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The drama of Ahmed Yerima : studies in Nigerian theatre

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Chapter One

Nigerian Theatre: From 'Masquerade Drama' to Nigerian Video-Film

Indigenous Nigerian theatre developed from masquerade performances, as evidenced in African theatre history. I believed ritual is a very significant factor in masquerade theatre. Ritual in itself is, in most cases, associated with religious belief and performance. Early Nigerian theatre and indeed drama is not guided by the Aristotelian model as most others are. This is because "drama is far more complex and universal a phenomenon than Aristotle could ever have construed."⁵² Within the traditionalist African context, it becomes difficult to distinguish drama from ritual because if the context of the performance is to be taken into cognizance "a ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency."⁵³ Drama evolved from ritual and, in some cases, it is also a part of the ritual enactment as there are situations where dramatic traditions have developed alongside rituals without any separation from their origins.

Theatre or drama, whichever term we choose to call it, has always existed in one form or another in Africa societies. They both have their foundations in "festivals and religious rituals."⁵⁴ There is no doubt regarding the existence of a robust theatrical tradition in many African societies. Performance of this theatrical tradition, predating colonialism is often executed by actors who regal in masquerade costumes. Masquerade theatre in Nigeria predates colonialism. Until 1914, there was no Nigerian nation, although around 1900, virtually all the regions or ethnic nationalities of what later metamorphosed into Nigeria had come under British domination. Lagos, the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated and administered as one country, Nigeria, in 1914.⁵⁵

The theatre of these individual regions or ethnic nationalities consisted of a different formation before the advent of colonialism. With which of these

⁵² Ogunba, O., "Traditional African Festival Drama", in Oyin, Ogunba and Abiola, Irele, (ed.), *Theatre in Africa* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1978), 3-26

⁵³ Enekwe, O., quoted by Yemi Ogunbiyi in his article "Nigerian Theatre and Drama," in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 5

⁵⁴ Garuba, A., "Introduction," in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), xi

⁵⁵ See Ekwueme, Alex, "The Constitution and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria- Challenges and Prospects", a paper delivered at International Conference on Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects at Imperial College London, 25th June, 2005.

different theatres did the Nigerian theatre practice begin? In order to make an educated guess, one must examine the formation of the Nigerian state and the development of theatre in the different regions that later make up Nigeria. Lagos was the first part of Nigeria to come under colonial domination. Its ports were annexed in 1861 due to the restriction on trade in slaves by the British and the desire to stop the passage of slaves from the hinterland to pirate ships on the coast. The Oil River Protectorate, formed in 1891, which later became Southern Nigeria with its headquarters in Calabar, was formed for the purpose of controlling trade coming down the Niger River. Benin, Bida, and Ilorin were firmly under colonial control by 1897. The Northern part of the country had earlier come indirectly under British rule in 1886, but it was not until 1902 that the whole country came under the rule of colonialism when Lord Lugard became the governor with a determination to rule the whole of the Niger area.⁵⁶

Pre-colonial Theatre

Pre-colonial theatre refers to all theatre practices associated with indigenous pre-colonial polities in Nigeria before 1900. A reference to a vibrant theatrical tradition long before colonial rule is found in the writings of Olaudah Equiano, one of the few black writers of the slave trade period who wrote in 1789 that: “We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians and poets.”⁵⁷

The introduction of the masquerade is attributed to Sango, the Alaafin (paramount ruler) of Oyo who reigned sometime in the fourteenth century. He is thought to have introduced the phenomenon of the ancestor-worship initially called *baba* (father) and later as *egungun* (masquerade), which sometime in the 16th century evolved as court entertainment.⁵⁸ Sango set up masquerade to represent the spirit of his departed father, Oranyan. Joel A. Adededeji writes that, at a special ceremony, Sango “brought the reincarnated spirit of his father to the outskirts of Oyo, set up the ‘Bara’ (royal mausoleum) for his worship and placed ‘Iyamode’ (the old woman of the palace) in charge of the mystery. Her duty was to worship Oranyan’s spirit and to bring him out as a masquerade during an evocation ceremony.”⁵⁹ According to Ogunbiyi, “By the middle of

⁵⁶ Ahmed Yerima, author’s note to *Attahiru*. (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 1998), 6

⁵⁷ See Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or, Gustavus Vasa, The African; Written by Myself*, vol 1. (London: G. Vassa, 1789), 10

⁵⁸ See Adededeji, J.A., “Alarinjo: The Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 221

⁵⁹ See Adededeji J.A., “The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre”, in *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 254-276, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4391149>. 11/12/2009. 08:41

the sixteenth century, the institution had become formalized into [a] festival”⁶⁰ where different groups presented performances to showcase their lineage’s history. Ogunbiyi notes that, “The refinement and perfection, ostensibly for purely entertainment purposes, marked, by 1700, the birth of professional Yoruba theatre.”⁶¹ Adedeji traced the development of the performances, thus:

The festival phase began when Ologbin Ologbojo, an official at court and a member of the egungun Society, inaugurated the festival... During the festival all ancestors or dead lineage-heads were evoked, and they appeared as eegu’nla (lineage-masquerades), allowed to visit the homestead and walk the streets of the community for a certain period in the form of a pageant. The pageant was marked by a procession to the king or natural ruler and a staged performance before him which took place at the ode (the open-space in front of the palace). The performance took the form of a ‘dance-drama’ with choral-chants provided by the omole (children of the compound) of each lineage-masquerade. After this formal salute and presentation to the ruler, each pageant receded to their different homes for feasting and merriment and later danced round the community and received gifts. The theatre phase emerged from the “All Souls” festivals. The development started when, at the instance of the alagbaa (the cultic head of the egungun Society), a special or command performance was called for the last day of the festival. This became a kind of ludus [sic].⁶²

He further states that:

The masquerades were expected to act plays in a form of competition. The contest was voluntary and merely intended to raise the voltage of the festival. Presents were given in appreciation of the performance of the best masquerade [...] The Ologbin lineage was remarkable for its ‘oje’ group of ballad-mongers who displayed acrobatic dancing and acted masques. The group was based at court. It was led by Olugb’ere ‘Agan as its masked-actor and acrobat and with the akunyungba (praise-

⁶⁰ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama,” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 6

⁶¹ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama,” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 6

⁶² Adedeji, J.A., “The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre”, in *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 254-276

singers at court) as his chorus. Ologbin Ologbojo was the animator and iyamode was the ballad instructor. The group was renowned for winning the contests of the annual festivals.⁶³

It is believed that Olugb'ere Agan established himself as leader of the first professional travelling troupe after his successes at different festivals. It must be noted that the troupe, whose performance began as court theatre, after attaining a level of professionalism, left the king's palaceto the patronage of important chiefs within and outside Oyo kingdom. This action leads to the formation of the Alarinjo (travelling or strolling) theatre. Several new troupes sprang up beyond the Ologbojo lineage, and these troupes were free to entertain any individual or group of people who invited them. Names of troupes like Eiyeba, Lebe, Aiyelabola and others emerged.⁶⁴ They participated in the annual egungun festivals as was their custom and, on non-festival days, were able to satisfy the people's desire for entertainment. Whether the occasion was a birth or a death, the troupes were invited to perform. Thus the period of intensive professionalism began. The tie between masquerade theatre and ritual was further widened by the rise of professionalism in the theatre. "Professionalism not only resulted in proliferation of troupes but encouraged competition which, in turn, improved the theatrical art."⁶⁵ The programme for every masquerade performance as noted by Adedeji, is like a variety show with items following a particular set order: the ijuba (entrance-song), the dance and the drama: spectacle, revue, the finale and recessional dance.⁶⁶ The ijuba is an opening glee at which point the troupe acknowledges the audience and assures them of a good play. Adedeji further describes the trend of the performance as follows:

The Dance is a sequence of ritual and secular dances interspersed with acrobatic display. While the Bata-orchestra plays, the actors chant the oriki of the particular deities whose dances are selected for each performance [...] The Drama of the spectacle-masques relate mainly to mythological and totemistic characters. Mythological characters include all the gods in Yoruba cosmology and local heroes like 'Ar'oni.

⁶³ Adedeji, J.A., "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre", in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 254-276

⁶⁴ Adedeji, J.A., "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre" in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 254-276

⁶⁵ Adedeji, J.A., "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre" in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 254-276

⁶⁶ Adedeji, J.A., "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre" in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 261

Totemistic characters use animal ‘motifs’. The performances analyze the Yoruba society and reveal its vices, pests and morality. All the revue depends on audience-participation for their full effect. As the sketches are mainly improvisational, they are capable of infinite changes. The chants they incorporate are stereotypical and the songs are topical and familiar. The Finale, on the other hand is usually known as the recessional spectacle. The masquerade is taken into a recessional dance round the streets of the community as an important device for collecting money and gifts. Occasionally, for an interlude, a puppet-theatre forms an item of the programme.⁶⁷

Examples of this type of masquerade performance abound in other parts of Nigeria. Whether among the “Kalabaris, Yorubas, the Ibibios, the Opobos, the Ijaws or the Efiks, etc.,”⁶⁸ there exists the “inextricable link between masquerade and ritual play.”⁶⁹ One significant aspect of traditional performances in Nigeria is that there is no distinction between court theatre and masquerade theatre. The performers may have their faces covered in a mask to represent a particular stock character or have the whole body covered in masquerade costume.

In other parts of Nigeria, especially in the eastern area of the Ibos, the masquerade ritual drama is still prominent. The yearly New Yam festival is always a great opportunity for theatrical events to take place. Though arguments are rife as to the extent of dramatic content contained in these masquerade performances, the indisputable fact is that they are theatrical performances. According to MJC Echeruo, “there are certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena to be found in traditional festivals.”⁷⁰ Echeruo writes about the Mbom Ama festival of the people of southern Nigeria as containing:

...the entire mythology of the town: the ancestry of Ebu, of his consort, Lolo; the circumstances of their domestication in the town; the crises of the past; the circumstances surrounding their annual departure from the

⁶⁷ J.A. Adedeji in *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 12, No. 46, (1972), 254-276.

⁶⁸ Ogunbiyi, Yemi. “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 11-12

⁶⁹ Ogunbiyi, Yemi. “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 11-12

⁷⁰ MJC Echeruo quoted Ruth Finnegan in his article “The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual.” In Yemi Ogunbiyi, ed. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 137

town; the reason for propitiatory and thanksgiving sacrifices. Each detail is a plot or the germ of drama; each is liable to a thousand varying interpretations and reinterpretations.⁷¹

This form was popular in the eastern and southern area of Nigeria. During the colonial period in Nigerian history when the Christian religion or Catholicism became dominant in the eastern part of the country, the Ibo's masquerade festivals were a consistent feature in spite of the fact that the Catholic churches in Iboland staged occasional drama of European form at schools at the end of the terms and during Christian celebrations. Some of the masquerade displayed by indigenous people highlighted the Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter⁷², and some masks were constructed to represent priests and colonial masters. The people of Southern Nigeria, who comprise of the Ijaw, Kalabari, Ikwerre, Efik, Anang, and the Ibibio, have vibrant masquerade performances and usually dramatize short and very simple mythological stories. Onuora Nzekwe posits that, before the change in theatrical performances brought about during colonialism, "the Kalabari recognized masquerading as ballet and drama. By the nineteenth century, some traditional performances had already reached the stage where rites addressed to the gods connected with them had become mere precautions against accident or bad weather marring the play."⁷³

Adedeji writes about a theatrical performance which the king of Oyo commands in the honour of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander in 1826 as follows:

To mark their seven week's stay in Old Oyo (Katunga), the capital of the Oyo (Yoruba) empire, the Alaafin (king) of Oyo, invited his guests to see a performance provided by one of the traveling theatre troupes which, at that time, was waiting on the king's pleasure. The time was Wednesday, February 22, 1826.⁷⁴

⁷¹ MJC Echeruo, "The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual" in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria*, 142

⁷² Onuora Nzekwu, "Masquerade", in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Edited by Yemi Ogunbiyi (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 135

⁷³ Onuora Nzekwu, "Masquerade", in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Edited by Yemi Ogunbiyi (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 134

⁷⁴ Adedeji, Joel, A., "Alarinjo: the Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), 221

William H.G. Kingston writes that Hugh Clapperton and his party:

...were entertained here with a pantomime, the stage being the open ground before his majesty's residences, the characters appearing in masks. One of them presented an enormous snake, which crept out of a huge bag and followed the manager round the park while he defended himself with a sword. Out of another sack came a man covered apparently with white wax to look like a European, miserably thin and starved with cold. He went through the ceremony of taking snuff and rubbing his nose. When he walked, it was with an awkward gait, treading as the most tender-footed white man would do in walking with bare soles over rough ground.⁷⁵

Nigerians were already accustomed to the use of satire in the treatment of political and religious matters in their drama even before there were contacts with Europe's colonialism as evidenced in the above narrative. Performances reached the highest state of artistic richness and "excellence during festivals at which certain central myths and rituals were re-enacted by the people as a whole."⁷⁶ In the words of Ndukaku Amankulor, this provided opportunities for the treatment of purely social issues through the use of masked characters, puppets, and other techniques. According to Ndukaku Amankulor: "the use of masks for character representation had the effect of liberating the actor from psychological inhibitions and imbuing him at the same time with sacred essence that, by convention, enabled him to be unique and to project a role that nobody would dare challenge or contest."⁷⁷

