paradoxical and imagistic narrative acts to give the audience innumerable codes and handles for plotting the play according to their own preferences (Artaud, 2010; Frank and Tamborino, 2000; Brown, 2001). This is a deliberate departure from the Aristotelian model of drama in which mimesis and a structured plot provide stability of the visual theme and the attainment of catharsis.

Consequently, the traditional assemblage of acts and scenes is re-arranged into a multiplicity of dramatic moments which are vistas for perceiving the different, often contradictory, inner meanings of the production by the audience (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989; Gallagher, 2002). This is what gives re-performances of postmodern drama the new “gestalt” (a new shape, a new figuring, etc.) that each production conveys (Schmid and Kesteren, 1984; Alter, 1990; Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2005). From rehearsals to opening night, the production becomes an improvisatory translation of the text, a stretching out of thematic directions in which all the production crew participates through their own unique contribution (Johnstone, 2012; Smith and Dean, 1997; Hoffmann, 2005). The reality that the production eventually presents becomes a montage, a simulacrum or ironic mock-up, deliberately constructed as a

critique or shadow of something or someone in real life (Gabriel and Ilcan, 2004; Malkin, 1999).

In the next section, I examine the performative practices in Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*.

### **Postmodern Performative Practices and Sociality in *A Play of Giants* and *The Beatification of Area Boy***

*Giants* and *Beatification* are completely plotless and exist as shards of narratives on an endless plateau of concerns and grievances against extant forms of political and moral rationality and authority. In his notes to *Giants*, Soyinka discloses that the "form" of *Giants* was borrowed from Jean Genet's *The Balcony* (Genet, 2009), first premiered in 1957 and described as one of the founding plays of modern theatre; it is a play in which reality and illusion compete as equals. This is probably the strength of the relationship between *Giants* and *Balcony*, illustrated in the excessive focus on the creation and (ab)use of political power through various forms of violation of a prevailing social order and how this is theatricalised in grotesque parody in both plays.

*Giants* is built around the grotesqueries of Kamini, Touboum, Kasco and Gunema (fictional African Heads of State) in Kamini's Bugaran embassy in front of the United Nations complex in Manhattan, New York. The parodic theatricality of *Giants* lampoons these antiheroes as historical references to the presidents of Uganda (Idi Amin), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Mobutu Sese Seko), Central African Republic (Jean-Baptiste Bokassa) and Equatorial Guinea (Macias Nguema). They have gathered to attend a session of the United Nations but are also responding to a request for a cultural work of art representative of their country to be displayed in a lobby of the U.N. as a kind of mood music for the occasion. Kamini enlarges the request into a full-fledged collective bust of himself and the others, and as the play opens, three of them, to be joined by the fourth, are sitting in front of a White sculptor from Madame Tussauds in London.

The rest of the play focuses on their collective circular relationships in which the "giants" each reminisce on their acts of despotism in a self-referential

manner, their grotesque egos shaping the norms of their nation-states, the desires of their bureaucrats and international diplomacy. Their reminiscences and, in particular, Kamini's, encircle them and the people in their political sphere in the mystique of political power, its majesty and meanness. They are surrounded by squirming fawners, principally, ex-colonial powers and the superpowers (the USA and the USSR) – and local aides, ranging from petrified administration and security personnel to foreign journalists and intellectual and cultural apologists. The session at the U.N. never takes place, the bust remains an unfinished work, and the play closes with Kamini holding all his embassy guests (including the other presidents, Russian and American diplomats and the Secretary-General of the U.N.) as hostages, and directing a violent assault at the U.N. complex across the street because he had been overthrown back in Bugara and, in his paranoia, this could only have succeeded with the help of the U.N. The entire farce freezes upon the hostages' "horror-stricken faces in various postures." But "the Sculptor works on in slow motion. Slow fade" (*Giants*, 82).

*Beatification* is also a grand theatrical spectacle, a vast expanse of a dreamy, nightmarish world in which everything is chaotic, unpredictable, zany and preposterous. At 82 pages, at least *Giants* was organised into two parts; contrastively, *Beatification* runs to 100 pages, has no formal parts, no division into acts or scenes but gushes on like an endless meandering gurgling stream, packed with society's sewage from top to bottom. The people in *Beatification* are vagrants, petty traders, petty barbers, petty shoppers, petty thieves, and the emerging middle class (big shoppers, big bosses, etc.) linked in seamy acts with the established acquisitive political class. However, through parody, at various points in *Beatification*, they all belong to one social class – the rubbish of society, except that in dark solecisms, tongue-in-cheek camaraderie and witty aphorisms, *Beatification's* petty people sometimes achieve pretensions to a form of nobility that is not theirs by any substantial moral virtue. Sanda, a university drop-out, is the Area Boy, or the head of the "area" – a metonym for the backwoods shopping suburb and ragged residences in rundown Lagos. Ironically, he is a self-employed Security Guard in control of a number of petty criminals. They and the urbane Lagosians who cut across their turf occasionally have different forms of power – cultic power

(charmners and diviners), turf power (Sanda and his retinue), money power (nouveau-riche, middle class Lagosians), and political power (the military and their top civil administrators).

Consequently, *Beatification* is filled with disconcerting narratives on the principles of power, the practices of power, and the people in power and those under someone's power as they struggle to shape their own dreams in response to the chaos and corruption bedeviling their society. The play closes with the acts of Sanda and his retinue inconceivably concluding in a lavish wedding rite, organised by the political class for one of their own but upended when the bride chose Sanda instead of finalising her nuptial procedure with the assumed bridegroom. This unexpected change of direction that marks the end of *Beatification* parallels its gross artificiality and underlines the anti-structural and antifoundational register of the cultural paradigm that is its social world.

Essentially, both *Giants* and *Beatification* lack logical coherence in narration as sequential and chronological time is displaced by a conversational rhythm that jumps from place to place – from quasi-historical collective reminiscences to exaggerated personal vignettes; from the quotidian ebb and flow of routinised social acts to the surreal cosmos of international politics and diplomacy; from epigrammatic references to political violence and the violation of social rights to embarrassing shenanigans of everyone (including nations) driven by self-interest and opportunism. There is altogether a piquant amoral universe in which the fragmentation of time and reality, the unpredictability of character and action, and the uncontrolled chaos and artificiality of the social world in both plays serve to parallel the discontinuities in the narratives and the ambiguities of the anti-heroes. Aesthetically and thematically, reality and rationality, authority and morality, structure and agency are de-natured and de-centred through irony, playfulness, and black humour. Everyone's version of social truth is deliberately and provocatively grotesque, subversive, controversial and fractional. This reveals history as a self-reflexive construction of reality, the subjective account of a particular witness which is "reconstructed" as the contextual background for some self-serving national or personal purpose.

For example, in *Giants*, Gunema provides several chilling accounts of the voodoo-basis of his hold on power and his rationality is comprehensive: “When politics has become routine, organised, we who are gifted naturally with leadership, after a while, we cease to govern, to lead: we exist I think, in a rare space which is – power” (*Giants* 12). Elsewhere, he asserts: “Some people are born to power. Others are – cattle. They need a ring in their nose for us to lead” (*Giants* 21). As a result, his authority over his subjects is exclusive: “When I look at each one of my ministers, or army officer, he knows I am looking into the heart, into the very soul of his village. He knows that I see through his head into the head of his wife, his children, his father and mother and grandfather and uncles and all his dependents, all his kith and kin, living or dead... yes, including the dead ones. It is he who must choose whether they lie in peace in their graves because, *la culpabilidad* the - er – guilt, it extends beyond the grave” (*Giants* 27). Such mystique is reinforced by sexual violation of his subjects in which power becomes a form of elixir, an aphrodisiac, obtained by violating the victim’s spouse (*Giants* 69-70). The majesty (or vainglory) of power is picked up by Touboum for whom the wanton carnage perpetrated by his forces, assisted by ex-colonial forces, in pursuit of armed rebels was a proud accomplishment (*Giants* 28-30).

Kasco’s majesty is different. He is a self-proclaimed Emperor, above and beyond politics: “power comes only with the death of politics. That is why I choose to become emperor. I place myself beyond politics. At the moment of coronation, I signal to the world that I transcend the intrigues and mundaneness of politics. Now I inhabit only the pure realm of power” (*Giants* 31). Kamini tops them all. He proudly compares himself to Hitler (*Giants* 22) and provides instances of despicable brutality, inhumanity and bestiality – his gross abuse of power re-defines the meanness of power. The intense self-reflexive acts and disclosures of these political freaks are juxtaposed with the condescension, cooperation and cringing loyalty of several functionaries and ex-colonial powers. They sustain the machinery and mania of power and become victims of the irrationality and delusion of Kamini. Indeed, paranoia becomes the main referent for the actions of everyone in *Giants* – it is the amoral switch that Kamini and the other presidents use to deflect attention

from their abuses; it is the authority behind the interferences of ex-colonial powers in the affairs of their ex-colonies; and the rationality for the obsequious conduct of state functionaries, the foreign press and cultural/ideological apologists for Kamini and others.

The eclectic narrative strands are bolstered by the jaunty shifts between historical personages (such as Napoleon, de Gaulle, Papa Doc, Hitler, Dag Hammarskjöld and Chaka) and the events surrounding them, and pure fabulation enacted to exaggerate the buffoonery and bestiality of the anti-heroes. The narratives are dramatic moments and obvious markers of mise-en-scène which give the unfolding events a pastiche-feel. Additionally, appurtenances, such as the flushing toilet, sirens, police cars screeching, machine-gunners, rocket launchers, exploding grenades, etc. present some sort of technoculture which heightens the theatrical “gestalt” in *Giants*, bestowing a firm sense of contrivance and artificiality. Similar examples are multiply instantiated in *Beatification*.

There is an endless array of characters in *Beatification*, each one the latest trope on the extended theatricality of the pun on the principles (ethics) of power, the practices of power and the people who hold power and are under power. Ethically, power is rooted in the norms of self-aggrandisement, self-interest, and self-ingratiation. As a result, power is practised abusively, wantonly, and derogatorily. Powerful people get rich at the expense of others, most are members of the military and political class whose wealth is based on fraudulent appropriation of state funds; others secure their wealth through the criminal underworld, or mysterious murders for harvesting body parts for money-making rituals and effigies; others mingle amongst the thronging masses on foot or on public transport to spirit away people’s genitalia for money-making rituals. These are the powerful people in *Beatification*, and they control the destiny of others through patronage, paternalism, fear, fraud and cultic influence. People under the tyranny of power live in the shadows of society, and accommodate themselves to the noise and nuisance of everyday life. The routes to power are listed by Sanda: “Cocaine. 419 swindle. Godfathering or mothering armed robbers. Or after a career with the police. Or the Army, if you’re lucky to grab a political post. Then you retire at forty – as a

General who has never fought a war. Or you start your own church, or mosque. That's getting more and more popular" (*Beatification* 240).

In numerous songs and spectacle, the underbelly of society is turned up as seamy, superstitious and sensational (*Beatification* 243-245, 251-259, 291-296, 303-313, 316-326). Each character provides their own unique commentary on the ills of state and the downhill direction of their society. The commentaries are multifocal, conveying contradictory and controversial standpoints in the culture and history of Lagos and the country. *Beatification* rumbles on from one exposé to the next, providing increasingly grisly and gnomic references to historical events such as the Nigerian Civil War, the profound wastage of oil earnings, disastrous international events (the invasion of Iraq, and Hitler's "Final Solution", for instance), government statements and economic policies (for instance, the Udoji Award of inflated salaries to public servants), and the slum clearance in Maroko. Entirely, all elements of corruption are covered in song, scenery and spectacle and *Beatification* is weighed down in the end by a surfeit of pastiche, paranoia, and techniques for inducing audience participation (for instance, popular lyrics, mass demonstrations, mass media reports, Afro "high life" entertainers, popular stories of vanishing genitals, abduction of albinos and mob justice). Moreover, the "broad sliding doors of tinted glass" into the shopping plaza, fronted by the open slummy market that Sanda inhabits, is deployed to great effect as a form of technoculture which reflects and distorts "traffic scenes from the main street". In fact, stage directions insist that "When the doors slide open, the well-stocked interior of consumer items – a three-dimensional projection or photo blow-up will suffice – contrast vividly with the slummy exterior". (*Beatification* 231)

As a result of the multiple uses of technoculture (*Beatification* 231, 238, 281-282, 284, 291, 300, and 316), localised narratives and the parodic assets of language, action, setting and characterisation, there is a grossly "simulated" version of reality in *Giants* and *Beatification* – a profoundly distorted copy which affects us in its own right as a model of truth, even in its hyperreality. The world of both plays is a constant reaction to and rejection of a social structure that is dehumanising and the subhuman cultural and political

governmentality (a la Foucault) which is its prevailing method of discourse, its morality, authority and rationality. In its holism, the structure of society that we encounter in *Giants* and *Beatification* shows how such a society diminishes the capacity of individual agents to substantially reformulate their world. In spite of this or even as a consequence, as agents, the people in both plays occupy a liminal space in which their social interactions are ironically overwhelmingly anti-structural. In both plays, through parody and irony, the operative cultural register is a vicious critique of the social order and conventional cultural and political processes which allow Kamini, Touboum, Kasco, and Gunema (*Giants*) and the Area Boy and his retinue, and the corrupt military and civilian functionaries (*Beatification*) the huge space for their violations. Their narratives are charged with odious details, which are so frequently graphic and quite disturbing as examples of corruption, sadism and masochism.

In the liminal space construed by both plays, cultural identity and morality, authority and rationality are undermined by the repellent nature of the philosophy and social acts of all the characters in *Giants* (except the Sculptor), and many of the characters in *Beatification*, at different levels of subtlety. The overarching intensities of chaos, indeterminacy and randomness in both plays establish a cultural environment in which manifold symbolic discontinuities are ritualised both as familiar and foreign properties of the social space. Through shades of irony and black humour, the Subjects criticize their own acts as they transmute from Subject to Object, or simply as a Subject-Object category. Accordingly, the cognitive dissonance we experience in both plays is largely informed by the overtly coded conflictual values in the acts of the various personae and the resultant environment of paranoia, guilt, filth, discomfiture and disquiet, amongst others. Consequently, in *Giants* and *Beatification*, social space echoes with abjection and is occupied by a series of abjected beings, values and ideas.

I use the word “abjection” in a poststructuralist sense: the grammar of Soyinka’s postmodernism, its operative cultural register inherently includes aspects which upset the consensus that underpins any particular social order and the conventional processes of cultural identity. Here, I am adopting and

extending the use of “abjection” by Julia Kristeva (1982) for whom the notion of the abject is that which, as a Subject or Object, is rejected by or disturbed by a certain cognition of offence, the transgression of some established consensus or social norm. In *Giants*, for instance, we are given a society in trauma, sawn through by the sabre of its iconic leaders. But Soyinka is an iconoclast, therefore, most of the characters, but especially, the tin-god dictators are odious to us because they offend our sense of civility, justice and humanity. Their cultural identity as Africans and Europeans/Americans is placed on a spectrum of grotesque social aberrations in which the modern sense of human dignity and civic propriety is constantly violated by acts of brutality and collusion. In the Bugaran Embassy, these characters are arranged as disturbing entities (objects) and we observe them as social actors outflanking one another in several transgressive acts.

But if we are external observers (subjects) as readers and audiences, these characters are also in-text/on-stage subjects because the entities we hear/watch in the Bugaran Embassy actually morph along the “abjection” spectrum inchoately in subject-object relations too. In a sense then, Kamini and his ilk are the active agents, consciously dictating the play frame. Their banality and venality strip out the humanity of their “objects” – the ex-colonial powers and their operatives, the cultural mendicants and pretenders (Gudrum, Mayor of Hyacombe and Professor Batey) and the automatons of the civil and diplomatic service (Chairman of the Bugaran Central Bank, Secretary-General of the UN, the Russian and American delegates, and the task force specials and guards). This is no less telling in *Beatification* where such relations are much more difficult to tell apart because the Area Boy and his cast of petty criminals arouse our sympathies much more than our ire or disgust; and the slum dwellers, petty shop keepers and crazed citizens such as Judge and Bokyo are victims of abjection rather than its source. Although these penurious characters defy the narrow norms of civility, they are acting against a social structure that is intimidatory and exploitative, and propped up by people in power or allied to power. Therefore, although there is a spectrum of sorts in *Beatification*, the layers of abjection in Subject-Object relations are more complex.

Arguably, the Subject-Object distinctions in any real historical but temporal space are concrete, but they are permeable and help to shape the interactions within a given space (Alway, 1995; Hillman, 1960). Such interactions determine the prevailing atmosphere of the space and often convey a palpable sense of liminality where the dialectics, as we find in *Giants* and *Beatification*, involve movements between various normative categories. As a result, the forms of morality, rationality and authority extant within the play space in both plays become subjected at various points to different levels of deliberate assaults both as a method of identity-formation as well as identity-destruction or damage. In *Giants*, the characterisation of Kamini and his ilk as phantoms builds their image as powerful dictators and also as mindless bogeys. In *Beatification*, Sanda and Mizeyi start off as unsafe off-cuts of the corruptive social structure, and end as sympathisers of the victims of the structure. The bridal ritual that concludes *Beatification* and the detonations that conclude *Giants*, implausible as they are, serve to underline how easily the holistic relationship between Subject and Object breaks down and is overtaken by disequilibrium, and an overtly conflictual atmosphere. Consequently, the play space transmutes into a place of abjection, a place where “abjected” things, values, ideas, or beings inhabit and a somewhat amoral universe prevails.

Alterity (Levinas, 1991, 1994, 2003) is not far behind abjection in both plays either. In order to deflect blame from them, people in *Giants* and *Beatification* construct a view of themselves as Subject and of others as Object. There then ensues a nearly circular argument of justifying the unjustifiable by a relentless tendency towards “Otherness”. This is displayed blatantly in *Giants* and becomes its substantial critique of colonialism, postcolonialism, and superpower complicity in global political instability, violence and venality. We hear the groans of Kamini and his ilk against an international system of power and politics that they freely use and abuse, and we see the squirming of their pawns (diplomats, civil service functionaries and security operatives) as they scuttle to preserve the façade of decorum and decency in their contacts with the “giants”.