As mentioned earlier, the travelling theatre troupe performed constantly to meet the taste of a wide public having ventured from the court as well as from religious festivals. They attained a level of professionalism in the art of performance which allowed them to move around to enact their performances freely without inhibition from the court. For instance, they could include satirical sketches about their earlier patrons in their performances. More often than not they lampooned their former masters for the amusement of

⁷⁵ William H. G. Kingston, *Great African Travellers, from Mungo Park to Livingstone and Stanley* (London: G. Routledge, 1874), 110

⁷⁶ Amankulor, Ndukaku, N, "English-Language Drama and Theatre" in Oyekan Owomoyela, (ed.), *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 140

⁷⁷ Amankulor, Ndukaku, N, "English-Language Drama and Theatre" in Oyekan Owomoyela, (ed.), *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 140

their new audiences. This was the trend of early masquerade performances until the advent of Christianity, which came concurrently with alongside the resettlement of the freed slaves who were the first people to embrace the Christian faith in Yorubaland. A vivid recount of the roles played by Christianity in changing the conventions of traditional theatre is noted by Ogunbiyi:

As early as 1839, the first batch of immigrants, freed slaves and their children, who had acquired some form of Western education, had started to arrive and readily provide a vigorous impetus to the realization of both the church and the British government. This set of immigrants, later to be joined by Brazilian emigrants, formed the very nucleus of a nascent Nigerian educated middle class. It is interesting to note that this class of Nigerians imported the Western and European forms of the concert and the drama which were to constitute the basic framework of early modern Nigerian drama.⁷⁸

The first missions were opened by the Church of England's Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Abeokuta in 1842,⁷⁹ later in Lagos and Ibadan. H.C. Metz notes that:

They were followed by other Protestant denominations from Britain, Canada, and the United States and, in the 1860s, by Roman Catholic religious orders. Protestant missionaries tended to divide the country into spheres of activity to avoid competition with each other, and Catholic missions similarly avoided duplication of effort among the several religious orders working there.⁸⁰

As a way of avoiding competition among the churches, Catholic missionaries were particularly active among the Igbo, the CMS among the Yoruba. In order to encourage indigenous participation:

⁷⁸ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 17

⁷⁹ See the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, *History: Early Beginning*.

<http://www.anglican-nig.org/history.htm>. Saturday, 11/12/2009

⁸⁰ Metz, H.C., (ed.), *Nigeria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991) <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/14.htm>

The CMS initially promoted Africans to responsible positions in the mission field, an outstanding example being the appointment of Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the first Anglican Bishop of the Niger. Crowther, a liberated Yoruba slave, had been educated in Sierra Leone and in Britain where he was ordained priest before returning to his homeland with the first group of missionaries sent there by the CMS. This was seen as part of a conscious “native church” policy pursued by the Anglicans and others to create indigenous ecclesiastical institutions that eventually would be independent of European tutelage.⁸¹

It is noted that efforts at anointing church priests from of indigenous Africans could not be supported by the European missionaries. “The effort failed in part, however, because some members of the church authorities came to think that religious discipline had grown too lax during Crowther’s episcopate. Due to the rise of prejudice, Crowther was [replaced] as Bishop [with] a British cleric.”⁸²

As European missionaries upheld colonial rule, with the foregone conclusion that indigenous Nigerians are not capable of teaching the Bible it also meant that they reinforced colonial policy. This action of European missionaries was viewed by the indigenous group as un-Christian. Therefore, “In reaction, some African Christian communities formed their own independent churches”⁸³ by breaking away from the mission churches. This would later contribute to the direction of theatre in Nigeria. Anderson points out that the independent churches “held services in Yoruba and introduced African music and chant.”⁸⁴

Around 1866, Lagos, which the British government had annexed in 1861, became the centre of the Yoruba state as well as the hub of theatrical activities. Influx of migrants into Lagos ostensibly increased the city’s need for recreation facilities. On 24th October, 1866, in response to these entertainment needs “Bishop Ajai Crowther, J.A. Otunba-Payne, Robert Campbell, Charles Foresythe, J.P.L Davis and a host of others”⁸⁵ formed the Academy to serve the

⁸¹ Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, *History: Early Beginning*. <http://www.anglican-nig.org/history.htm>. Saturday, 11/12/2009

⁸² Metz, H.C., (ed.), *Nigeria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991) <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/14.htm>

⁸³ Metz, H.C., (ed.), *Nigeria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991) <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/14.htm>

⁸⁴ Anderson, A.H., *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 2001), 62

⁸⁵ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 17. I would like to reiterate that the bulk of the information on the history of theatre in Nigeria used in

purpose. Between 1866 and 1900, many social groups were founded and fashioned after the Academy.⁸⁶ For example, there was the Brazilian Dramatic Company, the Philharmonic, and the Lagos Grammar School Entertainment Society.⁸⁷ Later, other groups like the Ibadan Choral Society, the Breadfruit School Society, and the Melo-dramatic society were formed. Earlier, the church, especially the Roman Catholic church, faced with the difficulty of preaching to a predominantly indigenous community who understood only Yoruba, resorted to drama and music to communicate with the people. In the same vein, “The French Order of Catholic Priests (Societes des Mission Africaines) which arrived in Lagos in 1867 was compelled to rely on the power of theatre for a more effective communication.”⁸⁸ Ogunbiyi writes that “Among the most successful ones were the Philharmonic Society [...] the Lagos Grammar School Entertainment Society, the Rising Entertainment Society, and the Orphean Club.”⁸⁹ The establishment of schools by the Christian churches also served as a factor in these movements. St. Gregory’s School, which was founded in 1881, staged Moliere’s *He Would Be a Lord* in 1882.⁹⁰ As mentioned earlier, the schism “within the protestant churches in Lagos, [...] led to the establishment of several”⁹¹ African churches. Native Baptist Church was the first to pull out of Baptist Mission in 1888. The First African Church Mission (FACM) or United Native African (UNA) Church established in 1891 under the leadership of William Cole, was the first to carve a new identity for itself. This trend was followed by both Bethel African Church in 1901 under J.K. Coker and United Methodist African Church, Eleja in 1917. Both UNA and Bethel African Church left the Anglican body. This cessation of the churches must be understood within a specific context of cultural nationalist movements⁹² within African members of the churches who were the educated

this thesis is derived from Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981).

⁸⁶ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 17

⁸⁷ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 18

⁸⁸ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 18

⁸⁹ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 18

⁹⁰ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 18

⁹¹ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 18

⁹² Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 19

members of the Lagos society challenge European and American missionaries' failure to incorporate African culture into Christianity; non-acceptance of African leadership in the church hierarchy as well as their leadership role within the church.⁹³ According to Allan H. Anderson, author of what we can see as the definitive history on the reformation of the African Church in the 20th Century:

The split in the Baptist Church was precipitated by the dismissal in 1888 of Pastor Stone by a missionary, W.J. David, who said he was free to dismiss Stone as "any of his servants". Vincent and a senior colleague who supported Stone were then dismissed from the Baptist Academy. Most members of the Church seceded ...the Native Baptist Church (later the Ebenezer Baptist Church) was the result....In 1894, Vincent abandoned all western cultural baggage (including the wearing of western clothing) and he and his wife changed their names to Mojola and Adeotan Agbebi.⁹⁴

In 1914, the two Baptist churches came under African leadership and were later reunited under Mojola Agbebi as the president. The removal of Bishop Ajayi Crowther as the Bishop of West Africa by the Anglican Communion and other disaffection within the church led to the formation of the United Native African (UNA) Church. The cause of the disaffection is succinctly captured by Anderson:

In West Africa, there was also the particularly aggravating dimension of the perceived failure of first African Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther's Niger Mission. The result was that new, young white missionaries were virtually unanimous in their view that Africans were unfit for [c]hurch leadership. [...] In 1890, a "purge" involving unsubstantiated charges of "immorality" against almost all the African clergy and other workers in the Niger Mission took place. The action of young British missionaries Brook and Robinson in particular, forced Bishop Crowther to resign from the Finance Committee of which he was [c]hairman. The elderly Crowther, humiliated by these white

⁹³ Anderson, A.H., *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 2001), 61

⁹⁴ Anderson, A.H., *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 2001), 61

missionaries in their twenties, died a year later and he was replaced by a white [b]ishop.⁹⁵

The dismissal of James Johnson, an assistant bishop, with his belongings thrown out of the Vicarage while absent in 1901 by the same Anglican Communion which had humiliated Bishop Ajayi Crowther a decade earlier, led to the formation of the African Church (AC), Bethel, by his loyalists.⁹⁶ This trend of humiliating and excommunicating Africans from the missionaries' churches resurfaced within the Methodist Church in Lagos in 1917 when the white missionary chairman expelled sixty-five Church elders for being polygamists. According to Anderson:

Like the Anglicans, the European Methodist missionaries had lowered the status of their African ministers and had gradually removed African district superintendents. The expelled leaders set up a separate Methodist Church called the United African Methodist Church (Eleja), the only African Church to secede specifically on the issue of polygamy.⁹⁷

Apart from the splits within these churches resulting in the founding of independent African churches, it also afforded the members opportunity to freely blend Yoruba and European materials in entertainment. Most notable was their being accommodating to Yoruba culture and re-workings of traditional masquerade songs into church songs as a means of winning over converts from traditional religions. One very important aspect of Nigerian theatre in the second half of the Nineteenth Century is the staging of popular European plays by the students of the schools established by the missions.⁹⁸ The performances took place in the various school halls and during religious festivals like Christmas and Easter. Around 1894, Ake School of Entertainment

⁹⁵ Anderson, A.H., *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 2001), 60

⁹⁶ Metz, H.C., (ed.), *Nigeria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991) <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/14.htm>

⁹⁷ Anderson, A.H., *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 2001), 63

⁹⁸ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile" in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 18

was already staging Yoruba farces built around the concept of the revered Ogboni cult.⁹⁹

Nigerian Theatre during the Period of Colonialism

Nigeria became a British colony shortly after the 1885 Berlin conference, which concluded on the partitioning and sharing of Africa between the European powers and the ultimate defeat of Kano and Sokoto by the British West African Frontier Force around 1902 and 1903. Glover Hall, built through the efforts of some elite indigenous members of Lagos and a couple of Europeans in 1899¹⁰⁰ for performances and other social engagements served as a venue for indigenous performances without the prejudice of the church who would never allow the use of their school hall for cultural performances with exception of European shows.

By this time, the theatre triumphed within the breakaway African churches. A truly Nigerian drama in the class of the European's literary form came from the African churches in 1902.¹⁰¹ This was the performance of D.A. Oloyede's *King Elejigbo and Princess Abeje of Kontagora* "under the joint sponsorship of the Bethel African Church and St Jude's Church."¹⁰² The play was staged at the Bethel African Church school-room.¹⁰³ Ogunbiyi notes that, for a long time the play "became the prototype of most Yoruba drama being written in Lagos."¹⁰⁴ Aside from the fact that the churches were responsible for vibrant theatrical activities in the European mode, one significant reminder is that this period is considered a 'period of cultural renaissance and nationalism' awakening by both the Nigerian Christians and the educated elites. Until this moment, the Christian church frowned at the masquerade theatre as a pagan performance which the converted Africans must not participate in. The early churches also discouraged the wearing of indigenous costumes, the use of indigenous music and musical instruments in worship. The breakaway churches, however, utilized them. Theatre was developed around the events of

⁹⁹ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., "Nigeria", in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 146

¹⁰⁰ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., "Nigeria", in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 145

¹⁰¹ Ogunbiyi, Yemi. "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile." In *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 19

¹⁰² Ogunbiyi, Yemi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile" in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 19

¹⁰³ Ogunbiyi, Yemi. "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile." In *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 19

¹⁰⁴ Ogunbiyi, Yemi. "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile." In *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 19

the Bible and morality plays of which the essence was to reveal how a Christian ought to live. The plays dwelled more on the importance of righteous living over a life full of superfluity which often led to destruction. A prominent aspect of the theatre of this period was the emphasis on music and dance to propel the mood and structure of the plays. The dialogues were sung with musical accompaniments. At this point some Nigerians such as A. B. David, E. A. Dawodu, Ajibola Layeni, A.A. Olufeye and G.T. Onimole¹⁰⁵ were already distinguishing themselves as actors and composers under the patronage of the church, performing “Native Air Opera”. Until 1945, when Hubert Ogunde, who had started his theatre career a year earlier, went professional, there was no full professional theatre group in Nigeria.¹⁰⁶ Ogunde, himself an officer in the Nigerian Police Force, began in one of the breakaway African churches, the Aladura Church at Ebute-Metta, Lagos.¹⁰⁷

Nigerian Popular Theatre

As mentioned earlier, the dawn of twentieth century Nigeria was characterized by two phenomena: colonization and cultural nationalism. The Yoruba people found it appalling that the missionaries mandated that Africans who converted to Christianity must wear Western dress and adopt European culture.¹⁰⁸ As a way of repudiating these phenomena, the Nigerian educated elites began to assume both political and cultural nationalistic stances. This development signalled the rebirth of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre in 1945, pioneered by Hubert Ogunde (1919-1990), a former school teacher, church organist and a member of the Nigerian Police Force. He is considered to be the father of modern Nigerian theatre. Apart from the travelling theatre of the Yoruba’s which thrived successfully under and beyond colonialism, there was the Igbo masked Colonial figures satirical drama. The plays mirrored the historical realities of the colonial period and also contributed to helping the rural Nigerians who lived in the Eastern part of the country to develop an outlet to

¹⁰⁵ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 22

¹⁰⁶ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 23

¹⁰⁷ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 22

¹⁰⁸ Ukpokodu, Peter, I., *Socio-Political Theater in Nigeria* (Mellen Research University Press: San Francisco 1992), 25, “To the missionaries, the adoption of European Culture was an outward sign of the inward transformation from ‘pagan’ to the Christian state. One of the missionaries Adolphus Mann, was reported to have been so indignant at the idea of renouncing European names for African names at baptism that he considered anyone who had such an idea and practiced it as “guilty of ‘Anglophobia’ and Anti-English ‘monomania.’”

extricate themselves from the cultural annihilation that the colonial government was subjecting them to. The people laughed at the European images represented in the drama featuring British colonial officers, police, missionaries and their families. Ndukaka Amankulor writes:

Colonial Europeans, men, women, and children, feature in the Ijele, Uzoiyi, Odo, Omabe, and Ikoro performances, to mention only a few in Igboland. In Ikoro the repertoire of European characters includes the King and Queen of England, the Governor General in Lagos, the Residents and District Commissioners in the provinces and districts, and the law enforcement officers. The performance takes the form of an official visit by the king and queen of England to their subjects at Ngwa in Igboland and the ceremonies and protocols performed to receive them, including the presentation of the welcome address and the response to it.¹⁰⁹

The European characters became a staple in indigenous theatres of colonial Nigeria as this was the only way that the people could have their own laughs at the colonialists.

The Yoruba Travelling Theatre

The Yoruba Travelling Theatre is a theatre conducted in the Yoruba language which originated from the society of masqueraders around the middle of the sixteenth century and succumbed to the inroads of Islam and Christianity during the nineteenth century. Out of the dying members of the old itinerant masquerade-performances and the traditional Yoruba's love for music, dance, and ritual, a new theatrical form emerged. The Yoruba Operatic Theatre developed from the "native dramas" and "cantatas" which enlivened the operation of the breakaway churches (the African churches and later the "Aladura" or Apostolic churches) in Lagos during the first decade of the twentieth century.

By the 1940s and 1950s, this theatre had developed into the popular theatre of Nigeria. The theatres performed "in school halls, town halls, and on improvised stages out of doors in many parts of the country."¹¹⁰ Karin Barber, who had first hand experience in this theatre form as a member of Oyin

¹⁰⁹ Amankulor, Ndukaku, J., "English-Language Drama and Theatre" in *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*, 142

¹¹⁰ Adedeji, J.A., "Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria" in *Research in African Literature* (Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1971)

Adejobi Theatre Company while in Nigeria as a researcher, writes that the “Yoruba popular theatre was capable of attracting audiences from across the full socio-economic spectrum. They could fill university theaters as well as village halls”¹¹¹ Nigerian Popular theatre¹¹², or Yoruba Popular theatre, has been well treated by Oyin Ogunba,¹¹³ J.A. Adedeji, Martin Banham,¹¹⁴ Oyekan Owomoyela, Ebum Clark, Alain Ricard, Dapo Adelugba, and Olu Obafemi¹¹⁵, Karin Barber¹¹⁶, including Yemi Ogunbiyi. Nigerian ‘Popular Theatre’ contains the plays of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Moses Olaiya, Isola Ogunsola, Jimoh Aliu, Leke Ajao, Ojo Ladipo and other Yoruba operatic exponents. It is a variety of folk opera of the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria that emerged in the early 1940s. “It combined a brilliant sense of mime, colourful costumes, traditional drumming, music, and folklore. Directed towards a local audience, it used Nigerian themes, ranging from modern-day satire to historical tragedy. Although the plays were performed entirely in the Yoruba language, they could be understood and appreciated by speakers of other languages with the aid of a translated synopsis.”¹¹⁷ Awam Amkpa believes that the “Yoruba Travelling Theatre’s use of indigenous themes and symbols within a framework of a multi-ethnic montage of Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa and others constructed by the English made it a celebrated populist dramaturgy Nigeria [as] ever experienced.”¹¹⁸ The practitioners’ indigenous themes and symbols were products of cross-cultural global and local contacts between the Yoruba and others with whom they crossed paths in the realms of trade, military engagement, and cultural engagement even before colonial presence. These theatre traditions “reflect and knit together a mosaic of cultures spawned by a long story of human movements, incursions, displacements, intermixtures or successions of peoples and of the impacts of these on the beliefs, attitudes and social organization of the people who today inhabit the

¹¹¹ Barber, Karin, *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life in Theater* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 204. It is noteworthy that out of all the critics who wrote on the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, Barber, a British Cultural Anthropologist, seems to be the only one who participated in it as an actor by being a member of Oyin Adejobi Theatre Company of which she has written extensively.

¹¹² Throughout this thesis I used the terms Nigeria Popular Theatre, Yoruba Popular Theatre and Yoruba Traveling Theatre interchangeably where necessary.

¹¹³ Ogunba, Oyin “Theatre in Africa” In *Presence Africaine*, vol. 3, no. 58, 2nd quarterly, 1966

¹¹⁴ Banham, Martin, and Clive, Wake. *African Theatre Today* (London, 1976)

¹¹⁵ Obafemi, Olu, *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre* (Bayreuth, 1996)

¹¹⁶ Barber, Karin, *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba popular life in theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000)

¹¹⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/371338/Mbari-Mbayo-Club#ref=ref720157>
Tuesday 08/12/2009

¹¹⁸ Awam, Amkpa, *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 77

great [...] area.”¹¹⁹ With the production of the folk operas *The Garden of Eden* and *The Throne of God*¹²⁰, Hubert Ogunde (1919-1990) began his theatre career in 1944. Due to the success of these productions and the reception given to them by the public, Ogunde resigned his position with the Police Force in 1945 and created a professional theatre company.¹²¹ That same year, he travelled with the company to different Yoruba communities where he staged his performances. According to Adedeji¹²², Ogunde was able to enrich the Alarinjo repertory system with modification and adaptations in the organization and presentation of the pieces:

In conformity with the practice of the traditional theatre as a lineage profession, Ogunde has worked his wife and children into his company in order to perpetuate it as a going family concern. To all intents and purposes, the popularity and success of the Ogunde Theatre is traceable to the extent of its leader’s glorification of the dynamics of the Alarinjo theatre.¹²³

Ogunde’s theatre, though it was in the form of opera at the beginning, it later adopted the concert party system. Ogunde’s theatre was inspired by the Alarinjo theatre, of which he related the nature and purpose of his theatre. Hubert Ogunde in an interview with Adedeji said: “I was playing drum with the masqueraders in my home town when I was young, and these Egungun people gave me the urge inside me to start a company of actors.”¹²⁴ This statement throws more light on the semblance and relationship between the old Alarinjo theatre and the new Ogunde theatre. This theatre was formed at a time that the spirit of nationalism was rife among Nigerians. It lent a supportive and critical voice to the aspirations of the educated elites who, at that time, were clamouring for independence from British imperialism. The theatre received a good reception by the Nigeria society of the time, especially for its criticism of the colonial government. According to Egun Clark, during the colonial period,

¹¹⁹ Awam, Amkpa, *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 77

¹²⁰ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 23

¹²¹ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 23

¹²² Adedeji, J. A., “The traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre”, in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical source book*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 244

¹²³ Adedeji, J. A., “The traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre”, in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical source book*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 245

¹²⁴ Adedeji, J.A., “The Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre”, in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 244

there was a “remarkable great interest in the existence and survival of the theatre as a channel for providing political as well as cultural education for the masses.”¹²⁵ In 1946, Ogunde presented *Hunger and Strike*, a dramatization of the 1945 general strike in Nigeria, and *Bread and Bullet* (1950) on the killing of the Enugu Iva valley coal miners who were shot and killed in 1949 for protesting wage payment. His other plays include *Darkness and Light* (1945), *Tiger’s Empire* (1946), *Herbert Macaulay* (1946), *Towards Liberty* (1947), and *Mr Devil’s Money* (1948). Peter Ukpokodu writes that between 1945 and 1950, “Ogunde wrote nineteen plays, of which thirteen are politically influenced.”¹²⁶ In this manner, he contributed to the nationalists discourse by writing and performing plays that called for the British imperialist to grant unconditional independence to Nigeria. In addition, most of his plays exposed the evils of colonial administration of Nigeria.¹²⁷ For being politically assertive in his plays, the colonial government censored and levied him different times. Amkpa writes that Major Anthony Syer applauded Ogunde’s theatre after seeing the rehearsal of *Mr Devil’s Money*, which was a satire on the colonial government, as follows:

Since my arrival in this country I have seen many plays and operas [...] but I had the greatest surprise of my life when I attended the rehearsal [...] written, composed and produced by Hubert Ogunde, [...] the theme is based on an old African story depicting the “here and after” of a man who signs (sic) a pact with an evil spirit in order to be wealthy. To see the cast rehearsing the Opera, dances, to hear the cheap native drums supplying the music with precision without any mechanical aid, the clapping of hands and high standards of discipline maintained throughout is to think one is back at London theatre. The singing is excellent. Dance formations, lighting and the stage settings are concrete proof that the African is no more behind as many people think.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Clark, E., *Hubert Ogunde: The Making of the Nigerian Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 79. Most of the information on Ogunde Theatre used in this research is from Ebum Clark, “Ogunde Theatre: The Rise of Contemporary Professional Theatre in Nigeria 1946-172”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 295-320

¹²⁶ Ukpokodu, Peter, I., *Socio-Political Theater in Nigeria* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 29

¹²⁷ Ukpokodu, Peter, I., *Socio-Political Theater in Nigeria* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 29

¹²⁸ Quoted in Awam, Amkpa, *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* (Routledge: New York, 2004),

Ogunde's drama was so popular in the 50's and 60's that he became a model for most of the travelling theatre troupes that later emerged. His theatre was active during and after Nigeria's independence from 1960 till 1970's when he ventured into the cinema. In 1964, after the production of *Yoruba Ronu*, the government of the western region banned Ogunde's Theatre from performing in the area where, hitherto, he was most popular.¹²⁹ The government criticized the play as follows: "It falsifies and distorts the whole history of the crisis that plunged Western Nigeria into a state of emergency. It stigmatizes leading public figures in Western Nigeria as traitors because they had the courage and conviction to stand against pride, arrogance and inordinate ambition of one man."¹³⁰ Meanwhile, the play commissioned by the same government who clamped down on it was only a clarion call to the Yoruba to think deeply about the on-going political situation. Ogunde responded to the government's accusation with another play, *Otito Koro* (Truth is Bitter). According to Colin Chamber: "One thing about Ogunde's theatre and the popular theatre as a whole is that [a] play is not only structurally and aesthetically influenced by the traditional [...] theatre, but also continue[s] the tradition of using theatre for social reflection and criticism."¹³¹

Kola Ogunmola (1925-1973), who began his professional theatre practice in 1948 with *Reign of the Mighty*¹³², is another influence on the success of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre. His plays are considered by critic like Ulli Beier as a refinement of the Alarinjo theatre by making it come "closer to literary drama."¹³³ He constructed his plays differently from Ogunde and Duro Ladipo by attempting to make the audience laugh without overtly criticising any human action. Though Ogunmola acknowledged the influence of Ogunde on his theatre, however, he refrained from overt political plays; rather, he concentrated on social satire.¹³⁴ His plays draw influences from both the Bible and Yoruba folk tales. His relationship with Ulli Beier and the Ibadan School of Drama probably influenced the reason why some of his plays were performed

¹²⁹ Martin, Banham, "Ibadan 1960", in Jane Plastow, (ed.), *Leeds African Studies Bulletin*, No. 69, December, 2007, 67

¹³⁰ See Anthony Graham-White, A., Ricard, A. "Between the Oral and the Written: Theatre in Ghana and Nigeria." In *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2., 229-238

¹³¹ Colin, Chamber, C., (ed.), *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 500

¹³² David, Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-colonial Times to the Present Day* (London: James Currey, 1995), 95

¹³³ David, Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-colonial Times to the Present Day* (London: James Currey, 1995), 95

¹³⁴ David, Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-colonial Times to the Present Day* (London: James Currey, 1995), 95

in both Yoruba and English language. Some of his plays include *Ife Owo* (1950), *Eri Okan* or *Conscience* and *Omuti* an adaptation of Amos Tutuola's successful novel *The Palmwine Drinkard*. *Omuti* was created by Ogunmola with support from the University College Ibadan, School of Drama¹³⁵ where he took "up residency in 1962."¹³⁶ According to Ulli Beier, "Ogunmola cut out the music hall element of Ogunde's play, the horseplay, the sex appeal, the saxophones; and he tries to substitute these by serious acting. Beier was so impressed with Ogunmola's theatre that he glowingly praised it "as the purer traditionalism of performances and with sense of stylization."¹³⁷

Though Ogunmola acknowledged the influence of Ogunde on his theatre, however, he refrained from overt political plays; rather he concentrated on social satire and dramatization of literary works. The unparalleled tribute given to Ogunmola's theatre made it possible for the theatre group to spend almost two months at Eugene O'Neill Theatre in Connecticut. In 1971, Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* was also rehearsed at the same venue.