Although subtler in *Beatification*, alterity grants the Area Boy and his retinue the *raison d'être* to construct their shadowy existence and petty criminal underworld as a valid norm in contrast to and negation of the proximate identities of the military and political class whose sway of power over their lives is condemnable and objectionable. But alterity is a two-way discourse: in the eyes of the apparatus of government, Sanda and his community are "Others" who must be consigned to a social realm in which no-one is above the law and the "rule of law" for once can be asserted aggressively to their detriment. In other words, in *Giants* and *Beatification*, "Subject" and "Object" categories demonstrate the processes which create a series of "cultural others" and represent them according to the requirements of the Subject. Principally, as we discover in *Giants* and *Beatification*, "cultural others" are guilty, inferior, pathetic, vulgar, disposable and dispensable. Of course, "cultural others" are an abstraction, they are the imagistic construction of the Subject. Their ample reality and historical significance have been hollowed out and their being as a social phenomenon has been reduced to a handy category of cultural experience in order to satisfy the conditions and criticisms of the Subject exclusively.

Consequently, there is an underlying discourse in *Giants* and *Beatification* in which, for aesthetic effect, thematic sanguinity and ideological respectability, everyone is tainted and almost unredeemable, and overly satirised and caricaturised. *Giants* skewers everyone and every institution it encompasses, but dramatises postcolonialism as an unnatural disorder, implicated largely by the (sub)mentality of the ruling authorities in ex-colonies and the continuing mischief of ex-colonial powers and opportunistic superpower political machinations. The postcolonial discourse in *Giants* may be a fierce criticism of the levers of political and economic control inside and outside ex-colonies, but it is ultimately empty of any transformative power or vision. In a slightly more genteel fashion, *Beatification* represents postcoloniality as the conditionality within culture and the political and economic system which inherently breeds social aberrations and limits the scope ominously for eventual remedial action. There are ironic moments when *Beatification* appears sympathetic to the pain and penury of the powerless and the voiceless but it soon defaults to its main aim and parodies their puerility, naivety and incredulity. In the end, the

postcolonial discourse in *Beatification* is overly pessimistic and despairing, and merely squints at any favourable future prospects.

So far, I have treated these two plays without any direct reference to Soyinka's authorial cultural and political interests in the unfolding of the disparate events dramatised in *Giants* and *Beatification*. This is deliberate: firstly, as I have argued in my Introduction, my poststructuralist methodology implies that the author dies where the text begins; secondly, the thematic and aesthetic "formularies" that I have noted in *Giants* and *Beatification* are actually heavy stage props with clear authoricidal propensities. As pieces of artifice, they allow us to bypass the author's proprietary role in the possible meanings of the text and attack any concept of reality or history as a linear, lineal and self-autonomous social construct. The multiplicity of characters morphing, altering and disappearing only to re-appear in other guises and for endless theatrical and thematic necessities presents access to several standpoints of meaning, and cultural and social identities in a manner that subverts the temporal naturalness of the text, de-naturalising it and elevating its artificiality.

I have cited examples in *Giants* and *Beatification* of fictionalised accounts of actual people, places and events. These fictions become the stage technique for pastiche and fabulation, the dramatic method for converting history into metahistory, and achieving the implausible and logically impossible effect of a truthful, serious and yet sensational and overblown portrayal of historicised personages and specious factual narratives. On the surface, this kind of approach to historicity is confusedly porous, apolitical and ahistorical. However, its aesthetic and ideological ramifications suggest that actually the whole is greater than the sum of its parts - *Giants* and *Beatification* are left-of-centre guerrilla pieces of theatre launched against decadent right wing values and social and cultural practices. Through maximalism, mainly, both plays present a clear, even if sometimes inchoate, ideological argument framing the postcolonial state and its functionaries as abject beings, international powers as supercilious and exploitative, and ordinary people as mired in a self-authored culture of abject naivety, puerility, and materialism.

Everything in both plays appears left to chance due to the self-conscious and experimental approach to characterisation, action and setting. If there is anything organic in the presentation we encounter it is the world of mayhem, madness and mythic metaphors in which a system of meanings and an apparent culture of symbolic mediation of history subsists. Otherwise, everything is jaunty, improvisational, disordered and spontaneous. The appurtenances of art and media forms give both plays additional performative ambience which increases the pastiche-feel, and a certain intertextuality imitating the heterogeneity of cultural forms in society and how “highbrow” and popular strands of culture co-mingle in everyday life. In *Giants* and *Beatification*, the narrative flow is constantly disrupted and replete with discontinuities and fragmentary information; action and character are mainly asynchronous, paradoxical and imagistic to give the reader/audience innumerable codes and handles for “plotting” the play according to their own preferences.

Furthermore, the plays are ingested with audience-participatory tools, especially, as the traditional assemblage of acts and scenes are simply a series of dramatic moments and vistas for perceiving the different, sometimes, contradictory, inner meanings of the plays by the audience. This ensures a discernible trace of “gestalt” – modes of perception and cognition – that actors, directors and audiences can use to mine the meanings layered into the text of both plays, and prioritise them according to their own preferences. In this way, Soyinka’s effacement is complete in the montage and ironic mock-up of fact and fiction in *Giants* and *Beatification*. In the next section, I locate textual illustrations of the stagecraft and stage-vision encoded in Soyinka’s postmodernism as indexical of his dramatic idiom, the “fourth stage”.

### **The “Fourth Stage” and Tropes of Alterity**

In my conception of the particularised label “postmodern drama and theatre”, I stress variability of form and gestalt, and variegated, almost catchpenny theatricality of pun and parody. In my view, this fits into the paradoxes of Soyinka’s “fourth stage” as tropes of alterity, especially, recalling for me Taussig’s (1993) aphorism of the mimetic faculty as the enabler of some sort of “sympathetic magic”, conceiving a process that furthers “the construction

and subsequent naturalization of identities” (Taussig, 1993: xiii-xiv). In dramatic terms, it is “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other” (Taussig, 1993: xiii). If this is the case, let me illuminate some of the stage appliances in the texts of *Giants* and *Beatification* which imply sympathetic magic, in a literary sense, and the ritualistic acts which support Soyinka’s oxymoron for people who are larger than life but are cultural and political dwarfs.

The dramatic narratives in *Giants* are all unfolded on the podium situated in the Bugaran Embassy to the United Nations:

Three figures are seated in heavy throne-like chairs at the top of a wide, sweeping stone stairway. Behind them runs a curving gallery, with framed portraits, really the balcony of the upper floor, windows overlooking a park, across which is a skyscraper, the UN building, in silhouette... GUDRUM, a stout, florid and rather repulsive Nordic type sits half-way up the steps, gazing in obvious adoration at KAMINI... A SCULPTOR is working at a life-size group sculpture of the three “crowned heads”, on which any likeness is hardly yet apparent. When the sitters speak, they do so stiffly, in an effort to retain their poses. But first the tableau is revealed in silence, the SCULPTOR adding putty here and there or scraping away (p.11).

The podium is a metonym for the false grandeur of the personae in *Giants*. It accentuates the characters as one dimensional and obvious caricatures. On account of the historical context, the psychology and type of the whole spectrum of men and women that ascend the podium will not be news to the reader or the audience. The probable tepidity this can cause is tempered by a self-ridiculing style in which all the personae indulge: the brutal dictators avow their own gross blood-thirstiness, the fawners (Gudrum, Professor Batey, the Mayor of Hyacombe, and the Bugaran Ambassador) fawn lavishly, the pawns of power squirm liberally and the foreign backers (Professor Batey, the Russians and the Americans) inflate their critique of one another’s machinations in Third World politics. In the background, we hear the periodic

monotony of an emptying cistern in the lavatory where Kamini's Chairman of the Central Bank of Bugara is forcibly held down over the bowl by Task Force Specials for failing to negotiate a prized World Bank loan for Bugara.

Appearances are over-detailed as well to distort and parody the characters' self-identities:

Enter LIFE PRESIDENT BARRA TUBOUM. He is dressed in a striped animal skin "Mao" outfit with matching fez-style hat. He sports an ornately carved ebony walking stick. At his waist is strapped an ivory-handled side-arm stuck in a holster which is also made of zebra skin. (p. 28)

Referencing the Honourable Mayor of Hyacombe and his party, the text informs us, he is:

Preceded by a beadle (PROFESSOR BATEY) who carries a golden key on a red velvet cushion, the MAYOR enters in full regalia, chain and all. He makes a low bow, sweeping the floor with his hat, and suddenly freezes. He comes up very slowly, his eyes popping [because he was only expecting to meet KAMINI but he got three other similar Excellencies on the dais with KAMINI]. (p.32)

Elsewhere, we hear:

Voices coming in from outside. Enter a GUARD who carries in another chair which is brother to those already on the top landing. He climbs the stairs and re-arranges the others to make space for the fourth. KAMINI enters, followed by his three brother Heads of State and the SECRETARY-GENERAL. KAMINI speaks as he leads the way up the stairs, begins to fiddle with the chairs for a more satisfactory arrangement, positioning the other three crowned heads, changing his mind, then trying something else. The SECRETARY-GENERAL remains at the foot of the stairs. KAMINI

shows all the signs of having dined well; picking his teeth and belching from time to time. (p. 46)

These details furnish the stage with an overblown comic ambience that is heightened, particularly, in those moments when the dictators vie over the macho credentials of their preferred world leaders (pp. 21-22). The Mayor of Hyacombe and Professor Batey compete for the spot of top fawner (pp. 32-34) and the cultural experts (Gudrum and the Sculptor) face down each other over the political status of the dictators' statue (pp. 37-39). The two Russian diplomats vilify the dictators in Russian but pass off their act in English as encomiums and the furore that ensues when their double entendre is discovered (pp. 55-62) is farcical. The raucous arguments between US and Russian diplomats and the dictators following the coup in Bugara (pp.71-80) are risible. The unlawful imprisonment of all the personae in the Bugaran Embassy by Kamini, scattered in panic over the podium and the ferocious gun battle that ends the play as Kamini slugs it out with protesting Bugaran refugees detail further parodic elements in *Giants*. The parody becomes overwhelmingly combustible at the end of play:

Guns and rocket launchers open up everywhere. The whine of rockets mingles with the boom of exploding grenades. Screams and panic. The sound of the crowd in panicked retreat. Instinctively TUBOUM and KASCO have flung themselves flat. TUBOUM reaches up and pulls GUNEMA down with them, pulling out his gun. KAMINI swings back into the room, his gun aimed directly at the hostages. Their horror-stricken faces in various postures – freeze. The SCULPTOR works on in slow motion. Slow fade. (pp. 81-82).

At a glance, this quilt of a theatre, the asynchronous motifs of power and puerility, of mania and method, is achieved by the synchrony of the stage set as the symbolic space for constructing a Bugaran identity for Kamini (local and national in context), a continental identity specified by overt references to certain historical tyrants as African, and an international (even global identity) indexed in the virtual nationalities of the personae on stage, as well as the

characterisation of the stage set as the literal Bugaran Embassy at the United Nations with an unmistakable silhouette of the iconic UN building in full view. The tyrants are copies of one another, and so are the diplomats, the cultural experts, and the array of fawners and squirming victims – the characters are sequenced as potent imitations of one another. The stage exposes their values relentlessly as false and shabby, and even the Sculptor that has a glint of decency is merely working for his pay, his most courageous act of defiance is a paltry reference to Kamini and his fellows as waxwork inhabitants fit for the Chamber of Horrors.

Therefore, the success and weakness of *Giants* is in its “naturalisation” of these identities as verbatim specimens of people in the corridors of power and the “puerilisation” of their politics. There is pure art and little besides as the banality of the giants’ podium effects the transitional narratives on tyranny and its champions, its collaborators and collateral human cost. The bane of all of this is that *Giants* fails to find the balance that the Ogun-Obatala functionalism of Soyinka’s “fourth stage” celebrates. By the over-embroidery particular to parodic language and the stage set, the dramatis personae of *Giants* are not mere mouthpieces; they nearly literally become the monsters that society wants to get rid of. This is the common cloth, to some extent, in *Beatification* as well.

The stage set in *Beatification* is depicted as follows:

The broad frontage of an opulent shopping plaza. Early daybreak. As the day becomes brighter, the broad sliding doors of tinted glass will reflect (and distort) traffic scenes from the main street which would seem to run through the rear of the auditorium. This is realised by projections, using the sliding doors as uneven screens. When the doors slide open, the well-stocked interior of consumer items – a three-dimensional projection or photo blow-up will suffice – contrast vividly with the slummy exterior. Frontstage consists of a broad pavement, with three or four broad steps leading up to it. An alleyway along the right side of the shopping block vanishes into the rear, and is lined by the usual makeshift stalls, vending their

assortment of snacks, cigarettes, soft drinks, household goods, wearing apparel, cheap jewelry etc. The closest stall to the street, downstage right corner of the block, belongs to TRADER, also addressed as AREA TWO-ONE. He is busy arranging his stall which soon displays a wide assortment of cheap consumer goods. The barber-stall will be to the left, next to MAMA PUT's food corner. A partially covered drainage runs in front of the shopping block. Street-level planks laid across the gutter provide a crossing into the alleyway. A vagrant, called JUDGE, is perched on a step near the top. His posture suggests some kind of yoga-type body exercise. (p.231)

The frontstage – this slummy exterior – envelopes the whole play and the lush interior of the plaza becomes merely some sort of dressing room where moneyed individuals, passing quickly through the slums, disappear. This fabrication allows a street view of Lagos, a jaunty medley of vendors, vagrants, territorial criminal gangs (whose leaders adopt the pontific title Area Boy) and the cross-breed of army and civilian villains taking control of the street occasionally to regulate it according to their own whim and caprice. This potent hurly-burly is zoned on stage into a series of narrative units tied together by songs, badinage and a comedy of craft – stagey improvisations strung together almost like a quilt or carapace. In his own acknowledgements, Soyinka admits that some scenes in *Beatification* were developed in the “ITI/Sisi Clara” Master Workshop of 1992” in collaboration with “the old hands from Orisun Theatre” which he formed in the early 1960s (p. 229). These collaborations provide the technoculture of the stage, the intermediality of “high life” music, cinematic transitions and the role of the Minstrel whose songs and ditties sew together the patchwork of a theatre as we find in *Beatification*. I will cite some examples of collaboration with “the old hands from Orisun Theatre” and the coloration of the stage-set as a cultural space for ritual enactors of a fragmented postcolonial community.

**The destruction of the slums of Maroko by the government.** This opens *Beatification* and is set mostly around Judge, a vagrant who sleeps rough on the top step of the entrance to the plaza. He is mock-ironic and hallucinates constantly:

JUDGE: It is the kind of day when unbelievers are shamed and the faithful exalted. Look at the horizon – there, where the sun is just rising. Have you ever seen a dawn the likes of that? (Grandly.) Do you see how it's opening up the rest of the sky? My work. Pity I slept late, so I could not usher it in with the secret mantras. Still, asleep or awake, that dawn is my handiwork...I am a specialist of sunrise. I have seen more dawns from every vantage point, more dawns than you can count white hairs on my head. I have a proprietary feeling towards dawns you see, not that you can understand but I have a right to claim that they belong to me. Once, I could only predict what kind of sunrise it would be, yes, I could tell that even before going to sleep. Then I began to pray for the kind of dawn into which I wanted to wake. In detail, you know. Colours. Moods. Shapes. Shades of stillness or motion. It was something to look forward to. (pp. 234-235).

He disappears into the sunrise on a trail to recover lost souls and is never heard of again until near the end: “Enter JUDGE, but startlingly transformed. His long hair has been permed and curled so it actually looks like a judicial wig. He also has on the semblance of a purple robe, certainly much the worse for wear” (p.287). He seems to be a detail added on here to stiffen the theme of injustice and earlier references to illegal get-rich-quick schemes.

**The destructiveness of Nigeria's civil war and oil-boom days.** This is built around Mama Put whose reminiscences are accompanied by a bayonet, allegedly, the same one employed by a soldier to stab her brother, with which she now dices meat in her stall and brandishes menacingly to support her grief:

MAMA PUT: And don't remind me of medals! They all got medals. Those who did this thing to us, those who turned our fields of garden eggs and prize tomatoes into mush, pulp and putrid flesh – that's what they got – medals! They plundered the livestock, uprooted yams and cassava and what did they plant in their place? The warm bodies of our loved ones. My husband among them. My brothers. One of them stabbed to death with this! And all for trying to save the family honour. Yes, and children too. Shells have no names on them. And the pilots didn't care where they dropped their bombs. But that proved only the beginning of the seven plagues. After the massacre of our youth came the plague of oil-rigs and the new death of farmland, shrines and fish sanctuaries, and the eternal flares that turn night into day and blanket the land with globules of soot ... I suppose those oilmen will also earn medals?  
(p. 247)

The reminiscences are pithy and tragic but they sound contrived and jarring in the totality of the nastiness that the play seeks to portray about the urbanity of Lagos.

**The destruction of family life in the slums of Lagos.** A slender improvisation led by Mama Put and her daughter (GIRL) to which Sanda and others contribute. Girl enters the street at the tail of a song by MINSTREL about how the nation wastes billions through fraud and mismanagement (p. 245). Mama Put discloses the hardship they face in getting textbooks and paying school fees. Girl then disappears for the school day and emerges on the street again at the end of the day just as Minstrel begins to sing "Omo L'aso" which translates roughly as "My child is my future". Mama Put then admonishes her:

It's a hard school we attend here, girl, so be sure to enjoy yours. Work hard at your books, but also enjoy what fun is still left in your schools. Here, don't use your hand. Use the fork and knife like you do at school. Oh, I know I snatch the knife from you sometimes and prefer to eat from a clay bowl, but that is only when I remember... I

even prefer prefer clay pots for cooking. But it's not that I refuse to touch metal. After all, I prepare the meat with this heirloom. I use it to cut vegetables. (She grips the bayonet hard.) And I keep it handy. It's a hard school we go to, a hard school in a heartless city, and today one child didn't even get to enjoy her childhood. (p. 286)

Minstrel's song may be rhythmic and hopeful but city life for families is doleful and disordered, epitomised by the matted stage set. The re-appearance of Girl near the end of the play is a cover to re-assemble the whole cast for the finale.

**The destructiveness of illegal get-rich-quick schemes.** This consists of several yarns which are carefully choreographed to maintain its centrality to the motifs of venality and banality that shape the stage set. Whilst Sanda (Area Boy) knowingly affirms that overnight millionaires are created by drug dealership, "419 swindle. Godfathering or mothering of armed robbers. Or after a career with the police. Or the Army...Or you start your own church, or mosque" (p. 240), Trader and Barber fill in the gaps with tales of fetishes procuring wealth for those who know how.

BARBER: Those who make money with black magic. I mean, there are people who do it. It is bad money. It doesn't always last, and the things people have to do to get such money, it's terrible business. Sometimes they have to sacrifice their near relations, even children. It's a pact with the devil but they do it...You see all those corpses with their vital organs missing – breasts in the case of women, the entire region of the vagina neatly scooped out. And sometimes just the pubic hair is shaved off for their devilish mixture. And pregnant ones with the foetus ripped out. Male corpses without their genitals or eyes. Sometimes they cut out the liver... (p. 239-240)

This initial yarn is followed immediately by the blind MINSTREL, with his box-guitar, singing "Lagos is the place for me" (p. 241). This ironic mood is perpetuated constantly on stage by Minstrel at opportunistic moments.