Duro Ladipo (1931-1978)¹³⁸ is another exponent of this highly vibrant theatre, however, he began later than the two mentioned earlier. Duro Ladipo is a Nigerian dramatist whose innovative folk operas incorporating ritual poetry and traditional rhythms performed on indigenous instruments were based on Yoruba history. The source of his material is the Yoruba mythological world, Biblical stories and everyday subjects.¹³⁹ Ladipo became an exponent of the Sango myths most of his plays were a variation of the god's story. His *Oba Koso* (1963) remained one of the most popular of the plays of the period before the travelling theatre's transition to television and the cinema. The play was so successful with the mass audiences, academic communities and the government that it was taken on tour in the United States, London, Germany and some other European countries. For the success of *Oba Koso*, he was bestowed with the

¹³⁵ Ulli Beier, "E.K. Ogunmola: A Personal memoir", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 328

¹³⁶ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., and Adeyemi, S., "Nigeria" in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 149

¹³⁷ See Ulli Beier statement in David, Kerr, *African Popular Theatre from Pre-colonial to the Present* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1995), 95. For information about Kola Ogunmola, I relied extensively on Ulli Beier, "E.K. Ogunmola: A Personal memoir", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 321-331

¹³⁸ Yemi Ogunbiyi, "The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 334. On the theatre of Duro Ladipo, I relied extensively on Ogunbiyi's writing.

¹³⁹ See Yemi Ogunbiyi, "The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 342

national honour of Member of the Order of the Niger (MON) by the Nigerian government¹⁴⁰ the same year the play was produced. In the same period, he wrote *Oba Moro* (Ghost-Catcher King, 1961) his first opera and *Oba Waja* (The King is Dead, 1964) *Gbadegesin* and *Moremi*.¹⁴¹ In 1962, he founded the Mbari Mbayo Club, a performance venue and a training centre for the art in Osogbo. Ladipo, with the support of Ulli Beier contributed immensely to bringing the “myths of Sango and some other Yoruba deities to the international stage.”¹⁴² Ogunde, Ogunmola and Ladipo shared a common strand in their formation years. Prior to becoming theatre owners, the three theatre practitioners were educated and children of clergymen. The three theatre owners moved away from their various churches because of interest in indigenous African traditions, which the Christian faith was not yet ready to accommodate. The theatres of the trio were mutually reinforcing.

Moses Olaiya (1936-) also known by his stage name Baba Sala, is a comedian unlike the three practitioners of the Nigerian popular theatre earlier mentioned. In fact, he was the most famous comedian and one of the most highly regarded dramatists in Nigeria from the 1960s to the early 1990s. He is regarded as the father of Nigeria’s comedy, moving from the stage, which he joined in 1960, to the television and later to cinema and video film.¹⁴³ Olaiya gave rise to the “birth and proliferation of comic drama groups in Nigeria.”¹⁴⁴ While describing the theatrical style of Moses Olaiya and its emergence, L.O. Bamidele writes:

To arouse laughter and excite interest in the people he started with the idea of incongruity on the stage for comic effect. He started with the idea of mechanical encrustation upon the living; he started with a language of comedy that tends to the aesthetic of the jokes; he started what one might call being outlandish with pillow-stuffed belly and

¹⁴⁰ Ogunbiyi, “The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 345

¹⁴¹ For extensive lists of plays by Duro Ladipo, see Yemi Ogunbiyi, “The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 333-353

¹⁴² Olorunjobi-Oju, Taiwo, “Irreducible Africanness and Nigerian Postcoloniality from Drama to Video” <http://www.nigerianbestforum.com/index.php?topic=19160.20;wap2> Friday 18/12/2009

¹⁴³ For adequate information on Moses Olaiya, see Jonathan, Haynes, *Structural Adjustments of Nigerian Comedy: Baba Sala* (Ann Harbor, Michigan: Mpublishing, University of Michigan Library, 1994). Online

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/passages/4761530.0008.010?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

¹⁴⁴ Bamidele, L.O., *Comedy: Essays and Studies* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2001), 53. This publication by L.O. Bamidele is the major material I used in writing about Moses Olaiya Theatre.

playful tricks; he started clownish display bordering on childish display of intrigues and jack-in-the-box pranks.¹⁴⁵

Moses Olaiya was not only famous as a performer on Nigerian stage and television. He also influenced many theatre practitioners from the mid 1960s to begin to do comedy performances. While Ogunde enjoyed the prestige of being the greatest of the Nigerian theatre practitioners due to his pioneering effort and the fact that he was visible for a longer period of time, “in terms of the mastery of the comic tastes of the audiences and of the theatrical skills suited to these, most Yoruba theatre goers would unequivocally swear by the name of Moses Olaiya.”¹⁴⁶ Bamidele argues that Moses Olaiya staged *Owo Lagba*, *Tokunbo*, *Emi Oga*, *Omo Oloku*, and so on, “with farcical finesse to the admiration of the leisure and fun loving audiences.”¹⁴⁷ Olaiya refrained from profane and vulgar language in his plays and Dapo Adelugba opines, “His speeches have vigour and vivacity whether he is using Yoruba language or the ungrammatical structure of the English language. They become more vibrant for explosive laugh in their ungrammatical state.”¹⁴⁸ Oyin Adejobi another popular practitioner of the period started his professional theatre in 1963 and produced notable plays in a career that spanned over four decades, transiting from the stage through television and film.¹⁴⁹ Popular among Adejobi’s plays is *Orogun Adedigba* which was serialized for television in the 1960’s and remained on air till the late 1980s. Other notable practitioners of the Yoruba travelling theatre that emerged in the early 1970s include Ojo Ladipo, Akin Ogungbe, and Jimoh Aliu, who’s *Arelu* was the most popular indigenous drama on the Nigerian television in the second half of the 1980’s. Also popular was the theatre of Ola Omonitan, Leke Ajao, Ade Afolayan, Isola Ogunsola, Lere Paimo,¹⁵⁰ Akeem Adepoju, and so on.

¹⁴⁵ Bamidele, L.O., *Comedy: Essays and Studies* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2001), 53

¹⁴⁶ Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 286

¹⁴⁷ Bamidele, L.O., *Comedy: Essays and Studies* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2001), 53

¹⁴⁸ Dapo Adelugba Professor of Theatre Arts, and one of the earliest critics of African Theatre, quoted in L.O. Bamidele’s *Comedy: Essays and Studies* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2001), 56

¹⁴⁹ Barber, Karin, *Yoruba Popular Theatre: Three Plays by the Oyin Adejobi Theatre* (New Jersey: African Studies Association, 1995)

¹⁵⁰ Oyin Adejobi’s theatre and Lere Paimo’s Eda theatre are well discussed by Karin Barber in *West African Popular Theatre*. Karin Barber, John Collins and Alain Ricard, (eds.), (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press/Oxford: James Currey, 1997), vii-xviii & 183-270

The theatre of Adunni Oluwole (1905-1957)¹⁵¹, though short-lived, was of immense interest due to the passion of the founder as well as for being the first woman to establish a professional theatre company in the country. Adunni Oluwole, who began her theatre in the church in 1950, used it as an instrument for socio-political change. She was vehemently against the granting of independence to Nigerians in 1956 pointing out that the politicians were simply pursuing their self-interest which bordered on how to despoil the nation with ease.¹⁵² Adunni Oluwole disbanded her troupe in 1954 to form a political party and died in 1957 shortly after returning from a political tour. The second woman who also conducted a professional travelling theatre is Funmilayo Ranko.¹⁵³ Biodun Jeyifo mentioned Funmilayo Ranko and Mojisola Martins as two women who had professional theatre troupes in 1980s.¹⁵⁴ Funmilayo Ranko's Theatre was based in Ilesa, while that of Mojisola Martins was in Lagos. The mass appeal of the popular theatre resulted in the adoption of some of the practitioners by the universities (Ibadan and Ife) in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Popular Theatre and the Advent of Television

The introduction of television into Nigeria in 1959 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the government of Western Region opened a new vista in the life of Yoruba popular theatre. The practitioners were availed the opportunity of reaching unto a wider spectrum of audience. It seemed the television station in Ibadan had the travelling theatre and the university in mind when it began operation as, in order to have programming, it quickly befriended the already vibrant theatre companies. For instance, Hubert Ogunde performed songs and dance in the small studio of the television station in Ibadan for at least half an hour every time he was invited. According to Segun Olusola "as early as 1960, Wole Soyinka was commissioned to write a play for television which was subsequently produced and broadcast ..."¹⁵⁵ Ogunde's theatre later took part in many drama productions for the television, a relationship which he would later sever in 1965 when the station's Director of Programmes could not grant a

¹⁵¹ For a detailed account of the political life of Adunni Oluwole, see Valentine U. James and James I. Etim, eds., *The Feminization of Development Processes in Africa: Current and Future Perspective* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 22

¹⁵² Ukpokodu, Peter, I., *Socio-Political Theater in Nigeria* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 43

¹⁵³ David, Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-colonial Times to the Present Day* (London: James Currey, 1995), 100

¹⁵⁴ Jeyifo, Biodun, *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1984), 68

¹⁵⁵ Olusola, Segun "The Advent of Television Drama" in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 373

raise in artistes fees.¹⁵⁶ Duro Ladipo's theatre was among the first set of the Nigerian popular theatre to enjoy the privilege of play performances in the studio and he owed most of his popularity to the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) station. Television reduced the play that took several hours on stage to thirty minutes.¹⁵⁷ In Ibadan, Adebayo Faleti (1938-), a Yoruba novelist and dramatist produced a theatre series for television. He used plays drawn from the repertory of popular troupes. According to Olusola, Adebayo Faleti "finds a good production, and then worked with the troupe to adapt it."¹⁵⁸ Television producers were not contented in giving their audiences established troupes; they played a role in making some of the troupes successful. According to Graham-White and Alain Ricard, "The Duro Ladipo Theatre owes its popularity to two factors: the interest of the WNTV staff in Ibadan and the help of the Mbari Mbayo of Osogbo."¹⁵⁹ This role of the television is also proclaimed by Moses Olaiya in an interview "I was very popular and irresistible by television stations. I was on all over Lagos, Oyo State, Kwara, Ogun, Ondo and even in the north."¹⁶⁰

The transition to television by the various theatre troupes in Nigeria was facilitated by the introduction of this medium in all the three regions of the country in the first half of the 1960's. Troupes emerged from other parts of the country contributing to the entertainment programme on the television stations. This development reduced the itinerant nature of the established troupes to an extent and also created room for the development of new ones by further attracting public attention to theatre. According to Lanre Bamidele, "The television play [...], however, invited or enticed more audiences to the live performance of some plays."¹⁶¹ One can find examples in Jimoh Aliu's *Arelu* and Isola Ogunsola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*.¹⁶² Both were staged in 1987 at the cultural centre and Liberty stadium in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria.

¹⁵⁶ Olusola, Segun "The Advent of Television Drama" in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 378

¹⁵⁷ Olusola, Segun "The Advent of Television Drama" in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 374

¹⁵⁸ Graham-White, Anthony and Alain, Ricard, "Between the Oral and the Written: Theatre in Ghana and Nigeria," in *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2, May, 1976), 233

¹⁵⁹ Anthony Graham-White and Alain Ricard, "Between the Oral and the Written: Theatre in Ghana and Nigeria," in *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2, May, 1976, 234

¹⁶⁰ In an interview conducted by Yemisi Adeniran, in "Nollywood Exclusive", *Sun*, 14 Sep 2008: <http://www.modernghana.com/news2/2922/4/i-am-back-with-vengeance-baba-salaolaiya-adejumo-a.html>, 17/12/09

¹⁶¹ Bamidele, L.O., *Literature and Sociology* (Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2000), 49

¹⁶² David, Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-colonial Times to the Present Day* (London: James Currey, 1995), 100. Kerr recorded that the audience of 14,000 crammed Liberty Stadium in Ibadan, Nigeria, to see *Efunsetan Aniwura*. Meanwhile, Yemi Ogunbiyi recorded that the

The theatre of Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, and Oyin Adejobi occupied the airwaves in the 1960s and 1970s. They were joined by the Ojo Ladipo Awada Kerikeri Organization, Jimoh Aliu Theatre, Ade Afolayan Theatre, Jacob, Papilolo and Aderupoko Theatre, Ajileye Theatre and many others. Popular dramas like “The Village Headmaster”, “The New Masquerade”, “Sura the Tailor”, “Koko Close”, “Mirror in the Sun”, “Mind Benders”, “Samanja” and “Jagua” were produced in either standard English or Nigerian Pidgin English or a blend of both. The 1980s saw the movement of virtually all existing theatre troupes who could not afford film production, which was the vogue, onto television. Prior to 1980, only a few troupes and the artistes of the Nigerian popular theatre were well known, however, Biodun Jeyifo recorded the presence of one hundred and twenty troupes by 1984.¹⁶³ By the late 1980s, there existed nearly one hundred and fifty troupes existed in the movement with the numbers of plays in their repertoires numbering several thousands.¹⁶⁴ The different theatre groups organized themselves into a body known as Association of Nigerian Theatre Practitioners (ANTP) under the leadership of Hubert Ogunde.

I witnessed this vibrant popular theatre at its peak and their eventual decline beginning in the early 1980s. Leke Ajao (Kokonsari) the actor-manager-director and owner of Konkosari Theatre Troupe, was my neighbour in Iwaya, Lagos, between 1979 and 1986. His group and other notable troupes usually performed every Friday and Saturday night, and I made it a point of duty to attend both their rehearsals and productions in the early 1980s. The Yoruba Traveling Theatre was the core of what eventually became the Nigerian video movement.

Movement from Stage to Cinema and Video Culture

The movement to cinema was a progression from the stage to television and was followed by a progression to the 35mm and 16mm cinema format. Though film was first used in both the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1903 by the British colonialists, it was not until the 1970s that Nigerians made their first

performance of Akin Isola’s version of *Efunsetan Aniwura* at Olubadan Stadium opened to estimated crowd of 40,000 in 1981. See Ogunbiyi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 41

¹⁶³ Jeyifo, Biodun, *The Yoruba Popular Theatre of Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1984)

¹⁶⁴ Banham, Martin, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1216

feature film¹⁶⁵ with input and support from expert film-makers like Francis Oladele, Ola Balogun, and Bankole Bello who had studied abroad.