*Beatification* ripples at other points with gory details of vanishing genitals for money fetishes (See, for instance, pages 260-263; 276-281; 284).

**The destruction of community by criminality.** This is the mainspring of **Beatification** and is shaped largely around Area Boy and his business in a provocatively entertaining way in which the rogue acquires the respectability of a “Robin Hood” – one who robs the rich to robe the poor. Ironically, this educated felon actually envisions a community-building role for himself and his spouse, Miseyi, once the Army restores civilian rule. He confides in Miseyi:

We could settle down with the Maroko people in one of the new locations. It will be cheap, and we would be among the founding members. There will be a lot of demand on us. We could work with them, take up their case, maybe get them compensation – that at least ... (p. 323)

Sanda’s activities contrast wildly with those of army and civilian apparatchiks whose unconscionable plunder of the national coffers is referenced in many songs by the Minstrel and their wantonness dramatised in their clash with ordinary citizens on the streets:

The light has been changing gradually to onset of dusk. TRADER enters with the departure of the soldiers, nods to SANDA and begins to pack up his wares. So do BARBER and MAMA PUT at a brisk pace. Enter a group of SOLDIERS, armed, aggressive. They charge the various stalls, throwing merchandise, pots and pans in every direction. Protestations. MAMA PUT goes wild, picks up her bayonet and dares them. Three guns are leveled at her. SANDA finally makes himself heard during the stand-off. (p. 313)

Although the *Robin Hood* guise of Sanda rambles through the streets and alleyways on stage and is couched in utter jest and ironic realpolitik, it provides the best moments of craft and comedy in *Beatification*. In something of an urban phantasmagoria, *Beatification* ends in a “dance of the streets” in

which the ragtag cast has been shaped into some disciplined force for change by their shared experience of poverty and mistreatment.

**The destructive mismanagement of the nation's economy.** The improvisation on this theme surrounds the cyclist that turns up in front of Trader's stall. His bicycle becomes the irony for the nation's economic downturn – the switch from gliding automobiles to battered bicycles as mode of public transport. The irony is lost on the cyclist who imagines he has earned some celebrity status for riding a battered bicycle until Minstrel underscores the skit with his song, "Alaru T'o Nje Buredi", which translates as "The Hardworking Citizen Can't Afford a Loaf". Soon, other songs put the cyclist in the picture:

I thought it was a case of an optical illusion  
I don't recall a journey in a time-machine  
Damn it! This is Lagos, not a rural seclusion  
And nineteen ninety-four, far from colonial mission  
No one worth his mettle goes pedalling a bike  
Not even with petroleum on an astronomic hike  
There's something fishy here, or else a miracle  
To see a Lagos body on a bicycle (p. 258).

**The destructive waste of manpower.** This is dramatised by a group of inmates, headed by a warder, marching into view as public works squaddies. "They set up a beat with cutlasses, iron files and dustbin covers" (p. 293) and lampoon the system that has snuffed out their lamps:

Drifting, drifting, drifting.  
How sweet is simply drifting  
I'll see you around  
When the ship goes down  
Drifting, drifting, drifting... (p. 296)

Their scenario completes with the technoculture of:

A ragged procession ... reflected on the doors. Men, women and children, carrying baskets, boxes, rolled-up beddings, bed springs, cupboards, chairs, clutching all kinds of personal possessions. Interspersed among them are the occasional lorries, equally laden to the top, with people perched precariously on top and among the loads. Wheelbarrows, omolanke, a tractor with trailer, also loaded with human and domestic cargo, the odd television set and antenna protruding from among baskets and sacks – An animated “battered humanity” mural of a disorderly evacuation, maybe after an earthquake, from which an assortment of possessions have been salvaged” (p. 300).

The mural – a synopsis of the slum clearance at Maroko – is artificially slipped in to blow up the image of a wasted generation in the spoofs of the inmates.

**The destructive waste of vision.** This is centred on Sanda and Miseyi whose social vision, twisting round the tapestry of malaise and mistreatment that society inflicts on them and their own complicity in copious forms of gimcrackery, finally reverts to true type: impractical idealism of college lovers. Sanda abandons his post as Area Boy and Miseyi abandons her career in high class prostitution to begin a new life amongst the displaced poor of Maroko. A foiled marriage ritual, set in epic proportions on stage, marks their exit from “high” society into the dispersed communities of ex-Maroko tenants.

Altogether, *Beatification* recalls again the over-embroidery of parody and the carefree craft that we find in *Giants*. However, unlike in *Giants*, the chaos and excess noted of the social actor imbricated in the typology of Soyinka’s Ogun appear slightly tempered by the medial rationality of Obatala. However, in both plays, the stage presences and the narrative units that support them alternate between fact and fiction, as between the pathos of tragedy and the bathos of comedy. This, arguably, fittingly sums up the tropes of abjection and alterity in *Beatification* and *Giants*. As a result, Soyinka’s postmodernism is the hyper-reality of the consequent tensions between myth (fabulation) and history (social facts), and between ritual (a serious portrayal of a significant human action) and theatre (the excessive exaggeration of the people who

hold power and those under their power), issuing in part from the liminality and postcoloniality of the world we find in both plays, as much as from the complexities of the “fourth stage”.

### **Postmodernism – Soyinka’s Transhistorical Cultural Paradigm**

My central argument is that postmodernism is a continuing cultural category both as a matter of history and theory. Although patently a Eurocentric construct, its transhistorical character enables it to have referents in cultures well outside of Europe as purely a materialist dialectic in which the conjunctions of imperialism, capitalism and postcolonialism – as a minimum condition - have elevated both neo-Enlightenment and contra-Enlightenment concerns as global cultural and theoretical forms of discourse in different modes of production of knowledge. The polemics of the emergence, nature and duration of the postmodern turn will, arguably, continue far into the 21<sup>st</sup> century despite the announcement of its extinction by a number of theorists, including Alan Kirby (2007) and Raoul Eshelman (2009) for whom the hallmarks of postmodernism – pastiche, parody and parataxis – have become less endemic in post-postmodern literature and the arts.

Finally, arguably, on the basis of the liminal criteria in the culture dramatised in Soyinka’s theatre, the different versions of postcoloniality traceable in the entire corpus, and the engaging craft which is the vehicle for his thematic and aesthetic concerns, postmodernism becomes a transhistorical cultural paradigm which expresses the controversial and seamy politics of Soyinka’s “people”. As *Giants* and *Beatification* demonstrate, this is a paradigm that shifts continuously even within particular texts and articulates a subjective view of history in which the elements of structure and agency are often in chaotic tension, unpredictable and open-ended. Perhaps, this explains the complexities and bewildering array of metaphors and motifs in Soyinka’s dramaturgy. In this instance, postmodernism as a form of heuristic historicism has helped to decomplexify Soyinka, providing a discursive schema for interrogating his plays as cultural artifacts.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Metamodernism and Liminality

#### *A Scourge of Hyacinths and From Zia with Love*

##### **Opening the Time Capsule of Metamodernism**

*A Scourge of Hyacinths* (*Scourge*, 1991) and *From Zia, with Love* (Zia, 1992) are two complementary plays on the roguish military junta that ruled Nigeria between 1983 and 1985, and the execution of three drug couriers by the regime, one of whom had his sentence applied retroactively. *Scourge* is a radio play first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 8<sup>th</sup> July, 1991. *Zia* was premiered in June 1992 in Sienna, Italy and published the same year. I will employ both plays to uncover the socio-aesthetic impulses which characterise Soyinka's metamodernism and the extent to which liminality becomes its applicable romantic irony.

In an article in 1975, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh applied the term metamodernism to a range of American literature produced in the 1950s and up until the 70s as fictions portraying reality both accurately and absurdly. He observes a metamodern narrative in the literature in which "(T)he alienation, deracination and victimization once symbolically incorporated into the concentrated experience of modernist fiction are now universal conditions" (Zavarzadeh, 1975:70). For him, in this literature reality as a form of certainty has been subverted by a notion of probability, the conjunction of randomness and uncertainty – it freights a "heavy symbolic load, fictive resonance, ironic overtone, and bears an uncanny resemblance to the shapeliness of invented fiction" (Zavarzadeh, 1975:70). Such tones could easily describe the aesthetics discoverable in Soyinka's *Scourge* and *Zia*. Although he is robust and convincing in his characterisation of the American literature of the period as metamodern, Zavarzadeh's empiricism curtails his observations to the codicils of mimesis as portraiture of society - the cultural streams of modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism as parallel and successive flows of species of art-making and heuristic (aest-ethical) philosophies of art and society seemingly escape him. This lack of an overarching theoretical grip leaves Zavarzadeh with a liability that is rectified in the parology of Timotheus

Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010) who have become the leading cultural theorists on metamodernism. To my mind, the background to their work is the obituary of postmodernism announced by Alan Kirby in an article published in 2007, arguing that it had been supplanted by variant forms of post-postmodernism, including his own brand which at the time he labelled pseudo-modernism but was later christened digimodernism (Kirby, 2007, 2009).

Kirby was not alone in chronicling the demise of postmodernism - he simply sounded the most polemical. As I argue below, others, though less funereal in their analysis of what they considered to be the “illusions” of postmodernism, were not less incautious. However, it is my view that postmodernism is still alive in its various successors, particularly, in metamodernism. Consequently, in this Chapter, I describe metamodernism as a form of cultural praxis flowing from postmodernism and explore the interjunction between metamodernism and liminality in Soyinka’s theatre. I will pursue the fragmentation of society and the dehumanisation of the characters we meet in *Zia* and *Scourge* as instances of the metastructure of the “romantic irony” typical of metamodernism. This leads me to open up the pathways of myth and ritual in the synthetic scope of ideograms and cryptograms that informs Soyinka’s stagecraft, linking this causally to his “fourth stage” dramatic idiom which I detail in my Introduction. My mainframe, however, is the discursive thesis of Vermeulen and Akker (2010) on metamodernism as a contextual cultural concept which I refine with Nicolas Bourriaud’s (2009) altermodernism.

### **Negotiating the Socio-Aesthetic Complex of Metamodernism**

Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984) is usually taken as the foundational theoretical work that established postmodernism as a socio-aesthetic discourse. However, it was Linda Hutcheon (1988, 1989) who detailed its particularities as a literary phenomenon. Hutcheon based her theoretical insights on Derrida, Foucault, Barthes and Lyotard in order to articulate a set of views about postmodern literature: (1) it is a radical departure from and conscious negation of the moral and aesthetic propositions of modernism; (2) it inflates the parodic/ironic qualities of language; (3) it includes a self-conscious introspection of the creative process,

drawing attention to itself as primarily some artifice; (4) it joins history to fiction and constructs sociality as a nearly autonomous indiscriminate assemblage of disparate and discontinuous pieces of information; and (5) it de-emphasises ontology (i.e. it asks fewer questions about selfhood, identity, authority, being, etc.) in preference for a kind of epistemology (in which our knowledge is relative and situation-dependent, actively adaptive and evolutionary) not bound to certain foreseeable ends, not restricted to conceivable, even logical, outcomes, but open-ended in its relationship to the social world, and its subjects and objects.

In essence, the foreground of postmodern literature is not teleology (even though it does not write off the possibility of final causes) but a form of gadfly or pragmatic ethics in which the conduct of individuals is a statement about their society as a whole, and the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the polemics of postmodern literature is a sublation of conformity and uniformity, and translates, essentially, into parology – a distinct movement against an established method of discourse which, in this instance, is modernism. As such, postmodernism sublates modernism by imposing a view of society and reality that is extemporaneous, effervescent, liminal and interstitial. There is supposedly no fixity or rootedness, reality is constantly morphing and transitory, and absolute categories (of morality, order, identity, selfhood, authority, etc.) are truncated and substituted with randomness, inexactness, and relativism.

This hyperreality and its seeming rootlessness trigger the criticisms of theorists such as Christopher Norris (1990) and Terry Eagleton (1996) who make capital out of what they argue is the political failing of postmodernism, its misreading of ontology and its flaky polemics of pragmatism. For Frederic Jameson (1984), postmodernism weakens historicity, because it obscures hard facts by obvious fancies; it mixes “high” and “low” forms of culture in a popular sweep of the arts into various forms of pastiche and collage; it lacks solid depth because it celebrates artificiality at the expense of concrete heuristic experiences; consequently, the older notion of the sublime is lacking and traded off for a form of affectlessness in which anxiety and paranoia weigh down objective historical truth; and the use of technologies as a mere

format of consumer-oriented reproduction or replication of the social world resolves the postmodern into a sort of technoculture junkie. Such barbs as these eventually consolidated in claims that postmodernism did not take off at all, or if it did, it never arrived.

From John Frow (1990) to Josh Toth (2010), a great slew of judgements poured out from the political Left and Right either serving notice of the demise and spectral smell of postmodernism or its wholesale dethronement by some voguish post-postmodernism such as Raoul Eshelman's (2000) "performatism"; Gilles Lipovetsky's and Sebastien Charles' (2005) "hypermodernity"; Nicolas Bourriaud's (2009) "altermodernism"; Alan Kirby's (2009) "digimodernism" and Robert Samuels' (2010) "automodernity", to cite just a few post-postmodernisms. Although they represent different sorts of argument in aid of their particular post-postmodernism, what they all have in common is an impassioned logic of replacement in which postmodernism ends in an expansive social compass – a new cultural praxis that straddles the unknown and seeks to break beyond present horizons in the fields of art and architecture, information technology and the internet, sociology, film, television and literature.

To my mind, claims that these post-postmodernisms signal the death of postmodernism are missing one singular point: any attempt to fix some historical date at which postmodernism ends and post-postmodernism (in this case, metamodernism) emerges is bound to be merely speculative. The span of twenty years between John Frow's essay, "What was Postmodernism?" (1990) and Josh Toth's book, *The Passing of Postmodernism* (2010), indicates that metamodernism was incubating in and developing alongside postmodernism. The two plays that I have elected to use as specimens of metamodernism in Soyinka's theatre were published in 1991 and 1992, respectively. Arguably, Soyinka as a man of letters has probably tapped into metamodernism, not as some metaphysical concept or a mere cultural theory, but as a specific mode of discourse, a specific cultural praxis which finds parallels in the postcolonial societies that his fictive characters inhabit. Whilst several commentaries have attempted to define post-postmodernism, in my

view, the clearest exercise was undertaken by Vermeulen and Akker (2010) in the critical framework they established for metamodernism.

Vermeulen and Akker find scaffolding for their arguments on metamodernism in Hutcheon's oft-quoted wager: "The postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on as do those of modernism in our contemporary twenty-first-century world" (Hutcheon, 2002:181). They then apply "material events like climate change, financial crises, terror attacks, and digital revolutions ... the appropriation of critique by the market and the integration of *différance* into mass culture ... (and) diverging models of identity politics, ranging from global postcolonialism to queer theory" into their interpretation of the cultural praxis they denote as metamodernism (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:2-3). They dismiss Gilles Lipovetsky's and Sebastien Charles' hypermodernity for its concentration on "hedonistic ecstasy" and "existential anguish"; Alan Kirby's digimodernism and/or pseudomodernism is fixated too exclusively on the computerisation of the text; Robert Samuels' automodernism overstates the parallels between "technological automation and human autonomy"; and although they are sympathetic to Nicolas Bourriaud's altermodernism, it is still an incongruous synthesis of modernism and postcolonialism.

Ironically, eventually, Bourriaud is rehabilitated (deservedly, in my view) and his aesthetic ruminations get incorporated into the theoretical insights afforded by metamodernism. Before then, for Vermeulen and Akker, these other post-postmodernisms merely "pick out and unpick what are effectively excesses of late capitalism, liberal democracy, and information and communication technologies rather than deviations from the postmodern condition: cultural and (inter) textual hybridity, "coincidental", consumer (enabled) identities, hedonism, and generally speaking a focus on spatiality rather than temporality" (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:3).

So, what are the theoretical impulses of metamodernism, what is its peculiar ideogram as a cultural practice?

Firstly, there is still the heuristic perception that whatever is happening to art forms, politics, the capital markets and so on in industrialised democracies has a consequential effect on cultures elsewhere either because such cultures were formerly colonial sites or have become part of the widening influence of the West through globalism. There is a thoroughfare in which the West and “elsewheres” intersect and modernism (constructed as the superimposition and synchronicity of unabridged Western discourses and forms of knowledge) retreats or moults, initially, into postmodernism and, subsequently, into various post-postmodernisms that are distinguished by heterochronicity, hybridity, nomadism and creolism. There is a continuing reaction/response to, and departure from, the utopism and unilinear historicism we are familiar with in modernism. However, whereas in postmodernism the essential outcome of this movement of the cultural pendulum is a fairly stable anti-modernism, metamodernism is a fairly unstable outgrowth of modernism and postmodernism. Secondly, this is happening now as a paradigm of the uncertainties of the global economy, geopolitics, climate change, and so forth.

For Vermeulen and Akker, by vacillating between modernism and postmodernism, the cultural industries increasingly are “abandoning tactics such as pastiche and parataxis for strategies like myth and metaxy, melancholy for hope, and exhibitionism for engagement” (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:5). Against the apathy and scepticism of the postmodern there is the naivety and idealism of the metamodern. However, this is not Hegelian idealism in which history appears predetermined positively to achieve progress (some Telos), it is rather pragmatic idealism that carries a distinct connotation that the Telos of history is indeterminate, unpredictable and probably only really imaginary. Nevertheless, pragmatic idealism marches towards this imaginary Telos “as if” it exists and can be reached, whilst all the way insisting it does not exist and cannot be reached. This “as if” logic is the ruling ideology of metamodernism. Its precursor is found in Kant’s (1784) historicism:

Each, according to his own inclination, follows his own purpose, often in opposition to others; yet each individual and people, as if following some guiding thread, go toward a natural but to each of

them unknown goal; all work toward furthering it, even if they would set little store by it if they did know it. (Kant, 1784:1)

As a result, the theoretical impulses of metamodernism are located in an undefinable space between modernism and postmodernism – the interstitial space in which it “oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity” (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:5-6). Unlike postmodernism whose main category is epistemological, metamodernism exists in the tensional relationship between epistemology (its “as if” logic) and ontology (its originary being in both modernism and postmodernism). There is a “both-neither” dynamic which finds emergent correlation in Plato’s notion of metaxy, and can be contrasted to Hutcheon’s (2007) description of “Postmodernism’s deliberate open-endedness, its “both/and” thinking, and its resolute lack of resolution...” (Hutcheon, 2007:7). Ordinarily, following the character of Diotima in Plato’s *Symposium*, metaxy connotes “in-between” and “middle ground” and is far different from its overladen usage in the discourse of Eric Voegelin (1989) which describes metaxy as “the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness, between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence...” (1989:119-120). In metaxy, we experience the world not simply from sequential multiple points of view, but rather at once, both here and there and nowhere.

Finally, thirdly, in consequence of its attachment to a view of culture as a thoroughfare of global concerns and the imbrications of the tension between agential and structural properties of globalised societies, metamodernist aesthetics confront us with a type of sociality in which the confines of the work predispose us to flow with the general conceptual outlook of its main theme, mood or character. Different horizons of possibility and impossibility are set out, and they become vectors which are intended to particularise certain ways of seeing and of being in the world. The deconstruction that is notable with postmodernism is pared back in the metamodern and sociality is reconstructed to fit the aesthetic paradigm of the both-neither dynamic.

Vermeulen and Akker describe this process of reconstruction as “an emergent neoromantic sensibility” (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:8) and link it to Isaiah Berlin’s (2001) observation that the Romantic attitude oscillates between the contrastive poles of, for instance, unity and multiplicity, individualism and collectivism, revolution and reaction, and war and peace, etc.

As the notion of “in-betweenness” is a concrete part of postmodernism, Vermeulen and Akker were at pains (but, to my mind, rather unsuccessfully) to differentiate this peculiar category of postmodern socio-aesthetics from the notion of metamodern oscillation on the basis that the latter alternates between opposite boundaries to subject us to the very tension that postmodern “in-betweenness” often resolves into irony and parody. In its neoromantic guise, metamodernism imbues the commonplace with significance, turns the ordinary into mystery and the familiar becomes estranged. This contrasts sharply with the utopic logic of modernism and the dystopic parataxis of the postmodern. “A-topic” has its roots in the Greek word “atopos” which literally implies “topos” (a place) that is “atopos” (not a place). Just as “meta” suggests “after”, “with”, “among” and “beyond”, and “taxy” suggests “ordering” and “taxonomy”, the atopic metaxy of the metamodern conveys categories of space and time that are both-neither ordered and disordered. It enables Vermeulen and Akker to conclude that:

Metamodernism displaces the parameters of the present with those of a future presence that is futureless; and it displaces the boundaries of our place with those of a surreal place that is placeless. (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:12)

It is so far, so good. However, Vermeulen and Akker appear to have limited their scope considerably due to what I think is their dogmatic dislike for the institutionality of postmodernism, contra the critical consensus that it started off as an antifoundational and anti-institutional tool; an unwillingness to think through the implications of their description of the “in-betweenness” or oscillation of metamodernism between the distant poles of modernism and postmodernism, especially, in relation to liminality and mythography; their unwarranted dismissal of the loaded prefix “alter” in altermodernism, and their

inexcusable omission to see the parallels between any development away from postmodernism and certain trajectories of postcolonial discourse which, again, most theorists argue as a form of postmodernism. They fail to comprehend the evolutionary progress of a discourse that started as a counter-institutional cultural method transforming into a standard against the standardisation of modernity. An impartial cultural historian always suspects that every successful discourse eventually becomes a rule; in effect, it becomes another rationality, another order and takes on some of the halo of its predecessor. This does not in itself destroy their original “unorthodox” label, even if it compromises their incipient neutrality and novelty. Once they have taken over the territory of their predecessor, they are no longer a force of resistance; they become a force to resist, borrowing the parlance of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972) in their influential delineation of the concepts of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation.

Moreover, the well-defined oscillation of metamodernism recalls the in-betweenness that is much characteristic of liminality and speaks to the interstitial spaces that facts occupy in the fictions of myth and the multiple social temporalities they configure. It is incomprehensible that Vermeulen and Akker stopped short of pursuing their insight into its evidential connections to the concepts of “in-betweenness”, “hybridity” and “mimicry” that Homi Bhabha locates in the aggressive transgressive, transactional, translational and heterochronic particularities of culture, predominantly, those engendered by colonialism and postcolonialism. As Bhabha notes:

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past.... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* - here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth.’ (Bhabha, 1994:1)

In order to establish the distinctiveness of metamodernism, Vermeulen and Akker observe that in Bourriaud's concept of altermodernism, he is infatuated with merely the structures of feeling or response established by the aesthetics of oscillation. However, in my judgement, Bourriaud actually argues that altermodernism implies much more than some endorphin rush. In his defining speech at the 2005 Art Association of Australia & New Zealand Conference, he talks, in particular, of "the creolisation of cultures and the fight for autonomy, but also the possibility of producing singularities in a more and more standardized world" (Bourriaud, 2009:1). Although he neglects to discuss explicitly the implicit roots of altermodernism in the idea of "otherness", the notions of selfhood, identity, Self and Other, Subject and Object are in the roots of altermodernism, and suggest a greater level of affinity between altermodernism and metamodernism, and continuities within the postmodern tradition. Altermodernism follows "an assumed heterochrony ... a vision of human history as constituted of multiple temporalities..." (Bourriaud, 2009:3). It gives "the impression of being uplifted by an immense wave of displacements, voyages, translations, migrations of objects and beings..." (Bourriaud, 2009:3).

These ideas of creolism and nomadism which punctuate altermodernism lead to "a fragmentation of the work of art" and they emanate "signs that are both heterogeneous (belonging to different registers or cultural traditions) and heterochronic (borrowed from differed periods)" (Bourriaud, 2009:4). One may disagree with Bourriaud that the nomadism of altermodernism necessarily entails the problematic that "There are no longer cultural roots to sustain forms, no exact cultural base to serve as a benchmark for variations, no nucleus, no boundaries for artistic language" (Bourriaud, 2009:4), but Bourriaud prefigures more precisely the sort of alterity and otherness well-known of the socio-aesthetic constructs of postmodernism in which metamodernism oscillates.

In sum, the power of metamodernism as a socio-aesthetic construct lies in the crafting of a fictive world which idealises "a deliberate being out of time, an intentional being out of place, and the pretense that that desired atemporality

and displacement are actually possible even though they are not” (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:12). I will explore the factors of this power in Soyinka’s portrayal of society as a pendulum swinging precariously between hope and despair, involving characters who are both aberrant and wanted with a nomadic approach to historicity; a creolisation of performative registers in which traditional elements of myth, ritual and spectacle are mixed with the Aristotelian/modernist (Western) practice of psychologically-defined character and mood-setting; some obvious heterarchy and heterochronicity of space-time categories in the narrative act; and an overall anti-structural register in which there is an ambivalent postcoloniality as part of an indifferent liminal environment. Wole Soyinka’s theatre is habitually a litany of grievances against hidebound forms of rationality and authority, and the tyranny of thought and praxis they impose on society as a whole. The fecundity of his imagination and the diversity of his art ensure a multiverse in which seemingly disparate temporalities create hardly any room for redemption or renewal. This is the neo-romantic irony we encounter in *Scourge* and *Zia*.

### **Fragmentation and Dehumanisation: Metamodernism in *Scourge* and *Zia***

The main cryptogram in *Scourge* and *Zia* is the proliferation of water hyacinths clogging up the arteries of the lagoon around Lagos, once the capital of Nigeria, a former British colony on the West African coast. In both plays the lagoon is the security moat around a penal establishment in which various inmates act out their own quotidian prison life whilst simultaneously role-playing the military bureaucracy, the elite social tapestry and the common life outside the walls of the prison. Both plays also focus on the execution by firing squad of three particular inmates – Miguel, Detiba and Emuke – an act which is the engrossing ideogram for the themes of tyranny and travesty of justice pervasive in the narrative acts of both plays. In his notes to *Zia*, Soyinka prefaces this piece as “an actual event which took place in Nigeria, in 1984, under the military rule of Generals Buhari and Idiagbon”. (*Zia*: 84) In a later newspaper article, “The Crimes of Buhari”, Soyinka laments as follows:

Does Decree 20 ring a bell? If not, then, perhaps the names of three youths – Lawal Ojuolape (30), Bernard Ogedengbe (29) and Bartholomew Owoh (26) do. To put it quite plainly, one of those

three Ogedengbe – was executed for a crime that did not carry a capital forfeit at the time it was committed. This was an unconscionable crime, carried out in defiance of the pleas and protests of nearly every sector of the Nigerian and international community - religious, civil rights, political, trade unions etc. Buhari and his sidekick and his partner-in-crime, Tunde Idiagbon persisted in this inhuman act for one reason and one reason only: to place Nigerians on notice that they were now under an iron, inflexible rule, under governance by fear. The execution of that youthful innocent for so he was, since the punishment did not exist at the time of commission – was nothing short of premeditated murder, for which the perpetrators should normally stand trial upon their loss of immunity. (See <http://pointblanknews.com/pbn/articles-opinions/the-crimes-of-buhari/>; Retrieved Friday 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2013)

Consequently, both plays are at once Soyinka's indictment of a particular government and an encompassing narration of the ills of any society in which public rights are crushed with impunity. Whilst *Zia* is, on Soyinka's testimony, "an entire product of imagination, and makes no claim whatever to any correlation with actuality" (*Zia*: 84), this is a contradiction of his own admission, and *Zia* actually pretends an account of the circumstances forcing the military regime towards the execution of drug couriers, such as Miguel, Detiba and Emuke. The regime "correctly" diagnoses the ills of the country as rooted in aberrant social norms and commences a purge of such norms through its flagship social campaign, the "Battle Against Indiscipline" (BAI). According to the Military Voice:

A corrupt nation is a nation without a future. Smuggling is economic sabotage. Smuggling is an unpatriotic act; it is next to treason. Nepotism is a form of corruption. Corruption in all forms has been the bane of our nation. Currency trafficking is economic sabotage; it plays into the hands of foreign powers. It is an act of treason and will be treated as such. So is drug trafficking; the trade of death. Avoid it. Expose any dealers you know. Protect the soul of your fatherland. Make BAI your watchword. Support the Battle Against

Indiscipline. Enrol in your local brigade. Be the eye of the nation.  
(*Zia*: 107).

Also:

BAI Culture is for you, and You! Do not exempt yourself from the Battle Against Indiscipline. Tighten your belt. Redemption may be sooner than you think. No citizen is beyond redemption. Cultivate vigilance. Report anything suspicious. Play a role in preserving our sovereign integrity. Subversion can sprout in the unlikeliest places – root it out! Fight the drug menace. Drug dealers are national saboteurs – sniff them out! Root them out! Forward with BAI, the vanguard of our national redemption. (*Zia*: 167).

Despite this patriotic propaganda, the regime is a dictatorship with the particular aim of perpetuating itself and BAI is its main tool of violent repression of the citizenry. Moreover, high placed regime officials and their syndicates are the main culprits and sponsors of the catalogue of evils that BAI concentrates on. They are the hyacinths in the creeks and canals of the lagoon that winds round Lagos and the penal colony in *Zia*, choking off its animation. This ecological imagery subsists more intensely in *Scourge* where it is a haunting, dark, watery peril in which the mythology of Yemanja – a water goddess – mixes with the mendacity of the regime and the morbid fate of Miguel, in particular, but also his prison mates, Detiba and Emuke. *Scourge*, a radio play, is a relentless psychological analysis of the fate of Miguel; it is a complete additament that fills the gaps in our knowledge of the alleged offence of the couriers with the rationalities that compel one of them, Miguel, not to jump bail in *Zia*, but to return to court, and subsequently to gaol and nemesis by firing squad.

On account of its radio status, *Scourge* is largely a “confessional” script in which the characters’ self-disclosures help the radio audience to absorb the jangled details of the intertwined lives of the drug couriers, the constant admixture of hope and despair in their voices, and the unsettling features of the injustice they face. Like all great radio dramas, the characters attract us and hold our attention through sound alone. *Zia* contains all probable

vignettes and grievances of social malaise, indicting one-party “democracies” and military oligarchies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the alleged complicity of the neo-imperial power, the United States of America, and the ex-colonial power, Britain. Contrastively, in psychological terms, *Scourge* is trenchantly engaged with the paralysis of will and action that accompanies the admixture of mendacious politicking, meaningless mysticism, misplaced loyalties and muddled social identities (or forms of selfhood) through auditory effects. In the end, it is not merely the fated predisposition to chaos and collapse of society that troubles us in both plays but the accompanying indifferent fragmentation and dehumanisation of the human person, especially, the overwhelming loss of the sanctity and dignity of the human being, most of which is demonstrated in the metamodern susceptibilities of Soyinka’s dramaturgy.

Primarily, society is perched precariously between hope and despair. Although both plays tumble into the chasms of despair mostly, there are certain traces of hope in the performance of the Director of Security, Major Awam (*Zia*: 86-95), the prison Superintendent (*Zia*: 106, 171 and 173-174); Miguel, Tiatin (Mother) and Chime in *Scourge*. Apparently, Major Awam is in gaol for plotting a coup but his verdict is based on hearsay and a desire by the regime to silence internal dissent. Responding to Commandant’s allegation that he is a coup plotter, Major Awam replies:

Suspicious. Mere suspicions. I’m just a talker, I enjoy a bit of agitating over matters I really care about. That’s all. But they got nervous and decided to get rid of me. You can see how long they’ve kept me here without trial. The ones who don’t talk – they’re the ones to look out for. Me, I don’t plot coups. I believe in the power of truth. (*Zia*: 94)

Instantly, the “Cabinet” reacts:

Commandant: I’ll have to watch out for you Major. See? He believes in the power of truth. No wonder he’s here. Major, you are a security risk. A spoilsport. Your CV was most entertaining but –

look around. Look at all the faces. (All heads are instantly dropped.)  
You have depressed everyone. I decree a change of mood. (*Zia*: 95)

The “Cabinet” of course is all role-playing by the inmates, a pointed caricature of the military dictatorship. All the “ministers”, except Major Awam, concentrate their government portfolios on curtailing basic freedoms and compounding the social and economic troubles of their country. Contrastively, Major Awam seems set on a transformational vision for his “department”, one that threatens the solidarity of the Eternal Ruling Council and meets only with hostile reception. The hostility reaches explosive proportions in the Cabinet when Major Awam proposes the release of political detainees:

Commandant: Quiet, Director, I have heard enough. I think the entire Council has had enough. Those thieving politicians from whom we saved this nation – is it the heartless prodigals you now propose we should release from detention? ... Oh, yes Mr Director you are a fifth columnist in our midst, you have been planted here by those bearded bastards and you have been tempting me to explode and geographical spread and quota or no quota I think I am just about ready to explode! (*Zia*: 92/93)

As the Commandant explodes, Major Awam climbs down – the brief glint of hope overwhelmed by the darkness of despair. The Prison Superintendent seems to emit a similar glint: perhaps more than superficially he is critical of the Military Command, at least in respect of the shortages affecting his inmates:

We are short of beds and other items right now, so you’ll have to manage. I don’t have to tell you, the prison is overcrowded. But the Military Command and Security send everybody in here as if space is no problem. That’s how you got thrown among those others in the first place – I apologise for that mistake by my subordinates. I suppose because we are hemmed in by the lagoon, the regime thinks this is the most secure prison. (*Zia*: 106)

In his contacts with the detainees he is almost embarrassed by their presence in gaol. He remarks to Miguel:

I am sorry about how things turned out for you in court this morning but I hope you didn't take the sentence seriously. This regime wants to put a scare in people, that's all. If there is anything we can do for you – under the circumstances – just summon my immediate assistant. I have instructed him to make you as comfortable as possible. All of you. (*Zia*: 106)

Later on, he arranges for Miguel to have sight of sympathetic newspaper reports on public support for the convicts and the possible commuting of their death sentence to jail terms:

Mr Domingo, the Superintendent wanted you to see this. (Passes a newspaper to him.) There is something there to cheer you up. Everybody is speaking up against the sentence. (*Zia*: 171)

In a different conversation, he seems to be instilling optimism in Miguel and his companions:

I'm not supposed to tell you this, but we received a secret circular yesterday. All offences in your category, including verdicts delivered by the political tribunal, are no longer subject to a decision by the Court of Appeal. The Head of State has taken over their functions. He has created a Review Panel – it's the only kind that would sit on a weekend – I'm only guessing, but I don't see why else they should bother you today. (*Zia*: 173)

Tragically, again, this glint of hope, of a person working within an inhuman system but affirming humanity, is overcome by the execution of Miguel and others as they step out of the prison walls only to face the firing squad. This oscillation between hope and despair, perhaps some sort of cruel irony, too, is very fragile and weighted more towards despair/irony, although it provides a

counter-grip for the prevailing cynicism and dehumanisation we encounter in both *Scourge* and *Zia*. In *Scourge*, particularly, Miguel, Tiatin (Mother) and Chime are shafts of light in an otherwise parallel universe invaded by darkness. Miguel re-assures us that he is not guilty as charged: “I am innocent. But I do not wish to die to prove it to anyone, not even to the Domingo clan!” (*Scourge*: 202) Even if he does not espouse some alternative vision, he abhors the violence of the regime, its chicanery, misrule and lawlessness. On the importation of cement by the regime, he observes:

...the regime licenced importation of cement from all corners of the world. And the world obliged. An armada of ships loaded with billions of tons of cement, sealing up the harbours and even extending beyond our territorial waters. Christ, they certainly made us the laughing stock of the world. The treasury was emptied paying demurrage to ship-owners! (*Scourge*: 192)

He describes the regime as men “who burst through their mothers’ wombs with machine guns and hand grenades” and “men of studded boots, of whips and batons and guns and mind-numbing propaganda” (*Scourge*: 200, 201). He had earlier judged the regime’s BAI pronouncements as “banalities” (*Zia*: 167) that would not produce a single patriot, and in *Scourge* he further considers them intimidatory, giving people “the feeling of being surrounded” (*Scourge*: 214). He tells Tiatin (his mother), “there is something about these people which robs me of my sleep” (*Scourge*: 202). Separately, Tiatin takes the scourge of hyacinths on the lagoon as an allegory for “the army interlopers. They choke us. Their embrace suffocates the nation” (*Scourge*: 193). She develops the allegory further:

Hasn’t it struck you sometimes as you watch them massed on the parade ground? In those olive green fatigues starched and ironed a deadly gloss. That’s when they most resemble a field of crisp lettuce. A kind of mutation but still – lettuce.

MIGUEL (laughing). Oh Tiatin.

THE MOTHER. But deadly. Poisonous. Nothing I would introduce into a bowl of salad. (*Scourge*: 193).