The 1970 film adaptation of Wole Soyinka's play *Kongi's Harvest* was the gate opener¹⁶⁶ for the business minded practitioners of the Nigerian popular theatre who could not see a corresponding balance between their acquired fame through the stage and television and their lack of wealth or material acquisition due to television stations not paying enough money to the owners of theatre groups or individual actors. For example, some actors claimed that they were given money that barely paid for their transportation from the station to their homes after the recording of an episode of drama.¹⁶⁷ After this first attempt by Francis Oladele's Calpenny production and Wole Soyinka, an inroad into an otherwise foreign venture was opened for the travelling theatre troupes' owners. By the middle of 1980's, there was an economic downturn in Nigeria due to many factors, one of which was the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)¹⁶⁸ of International Monetary Fund (IMF) introduced by General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) through the advice of the World Bank.

During the period when the Nigerian popular theatre was mainly devoted to live performances, troupes would travel from their various bases in the country to all corners of Nigeria, "as well as West African countries such as Ghana, Togo, and Benin."¹⁶⁹ In some cases, the troupes travelled as far as Sierra Leone, Cameroun and wherever there was a large concentration of Yoruba speaking people in Africa. This aided in the Yoruba Travelling Theatre becoming the most mobile theatre movement in African history.¹⁷⁰

Beginning in the 1970s, travelling theatres in Nigeria began to experience constraint in live performances and sought out to seek other options. The most attractive outlet to them was film. After *Kongi's Harvest*, Ola Balogun directed Duro Ladipo's *Ajani Ogun* as the first Yoruba language film

¹⁶⁵ Ukadike, N.F., *Black African Cinema* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 144

¹⁶⁶ Ukadike, N.F., *Black African Cinema* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 144

¹⁶⁷ As I witnessed also in the early 1990s, television actors in Nigeria were often not paid to appear in a drama after the producers had promised to pay them a particular amount per episode. Up to this moment there is no legislation in place to enforce television stations to pay actors any particular amount of money as appearance fees. Since the advent of video-film production television stations are no longer producing drama, they rely on independent producers for television contents including drama.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan, Haynes, *Structural Adjustments of Nigerian Comedy: Baba Sala* (Ann Harbor, Michigan: Mpublishing, University of Michigan Library, 1994).

Online <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/passages/4761530.0008.010?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

¹⁶⁹ Banham, Martin, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1216

¹⁷⁰ Banham, Martin, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1216

and later followed with Ade Afolayan's *Ija Ominira* (The Fight of Freedom). After over three decades on the stage, Ogunde also began to look in that direction. This decade and the next produced Moses Olaiya's *Orun Mooru* (Heaven Has Heat) and *Are Agbaaye* (World President), *Mosebolutan*; Ogunde's *Aye* (The World) and *Jaiyesimi* (Let the World Rest). Ogunde actually produced the largest body of film made on either 35mm or 16mm in Nigeria to date with *Ayanmo* (Destiny), and *Aropin N'teniyen* (Human's Desire for Your End); he also appeared as Brimah in Bruce Beresford's *Mister Johnson* (1990). There were other films made by Nigerian filmmakers who did not belong to the travelling theatre industry, for example, Jab Adu made *Bisi the Daughter of the River*, while Eddie Ugboma produced and directed *Tori Ade, Omiran, The Rise and fall of Dr. Oyenusi, The Boy is Good* and *Death of the Black President*. By the turn of the 1980s, major travelling theatre owners had an imprint in the film industry that was to collapse by the middle of the decade.

The advancement in audio-visual technology in the late 1980's and the effect of the ill-advised SAP programme which had earlier caused film to be produced in reversed stock, paved the way for the production of video-films like *Ekun*, *Aje Ni Iyami*, and *Asewo T'ore Mecca*. After Moses Olaiya lost his fortune when his film *Are Agbaye* on mastered tape was stolen and released to the market by pirates before the official date set for its release, he made *Ore Adisa* and *Asale Gege* in video-film format for home viewing. According to Haynes, he also produced and directed for "video, *Agba Man* (1992) and *Return Match* (1993)."¹⁷¹ The Nigerian video-film was born through the efforts of the less affluent theatre practitioners who had fallen on hard times due to the economic downturn of the 1980s; they "resorted to using the cheaper medium of the video cassette to check the spiralling turn of theatre patronage in the cities."¹⁷²

Alade Muyideen Aromire (1961-2008), who became a theatre practitioner in the early 1980s, was the first to conceive the idea and actual recording of stage production with a Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) on VHS format for home viewing in 1984. He produced *Ekun* (1984) and screened it at some major and little cinemas in Lagos before making it available for home viewing. Due to the reception given to this new format by the Yoruba audience

¹⁷¹ Jonathan, Haynes, *Structural Adjustments of Nigerian Comedy: Baba Sala* (Ann Harbor, Michigan: Mpublishing, University of Michigan Library, 1994).

Online <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/passages/4761530.0008.010?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

¹⁷² Onookome, Okome, "Introducing the Special Issue on West African Cinema: Africa at the Movies", *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (2007), 2.

<http://journals.sfu.ca/pocol/index.php/pct/article/viewFile/776/433>, 21/12/2009

in Lagos and Ibadan, the Yoruba travelling theatre practitioners, who were at first sceptical, later began using the format to the detriment of the celluloid made film which had become too expensive to make. This incursion into video-film by the Yoruba Travelling Theatre practitioners would culminate in the disappearance of theatre groups that were numbered more than two hundred and thirty.¹⁷³ However, after this peak, stage performances and the cinema culture disappeared to make room for the new video-film format which characterized the whole of the 1990s and up to the present. In 1992, the Igbo community in Lagos joined the video-film industry which hitherto was the preserve of the Yorubas. The Igbo language video *Living in Bondage*¹⁷⁴ by Kenneth Nnebue which was well received, and it became a box office hit. The success of *Living in Bondage* prompted the interest of the Igbo electronic market traders in Idumota, Lagos Island, and Onitsha, Anambra State to rush into the industry expecting a quick return on their investment. Though their expectations were met, it created a proliferation of hurriedly made substandard video-films. The producers of television soap opera in English and Yoruba languages also rushed their recordings for home viewing into packaging as video film instead of selling them to Nigerian Television Authority. Despite the shortcomings in production, contemporary Nigerians have been eager to watch locally produced video-film. By the year 2000, the video-film industry had assumed a monumental presence that drew attention to itself from Western film critics. In 2005, the Nigerian video-film industry colloquially called Nollywood in some quarters, was regarded as the “third-largest motion picture industry in the world, producing at least two hundred movies every month.”¹⁷⁵

According to Melita Zajc, the Nigerian video-film industry “challenged the global systems of video production and distribution.”¹⁷⁶ Similar to its predecessor, the Nigerian popular theatre, the connective narrative strand of the battle between “good and evil” runs through the majority of the video-films produced. In spite of this stereotype in storyline, the Nigerian video-film popularity had attracted the attention of film festivals,¹⁷⁷ film critics and

¹⁷³ Amkpa, A., *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 78

¹⁷⁴ There is also a version in English language. In fact, the video success is attributed to the English language version.

¹⁷⁵ Melita Zajc, “Nigerian Video Film Culture”, *Anthropological Notebooks* Vol. XV, No. 1 (Slovene, Anthropological Society, 2009), 68

¹⁷⁶ Melita Zajc, “Nigerian Video Film Culture”, *Anthropological Notebooks*, Vol. XV, No.1 (Slovene, Anthropological Society, 2009), 65

¹⁷⁷ Ebewo, Patrick J., “The Emerging Video Film Industry in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects” in *Journal of Film & Video*, 2007 (online)
<http://www.britannica.com/bps/additionalcontent/18/25752157/The-Emerging-Video-Film-Industry-in-Nigeria-Challenges-and-Prospects>. Sunday 20/12/2009.

scholars in many parts of the world in less than twenty years. Hyginus Ekwuazi¹⁷⁸, Jonathan Haynes, Onookome Okome, Folake Ogunleye¹⁷⁹, Femi Shaka, Steve Ayorinde,¹⁸⁰ Julius-Adeoye, etc., have written extensively on the Nigerian video-film industry. Other critics include Melita Zajc, Manthia Diawara, Patrick Ebewo, and Pierre Barrot¹⁸¹.

Nigerian Literary Theatre

The distinctive factor between the Nigerian popular theatre and the literary theatre is that the former is formed as professional theatre with all emphasis placed on performances creation, while the latter created playwrights' whose interest is to create dramatic text that can be performed by independent groups. The interest of playwrights is dramatic creation, therefore, have not been able to create a successful professional company¹⁸² like that of Hubert Ogunde or Duro Ladipo; however, they often try to create semi-professional troupes either located within the academic environment or the non-academic society. The major difference between these two theatres is well captured in the words of Biodun Jeyifo:

The most obvious illustration of this divergence is the respective fates seemingly assigned by both critical posterity and contemporary wisdom to the text and the performance: the text will outlast the performance, and even at the very moment when the two share

¹⁷⁸ Hyginus Ekwuazi was the former Director-General of the Nigerian Film Corporation; a Professor at the University of Ibadan as well as one of the earliest Nigerian scholars to engage on the discourse of the Nigerian video-film at the dawn of the 1990 before Jonathan Haynes arrived Nigeria to research the subject. He authored *Film in Nigeria* 1987, "Towards the Decolonization of the African Film", in *African Media Review* Vol. 5, No. 2, 1991, "The Hausa Video film: the call of the muezzin", in *Film International* Vol. 5, No. 4, 2007. Onookome Okome was a student of Ekwuazi at the University of Ibadan. Before taking up a professorial position in the US, he co-authored with Jonathan Haynes *Cinema and Social Change in West Africa* (Ibadan: Caltop Publishing, 1995)

¹⁷⁹ Ogunleye, Foluke, (ed.), *African Video Film Today*, (2003), *Africa Through the Eye of the Video Camera*, (2008), and *Transformation and Advancement: The African Video Film*, (2009). She is the Initiator and Executive Director of the Ife International Film Festival.

¹⁸⁰ Ayorinde, Steve, "Representation of the Nigerian Video/DVD Industry in the News Media" *Dossier Africiné* N°3: Cinéma et télévision (en anglais), 2007, (online). <http://www.africine.org/?menu=art&no=7200>

¹⁸¹ Barrot, Pierre, *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008)

¹⁸² Nigerian playwrights like Wole Soyinka, JP Clark, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Bode Sowande and few others made attempts at creating theatre companies without success. Many of these playwrights, apart from Bode Sowande, who resigned his position at Ibadan to concentrate on Odu Themes, are university lecturers who have other commitments and were unable to focus on running a theatre group.

contemporaneous existence, the performance lasts for a few hours every night for a few weeks, while the text is virtually available all the time.¹⁸³

Literary drama was already taking root in Nigeria before the establishment of the University College Ibadan, an arm of the University of London, in 1948. The Oloyede's *King Elejigbo and Princess Abeje of Kontagora* was already being performed in 1902. The Onitsha market plays were also growing and texts and performances were produced from the 1940s to 1950s.¹⁸⁴ It is worthy to note that, unlike the Nigerian Popular Theatre that was indigenous language based, the literary theatre utilizes both English and Yoruba languages, as well as the subsequent culturally popular 'Pidgin' English.

The history of serious literary theatre in Nigeria began with James Ene Henshaw (1924-2007) who was the first recognized playwright in Nigeria. The emergence of Henshaw's *This is our Chance* which was performed in 1947 and published ten years later in 1957 clearly puts into perspective the 1956 date given by Dapo Adelugba, Olu Obafemi and Sola Adeyemi "as the year of the birth of Nigerian drama in English."¹⁸⁵ Among Henshaw's plays are *A Man of Character* (1957), *Jewel of the Shrine* (1957), *Companion for a Chief* (1964), *Children of the Goddess* (1964), *Magic in the Blood* (1964), *Medicine for Love* (1964), *Dinner for Promotion* (1967), *Enough is Enough* (1975), *Son to Mary Charles* and *Irish Sister of Charity* (1980). Henshaw's plays, though popular with school students, are considered too fashioned in the "European model without any modification."¹⁸⁶ He performed his first play, *This is Our Chance*, in Dublin in 1948.¹⁸⁷ In 1952, he won the first prize at All Nigerian Festival of the Arts with his one-act-play *Jewel of the Shrine*.¹⁸⁸ Henshaw's works were "mainly interested in social foibles and domestic conflict, often presenting

¹⁸³ Jeyifo, Biodun, "Literary Theatre and the Search for a Popular Theatre in Nigeria" in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 411

¹⁸⁴ Colin Chambers (ed.), *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 550

¹⁸⁵ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., "Nigeria" in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151

¹⁸⁶ Colin, Chambers (ed.), *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 550

¹⁸⁷ Adedeji, J. A., "Wole Soyinka and the Growth of Drama", in Albert S. Gerard, (ed.), *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Volume 2, (Budapest: Akademiaio, 1986), 718

¹⁸⁸ Adedeji, J. A., "Wole Soyinka and the Growth of Drama", in Albert S. Gerard, (ed.), *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Volume 2, (Budapest: Akademiaio, 1986), 718

dramatic encounters between generations separated by opposed traditions, beliefs, and mores.”¹⁸⁹

Henshaw later wrote plays which attacked corruption in the country shortly following its independence. His plays were performed regularly in high “schools and by amateur theatre companies across Nigeria”¹⁹⁰ until recently when a preference for performing plays developed on the school syllabus. For example, the first play I directed as a student of theatre at the University of Ibadan is Henshaw’s *Dinner for Promotion*. Dapo Adelugba and Olu Obafemi posits: “Henshaw’s plays are populist and filled a lacuna, a paucity of drama texts in Nigerian schools, before the arrival of more profound and serious dramatic texts of Wole Soyinka, JP Clark, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola, playwrights who properly typify the first-generation Nigerian playwrights and dramatists of the English literary tradition.”¹⁹¹ Apart from the plays of Henshaw, Ogali Ogu Ogali wrote and staged *Veronica My Daughter* in 1957 in a “style chiefly influenced by classic literature, the Bible and Shakespeare.”¹⁹²

The Establishment of the Arts Theatre in Ibadan

The Ibadan Arts Theatre was built in 1955 for the purpose of holding concerts and film shows, but the arrival on campus of theatre enthusiasts among the teaching staff of the University College around this period helped to shape the new course of events. People like Martin Banham and Geoffrey Axworthy, especially, began an active program of theatrical production at the Arts theatre. Martin Banham and Geoffrey Axworthy were using the student group of the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (UCIDS) and the staff group of the Arts Theatre Production Group (ATPG)¹⁹³ for production. In addition, they ran a series of theatre workshops for the departments of English and of Extra-Mural Studies, as well as the Institute of Education. These activities were so popular and so important that “the 1961 University Visitation Report

¹⁸⁹ See Simon Gikandi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 308

¹⁹⁰ Simon Gikandi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 308

¹⁹¹ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151

¹⁹² Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151

¹⁹³ See Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

recommended that theatre should be organized properly as an academic discipline.”¹⁹⁴

The Ibadan School of Drama, which was instituted in 1962¹⁹⁵ and, subsequently, metamorphosed into the present Department of Theatre Arts sometime in 1970, was initially the drama component of the literature programme of the Department of English.¹⁹⁶ Prior to the initiation of the school, both UCIDS and ATPG had begun creating an audience for literary drama within the university.¹⁹⁷ The group performed, under the direction of Axworthy and Banham, plays by several authours such as Bernard Shaw, Andre Obey, Shakespeare, Gogol, Ibsen, Pinero and many others.¹⁹⁸ By 1958, the groups presented Wole Soyinka’s *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*. This effort on the work of Soyinka and his subsequent arrival in Nigeria in 1960 marked the turning point for drama creation among the university students and members of the UCIDS. With formation of the Player of the Dawn in 1959¹⁹⁹ by the graduates of the university residing in Ibadan, the community became a haven of theatrical life.

The Ibadan Drama Groups

In 1962/63 when the Ibadan School of Drama commenced an academic programme, the UCIDS, ATPG, The Player of the Dawn, and Wole Soyinka’s the 1960 Masks were already visible. Though not a theatre troupe, the Mbari Centre was noted for making its facility available for the creation of creative and literary endeavours by enthusiasts. The 1960 Masks, established in the same year, produced the premiere production of some Wole Soyinka’s works, JP Clark’s *Song of a Goat* in 1964, as well as those of its other members.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ See the Department of Theatre Arts homepage on University of Ibadan website <http://www.ui.edu.ng/?q=node/934>, 23/12/2009

¹⁹⁵ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151

¹⁹⁶ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

¹⁹⁷ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

¹⁹⁸ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152, Dele Layiwola mentioned Anouilh, Behan, Becket, Fry, Congreve, Dryden, Durrenmatt, Frisch, Jonson, Miller, Moliere, Mortimer, Pinter, Yeats, Webster and Wilder, see *African Theatre in Performance: a festschrift in honour of Martin Banham* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 2000), xiii

¹⁹⁹ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

²⁰⁰ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

Simultaneously, a “theatrical development in the eastern part of Nigeria was taking place at the same time, in particular the John Ekwere’s Ogui Players which later became the Eastern Nigerian Theatre Group.”²⁰¹ After Soyinka left University College Ibadan in 1964 for a teaching appointment at the University of Ife, founded in 1962, he established the “Orisun Theatre Company” through which he produced his own plays. According to Adelugba, Obafemi and Adeyemi, the first Nigerian theatre generation grew out of such literary culture of the period.²⁰²

The First Generation of Nigerian Literary Dramatists

Between 1958 and 1965, a robust ferment of intellectual activities developed at the university and in the city of Ibadan, especially at the Mbari Centre, where the first serious and significant generation of literary dramatists, including Wole Soyinka and JP Clark, emerged.²⁰³ Soyinka had already written and staged some of his works in England before arriving in Nigeria in 1960. Other dramatists who also began writing around this time include Wale Ogunyemi, Sonny Oti, Zulu Sofola and Samson Amali.²⁰⁴ Ola Rotimi is also part of this generation, though he was studying at Yale University in the US at the point when this movement began.

Wole Soyinka (1934-), who was based in England, arrived in Ibadan and formed the 1960 Masks, drawing members from the Player of the Dawn.²⁰⁵ He considers the 1960 Masks a theatre laboratory that would develop into a permanent National Theatre of some sort because members were from different parts of Nigeria.²⁰⁶ The theatre served as a facility for promoting his research in African theatre forms and for the performance of his works and the works by other African writers. According to Biodun Jeyifo, “Soyinka’s work has already accumulated a vast and comprehensive list of critical studies with innumerable diverse approaches to which it would be hard to add something

²⁰¹ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

²⁰² Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

²⁰³ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, “Nigerian Popular Theatre: A Critical Profile” in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria*. (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 30

²⁰⁴ Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 153

²⁰⁵ See Adelugba, D., Obafemi, O., Adeyemi, S., “Nigeria” in Martin Banham, (ed.), *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152

²⁰⁶ Olusola, Segun, “The Advent of Television Drama”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 372

without a risk of tedious repetition.”²⁰⁷ As I agreed with Jeyifo, it is important to add that he has traversed the Nigerian, indeed the world, dramatic landscape for over half a century and, along the way, winning every laurel associated with literature including the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. Soyinka is the first Nigerian and African multifaced literary figure that distinguished himself in all the genres of literature. He is a poet, novelist, critic, essayist, autobiographer, playwright and director. He is both a cultural and political activist. “From 1957 to 1959, he served as a script-reader, actor and director at the Royal Court Theatre in London and, while there, developed three experimental pieces with a company of actors he had brought together.”²⁰⁸ From his earliest plays (“The Invention” (1957, unpublished), *The Swamp Dwellers* (first staged in 1958, and published 1963), “The Root” (1959, unpublished) performed during the British Drama League in London, *The Trials of Brother Jero* (performed in 1960, and published 1963), *The Lion and the Jewel* (performed in 1959 at the Royal Court Theatre, and published 1963)²⁰⁹ to the present, he has established himself as Africa’s finest and most discussed playwright. His other works include *Jero’s Metamorphosis* (performed 1974, publ. 1973), *A Dance of the Forests* (performed 1960, publ.1963), *The Republican and the New Republican* (performed 1963), *Kongi’s Harvest* (performed 1965, publ. 1967), “Rites of the Harmattan Solstice” (performed 1966) and *Madmen and Specialists* (performed 1970, publ. 1971). He also wrote *The Strong Breed* (1963), *Before the Blackout* (performed 1965 publ. 1971), *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975). In “*The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), he has rewritten the *Bacchae* for the African stage and, in *Opera Wonyosi* (performed 1977, publ. 1981), bases himself on John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* and Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera*.”²¹⁰ Others are “The Golden Accord” (performed 1979-80), “Priority Projects” (performed 1982), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *Requiem for a Futurologist* (performed 1983, publ. 1985), *Childe Internationale* (performed in 1964, publ. 1987), *From Zia with Love* (1992), *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (performed on BBC radio 1991, publ. 1992), *The Beatification of Area Boy* (performed 1995, publ. 1995), and *King Baabu* (2002).

²⁰⁷ See Femi Osofisan “Wole Soyinka and the Living Dramatist: A Playwright’s Encounter with the Drama of Wole Soyinka,” in Biodun Jeyifo, (ed.), *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 174

²⁰⁸ See Wole Soyinka <http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc53.html>, 29/12/2009.

²⁰⁹ See Bernth Lindfors, “The Early Writings of Wole Soyinka,” in James Gibbs, (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington: The Three Continents Press, 1980), 19-44

²¹⁰ http://www.iti-worldwide.org/ambassador_soyinka.html, 28/12/2009

Beginning in the 1960s, rigorous expositions of Soyinka's dramatic oeuvre have been undertaken by Jones, Irele, Gibbs, Manduakor, Wright, Euba, Jeyifo, Obafemi, Owomoyela, and other recent doctoral theses. Critics have taken into consideration both his "metaphysical and materialist perspective in evolving a dramatic aesthetic."²¹¹ Some of his writings are based on the mythology of the Yoruba, with Ogun, the god of iron and war, as central influence. According to James Gibbs, "Soyinka treats mythology as the works of individuals which has been adopted by the community but which, nevertheless, remains susceptible to manipulations by individuals."²¹² Though myth enjoys a great presence in Soyinka's works, he, nevertheless, rearranged it in the plays to suit his purpose on the stage. Soyinka argues that to use myth on stage "...it is necessary for me to bend it to my own requirements. I don't believe in carbon-copies in any art form. You have to select what you want from traditional sources and distort it if necessary."²¹³ He went further in another circumstance to acknowledge the aesthetic medium of the "Yoruba tradition as the fount of his inspiration."²¹⁴

Soyinka's 1960 *Masks* was a training ground for theatre formation in Nigeria for many of Nigerian dramatists and actors of the period. Soyinka himself became a world famous African playwright in the English language, fusing the ritualistic exegesis of the Yoruba worldview with all that is good in the English world. Due to the fecundity and range of Soyinka's works, his dramatic outputs are divided into satirical comedy, serious philosophical plays and tragedy. Subjects and themes that encompass the existential man and his sociopolitical world are consistent features in his drama. Within the generality of the subject frame and themes of Soyinka's works are "being, salvation, betrayal, cultural survival, waste, corruption of power, destruction of the human potential and other topics."²¹⁵

Segun Olusola notes that Soyinka contributed to the development of television drama with his 1960 script *My Father's Burden* as well as to film

²¹¹ Obafemi, Olu, *Contemporary Nigerian theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies Series, 1996), 122

²¹² Gibbs, James, *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington: The Three Continents Press, 1980), 4

²¹³ Valerie, Wilmer, "Wole Soyinka Talks to Flamingo" *Flamingo*, Vol. 5, No. 6, 1966, 16

²¹⁴ Soyinka, Wole, "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetic of Pseudo-Tradition" *Transition*, Vol. 48, 1975, 44

²¹⁵ Euba, Femi, "Wole Soyinka", in Pushpa Naidu Parekh and Siga Fatima Jagne, (eds.), *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 443

production in Nigeria.²¹⁶ According to Segun Olushola, “When, in 1960, Wole Soyinka returned to the country ready to launch [...] theatre groups, his colleagues in radio, television and the local amateur scenes rallied round him.”²¹⁷ He was commissioned to write a play for television which was subsequently produced and broadcast. This became “the first drama presentation on Nigeria Television broadcast in August 1960.”²¹⁸ Also the adaptation for the screen of his play *Kongi’s Harvest* in 1970 pioneered filmmaking in the country. He also wrote for the radio both in Nigeria and for the British Broadcasting Corporation. Between 1960 and 1978, Soyinka created three semi-professional theatre groups (Masks in 1960, Orisun Theater in 1964, and Guerrilla Theatre Unit of the University of Ife in 1978).

These theatres, created at different stages in Soyinka’s life, performed distinctive roles in his theatrical career. At Ife, where the Orisun Theatre was established by Wole Soyinka, he employed the willing practitioners of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, especially those without a ready troupe at the time. They later formed the bulk of the university’s own troupe. Wole Soyinka’s Orisun theatre “recruited the performers in an attempt to develop a hybrid programme based on a combination of traditional and literary theatre conventions.”²¹⁹ His Guerrilla Theatre “specialized in performing satirical revues to criticize and condemn the nefarious activities of the government of the day”²²⁰ in Nigeria, staging plays at open motor parks and market spaces without prior notice. Some of the notable plays of the Guerrilla Theatre phase are contained in his *Before the Blow Out* and *Etiye Revolu Wetin*. On October 21st, 1994, Soyinka was “appointed United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Goodwill Ambassador for the Promotion of African culture, human rights, freedom of expression, media and

²¹⁶ Olusola, Segun, “The Advent of Television Drama”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 372

²¹⁷ Olusola, Segun, “The Advent of Television Drama”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 370-380

²¹⁸ Olusola, Segun, “The Advent of Television Drama”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 370-380

²¹⁹ Amkpa, A., *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 78, see also James Gibbs, *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington: The Three Continents Press Inc., 1980)

²²⁰ Musa, R.A., “The Drama and Theatre of Wole Soyinka”, in *An Encyclopaedia of The Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2006, 216-229 (online)

<http://www.unilorin.edu.ng/unilorin/publications/rasheed/rasheed%20LASU%201.pdf>.

28/12/2009

communication.”²²¹ His works represent a definitive literary output among the first generation and subsequent generations afterward.