Nevertheless, her naivety, mysticism and commitment to family honour compel her to argue that her son should not jump bail but attend court to prove his innocence. She tells Miguel: “We have a name to maintain. Confronted by these barbarians in uniform, that becomes even more important. We have to show them we are from durable stock. We too have fought battles and won. We bear honourable scars”. (*Scourge*: 194). Advised that the decree under which Miguel was charged was retroactive, she insists, naively:

That’s not the way I heard it. And what if it did anyway? You are innocent. Running away will however paint you guilty in the eyes of the world. Miguel, the Domingos do not run. Even your grandfather understood that. He changed his name – yes, he led a wretched existence till he died but he remained here. Disgraced, destitute, despised. But he stayed! But you will let these rootless gangsters chase you out? These – these people without a name? (*Scourge*: 198).

Her fierce devotion to family honour is matched only by her ritual worship of the goddess of the Sea, Yemanjá. This is her personal deity, a deity that the community celebrates as the Protectress of Innocents whose personal word she has for Miguel’s safety. Again, tragically, all her hopes are dashed as the water hyacinths clog Miguel’s escape path, and he is forced to return home at dusk to face the trial that concludes in his execution.

In contrast, it is Chime’s action that conveys hope, not his words. His tenacious attachment to Miguel in order to spirit him out of the country even at the risk of his own life contrasts sharply with the deadly doggedness of the regime’s pursuit of a possibly innocent quarry. Where the regime’s men represent darkness, death and treachery, Chime is light, life and fidelity. However, all his appealing energy ends in futility, his resourcefulness was overtaken by the water hyacinths. Altogether, these and other characters are

constructed within the both-neither dynamic – they are both-neither aberrant and wanted, reflecting “in-betweenness”, “hybridity” and “mimicry”.

Take for instance, the “Cabinet” members and Sebe Irawe in *Zia*, and Miguel and Tiatin in *Scourge*. The Cabinet members are convicted criminals; they are at once alert to and critical of the perfidies and brutalities of the military regime but equally imitators of the same excesses. Sebe Irawe and Wing Commander are also of this ilk. These characters are obvious caricatures of regime officials whilst in the same breath they are not: they are their own men; in principle, they are individuals who have absorbed and internalised the modus operandi of the regime, whose innocence must not be assumed, whose impartiality is suspect, and whose sense of victimhood is critically exaggerated. It is equally difficult to place Miguel and Tiatin – they both vacillate between rationalism and traditionalism, between pragmatism and idealism. Actually, the eventual inaction and paralysis of will that Miguel displays in his battle against the water hyacinths simulates the battle ensuing in his own mind between rationalism and traditionalism. In the end, a both-neither conundrum is established and, consequently, a particular kind of passiveness in the face of fate negates the courage and candour we note of Miguel. The same applies to Tiatin whose impassioned attachment to family honour, combined with her piety and ritual zeal, topped by her instinctive distrust and hostility for the regime only conclude in an impenetrable impassiveness in the face of fate:

DETIBA. She was waiting up when you returned, you said. Didn't she do anything?

MIGUEL. Nothing. And she said nothing at all. Her chair was aligned as if it marked the end of the futile furrow we had just cut through the hyacinths. So was her gaze. Only that had travelled much beyond, perhaps it came to rest on the haven which had eluded us. I stopped by her side, waited briefly, but she remained as she was, immobile. I went up to my room to prepare for the trial.  
(*Scourge*: 219)

If the Cabinet and Sebe are accomplished mimics in *Zia*, their mimicry of the corruption and ruthlessness of the regime reflects also their own complicity and duplicity, and is a loud statement about their society as a whole. They are emblematic of a society in which the ethic of governance has disintegrated, and the dignity and humanity of the human person are items that have been bartered for the maintenance of the regime and its apparatus, and for aberrant social norms. The “mimicry” of Tiatin and Miguel in *Scourge* is of a different order altogether but serves the same end. Tiatin and Miguel are not caricatures of the regime, they are its critics. However, they mimic rationalism and traditionalism and problematise the struggle and confusion that society faces when it reads current realities only through the rear view mirror of yesterday’s history. Consequently, such characters become part of the fragmentation of society and hardly escape the dehumanisation which attends it. The “in-betweenness”, “hybridity” and “mimicry” that I have noted about these personages are shaped, essentially, by a nomadic historicity in which there is a non-hierarchical approach to reality and multiple temporalities of space-time categories become the narrative act.

There is no plot as such in *Scourge* and *Zia* but numerous accounts of behaviours and events in which history is fragmentary and non-hierarchical, and chronology and synchrony are disjointed elements of time and space. References are made to different historical periods and persons but interlaced in a way in which past, present and future events happen nearly altogether in the same account to cast some direct light on the current reality and the personal choices of the characters on stage. The stage itself is zoned by flashbacks and flashforths, lighting, prop and song into a spatialised landscape in which particular parts are narrated and transmuted according to the characters’ memories of the past, their present reality and possible future. In this way, both plays (but in particular, *Zia*) present a complex network (an archipelago) of stories thrown together in a jumbled but thematic fashion to illustrate the travesty of justice, the tyranny that promotes it and the trauma that it causes as a continuous historical experience of the society we find in both plays.

In their reminiscences, the characters journey through the colonial pasts of countries such as Ghana, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uganda and certain republics in Latin America; they cite the imperialism and duplicity of the United States of America in the regime's "Battle Against Indiscipline" programme and the complicity of the ex-colonial power (represented by Scotland Yard) in the muddled politics of its former colonies, particularly, Nigeria. In *Scourge*, Tiatin is the raconteur par excellence, her semi-autobiographical recollection of ancestral slave history and nature-deity worship weaves through Abomey, Fernando Po, Douala and Angola and then lands in Lagos. Genuinely, these characters are "homoviators", to borrow Bourriaud's label, or "nomads" wandering in and out of historical eras and spaces in order to reconstruct the past (experience of severe infringements of human rights, human dignity and sanctity) as a present reality, and suggest a trajectory in which the future is unlikely to be dissimilar because all possible figures of communal redemption and retrieval are casualties of the continuing infringements. To borrow a phrase from Hutchison (2013), in these texts, myths are "archives of memory", shelves of ethnic and social recollections, slanted to fit the memoirist's pursuit. This obvious heterarchy and heterochronicity of space-time categories in the narrative act specifies the creolisation of performative registers in which traditional elements of myth, ritual and spectacle are mixed with the innovations conveyed in mood-setting (through music and sound) and imagistic representation of people and places in both plays, for instance, the imagery of the water hyacinths and the prison fortress.

In *Zia*, particularly, society is an open sore whose unabridged pus is swollen and overflows in the eight songs or so that serve as scene-setting, character-delineation and ironic commentary on the behaviours of the regime, its apparatus of power and the aberrant ideologies or social norms which have become commonplace in society. In the broad pathways of parody and comic spoofs, everything and everyone is tainted, and nothing and no-one is unspotted or spotless enough to be redeemable, or act as redeemer. In *Scourge*, the overpowering metaphor of death and disaster presented by the water hyacinths becomes the predictive analogy, not just for Miguel and his doomed companions, but actually for society as a whole: the hyacinths are the "spongy, uninvited guests" that have "defeated technicians and scientists –

marine biologists and all” (*Scourge*: 193). As Detiba recalls: “...during the ten months we’ve been here, the weeds finally gained the upper hand. First they fouled up the propellers, so the boats took to paddles. Then even the paddles couldn’t fight the weeds” (*Scourge*: 187). Consequently, those who dared to fight the weeds either gave up or drowned trying. (*Scourge*: 187; 189-190). In *Zia*, which is a parallel universe to *Scourge*, the head of the Eternal Ruling Council – the military regime – is Commandant Hyacinth!

Dramatic action in *Scourge* and *Zia* is not distributed into formal acts but into several units of narratives strung together by the themes of tyranny and travesty, and the consequential tragic trauma that individuals, representative of certain social categories, experience. Both plays, but particularly, *Zia*, range backwards and forwards to rake in heuristic moments in the life of individuals and their community in a style that varies nearly equally between pastiche and paradox, and mythography and metaxy. By metaxy of course is implied the complex notion of “in-betweenness” in which one can fix the overall liminality of the postcolonial space in both plays. Exploring dramatic action through the speech acts of the inmates, Sebe Irawe and Wing Commander in *Zia*, and Tiatin, principally, in *Scourge*, suggests that the “telos” of history is indeterminate and unpredictable, however, it is not “as if” there is a benevolent or even benign future ahead. It is rather “as if” there is no future ahead at all, and the characters are all stuck in limbo, in terrifying reminiscences, and a present in which past evils are certainly real because they are repeated. As a result, *Zia* is drenched in torrents of cynicism and apathy and, contrastively, *Scourge* brims over with naivety and idealism, especially, in the performance of Tiatin. The anti-structural register and ambivalent postcoloniality of *Scourge* and *Zia* can be located in these contradictory complexes.

Directly, aspects of liminality, mythology and alterity combine in both *Scourge* and *Zia* to define the anti-structural register and ambivalent postcoloniality that we encounter in both plays. The main thesis in both plays is that the postcolonial state remains circumscribed by the limitations and influences of its colonial past. That the past plagues the present is writ large on the (mis)deeds of everyone we find in the society conceived in both plays. The hegemony of the imperial experience adds to the weight of antiquated beliefs

and myths (such as faith in appeasement rituals, dark portents and incantatory chants to ward off evil, to make fate malleable, and alter negative outcomes, etc., and the lethal fear of the unknown), creating a society in perpetual twilight, and a people caught in the unending fog of dusk – political independence has brought change but it is a change that is caught in the harsh realities of continuing imperialism. As a result, the cultural landscape is stretched in bizarre directions to accommodate, critique and resist this change. The “standard” version of the metropolitan language is complemented by its pidgin variety in both plays; people wander in and out of events and mannerisms which are ostensibly of African origin but re-modelled to aid the knowledge of the metropole or contradict its overt cultural paradigm; and the pervasive ambulant approach to the colonial past reflects an ongoing sense of displacement and confused apprehension of selfhood.

The theatrical space – the stage – appears intentionally constructed to mimic this particular postcolonial condition. As the lights, songs and mise-en-scène mark the passage of time, denote the arrival and exit of particular characters, and shift the geography and history from place to place on stage, it can be argued that this is the impact of the dislocation (or placelessness) and denigration that colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade entail for the characters on stage. Either as offspring of former slaves or the colonised, the people in the society in *Scourge* and *Zia* are struggling to find their feet in the new world because of the critical crisis of vision and rationality, the doubtful authenticity of pluralised histories of the colonial experience subjected to the master-history of the coloniser, and the (in)validity of multiple self-identities.

By journeying through time and space, the characters reveal pertinent memories of their communal past and are then snared in the conflicting identities that their reminiscences generate. If the metropole is the acclaimed centre, these are people limited to the margins of history as constructed within metropolitan discourse in every conceivable aspect, and are as such faced with two perplexing options: either re-model themselves to fit into the culture and rationality of the metropole, or resist it through an arduous process of decolonisation and communal retrieval. The people in *Scourge* and *Zia* opt for neither but seem trapped in the unwieldy gap in-between. Their continuing

indeterminacy is the kind of “cultural cringe” (Phillips, 1958) – an internalised inferiority complex - and symbiosis that lead ultimately to the fragmentation of their society and the dehumanisation of their being. Mythology in both plays underlines this creeping cringe and symbiosis. For instance, in *Zia*, Sebe Irawe’s extensive mythopoesis around Esu, the god of fate and trickery, is a parallel reconstruction of the postcolonial state. Esu is the patron god of people who go “backwards and forwards at will. And in circles...He throws a stone today and it kills a man last week. That retroactive twist is just the kind of idea he inspires in men of action” (*Zia*: 156, 157). Paradoxically, there are placatory shrines receiving sacrifices from people who want to buy his protection and people visit major crossroads at midnight to seek his leniency. The belief in Esu and other companion deities is linked to several bodies being found “with all their vital organs missing” (*Zia*: 157). Myth is also suggested as a model of political power. Sebe counsels Wing Commander:

Your man is Esu, but you are going more modern. Esu only throws stones, you, you fire bullets. But Esu is broadminded, don’t worry. He won’t be resentful of your prowess – that is, as long as we give him his due. This exercise eh, you’ll see, when you fire a bullet today, it will have hit its target long before you ever took over government. Now that is real power. (*Zia*: 159)

The iconic figure of Esu is matched by Yemanja in *Scourge*. Yemanja’s power, however, is, in part, a model of justice and protection within the community, accessible to the victimized. This is disclosed in Tiatin’s incantatory address:

Oh, Yemanja, sister of the clear waters, fill me with wisdom. Find me the path. Cut through the unseen weeds which enfold my house in a fulsome embrace. Save us from this shame hanging over our heads, protectress of the innocent. Let your luminous waters unroll a carpet of light in the direction I must take. Show me a sign. Point your spangled fins in the direction I must proceed. Unveil yourself before me tonight. Let your eyes be the twin stars locked one on

each foot. Rescue this house from shame, from the deep shame...  
(*Scourge*: 190).

Curiously, the myth of Yemanja also allocates responsibility for the affliction of the perilous hyacinths to Yemanja, as Tiatin believes: “There is nothing that the government – or anyone – can do. It was sent, and it will be removed when SHE is appeased” (*Scourge*: 191). If this is contradictory to us, it is not so to Tiatin whose evangelical faith in Yemanja makes her sound ultra-persuasive when she re-assures Miguel: “I have faith in your innocence, and that means that I see you in the embrace of Yemanja, protectress of the innocent. Nothing, no one, can harm you” (*Scourge*: 197). However, moving backwards and forwards and in circles, her faith is bolstered by other forms of hard headed calculation: “We have the best lawyer in the country. He has never lost a criminal case. The family will spend its entire fortune if need be. And we have contacts at the very highest level. Your Uncle Demasia ...” (*Scourge*: 197). This backcloth of ritual and rhapsody, of rationalism and traditionalism spreads throughout both plays in different directions, becoming the very reason for the fragmentation and dehumanisation that the experience of postcolonialism appears to engender.

Myth, as a device for self-identity by Sebe Irawe and Tiatin, for instance, enables us to re-experience how past events and the memories people share can haunt their lives and shape their sense of place and selfhood. In contrast to the solipsism – the self-focused rationality – that we can read into their individual acts, when not mythicised, the way the characters in *Scourge* and *Zia* deploy myth also enables us to understand the intersubjectivity (or psychological relationship) between the characters. They employ myth as a departure point for the shared cognition of their experiences, the inherent prosaic or common-sense nature of their memories, even if illogical and irrational, and the divergences of meaning they portend for different characters in both plays. Soyinka uses all of this effectively to reinforce the parodic and paradoxical moments in both plays. In their self-presentation, pretenses and practical puns, the Cabinet, Emuke, Detiba, Sebe Irawe and Wing Commander, especially, in *Zia* and Miguel, Tiatin, Chime, Detiba and Emuke, to a lesser but still noticeable degree in *Scourge*, effect a cosmogony

in which myth and ritual merge in everyday discourse and are a form of reality inseparable from people's sense of selfhood and otherness.

"Otherness" or alterity (Levinas, 1991, 1994, 2003) is the theatricised construction of variant forms of Self and the Other in both plays. The inmates, by role-playing as the ministerial Cabinet of the Eternal Ruling Council in *Zia*, succeed largely in their dramaturgical function by contrasting their real Self as convicts and their not-selves as the Other (as regime insiders). By assuming the identities of the military dictatorship, they bring to life the existence of alternative viewpoints which they criticise and yet internalise in their performance. In an elaborate imitation of "the looking glass self", the dynamics of in-groups and out-groups within the Cabinet are shaped by the symbolic interactions between the convicts and their understanding or perception of what types of behaviour fit into the criterion of the in-group: invariably, the behaviours that qualify membership of the in-group are those that victimise and dehumanise the citizenry.

Accordingly, the inmates adopt the social categories outside their prison wall and the variant forms of selfhood that promote them. Their agreement, disagreement and negotiation of the norms and meta-norms of their assumed roles as Cabinet members, and as individual inmates caught in the dehumanising routines of the prison system, plus the interactions between Sebe Irawe and Wing Commander, supply the crucial tension, witticism and paradox that characterise the explosive moments in *Zia*. As the inmates alter from Self to the Other, the distinction between Self and not-self increasingly blurs and their identities as criminals behind bars transmute into those of state-franchised and state-protected criminals in commanding social positions outside the prison walls. A similar process, although subtler, obtains in *Scourge*. The social interaction between Miguel and Tiatin provokes a series of self-introspection in which each of them asserts their individuality by casting the other as the cultural Other – the cultural Other is not only different but ignorant of the complex norms behind either rationalism or traditionalism.

Miguel is the rational Self, asserting the primacy of his worldview over and against the traditionalism of Tiatin. This is however equally matched by Tiatin

as the traditional Self who perceives in the Other (Miguel) less rootedness in time-tested values and loose understanding of the ultimate implications of such a position within the community. However, more than its effect as a marker of the altering viewpoints of Miguel and Tiatin, alterity in *Scourge* is the tool of the tragic cosmos that overwhelms this play: the failure of Miguel to jump bail and escape his fate is played out in the unresolved collision in his mind between rationalism and traditionalism, and tilts too late towards traditionalism when he sets out towards the haven of Yemanja in Tiatin's canoe, having abandoned his plan to catch a flight out of Lagos. Deterred by the hyacinths, he returns home to Tiatin, then to the courtroom, and is later imprisoned and executed.

By emphasising various levels of difference and similarity in the social identities of the characters in both plays, and situated within a social process in which such identities depend on asymmetrical power relationships, the obvious tension between agential and structural elements of each social act is further inflated. Arguably, alterity suggests that the characters' social identities are not *natural* or innate but are created and based on their own beliefs about their world, their own self-awareness and self-perceptions, and how these shape their self-image in interactions with other people. Alterity shows that the characters are quite independently capable of altering their worldviews and self-image to re-negotiate constructive norms for their society. In the next Section, I will examine the "neo-romantic" irony of Soyinka's "fourth stage" in the light of the metamodernist attributes of *Zia* and *Scourge*.