John Pepper Clark (1935-) is one of Soyinka’s contemporaries who also distinguished himself in the field of drama as well as in other genres of literature as a whole. He is an accomplished poet and playwright. He was a member of Soyinka’s 1960 Masks and the Mbari Centre and was also editor of the Black Orpheus-magazine which also published some of Soyinka’s early works. In 1981, he established the PEC Repertory Theatre as a professional theatre company in Lagos. Clark bases his drama on the culture of the Ijaw-people of Southern Nigeria, a culture with which he is very familiar. He frequently deals with the themes of “revenge, retributive justice and its excesses”,²²² adultery, protest, violence, corruption, cultural nationalism and colonialism through a complex of interweaving of indigenous African imagery and that of Western literary tradition. Arthur Smith notes that:

The traditional and the modern are almost always blended in Clark's plays in themes, attitudes and techniques as they are in some of Soyinka's early plays. His first two plays, *Song of a Goat* (performed in 1961) and *The Masquerade* (peformed in 1965), contain elements of classical Greek and Shakespearean drama, the poetic plays of T.S. Elliot and the folk literature of the Ijaw people.²²³

The Encyclopedia Britanica cites that Clark’s first three plays *Song of a Goat*, *The Raft* and *The Masquerade* “are tragedies in which individuals are unable to escape the doom brought about by an inexorable law of nature or society.”²²⁴ He wrote *Ozidi* (1966), a compilation or “stage version of an Ijaw traditional epic and ritual play, which in a native village would take seven days to perform.”²²⁵ Clark’s portrayal of his characters as being helpless in the hands of nature or supreme forces has critics classifying his tragedy not as an

²²¹ See http://wapedia.mobi/en/Wole_Soyinka?t=2, 30/12/2009

²²² Emevwo Biakolo, “J. P. Clark-Bekederemo”, in Pushpa Naidu Parekh and Siga Fatima Jagne, (eds.), *Postcolonial African Writer: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 105-110

²²³ Arthur Smith, “Blending the Traditional with the Modern in John Pepper Clark's Plays” <http://ezinearticles.com/?Blending-The-Traditional-With-The-Modern-In-John-Pepper-Clarks-Plays&id=990961>, Monday 04/01/2010

²²⁴ See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/119951/John-Pepper-Clark>, 04/01/2010

²²⁵ See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/119951/John-Pepper-Clark>, 04/01/2010

imitation or derivative of Greek classics but hugely indebted to it.²²⁶ He wrote and published *The Bikoroa Plays* (performed 1981, publ. 1985) which is a collection of three plays: *The Boat*, *The Return Home* and *Full Circle*. His other plays include the comedy *The Wife Revolts* (1984), *The Ozidi Saga* (1977) and *All for Oil* (2000).

Ola Rotimi (1938-2000) was still studying at University of Boston in the United State of America (USA) when Wole Soyinka began working with the 1960 Masks, but he returned to Nigeria before the end of the 1960s to assert his presence on the Nigeria literary theatre stage. Ola Rotimi often examined Nigeria's history and ethnic traditions in his works. According to Olu Obafemi, Rotimi "employs elements of traditional theatrical performances-language as in incantation, proverbs, an unabashed translation of stock Yoruba sayings, music, dance, songs, mime and acted narratives to achieve meaning and dramaturgy."²²⁷ His first plays, *To Stir the God of Iron* (performed 1963) and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (performed 1966; published 1977) were staged while he was a student at the drama schools of Boston University and Yale, respectively.

Upon taking a position at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ife, he wrote his most famous play, *The Gods are not to Blame* (performed 1968, published 1971), an adaptation or recasting of Sophocles *Oedipus Rex*.²²⁸ He set up the Ori Olokun Theatre Company at Ife with the aim of using the company to create a truly authentic African theatre. He wanted a departure from imported European and colonial inherited theatre. David Kerr writes that the unique creative achievement of Rotimi's work at the Ori Olokun Theatre is that "it evolved out of the ivory towers of the University, an 'unfriendly' territory as far as the indigenous theatre is concerned."²²⁹ "Ola Rotimi dedicated his art to exploring the traditional/indigenous artistic expressions of the Nigerian people at a point when the African aesthetic had completely lost ground to the European value system."²³⁰ Rotimi distinguished himself as a

²²⁶ Arthur Smith, "Blending The Traditional With The Modern In John Pepper Clark's Plays." <http://ezinearticles.com/?Blending-The-Traditional-With-The-Modern-In-John-Pepper-Clarks-Plays&id=990961>. Monday 04/01/2010

²²⁷ Obafemi, Olu, *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision* (Beyreuth: Beyreuth African Studies, 1996), 109, see <http://www.amazon.com/Ola-Rotimis-African-Theatre-Development/dp/0773461477>

²²⁸ Kerr, David, *African Popular Theatre: from Pre-colonial times to the Present* (London: James Currey, 1995), 117

²²⁹ Coker, Niyi, *Ola Rotimi's African Theatre: The Development of an Indigenous Aesthetic* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press New York, 2005)

²³⁰ Yemi, Ogunbiyi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 36

historical dramatist with *Kurunmi* (performed 1969, published 1971) a dramatization of the Yoruba nineteenth Century war and its actors, as well as in *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, (performed 1971, published 1974), a stage documentation of the fall of the last ruler of Benin before the fall of the empire to the British imperialist in 1897. He also wrote *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988) an exploit of Harcourt White and the bravery of the inmates of the lepers' colony in 1939. In his argument for historical plays, Ola Rotimi posits:

Most of us Africans are ignorant of our history. When I was in secondary school, we learnt tangentially African History and usually from a myopic, jaundiced perspective of Western scholars.... The play tries to teach history through drama. My second mission is, of course, to see whether we could emulate some heroic figures in history.²³¹

Based on his beliefs of the importance of drama in the documentation of history, he wrote some plays with reference to historical figures and institutions. "Rotimi's philosophical belief is in justice and fairness, gender equality, and religion tolerance. All of these influence his plays which centre on the oppressed in the society."²³² For example, in *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled* (performed 1979, published 1980) and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988) he champions the cause of the masses and the downtrodden in the Nigerian society. Rotimi's other plays include *Holding Talks* (performed 1970, published 1979), *Initiation into Madness* (performed 1973), *Grip Am* (performed 1973), *Akassa Youmi* (performed 1977), *Everyone His/Her Own Problem* (a radio drama broadcast 1987), *When the Criminals Become Judges* (1995), *The Epilogue* (contained *Tororo Tororo Roro* and *Man Talk Woman Talk*, 2002).²³³

Zulu Sofola (1935-1995) was the first female dramatist in Nigeria. She belongs to the first generation of the country's literary dramatist; although her first publication would not appear until 1972, she was already writing and performing her plays in the 1960s. Many feminist critics find it difficult to define her works as examples of feminist writing but, rather, define it as celebrating African culture. Some critics complain that women characters are

²³¹ Kunle Ajibade, "The Man Ola Rotimi", in *Weekend Concord*, April 20, 1991 <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2870300065.html>. 04/01/2010

²³² Okafor, C.G., "Ola Rotimi: the Man, the Playwright, and the Producer on the Nigerian Theatre Scene", in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 64, 1990, (online). Accessed on Wed. 04 Jan. 2010. <http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=95710474>

²³³ *Epilogue* was published after the death of Ola Rotimi in 2000, but the two plays were staged and directed by the playwright before his death.

poorly projected in many of her plays. They argued that, in Sofola's works, their education as women is taken as unnecessary at critical points while men are favourably drawn.²³⁴ Tejumola Olaniyan concludes that in *The Sweet Trap*, "the playwright's vision is anti-feminist with a dogmatic closure on gender identity and difference."²³⁵ Olu Obafemi, on the other hand, concludes that Sofola's preoccupation is with the "plight of womanhood in the modern world and the exploration of the tragic and the traditional in contemporary society in her plays from the eighties and nineties."²³⁶ Sofola wrote voraciously, drawing themes extensively from both African cultural milieu and the Bible. After the performance of her first play, *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (performed 1969, published 1971), which was commissioned by an all-girls secondary school in Ibadan, she wrote *Wedlock of the Gods* (performed 1971, published 1973), *King Emene* (1974), *Old Wines are Tasty* (performed 1975, published 1981), *The Sweet Trap* (performed 1975, published 1977), *The Deer and the Hunters Pearl* (performed 1976), *The Wizard of Law* (1976), *Song of a Maiden* (performed 1977, published 1991), *Memories in the Moonlight* (performed 1977, published 1986). She also wrote *Eclipsos and the Fantasia* (performed 1990), *Lost Dreams and other plays* (contained *The Love of the Life*, *The Operators*, and *The Showers* 1982), and *Queen Omu-Ako of Oligbo* (performed 1989). Other plays written by her are *Celebration of Life*, and *Ivory Tower*.

Wale Ogunyemi (1939-2001), who first started writing his plays in the Yoruba language, is regarded as the most indigenous of all the Nigerian literary dramatists writing in English. He was a member of the Wole Soyinka's theatre companies and an ardent believer in the Yoruba religion and cultural worldview. Wale Ogunyemi was extolled for his mastery of many theatre techniques. Apart from his knowledge of European theatre, he employed all the known traditional African performance elements. These elements which play prominent role in traditional Yoruba drama in which Ogunyemi is very familiar, made his work an important reference point for other artists. He is also one of the earliest Nigerian dramatists to have their plays broadcast on

²³⁴ Obafemi, Olu, *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 1996), 161

²³⁵ Tejumola Olaniyan, "Zulu Sofola and Her Sisters: The Example of *The Sweet Trap*", in Wylie, H., Brutus D., and Silenieks J., (eds.), *African Literature: New Mask* (Washington: Three Continents, 1988). 40-49

²³⁶ Tejumola Olaniyan, "Zulu Sofola and Her Sisters: The Example of *The Sweet Trap*", in Wylie, H., Brutus D., and Silenieks J., (eds.), *African Literature: New Mask* (Washington: Three Continents, 1988). 40-49

television. He is often regarded as having his legs between the two generations of the Nigerian literary drama firmament until his death in 2001. He used myth and history as a base for his drama more than any other playwright in Nigeria, constantly researching into different Yoruba cultures.

In 1965, Ogunyemi co-founded the Theatre Express along with two of his friends. The mini-troupe was established for the purpose of staging plays at civic functions as well as taking theatre to other venues such as market places. He was part of both the Yoruba Travelling Theatre in the 1960s as well as the thriving literary theatre of the period.²³⁷ Ogunyemi's *Langbodo* (performed 1977, published 1979), a stage adaptation of D.O. Fagunwa's novel, was Nigeria's entry to the 2nd Festival of World Black Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77).²³⁸ A major concern in most plays of Ogunyemi is the quest for national unity, evident in *The Divorce* (performed 1975, published 1977), *Langbodo*, and *The Vow* (completed in 1962, performed 1972, published 1985) which won the African Arts award of the University of California, Los Angeles in 1971.²³⁹ His other plays include *Business Headache* (1966), *Are Kogun* (1968), *Be Mighty, Be Mine* (1968), *The Scheme* (performed and published 1967), *Esu Elegbara* (performed 1968, published 1970) about the Yoruba trickster-god, *Ijaye War* (1970) and *Kiriji* (performed 1971, published 1975), both dramatizations of Yoruba society during the nineteenth-century internecine wars. Ogunyemi also published *The Sign of the Rainbow* and *Eniyan* (performed 1982, published 1987) an adaptation of the medieval *Everyman*.²⁴⁰

The Second Generation of Nigerian Literary Dramatists

The period after 1970, considered the post-civil war phase in Nigeria, witnessed the emergence of a different crop of playwrights, regularly referred to as second generation dramatists. The best in this group of playwrights were set apart from their predecessor not necessarily by any age difference, *per se*, but rather by what Yemi Ogunbiyi considers to be temperament and vision, hardened, as it were, by the trauma of the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war.²⁴¹

²³⁷ See Martin, Banham, "Wale Ogunyemi: A actor and playwright he celebrated Nigerian myth and Legend" in <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2002/feb/14/guardianobituaries.books>

²³⁸ See Biographical Note on Chief Wale Ogunyemi (J.P., M.O.N, CNT).http://www.waleogunyemi.net/abridged_biography.html 09/09/2012

²³⁹ See Dictionary of Literary Biography on Wale Ogunyemi. 4. <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/wale-ogunyemi-dlb/4.html>, 05/01/2010

²⁴⁰ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 17

²⁴¹ Yemi, Ogunbiyi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 36.

Among these writers are Wale Ogunyemi, Fela Davies, Comish Ekiye, Soji Simpson, Kole Omotosho, Bode Sowande, Meki Nzewi, Laolu Ogunniyi, Bode Osanyin, Esiaba Irobi, Tunde Fatunde, Ahmed Yerima,²⁴² Akinwunmi Isola, and Femi Osofisan. However, Wale Ogunyemi glides between both the first and second generations as a founding member of the old Orisun theatre, the travelling theatre and part of early television in Nigeria. These second generation writers led by Femi Osofisan, out of an ideological commitment, were initially shunned or, at best, were indifferent to Western acclaim by refusing to publish with foreign firms. They firmly believed that the production of literature cannot be divorced from its content and overall objective in a neo-colonialist economy. Akinwunmi Isola is prominent within this group as the most versatile of the writers who adopted the indigenous Yoruba language in the writing of his plays. Unlike their older predecessors Soyinka, Clark, Rotimi and Sofola, these playwrights are unequivocal in their sympathies with the working masses, and “even when they use myth as their backdrop for dramatic action, it is manipulated in such a way that the message comes out clearly in favour of radical change.”²⁴³ They appropriated Marxist exegesis in their creation of drama and in the analysis of existing literature.