### **The Fourth Stage and Metamodernism: Neo-romantic Irony in Perspective**

As I have illustrated in my Introduction, Soyinka's "fourth stage" contains both theatrical and dramaturgical possibilities. It is Soyinka's peculiar shorthand for a world of worlds in-between the crevices of the world of the living, the dead and the unborn. In relation to metamodernism, Soyinka's cryptic *sens* of the fourth stage as "the chthonic realm, the area of the really dark forces, the really dark spirits, and it also is the area of stress of the human will" (Soyinka, 1975:89) recalls for me the description of irony by Friedrich von Schlegel: "Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming

chaos” (cited by Miller, 2001:17). For Schlegel, this type of irony romanticises reality by creating a plurality of worlds in which meaning is symbolic or allegorised. As Clyde Ryals (1990) argues, “There can be ... no certainty in this world of flux because there is no stability, the only constant being change itself without *telos*” (1990:5). Vermeulen and Akker (2010) lean heavily on Schlegelian categories in their objectification of the social realities that metamodernist art portrays. Consequently, they note: “Metamodern neoromanticism should not merely be understood as re-appropriation; it should be interpreted as re-signification: it is the re-signification of “the commonplace with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seemliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite”” (Vermeulen and Akker, 2010:12). The purpose of making the familiar unfamiliar, particularly, in *Scourge* and *Zia*, is to immerse us and, at the same time, alienate us from the disturbing affects of the postcolonial world in which the characters in both plays attempt and fail to surmount the dehumanising social realities that they face despite, or as a consequence of, their replete self-identities. This neo-romantic irony is equally deeply suggestive in the sound, lighting and stage décor that shape both play texts for radio broadcast (*Scourge*) and the stage (*Zia*). These elements convey hope and despair, and life and death in a way that swings our attention and emotions back and forth ceaselessly and sits us, sometimes, uncomfortably, in-between both extremes.

### **Sound**

By sound, I am concentrating on authorial cues for developing character, setting the mood, shaping the narrative and effecting scene transitions. For instance, the haunting and macabre mood of *Scourge* is set by a “Tramp of footsteps through echoing corridor – five men in a file, but irregular steps” (p. 183). This radio play utilises the language of sound to convey the grim reality of a murderous but populist military junta, the inescapable fate of those caught in its cogs, and the personal naivety and sometimes chivalry of those who accommodate its logic or seeks to resist it. Miguel and his two accomplices are in a cell surrounded by “footsteps fading down the corridor” (p. 184); “Silence, except for a soft lapping of water and lagoon sounds... Footsteps across a concrete floor... (and) Metallic noise as if the door has been gently

shaken” (p. 184). To engage the radio audience, conversations are overly descriptive and provide details in a kind of lexicon that paints the scenes for us. Miguel’s ironic premonitory opening comments on the spread of the hyacinths around his penal colony (p. 184) and childhood sights of the establishment are straight examples:

MIGUEL. It beats me. How could one have been so completely without any premonition? I have seen this wall from the outside – I don’t know how many times – maybe over a hundred times. We used to go boating from the family house in Akoka; quite often we would take this route. Sometimes we simply came to meet the fishermen in the evenings as they came in with their catch – over there, in that direction. The prisoners would look out from the windows and wave at us. Sometimes we waved back. At least I did, as a child anyway. Maybe I even waved to someone standing against the bars of that very window. There was nothing like the water hyacinth then, so the fish market was a regular event. (Pause.) In all those pleasure rides, I never thought I would be looking outwards from this side. The thought never crossed my mind. (p. 186).

The eventual fate of the detainees is echoed in the scene of a canoe trying to break through the hyacinths. There is a “Scramble of feet towards the window. Distant splashes on lagoon... Shouts from the other windows along the wall urging on the lone paddler... Loud cheers from the entire length of the wall. The cheers slow down. Change of tone from optimism to depression” (p. 189) as the lone paddler fails to break through and gives up trying. Immediately, we have the cue: “Fade in Yoruba-Cuban music, a ceremonial chant for Yemanja. A man’s footsteps descend a wooden staircase, slowing down as they get closer to the bottom. Footsteps stop. A pause” (p. 190). The play then presents us with Miguel’s mother (as we later discover), softly intoning a dirge-like hymn to her water goddess as the scene changes from Miguel’s prison cell to his mother’s home. Footsteps, chuckles, a record playing loud African-Cuban music on and off, laughs, sighs, sound of chairs scraping against the floor, sound of suitcase hitting the floor, keys turning in the lock and doors

creaking open weave in and out of long descriptive conversations that are mostly reminiscences and dramatised flashbacks.

These sounds invoke the virtual surroundings of Tiatin's home, Miguel's disastrous trip to the boat house in search of refuge and visit to the airport in his desperate attempt to abscond from his bail. There, Miguel's anticipation rises phenomenally as he is surrounded by "Airport sounds. Jet engines warming up in the background, roar at full throttle, fading off. The somewhat muted motions of an airport stirring itself awake" (p. 207). However, in-between announcements of arrivals and departures, there is "A loud click as the microphone is switched off. A clipped military voice takes over" (p. 207). The Military Voice, declaiming the jingoism of Battle Against Indiscipline haunts Miguel's every escape route and shuts down his options one by one. In a kind of crescendo:

Sliding doors open towards the end of the broadcast, slide shut and cut off the words. The open-air roar of a plane about to take off. Sibilant screech as it taxis towards take-off. Full take-off roar, fading off into distance. Over vanishing plane, fade in the mournful sound of foghorns, then a gentle lap of waters. (p. 216).

We know Miguel's fate is sealed despite the ironic statement of his friend Chime that dawn is breaking (p. 217). The sounds invading our world clearly make a case for this:

Mix ecstatic section of Yemanja's ceremonial music which later changes to elegiac. About thirty seconds, gradual fading out, leaving the sound of water splashing against the sides of a canoe as two paddles stab into thickly clogged water. Occasionally the paddles drag up seeming debris which splash back dully into the lagoon as if it has been dredged up from an unending tangle. Heavy breathing and even groans betray exertion beyond normal paddling (p. 216-217).

One quickly sources Miguel's despondency and resignation as "The sound of water rises to huge splashes. Then tones down to a more rhythmic lapping against a stone wall" (p. 219). This re-sets us in the detainees' prison cell and their final psychological wrestling with impending death. As they are led out to the firing squad, our ears pick up the author's cues: "Bolts are withdrawn. A wooden bar is raised from its rest against the gate. The wooden gate creaks open. Immediately there is noise from a distant crowd. Audible moans of "No", "No", "No". It is a helpless, not aggressive "No". A sudden burst of gunfire. Three single pistol shots, one after the other... Fade in dirge from Yemanjá's music" (p. 224/225). In swift descriptive details, the play exploits the listener's imagination and concentrates their mind on the tragic naivety of Tiatin, the foreboding future awaiting Miguel and his prison mates and the haunting populism of the military junta. The play uses silences and pauses to convey anxiety and tranquility, and hope and despair, enclosing the listener tightly in the unfolding catastrophe that befalls Miguel. Noisy sequences with several voices and sound effects contrast skillfully with passages of interior monologue depicting the paralysis of will that subsumes Miguel as he surrenders to his fate. The ritualistic setting of Tiatin's home and cultic boat house off-shore jars with the grey foreboding cells of the penal colony which in turn contrasts with the noisy sequences at the airport. These locations provide the play with its momentum and signal the underlying tensions and mood of the characters from exuberance to forlornness, from "ideological/cultural" clashes to personality conflicts.

Although the focus is on Miguel, the play has multiple storylines running in parallel – heavy hints of slavery, colonialism, ancestral worship, military dictatorship and personal misfortunes – supplying both great entertainment and a dark, distressing underside in which the listener experiences fear mixed with ecstasy. Although Miguel, the main character, is a condemned drug courier he snatches the sympathies of the listener through his protestation of innocence and characterisation of the military dictatorship as unjust and absurd in their retroactive decrees. There is an emotional conflict between him and his mother; a moral struggle between him and the establishment; and a human dilemma between him and his co-accused. These levels of conflict create a plurality of worlds and clashing views in which the common injustice

faced by Miguel and his co-detainees is heightened into a supra narrative on the ills of a postcolonial society, and the ordinary life of Tiatin, for instance, is laced with the mysteries of Yemanjá. The polarities or, rather, oscillation between the commonplace and the significant, the ordinary and the mysterious, and fear and ecstasy supply the overwhelming ambience of *Scourge* and make this a radio play that grips our imaginative participation and sets our teeth on edge throughout as listeners.

In *Zia*, sound helps the role-doubling of the characters as inmates, members of the military regime and ordinary citizens. This is noticed particularly in Commandant who is a stub for the Head of State and Sebe Irawe, the drug baron, social fixer and false shaman. As the play opens, Commandant is leading an explosive cabinet meeting in which the workings of the highest organ of state are burlesqued as crude and venal. Through the use of audible gasps (p. 87), guffaws and dutiful laughs (p. 88/97), derisive chorus (p.89/90), hidden loudspeakers (p. 107), ghostly footsteps (p. 103/171), voices without faces (p. 104), nameless faces in the “Song of Displaced Moralities” (p. 174) and other dramatised songs the real world of the prison collides with the world of the military junta, the world of international politics and the quotidian scrummage of ordinary citizens on various backstreets.

In the clash between the Head of State and his Director of Security, the Commandant’s nickname as Hyacinth is ironically celebrated by the cabinet. As the hyacinths are choking marine life and making navigation hazardous in the lagoon, the Head of State adopts this as his personal profile:

COMMANDANT. Gentlemen, I propose three hearty cheers for the water hyacinths – Hip! Hip! Hip!

INMATES. Hurray!

COMMANDANT. Hip! Hip! Hip!

INMATES. Hurray!

COMMANDANT. (standing). And make this a truly big one for Commodore Hyacinth himself, the Commander-in-Chief, and your Cell Commandant – Hip! Hip! Hip!

INMATES. (throwing buckets, cups, brooms, etc., in air) Hurray-ay-ay-ay-ay!!!

COMMANDNANT (waves his arms grandly). Now that is the sound of stability. And security. (*Sits.*) (pp. 89-90)

Matters come to a head in his tirade against his Director of Security:

COMMANDANT. Shall I explode?

CHORUS. Explode

COMMANDANT. Am I or am I not overdue for explosion?

A loud explosion follows effected by the SERGEANT-MAJOR with an inflated paper bag. COMMANDANT sinks back in his chair, exhausted. Applause from the inmates. (pp. 93-94)

From then on the play fixes the Head of State and his cabinet as rogues who deserve to be behind bars. As for the crafty and dissembling Chief Sebe Irawe, he is the alter-ego of the Head of State, the civilian face of the hyacinths (p. 119). In the “Song of the Social Prophylactic”, performed by himself, his portrait is clear:

Before you start to look at me  
So censorious  
Just remember it's all basic  
Man must wack

And so for a very modest fee  
Parsimonious  
I act as a social prophylactic  
Man must wack (p. 124/125)

Authorial cue further directs that: “During the song, the scene is swiftly altered to indicate the interior of SEBE’s home...” (p. 126). The “Song of the Diplomatic Bag” (p. 136) soon swings the scene back to the prison cell where Miguel, Detiba and Emuke are playing draughts. The dreadful mood of impending death slowly seeps into the cell through “the muffled sound of

foghorns” (p. 139). Elsewhere, the “Rap of the Military Time-Machine” swings the whole play into a mock ironic war-march in which “The prisoners stomp on stage in a variety of military cast-offs, some with gas masks – half-face with goggles – several with “Tyson” crew-cuts, cavorting in “rap” motions. They go through their contortions in precision drill, chanting the chorus in “rap-recitativo” mode. WING-COMMANDER (**a double of the COMMANDANT, my note**) takes the solo, later joined by SEBE who hugs himself with delight and dances with approval as the WING-COMMANDER develops his campaign of “reforms” (p. 160).

The war-march ceases with a military voice coming over the hidden loudspeakers, declaiming the junta’s cynical jingoism - Battle Against Indiscipline – and the scene shifts to the cell of Miguel and company, with the premonition of death hanging thickly in the air and set by the detainees’ song of “Farewell, Social Lion” (p. 169). And when the end comes for the detainees, the scene is virtually reconstructed by the “Sound of distant machine-gun fire... A pause, then three spaced-out single shots... In the background, the prisoners’ voices rise in a dirge” (p. 179). What all of this adds up to is the neoromantic lexicon of metamodernism – the plurality of worlds, the subversion of reality with irreality and the ironic detachment of the characters (the prisoners) from their doubles outside the prison walls – ordinary citizens on the streets of Lagos and bureaucrats in the corridors of power – as they satirise the ills of their society behind prison bars. The prison offers them the interstitial space to parody their own world and dramatise the prisms which make postcolonialism a long unnerving encounter with a self-serving bureaucracy and a hybrid popular culture.

### **Lighting**

As a radio play, the passage of time and change of mood and scene is highlighted through dialogue in *Scourge*. Opening the play, the prison Superintendent intimates us that “A warder will be along before evening with an extra mattress” (p. 183). Shortly afterwards, he states his sympathies to the new detainees: “I am sorry about how things have turned out for you this morning” (p. 183). There is a hint here that the detainees arrive prison in the afternoon and although they are anxious, they are not yet pessimistic. The day

is still bright. This contrasts with the flashback to Tiatin's home. We know it is late in the night from Miguel's approach to his mother: "Tiatin. What are you doing up so late?" (p. 190). Darkness soon invades the conversation between mother and son, their anxiety rises and the mood of hopelessness and resignation sets in. When Miguel ends this late night parley, although he is going to "stay with a friend – you know him, Chime – tonight" (p. 202), the outlines of the impending tragedy are firmly set. Hope returns gingerly as dawn breaks as Miguel imagines he will be able to jump bail: "By six in the morning we are through the toll gates. By the time the Tribunal issues a bench-warrant, I'll be over the border" (p. 204).

But Tiatin, ironically, reduces that hope when she tells Miguel, "Be quiet. You understand nothing. Just bring in your poor abandoned friend so we can all get some sleep before morning" (p. 205). The next flashback recalls the hustle and bustle of a busy airport, with authorial cue suggesting time of day through "The somewhat muted motions of an airport stirring itself awake" (p. 207). The resurgence of hope conveyed by another dawn is, however, quickly drained by the Military Voice hunting Miguel's every step in the airport foyer. He misses his plane and contrives another plan to flee the country at nightfall via the creeks. Night is so unpromising as Miguel finds out – all the creeks are clogged up by water hyacinths and his canoe returns to shore at dawn with the fugitive fully persuaded of his own doom. When his abettor, Chime, states that "Dawn is breaking, Miguel" (p. 217), he retorts, "Worse than dawn will find us if we remain here" (p. 217).

Dawn has turned into dusk for Miguel. As the flashback returns us to his prison cell, we find him and his fellow detainees being ushered out at dawn to the firing squad. There is dramatic irony when the prison Superintendent tells them, "Well my friends, good luck. See you on my evening rounds" (p. 223). The "placelessness" and "in-betweenness" that are the tropes of metamodernism are conveyed in the interchangeability of dawn and dusk, the parallel worlds of Tiatin and Miguel, and the penal moat and the airport foyer – all imagined and experienced by the listener both through the passage of time and the difficult moods this suggests for the characters. They are the

inhabitants of Soyinka's "fourth stage" - "the chthonic realm...the area of stress of the human will" (Soyinka, 1975:89).

Contrastively, the opening of *Zia* is "A row of cells in a half-arc on one side of the stage. On the other side is one large cell, lit by a kerosene lantern and two or three candles" (p. 85). This dismal envelope alters frequently according to the worlds and profiles that the inmates assume. Four of such worlds, with matching profiles, regularly come alive in *Zia*, overlapping, colliding and incestuous – the prison, the cabinet, international politics, and the daily life on the streets. Although often, the hurly-burly of seamless narratives unfolding on-stage anonymises the demarcations between these worlds, usually the transitions are aided by authorial cues about lights. For instance, when the inmates stop role playing and resume their profile as offenders behind bars, "The lights are blown out, leaving only the corridor light. Mats and mattresses are rolled back in place and occupied" (p. 103). At other times, when they perform ditties, "Someone begins to stamp to the rhythm. In a few moments the cell is filled with gyrating figures in silhouette, the corridor bulb leaving a pool of light forestage..." (p. 105). If an individual cell is the stage, "A naked electric bulb hangs from the ceiling" (p. 106/138) to cast the inmates in a sharp relief.

The spot light acts to intensify both the narrative and the psychological pressure that particular inmates – especially, Miguel and his fellow detainees – are experiencing. When the ubiquitous Military Voice bleats the jingo on Battle Against Indiscipline from hidden loudspeakers, the light fades out on individual cells but is full on in the general cell where the role players can respond to it in sync or out of sync with their roles (p. 113). Sometimes, "(T)he spot traverses stage to reveal the general cell" (p. 148), thereby moving along the half-arc and moving the storyline with it. The variety of acts in multiple locations on-stage requires various parts of the stage to be darkened out so that lights come on and off to pause or resume the narrative acts individually. For instance, this has a telling effect on cell "C" when the spot light effects a change of scene from the public street where a mock concert has just ended on the reverberation of "I've got you in a trap" to Miguel's cell which, as light comes on, is flooded by the Military Voice from hidden loudspeakers: "...Fight

the drug menace. Drug dealers are national saboteurs – sniff them out! Root them out! Forward with BAI, the vanguard of our national redemption” (p. 167).

Miguel and company are indeed in a trap from which they cannot escape. It is arguable that the ironic detachment accompanying the various double roles of the prisoners is choreographed by the interplay of light and location. This imbues the songs and speech-acts as liminal episodes in a continuing narrative on the ersatz cultural and political values of a collapsing social order. The “oscillation” of light between various centres of narration on stage fits into the carefree assemblage of multiple art forms in *Zia* and is sustained by collage and parataxis (“the mundanely surreal and the ordinarily strange”), as much as by myth and metaxy.

### **Stage Décor**

As can be anticipated, stage décor is imagined in *Scourge* because it is a radio play. The prison cell is simulated by an “echoing corridor... Jangle of a bunch of keys... A heavy steel door (that) swings open... The door clangs shut and the key is turned again in the lock” (p. 183). We then have references to the ferociously proliferating water hyacinths, the lapping of water and lagoon sounds. Important visual tableaux of the home of Tiatin, the boathouse where Yemanja is worshipped, the frenetic activities at a local airport and the grim execution ground are described to us by the characters or heavily hinted by complementary sounds.

There is a much larger physical décor in *Zia* – there is the row of cells in a half-arc, and an assortment of accessories - plastic chairs, packing cases, broken stools, benches, camp beds, pillows, mats and mattresses, broomsticks, buckets, dustbins, planks, rags, towels, enamel and tin mugs and plates, visible stains on walls and floors – employed by the inmates to “create sets for the various enactments” (p. 85).

The visual tableau for each of the four worlds – the prison, the cabinet, international politics, and the daily life on the streets – appears arranged around specific ideograms on stage: the soiled prison floor; the seamy cabinet room, the sunny daily life on the streets and the messy anteroom of

international politics. The accessories on stage are assembled in a two-dimensional fashion - they are not intended to “paint” some landscape in an illusionary manner, but to point up the contrived nature of the dramatic action unfolding on stage. Perhaps, in some Brechtian sense, we are clearly aware this is theatre, and the doubling of roles and the direct admission by many of the characters as role players, especially, when they are role-playing the cabinet and other high-wigs in society, the high-life music and the overtly caricatured roles recall Brecht’s significant dictum for his Epic theatre – theatre as presentation rather than representation.

Altogether, the artificiality of the stage is the “estrangement” tool that enables the characters to mock their real life assumptions and to present to the reader and audience a version of society whose familiar details of malaise and mercenary impulses are flayed relentlessly as irrational and unreal. There is a built-in irony in this irrationality since the characters are actually exaggerated copies of classes of people in society. The quirky tone that accomplishes the burlesqued life on stage presents a certain liveness of its own in which the ironic detachment of the characters facilitates their very engagement with the issues presented in their varied roles. Less directly, perhaps, but this is also true of, particularly, Miguel in *Scourge*.

All of this fits into Soyinka’s depiction of the ironic detachment of actors playing his art-deity Ogun as not “copying actuality” but merely stepping out as “the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering visions symbolic of the transitional gulf, interpreting the dread power within whose essence he is immersed as agent of the choric will” (Soyinka, 1988:23). As a mimic, Soyinka’s actor adopts the persona of Ogun by copying him; however, through ironic detachment, the actor challenges the illusion of playing Ogun by stepping out of character at will, becoming merely Ogun’s mouthpiece. I have argued in my Introduction that this habit explains the composite and inexact processes of self-identity, communal well-being and the politics of postcolonialism in the carnivalesque portraiture of society that we find in most of Soyinka’s plays. In *Scourge* and *Zia*, metamodernism appears to provide an additional direct window into the liminal postcolonial cosmos in Soyinka’s theatre.

## **Placelessness and Futurelessness – Unmasking the National Elites in Postcolonial States**

I have depended at length on the thesis of Vermeulen and Akker (2010) to isolate and analyse the constitutive elements of metamodernism in the theatre of Wole Soyinka. I have not adopted their thesis without my own criticism and, consequently, refurbishment partly by my criticisms and also by way of Nicolas Bourriaud's (2009) explication of altermodernism. The metamodernism I have followed here is, therefore, the coincidence of their views, certain of Bourriaud's and my contributions. Principally, I have retained from Vermeulen and Akker the notion that metamodernism is an oscillation between the distant poles of modernism and postmodernism and the philosophical construct underpinning it in the historicism of Immanuel Kant, specifically, his "as if" logicism. I have extended Bourriaud's ideas of creolism and nomadism, exemplified his "heterochronia" and furnished out the "alter" in his altermodernism. My contributions have been to join Vermeulen, Akker and Bourriaud and demonstrate that postmodernism is a continuing cultural praxis that flexibly allows new outgrowths such as metamodernism to derive essential ingredients from its own roots. The literary conditions of metamodernism are, therefore, not post-postmodern or contra-postmodern but essentially meta-postmodern or postmodern in an extra manner. That "extra" is an imprecise element that will vary according to the artist's or dramatist's instinctual and ideological preferences in a global culture that has become dominated by nomadism and archipelography.

Applied to the theatre of Soyinka in *Scourge* and *Zia*, the main impulses of metamodernism hold well, and illuminate the perspectives of the characters in a way in which their local concerns fit into global political issues around nationhood and selfhood, and the protection of social rights. It is easy to get lost in the array of neo-historical references and the several subterfuges (songs, myths, disorienting layers of disparate reminiscences, plays-in-a-play, pidgin English, African/Yoruba etiologies of social or personal misfortune, etc.) employed in both plays to inflate the pungency of Soyinka's attack on an immoderate, inflexible and murderous regime. The placelessness and futurelessness that these strategies convey can be bewildering at least.

However, it is hard to miss the fact that dramatic action, altogether, actually oscillates in the undefinable space between modernism and postmodernism in which every constructive constituent of the human condition is subservient to its opposite and lesser form. In political terms, *Scourge* and *Zia* continue Soyinka's exposure of the mission of the national elites of postcolonial states in concurrence with Frantz Fanon's (1968) view that it "has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism" (1968:152). Neil Lazarus (1999) argues it better:

If the state that emerges from colony to nation comes to be dominated by the national middle classes, capitalist social relations will be extended. This is the "neo-colonial" option; a capitalist world system made up – "after colonialism" – of nominally independent nation-states, bound together by the logic of combined and uneven development, the historical dialectic of core and periphery, development and underdevelopment" (1999:79).

It is clear that Soyinka's ire is directed against the "mission of the national elites" and his sympathies are on the side of the exploited and the powerless. However, in view of the paralysis and pessimism that conclude *Scourge* and *Zia*, the possibility of redemption and renewal that we stumble upon in certain of his characters seems to peter out in a landscape covered by the ever-recurring timelessness and twilightness of postcolonial disorder.

## CONCLUSION

### The Ends of Myth, Ritual and Postcoloniality in Soyinka's Theatre

#### **Liminality and Postcoloniality**

Given the questions I posed in my Introduction (see page 13), the heart of this thesis is found in the liminal world inhabited by Soyinka's characters in my study texts. Essentially, liminality presents in Soyinka's theatre the physical and mental constructs of the lived world of his characters as concurrent experiences of cultural rootedness and displacement. In their cultural rootedness we witness the characters' capacity for inventing myths to sustain their traditionalism and act out their resistances and compromises with agencies of fate and self-will, and a social order that is arbitrary and opportunistic. This cultural rootedness, which informs their primary identity as postcolonial subjects, is assailed and displaced at every turn by the postcoloniality embedded in the historical fundamentals of the societies in these texts. As a result, the characters are constantly ill at ease within their world and remain encumbered by the contradictory impulses of order and chaos, hope and despair, and traditionalism and modernity at work in their lived reality. In other words, within the postcolonial world that we meet in my study texts, the dramaturgical functions that liminality serves in Soyinka's theatre inform the shattering clash between society's need for order and stability and the individual's chase after self-will and self-preservation.

For instance, in my study texts, most of Soyinka's characters wrestle with ambiguities and ambivalence on account of the liminality that postcoloniality engenders. They are negotiating a passage through the dislocation and disruption engendered by post-colonialism to a future identity that is neither their pre-colonial nor their current postcolonial state. In each play, arguably, this passage is a thrust from the seeming fixities of a pre-colonial past to the loose, questionable and erratic modernity of the postcolonial present. Turner (1971) argues that this threshold eventually ends in some transformative outcome for the participants in the liminal phase. Turner refers to this possible positive phase as "communitas"; however, other theorists, for instance, Thomassen (2009), Szokolczai (2009) and Horvath (2013) have concluded

that in the modern era, liminal situations can be an unending period of insecurity, trauma, and existential angst. As Bhabha notes: “It is in this space of liminality, in the “unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty” that we encounter ... the narcissistic neuroses of ...[postcolonial] discourse” (Bhabha, 2004/2012: 214).

In my exemplar plays, this in-between period is projected as a series of disastrous acts of usurpation and truncation of communal norms by willful individuals, for instance, in *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. The outcome of this willfulness is often devastating. In *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*, there is race-abnegation, instead of race-retrieval – the forest gnomes thwarted the expectations of their human neighbours who wanted illustrious heroes, by summoning ancestors who were deeply involved in the perpetuation of gross inhumanity and injustice in precolonial times. In *A Play of Giants* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*, we witness the erasure of the state as a nation and its replacement with the erection of the state as a personal fiefdom. Similarly, the confusing social disorder and generalised anxieties associated with postcoloniality are huge narratives in *A Scourge of Hyacinths* and *From Zia, With Love*. Effectively, in Soyinka's theatre, liminality and postcoloniality act together as dramaturgical mechanisms for the conflicted neuroses displayed by the characters.

In other ways, liminality and postcoloniality also function as some time-lag mechanism that moves forward the arguments of Soyinka's plays whilst distorting the linearity of the dramatised narrative. This mechanism engraves on stage the cultural logic of past-vs-present, temporal-vs-spatial, occult-vs-secular, and order-vs-disorder. Performance sites, either indicated directly by authorial directions or insinuated into the dialogic flow, accentuate these binarisms. Additionally, they are configured by an approach to characterisation in which protean heroes and their sidekicks – for instance, Professor and Murete (*The Road*), Elesin and Praise Singer (*Death and the King's Horseman*), Forest Father and Aroni (*A Dance of the Forests*), Oba Danlola and Sarumi (*Kongi's Harvest*) – dictate the tempi, pauses and stresses of performance. They mark the thematic gestures and pulse of the whole performance and help to theatricise the irony, burlesque or satire intended

within the flow and frame of play. Consequently, the commentary that Soyinka mounts his works upon “a wide cultural perspective, with poetic overtones, fashioning the drama of existence” (Swedish Nobel Prize Panel, 1986) is an outcome of this function on stage. It is a conception of liminality and postcoloniality which, borrowing the words of Bhabha (1996), puts “the ‘self’ at the centre of a series of concentric circles that move through the various cycles of familial, ethnic and communal affiliation to the largest one, that of humanity as a whole” (Bhabha, 1996: 201).

In my view, overall, Soyinka’s theatre treats postcolonialism as a quarry of epistemic notions; as, chiefly, the instructive interplay of the discourses of power and knowledge which shapes identity and social norms. Its main personae are “political” and social leaders, as well as cultural figures whose originality and profanity, against the traditions prevailing in their world, lead to a tragic impasse for them and their communities. Myth and ritual function as models of thought and human action in a way that prepares the characters for and also, crucially, prevents them from overcoming the gulf between the membranous worlds of the living, the dead, the unborn and the chthonic realm. They remain amorphous in the profound liminality that imbues their acts of self-iteration.

This leads me to the second question I posed in my Introduction: “In what ways is liminality associated with Soyinka’s approaches to the cultural processes of myth, ritual, postcolonialism, the metaphysics of death, modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism?” The best way to sum up my finding in response to this question is to qualify Soyinka’s approaches as inferring the collapse of community and society - a form of social death - in the study texts.

### **Heterotopia and “Das Unheimliche” - The Collapse of Community and Society**

Soyinka’s arcane, almost sacral avowal of parallel universes of the living, the dead, the unborn and the chthonic realm is almost creedal in his amplified fetish of Yoruba mythology (Soyinka, 1976). However, apart from *A Dance of the Forests*, where these realms inform the geography of the stage and

Soyinka's historicism is a canvas of myths, these parallel universes are mostly metaphors in the chaotic jumble of social worlds traversed by his characters. In *Kongi's Harvest*, traffic leads in several directions almost simultaneously to the mountain retreat of Kongi, a similitude of sarcophagus, where he and his occult fraternity are in session. It veers to Danlola's palace where he and his retinue rehearse in elegiac dances the disappearance of their precolonial gravitas; and to Daodu's public house where Segi and others hatch their plot to assassinate Kongi.

In *The Beatification of Area Boy*, the mischiefs of the criminal underworld and the political class, and the misapprehensions of the lower classes interlock and overlap as their separate worlds morph into a singular landscape on stage where the neuroses of anger, fear, violence, fraudulence and mysticism compete. The performance space in *From Zia, with Love* is also an infrastructure of intersecting places in which the dominant architecture of the prison converts into scenes in the state house, the requiem in a stately home, the weed-clogged creeks of a lagoon and an airless airport lounge. This is the operative model in the plays examined by this study.

Theoretically, this insinuates Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Bhabha's notion of a "third space" (Foucault, 1971, 1984; Bhabha, 2004/2012). The heterotopic space is a set of places, existing together in a non-hierarchical manner, similar to Soyinka's interpretation of Yoruba mythology in which there are four parallel worlds of the living, the dead, the unborn and the chthonic realm, where the ambiguities of cultural identities are contested as a means of escape from social control and repressive norms. In such parallel places, in real life, people transgress boundaries, and limits are further pushed out. This arguable postmodern and poststructuralist invention of "place" as a heterotopic entity has gained traction with human geographers and social theorists for whom heterotopia describes the multiplicity of worlds in which different ideas of social identity compete and attempt to break free from the hegemony of a central leitmotif (Soja, 1996; Gordon, 2003; Franklin-Brown, 2012). Consequently, whether in the classroom (Blair, 2009), in trains, planes and automobiles (Mead, 1995), in archaeology (Preucel, 2008) or narrative theory and identity politics (Chan, 2001), the order of things in heterotopias is

a large sense of “otherness”, a peculiar set of worlds which are neither here nor there, and are simultaneously physical and mental. This is the resounding echo of the variant applications of liminality that I have addressed in this study.

Moreover, it aids my aim of finding the means to unravel the imagery and symbolism inscribed often in Soyinka’s theatre, in particular, in view of the overall uncanniness that the dense imagery conjures. The uncanny in Soyinka’s theatre manifests in the admixture of the familiar and unfamiliar, for instance, in *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*. It is the interpolation of myth and history (in *Death and the King’s Horseman* and *From Zia, with Love*); the overlap of fatalism, traditionalism and modernity (in *A Scourge of Hyacinths* and *Kongi’s Harvest*), and the fantasia of power and phony politics (in *A Play of Giants* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*). The topos (places and situations) created in these plays are familiar but thrown together incongruously in a way that bolsters whatever possible genre Soyinka appears to be working in.

Satire is present in all of the plays through the grotesqueries of characters daubed in the smear of self-alienation, for instance, Gunema, Kasco, Kamini and Tuboum in *A Play of Giants* and the Aweri fraternity in *Kongi’s Harvest*. The sublime tragic impulses in *Kongi’s Harvest*, *The Road* and *Death and the King’s Horseman* co-mingle with the surreal idiosyncrasies of Kongi, Professor and Elesin which make them both enchanting and repellent. The comical, and possibly absurd, pieces in *A Play of Giants* and *The Beatification of Area Boy* twist our notions of reality into irreality, and the hyperreal. In this way, Soyinka’s theatre is a congeries of visual tropes and variations of antipodal characters. It is congruent here to spin the uncanny climate inundating Soyinka’s symbolism within Freud’s (1919) notions of the “uncanny”, a translation of the German word “*Das Unheimliche*”.

Differently, Bhabha’s notion of a “third space” (Bhabha, 2004/2012) is helpful in expounding Soyinka’s parallel worlds. The “third space” coheres in the cleavages between two different but interacting cultures, acting and reacting in a dynamic and open-ended manner. There is a process of translation and

transformation within that interface, resulting in hybridity. As Ashcroft et al (2003) have shown, ultimately, with globalism, the uniqueness of all forms of culture is an intellectual abstraction; postcoloniality is the impact of the European Empire on its colonies and how this alters, simultaneously, the civilizing mission of the Empire. In Rutherford's (1990) word: "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity" (Rutherford, 1990: 211). There is a "mutual and mutable" (Bhabha, 1994) process in which the binarism of the coloniser/colonised as fixed positions is wedged open by a new cultural presence and difference, namely, hybridity. Ambiguity and instability are coefficients of this realm and define its anti-structural propensities.

However, depending on the critic's political commitment, hybridity, in this sense of translation and transformation, could be positive or negative. It could be seen as positive where the colonised is seen as embracing modernity; or negative, if they are resisting modernity and re-asserting precolonial values that have become outmoded in the march towards an idealised future. However, in the writings of Bhabha and Soyinka, hybridity is more than these two extreme poles of postcolonial identity. For Soyinka, in particular, in my Introduction, I raise two additional propositions which also fit into Bhabha's concept of the "third space": the chaotic territory in which idealised conceptions of sociality strive to come to terms with difference and acceptance, accommodation and rejection of the synthesis of the cultural dividends concomitant to postcolonialism; and the resurgent and sometimes muted claims of valuable autochthonous social praxis. Hybridity, therefore, is a social continuum in which the postcolonial subject acts out different responses at different times when faced with the complex realities of the postcolonial world. The performativity that I have argued as the core of Soyinka's "fourth stage" dramatic idiom resonates here in the replete self-identities that the characters in my study texts adopt to shape the realities of their world. They are in that third space, that heterotopic space where a form of social death (postcoloniality) marks their "threshold-crossing, shape-shifting and boundary-violating" acts, borrowing Conquergood's (1995) phrase.

In this study, the cultural processes of myth and ritual, the metaphysics or traditionalism of death, and the tropes of modernism, postmodernism and

metamodernism create important vistas into the liminal world of Soyinka's characters. They provide unique inferences of liminality, and help me to show that Soyinka's characters are battling those grand narratives of community, order, progress, enlightenment, and modernity, and pressing into the margins and borders of reality where everything is fluid and unsettled. As Bhabha reflects, "...the temporal movement and passage that [this] allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 1994: 4). This is the realm of myth-making, the deconstruction and reconstruction of primordial myths, the fashioning of urban legends, and the expansive vocabulary and grammar of postmodern life. In Soyinka's artifice of parallel worlds, we encounter in the metaphysics that he grounds in Yoruba mythology the funiculi of postmodern narratives in which the presence of alienating and disturbing worlds is part of the anatomy of the lived world. In my view, what this "third space" offers in Soyinka's theatre, especially, in terms of its postcoloniality, is a compelling account of the collapse of community and society in which marginality is not a slipstream but mainstream metaphor for the irruptions and instabilities in the postcolonial world of his characters.

The metaphorical and structural difference between community and society is well established, although, contested and constricted (Tönnies, 1957; Weber, 1968; Camic, Gorski and Trubec, 2005). However, in Soyinka's theatre, there is a strong and pervasive notion of community in the overlapping social groups belonging to a political or social class. To cite obvious identifications, there are regime insiders (in *From Zia, with Love*) and the political class (in *A Play of Giants*). There is the moneyed/middle class (in *The Beatification of Area Boy* and *A Scourge of Hyacinths*). There are laypeople, or ordinary folks, whose voices and faces are heard and seen in the rowdy market places (in *Death and The King's Horseman*), the communes (in *The Road*), the public festivities (in *Kongi's Harvest*), and animist convocations (in *A Dance of the Forests*). The social interactions within these groups, and the contradictions and ambiguities that permeate those relations at personal levels usually inform the collision of the parallel worlds in Soyinka's theatre.

The crises besetting these groups are fronted by iconic characters, such as Professor and Say-Tokyo-Kid in *The Road*; Elesin and Iyaloja in *Death and the King's Horseman*; Danlola and Kongi in *Kongi's Harvest*; Forest Father and Old Man in *A Dance of the Forests*; Kamini et al and UN bureaucrats in *A Play of Giants*; and Hyacinth and Miguel in *From Zia with Love*. They are not “archetypes” in strict Jungian terms – they are not, as in Jungian psychology, images from the nation’s collective unconscious, universally present in the individual psyches that we come across in Soyinka’s theatre. But they are archetypal in a different sense – a literary sense. Soyinka appears to be deploying them as constantly recurring motifs in his dramatic narratives; firstly, as basic referents in his mythopoesis and more as characters sharing similar dysfunctional traits recurrently in the liminal world of his plays. These traits and the situations they engender place the characters in the various postcolonial contexts that I have described in Chapters 1 to 4 and bequeath a level of social realism to Soyinka’s theatre. By populating his plays with these archetypes, meaning in Soyinka’s theatre is then shaped by cultural and psychological attributes, such as I have shown in exploring the tropes of traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism in Soyinka’s theatre. Moreover, based on those tropes, the archetypal contests in Soyinka’s plays are often overwhelming and always sink the bridge between idealism and realism, and between a romantic attachment to mythicised norms and an ironic detachment from illusory optimisms. Similar archetypal conflicts, arguably, describe the postcolonial contexts we notice in Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *The Swamp Dwellers* (1964), and *The Strong Breed* (1964). Such conflicts afflict the mentality and will of the corporatists and social rebels in *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973) and *Opera Wonyosi* (1981).

In my view, the process and outcomes of these archetypal conflicts create the dystopia that is recurrent in my exemplar plays, in which the world as known or hoped for constantly crashes with grave consequences for the archetypal protagonists, as well as for their societies. The composite portrait of the thought streams of these societies as recurring leitmotifs, depicting dehumanisation, social injustice and arrested development, fills us with

apprehension as the societies appear to be swirling downwards, unhinged from their own speculative orbit and heading out into the deep unknown. In effect, Turner's (1971) optimism that liminality will eventually engender "communitas" – a communitarian model of society – appears quite distant in Soyinka's drama and has been challenged as a simplistic notion of the role of agency and structure (Thomassen, 2009; Szokolczai, 2009; Horvath, 2013). Perhaps, this is the vital reason why Soyinka's theatre appears to beg the question of a revolutionary vision of society simply by alternating the human essence around the axis of creative-destructive tendencies, in contrast to, say, the plays of Femi Osofisan or Ngugi wa Thiong'o in which unambiguous revolutionary change and agency are paramount vectors (Hutchison, 2005; Banham, Osofisan & Njogu, 2014).

This invites the third question posed in my Introduction: "In view of the poetics of his "fourth stage", can liminality explain the presentation of the performative self embedded in Soyinka's play texts?" I sum up my finding below.

### **The Frames of Myth, Ritual Festival and Postcoloniality – Beyond the Fourth Stage?**

The presentation of the performative self embedded in my study texts is, overall, Soyinka's method of discharging his burden of myth and ritual; he distills the archetypal traits encoded in the ritual observances associated with Ogun, Obatala and Sango into his "fourth stage" dramatic idiom to substantiate his own literary methodology, as well as to furnish his plays with the *raison d'être* for his characters' existence. Additionally, he inserts into the mythologies of these deities the Yoruba's religious faith in the causal outworking of the parallel worlds of the living, the unborn, the dead and the chthonic realm as the typical substrates of the cultural cosmos and social discourse of his characters. As a result, in Soyinka's theatre, space-time categories are distorted by this particular use of myth and ritual because time past and time present collide, and the spatial representation of both is more illusory than real. Whether we are considering the ways Soyinka employs space to demarcate/invigorate the binarism of traditionalism and modernity; or how the inferences of myth and history signify cultural identity and social

position, a certain spatial ambivalence aids Soyinka's redaction of Yoruba mythic worldviews.

In his inventiveness, Soyinka does not sustain his theatre on particular specimens of Yoruba festivals in any realistic sense of a direct correspondence, as I have shown in the plays that form the primary material of this study; he mainly frames his theatre around the visual tropes that these festivals present. For instance, in *A Dance of the Forests*, the magic realism that energises the fiendish clash between the dead, the living, the unborn and the chthonic realm emanates from a profusion of festal rites, rather than from a specific set of Yoruba festivals. In *The Road*, the festivities associated with Ogun, the daemon of war and patron of metalworkers, and those of Agemo, the cult of self-dissolution and communal cleansing, aid our navigation of the roots of the clash between Professor and his commune as metaphors and juxtapositions of the syncretic annotations befuddling Professor and beguiling his cast. In *Kongi's Harvest*, the harvest metaphor played out in the ritual of the New Yam festival, intimates us with the promise of dawn and the presaged communal welcome of plenitude, ultimately shattered by the disastrous bogeyman, Kongi.

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the playboy simulation of Elesin, mixed with the gaiety of the market crowd, is a type of nature festival excessively amplified to make Elesin's fall from grace superlatively dramatic. These festival moments in Soyinka's plays are not an outright actualisation of the sacral authority of these festivals on stage. They are Soyinka's cunning acumen for presenting the worldviews and behaviours of his dramatis personae as recurrent motifs of the dehumanisation and cultural dislocation in the postcolonial contexts of his plays. As I have stated earlier on, this methodology converts Soyinka's protagonists into archetypes and the challenges they face become more recognisable as universal human problems in any world in which people struggle to master their fate or overcome the numinous effects of the social structure in which they are engaged.

I have argued in this study that the worldviews and behaviours of these archetypes include the occult agency of Fate and the insurgency of ancestral spirits underrated by individual citizens, for instance, in *A Dance of the Forests* and *From Zia, with Love*. There are narrativised details of the dread of the infliction of wrath by gods slighted by the human community and ritual saviours with a divine communal mission, whose volitions tragically affect their community, irrespective of their own personal belief or safety in *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. Soyinka injects propitiatory rites and behaviours that can ward off evil and secure positive auguries into *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest*. He finds similar motifs on the narratives of the caricatures in *A Play of Giants*, Sebe Irawe's musings in *From Zia, with Love*, the reveries of Judge and Trader's panic attacks in *The Beatification of Area Boy*, and Tiatin's anxieties in *A Scourge of Hyacinths*.

These are examples of the mythic paradigms that rarely shift in Soyinka's theatre on account of his attachment to the ritual archetype. The creative and cultural elements I have cited directly complement the festival handles of Soyinka's plays and the ensemble quality of his craft. This is, perhaps, most visible in *A Dance of the Forests* where a group of complementary parts, such as, role doubling, flashbacks and flash-forwards; recitation and music; dance, trance and mime, contribute the singular effect of magic realism. In *Kongi's Harvest*, the mountain retreat of Kongi, the palace of Danlola, the public house of Daodu and Segi and the Independence Square where Kongi falls by, shall we say, the Sword of Damocles, are locales that act as stations in a festival, as well as background metaphors and symbols for the central motif of postcolonial debacle. The stage, constructed as a maximum-security prison with different cells, in *From Zia, with Love* performs a similar effect, uniting the several strands of role doubling, play-within-a-play, high-life music, and overtly caricatured roles into a society imprisoned within its own tomfooleries and barricaded by rites of self-alienation. Professor and Murete (*The Road*), and Praise Singer and Elesin (*Death and the King's Horseman*) are like effigies borne by the crowd in a festival procession, symbolising the community's strength, as much as their mythic beliefs and aspirations.

The iconoclasm we find in *A Play of Giants* is overstated in the presentation of “heavy-throne-like chairs at the top of a wide, sweeping stone stairway” (p. 11), the photo-garlanded balcony of a Third World embassy, and the bloated self-immersed images of Gunema, Kasco, Tamini and Tuboum. Soyinka directs our attention to the coordinated costumes of his cast and the coordinated furniture of their surroundings to achieve the total effect of a parody. If festivals are sometimes rowdy, overcrowded and unreal – this is it. We get the same clues in *The Beatification of Area Boy*, aptly subtitled “A Lagosian Kaleidoscope” by Soyinka. This is an overcrowded play that bursts at the seams with innumerable street scenes, involving traders, touts, tramps, trumpeters and tin gods, spawned by a corrupt military dictatorship and their high-class fawners. The array of costumes and stage furniture in many of these plays is paralleled only by several separate but often interrelated story lines that Soyinka weaves into his dramaturgy.

Arguably, from my analyses, Soyinka employs the frames of myth and ritual to diagnose the postcolonial contexts and worldviews of his characters. Myth and ritual also appear pressed into service as a dramaturgical method for achieving the potencies of tragedy (in, for instance, *The Road, Death and the King's Horseman, Kongi's Harvest, From Zia with Love* and *A Scourge of Hyacinths*); and satirical functions (in, for instance, *A Dance of the Forests, A Play of Giants*, and *The Beatification of Area Boy*) in the portrayal of these characters. The frames of myth, ritual, and festival in Soyinka's theatre, and the postcolonial discourses they account for, assume different dimensions in my postulations of his “fourth stage” dramatic idiom. In other scholars' commentaries, Soyinka's “Fourth Stage” essay is seen mostly as his distillation of the tragic properties of African (Yoruba) ritual (Gibbs, 1980; Katrak, 1986; Jones, 1988; Oko, 1992; Gibbs and Lindfors, 1993; Jeyifo, 2001(a), 2001(b); Ebewo, 2002). I admit this is the obvious construct but I have argued throughout this study that it is more – it is actually an envelope for several other possible notions of Soyinka's theatre. For me, it is a freeway into the maze of theoretical conjectures of the performative self.

Consequently, I have covered in Chapters 1 to 4 the modular connections between Soyinka's fourth stage dramatic idiom and the performative models

that they illustrate. I mentioned the Ogun-Obatala model in my Introduction as the kind of constitutive attribute in which the social actor is immersed; it entails creative-destructive essences; vacillation between the extreme poles of calmness and turpitude; the binarisms of hope and despair; traditionalism and modernity, etc. However, unlike most commentators that I have cited, I have not fixed this typology to any of the characters in any specific terms, rather it is the fabric that sustains the panoply of emotions and volitions that the characters, as social actors, employ. They use this to validate or negate their cultural and social identities, whilst encountering the historical agency of postcolonialism. This accounts largely for my discussions of the performative implications denoted by traditionalism, modernism, postmodernism, metamodernism, and postcolonialism as tropes of liminality.

### **Epilogue**

The first play of Soyinka, *The Invention* (1959; Larson, 1971; Motsa, 2005), produced at London's Royal Court Theatre, where he was a resident playwright, and his most recent, *Alapata Apata* (2011), launched at the Ake Arts and Books Festival, Abeokuta, Nigeria in November 2013, probably have nothing in common other than the artistic cunning, aberrant witticism, and sardonic humour typical of his mature plays. However, between them are, at least, 26 other plays and several pieces of skits that form the tapestry of Soyinka's theatre. The eight plays I have studied here and the topics I have addressed are, in my view, a copious illustration of that tapestry. They are arches or apertures into Soyinka's theatrical cosmos, helping me to plumb those either hardly trodden or largely unfamiliar recesses of liminality and postcoloniality, from modernism to metamodernism, and the complex architecture of traditionalism, myth and ritual in his theatre. However, I have not opened the apertures wide enough to cover gender issues in Soyinka's theatre, and as I do spot the paucity of feminist discourse, especially, in the critical scholarship on Soyinka, this is an area I will be exploring in future.

In view of my overt engagement with the worldviews of Soyinka's characters as proper cultural identities in their own right, and not as props for Soyinka's personal world, I am also conveniently light in assessing the nature and scope of Soyinka's own politics in the overall hermeneutics of his theatre. I have

applied several theories, including Soyinka's, to explain key concepts and attributes of his theatre that have had either little or no hearing in the academic press on Soyinka. My view is that Soyinka's theatre is imaginatively built on the aesthetics of ritual and festival and depends for its success on the artful co-mingling and juxtaposition of multiple story lines, complicated by journalistic facts, polysemantic diction and multi-layered imagery. However, apart from his relentless flagellation of hidebound structures, ill-motivated leaders and the social corruption that taints nearly everyone in his cosmos, Soyinka's theatre appears to me elitist rather than radical. His plays suggest his desire for a pluralist world in which political power is exercised with accountability, however, the functionaries are bled from cultural archetypes who are deeply embedded in the social topography of power as dictators and sycophants, ritualist rip-offs and regime retrogrades, and scroungers and surrogate idealists. If the overall pungency is radical, perhaps it is more a testament to the nature of postcolonial Africa on the whole where, in contrast to Western democracies, it is certainly radical to proclaim or defend the exercise of power with accountability when it poses grave risks to the writer/critic's liberty and life. In future work, this is a strain to treat more deeply, especially, in the context of unceasing commentaries on Soyinka's elitism alongside his radicalism.

In terms of Soyinka's cultural perorations and credentials as an authentic formulator of the paradigms of African culture and its vocabularies in art forms, vis-a-vis what he terms European "period dialectics", I am pessimistic about the strong undertow of traditional mythic worldviews in his theatre, in which nearly sacral, unassailable authority is vested in some animist magisterium meshed in mythology. This seems to be held as counter-weight to the crass conditions of postcolonial settings in Soyinka's theatre. Of course, it is arguable that this is ironic Soyinka, since the psychological depth of his plays often assails moribund thought regimes of every skin. Nevertheless, I think this primitive undertow limits Soyinka's theatre to more-or-less a conservative view of modernity.

Additionally, the treatment of society as places where a perverse logic of aberrant social will and manic, impulsive proclivities for self-destruction exists

in Soyinka's theatre presents a striking drama. However, this is often unmediated by an alternative vision of society in the outplay of the crises unfolding on stage. Soyinka might be holding a mirror to society but this mirror appears darkened by the playwright's own misanthropic judgements about people and a persistent artistic connivance in enfeebling the few transformative voices in his theatre in order to make his bogeymen and women more repugnant. There is a repetitive layer in Soyinka's theatre of abject political, social and cultural figures embroiled in fantasy wars of the mind (Professor in *The Road*, Elesin in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Miguel in *A Scourge of Hyacinths*, and Forest Father in *A Dance of the Forests*). Otherwise, they are travesties of power and social justice (Kongi in *Kongi's Harvest*, and the giants in *A Play of Giants*), or mouthpieces for the crudities and raggedness of the social milieu (Sanda in *The Beatification of Area Boy* and Sebe Irawe in *From Zia, with Love*).

The proof text in Soyinka's theatre is probably the comment of Marcellus to Horatio in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Shakespeare, 2009:4). Everywhere we turn, something is rotten in Soyinka's postcolonial state but Horatio's rejoinder to Marcellus, "Heaven will direct it", is patently missing in that world, replaced as it were by personas, rites and myths that fail to guide the state back to health and stability. Soyinka may have created a theatre that is rich, in Jeyifo's words, in "haunting, apocalyptic creations of the imagination ... cumulatively elaborated in hieratic action, emblematic mime, epiphanic image [and] passages of incantatory speech and prose description" (cited in Maduakor, 1986:xii), but I come away from the theatre with a deep sense of disequilibrium and anguished by a combustible social vision that seems to find no room for heroes that dare the chthonic abyss with a transformative mien. Although I disagree with Adedeji's (1987) suggestion that Soyinka's theatre is not overly concerned with setting out a moral lesson but wantonly functions to "set a riddle, not to tell a story" (Adedeji, 1987:105), in this study, I actually find Soyinka socially elusive and politically vague on a transformational, or redemptive vision of society.

Overall, by devising a poetics situated completely in Barthes's poststructuralism, this study adds a novel critical approach to extant pathways

on Soyinka, such as the biographical approaches of Moore (1978), Maduakor (1986), Jones (1987), Wright (1996), and Msiska (1998). It complements studies of the comprehensive repertoire of Soyinka's cultural dependencies and borrowings as in the works of Ogunba (1975), Irele (1980), and Adedeji (1986), and those on Soyinka's comparative European generic assimilations as in Katrak (1986), Oko (1992) and Ebewo (2002). It widens discussions on aspects of narratology and stylistic/linguistic approaches to Soyinka as we find in Booth (1981), Gibbs (1986), Sekoni (1993), Lindfors (2008) and Gates Jr. (2014). Although my explications of postcoloniality in this study are mainly angular to the neo-Marxist and quasi-structuralist approaches of, for instance, Osofisan (1982), Quayson (1997) and Jeyifo (2004), notwithstanding, my contributions open up new flanks on Soyinka's political commitment and ideology. I have altogether avoided the somewhat idiosyncratic Afro-centric approaches of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1983) because they appear to misapply the critical dialogue and morphology of intersections between Western and traditional African aesthetics; and I am not persuaded by their neo-Negritudist ideation of the politics of race and ethnicity (Césaire, 1950/2000; Chinweizu, 1975). Nevertheless, in this study, I have calculatingly smuggled my views into the interminable controversies on Soyinka's prodigious talent as a quintessential African cultural literato.

My study of Soyinka's theatre through the methodology of poststructuralism and following the determinacy of European "period dialectics" (as articulated in modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism) exposes the acts of his protean characters as curious interpretations of their postcoloniality, and their deployment of myth and ritual as the scaffolding for their self-narration. As a kind of looking glass, they reveal the interiorities of Soyinka's fictive world as a house of mirrors in which his eidetic imagery and symbolism, and his polysemantic language are the efficacy of his art. This exclusively different approach discloses something entirely novel about Soyinka's theatre - its multi-semiotic nature is not merely the addenda of myth and ritual, or a curio sourced in festival frames, but the very terra firma of the universe of his characters. My study explores this terra firma and the terrae incognitae of poststructuralism and European "period dialectics" in Soyinka's theatre and

lays them bare as foundational elements of his craft and commitment. This is singularly new in the long tradition of scholarship on Soyinka.

To close, I owe Soyinka a large debt, not just on account of his influence upon my academic career, as one of his former pupils, but much more so in this study where I have critically examined eight of his major plays, partly on the basis of his dramatic theory. As a result, in those parts of this study where I address my own ruminations on his seminal essay “The Fourth Stage” to several aspects of his dramaturgy, I have regaled Soyinka in new robes. Knowingly, any sartorial ingenuity on my part has to be balanced by his own originality. As Appiah (1992, 2004) and Quayson (1997) have borne out, critical commentaries on Soyinka sometimes turn out to be no more than an amplification of his theories applied to his own works. Consequently, some of these commentaries never press beyond the parameters that Soyinka sets in his widely acclaimed essays on culture and literary criticism. However, I have bucked this trend by crossing his “gulf of transition” with my asseveration of the technique of going behind him into the lived reality of his dramatis personae as diverse aspects of their “transitional memory”. Therefore, as he often does, on account of his pronounced art and intellectual vigour, even here, Wole Soyinka, our own William Shakespeare, must be given the honour of the last word:

On the arena of the living, when man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts (the material of drama) have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf, he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon his spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition. (Soyinka, 1976:149).

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