Femi Osofisan (1946-), thought of as the most vocal literarily of this generation of radical dramatists, is considered to have written ideologically situated plays to reflect the struggle of the neglected masses of the Nigerian population. Osofisan ventured into all of the genres of literature and excelled in all. He writes poetry under the pseudonym Okinba Launko. His *Kolera Kolej* was published as prose before being adapted for the stage under the same title. In plays such as *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), *Morountodun* (1982), *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), including his early social farce, *Who's Afraid of Solarin* (1978), he demonstrated a commitment to social justice and political change. To reiterate Sola Adeyemi, “Osofisan continues to create a radical shift in the psyche of our nation, Nigeria, his drama staunches our open wounds and his songs rouse us from our lethargy and set us ‘ablaze’.”²⁴⁴

²⁴² See Yemi, Ogunbiyi, “Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile”, in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 36. Many critics have failed to include Ahmed Yerima among the second generation dramatists. However, with the performances and publications of three of his plays at the time the second generation playwrights were becoming fossilized, thus, he deserved to be so included.

²⁴³ Oyekan, Owomoyela, *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/James Currey, 1997), 162

²⁴⁴ Adeyemi, Sola, (ed.), *Portraits for an Eagle: Essays in Honour of Femi Osofisan* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 2006). For information on Osofisan, I relied on this collection of essays edited by Sola Adeyemi, I also consulted Muiyiwa P. Awodiya, *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective* Revised Edition (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2010)

In addition to creating the Kakaun Sela Theatre Kompany, a semi-professional troupe, he created a form of theatre style for which he used Bertolt Brecht's alienation technique changing the set, costumes, and recasting actors in the middle of a performance. Although Osofisan admires Brecht a great deal, his theatre is markedly different from Brecht's. Osofisan's theatre employs the use of music, dance, and spectacle to communicate pungent messages. In 1982, Osofisan wrote thirteen scripts for Unibadan Performing Company (UPC) for production on the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) Television, Ibadan.²⁴⁵ The scripts include *To Kill A Dream*, *At the Petrol Station*, *Operation Abandoned*, *The New Cathedral*, *A Success Story*, *Operation Rat-trap*, *And Fear Comes Calling*, *The Audience Also Dances*, *A Debt to the Dead*, and *A Date With Danger*. Osofisan's fecundity on stage is without unequaled among Nigerian dramatists. He wrote upward of more than three dozen plays which include, *Behind the Ballot Box* (1967), *Oduduwa Don't Go!* (1968), *A Restless Run of Locusts* (1975), *Morountodun and Other Plays* [with *Morountodun*, *Red is the Freedom Road* and *No More the Wasted Breed*] (1983), *Once Upon Other Robbers* (1984), *Farewell To A Cannibal Rage*, and *Midnight Hotel* (1986), *Two Short plays* [containing *Altine's Wrath* and *The Oriki of A Grasshopper*] (1987), *Another Raft* (1989). From the 1990's he published *Birthdays Are Not For Dying and Other Plays* [containing *Birthdays Are Not For Dying*, *Fires Burn and Die Hard* and *The Inspector and the Hero*] (1990), *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1991), *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* (1992), *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993), *The Album of the Midnight Blackout*, and *Ire Ni!, Nkrumah-Ni!...Africa-Ni!*, and *Tegonni, An African Antigone* (1994). He also published *The Oriki of A Grasshopper and Other Plays*, *Twingle-Twangle*, *A Twynning Tayle*, and *The Engagement* (1995). Others include *One Legend, Many Seasons* (1996), *Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark* (1996), *Making Children is Fun* (1996), *Reel Rwanda!* (1996), *Many Colors Make the Thunder-King* (1997)²⁴⁶, *Ajayi Crowther*, *The Play of Kolera Kolej*, and *Women of Owu* all in 2006. As Yemi Ogunbiyi notes:

Eclectic as he is original, Osofisan has sought to reshape traditional Yoruba mythology and ritual in the light of the contemporary realities, to squeeze out of old myths fresher meanings, in the belief that Man, in

²⁴⁵ See Muyiwa P. Awodiya, *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective* Revised Edition (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2010), 22

²⁴⁶ Adeyemi, Sola, (ed.), *Portraits for an Eagle: Essays in Honour of Femi Osofisan* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 2006)

the last analysis, makes his own myth. Not content to merely expose the ills of the society, he has dared to provide us with glimpses of his vision of a new society. It is interesting to note that Osofisan's plays are popular fares at institutions across the country.²⁴⁷

His works are characterized by what Tejumola Olaniyan regards as "skillful appropriation and re-interpretation of indigenous performance form, a fine-tuned materialist revision of history, and a consummate dramaturgic sophistication."²⁴⁸ He represents a significant number of his generation of Nigerian writers well who accept neither Eurocentric "conceptions of an ideal African past nor naive enthusiasm about Western influence, a generation that has seen both colonialism and postcolonialism and has few illusions about either."²⁴⁹ Bode Sowande (1948-) is "known for the theatric aesthetic of his plays about humanism and social change."²⁵⁰ He is a member of the radical dramatist school where there is a belief in the deployment of Marxist aesthetics in drama creation, a group "that favours a post-traditional social and political landscape where the"²⁵¹ people are "the creator and maker of their own history not just the subject of norms and tradition."²⁵² According to Osita Okagbue, "Sowande favours a much more political tone in his writing and seeks to promote an alliance or acquiescence to a change in the status quo and fate of the common man within the Nigerian society."²⁵³ He took an active role in Ori Olokun the production company of Ola Rotimi in the late 1960s. His plays are *Lamps in the Land* (1973), *Bar Beach Prelude* (1976), *Farewell to Babylon and other Plays* (contained *Farewell to Babylon*, *The Night Before* and *The Angry Bridegroom*) 1979, *Kalakutu Cross Currents* (1979), *Barabas and The Master Jesus* (1980), *Flamingo and other plays* (contained *Flamingo*, *The Master and the Frauds*, *Afamako-The Workhorse* and *Circus of Freedom Square*) 1986, *Tornadoes Full of Dreams* (1990), *Arelu* (1990), *Ajantala-Pinocchio* (1992).

²⁴⁷ Ogunbiyi, Yemi, "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile", in Yemi Ogunbiyi, (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981), 36-37

²⁴⁸ Tejumola Olaniyan, "Femi Osofisan: The Form of Uncommon Sense", in *Research in African Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 4, *Drama and Performance* (Indiana: Indiana University Press. Winter 1999), 74-91

²⁴⁹ Elaine Savory, "Femi Osofisan", in Pushpa Naidu Parekh & Siga Fatima Jagne, (eds.), *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 376

²⁵⁰ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bode-Sowande>

²⁵¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bode_Sowande

²⁵² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bode_Sowande

²⁵³ Okagbue, Osita, "Bode Sowande", in Brian Cox, (ed.), *African Writers*, Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997) (online)

Others include *Mammy Water's Wedding*, *A Sanctus for Women*, and *Arede Owo*, a play in Yoruba language.

Bode Sowande drama draws extensively from Yoruba sources and infuses large amounts of music and stage technology into his performances. He founded the Odu Theme, a professional theatre company at Ibadan that presented both television and stage dramas. Odu Theme has taken its founder's plays on performance tours of Europe, America and around Nigeria.

Akanji Nasiru (1945-) has also contributed significantly to this generation with over one dozen plays: *Our Survival* (1985), *The Bold Choice* (1987), *Come let us Reason Together* (1987), *Love and Strife* (1991), *Citizen Andrew's Dilemma* (1991), *Man in a Well* (1991), *Let's Find an Answer* (1991), *Alatise* (1992), *What Lies Beyond Six* (1992), *Ajosee Wa Ni* (1992). He recently added *The Irepodun Plays* (2005) and *Let's Find an Answer and Other Plays* (2006) to his volume of plays.

It is worthy to note that, apart from the playwrights discussed in this thesis, there are others who share the radical ideology but who are not as prolific in their dramatic outputs as those already mentioned. These playwrights include Kole Omotosho (1943-) with *The Curse* (1976) and *Shadows in the Horizon* (1977); Tunde Fatunde (1951-) with *Blood and Sweat* (1983), *No More Oil Boom* (1984), *No Food, No Country* (1985), *Oga Na Tief Man* (1986), *Water No Get Enemy* (1989), and *Shattered Calabash* (2000); Rasheed Gbadamosi (1943-) with *Echoes from the Lagoon* (1973), *Behold, my Redeemer* (1978), *Trees Grows in the Desert* (1991), and *3 Plays*; Olu Obafemi (1950-) with *Naira Has No Gender*. There are few who choose to write in Yoruba language and other Nigerian language in order to communicate effectively with the masses. A very good example is Akinwunmi Isola (1939-), the author of *EfunsetanAniwura: Iyalode Ibadan*, *Koseegbe*, *Olu Omo*, *Abe Aabo*, *Madam Tinubu: the Terror of Lagos*, and *Iku Olokun Elesin*; Adebayo Faleti (1931-) with *Basrun Gaa*, *Sawo Sogberi*, *Fere bi Ekun*, *Idaamu Paadi Mikailu*, *Omo Olokun Esin* (a Yoruba version of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*), and *Ogun Awitele*. Samson Amali (1947-) also made some attempts at writing in Tiv language with *OnugboMloko*.

I have decided to include the female playwrights who emerged after Zulu Sofola under the third generation dramatists because, aside from the fact that they were not visible during the period discussed, they are not entrenched with the hegemony of revolutionary aesthetics. Nevertheless, they are, at times, very virulent in the representation of the feminist ideology. Some of these women are energetic and prolific female playwrights like Tess Onwueme, Julie

Okoh, and Stella Oyedepo, who has more than three dozen plays to her credit. The interests of these female playwrights are sharpened more by feminist ideology than anything else.

The Third Generation of Nigerian Literary Dramatists

The third generation of Nigerian dramatists is defined not by nationalism or mythopoetic ethos. They are not particularly interested in revolutionary aesthetic or Marxist cantos but in individual survival strategies. However, hardly any of the plays by the third generation's playwrights deviate from what Ameh D. Akoh refers to as "the burning issues confronting postcolonial transitory state of Africa or Nigeria."²⁵⁴

Most of the dramatists within this group began their dramatic careers in the 1980's as a form of experimentation but, by the turn of the 1990s, their ideas have become solid and a challenge to their predecessors to a certain extent. Although the ranges of issues that are compartmentalized into individual survival strategies or survivalism is diverse, they are geared towards a single direction 'emancipation'. These issues are defined within a socio-political context as emancipation, recognizing individual survivalism which, in turn, serves as strength for collective emancipation in the face of strangulating cultural and societal blocks. The female members of the third generation have sharpened their voices and fervently aligned them with the course of their gender. Notable female third generation playwrights within this group are Tess Onwueme (1955-) with *A Hen Too Soon* (1983), *Broken Calabash* (1984), *The Dessert Encroaches* (1985), *Ban Empty Barn, and other Plays* (1986), *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988), *Legacies* (1989), *Tell it to Woman: an Epic Drama* (1995), *Riot in Heaven: Drama for the Voices of Color* (1996), *The Missing Face* (1997), *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen* (2000), *Then She Said It* (2003), *What Mama Said: an Epic Drama* (2004), and *No Vacancy* (2005).

Tess Osonye Onwueme is the most decorated of all Nigerian female playwrights, winning major awards like "the prestigious Fonlon-Nichols award (2009), the Phyllis Wheatley/Nwapa award for outstanding black writers (2008)."²⁵⁵ She also won "the Martin Luther King, Jr./Caeser Chavez Distinguished Writers Award"²⁵⁶, among others. In 2007, she was appointed to the US State Department Public Diplomacy Specialist/Speaker Program for

²⁵⁴ Akoh, A.D, "The Constraints and Prospects of Post-Military Literary Engagement in Nigeria", in *Nebula*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December, 2009, 264-272

²⁵⁵ See "Dr. Osonye Tess Onwueme" <http://www.writertess.com/>

²⁵⁶ See "Dr. Osonye Tess Onwueme" <http://www.writertess.com/>

North, West, and East India.²⁵⁷ Onwueme is currently a “Distinguished Professor of Cultural Diversity and English at the University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire”²⁵⁸, a position she attained in 1994. Julie Okoh (1947-) is the author of *Austerity, Mask* (1988), *Mary, Model for all Woman*, *The Mannequins* (1997), *In Search of Jesus*, *The Nativity*, *Edewede* (2000), *In the Fullness of Time* (2001), *Who can Fight the Gods?*²⁵⁹ (2002), *Aisha* (2005), and *Closed Doors* (2007). Okoh is a Professor in the department of Theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria.

Stella Dia Oyedepo (1952-) began writing with *Our Wife is not a Woman* (performed in 1979) and, since that first attempt has written and published many plays which include *The Greatest Gift* (1988), *Beyond the Dark Tunnel* (1992), *Don't Believe What You See* (1994), *My Daughter is an Egg* (1997), *Doom in the Dimes* (1997), *A Play that was Never to be* (1998), *See!: A Play* (1997), *Alice, oh! Alice* (2000), *Brain has no Gender* (2001), *The Mad Doctor* (2001), *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* (2002), *On His Demise* (2002), *At the Devil's Mercy* (2002), *The Dainty and the Dirty* (2004), *Blindfolded by Fate* (2004), *All for Nothing* (2006), *The Day of Woe* (2006), etc. She was the Director-General of Kwara State Cultural Centre, Nigeria for more than ten years.

Other female playwrights include Irene Salami-Agunloye (1962-) with *The Queen Sisters* (2001), *Emotan* (2001), *More Than Dancing* (2003), *Sweet Revenge* (2004), and *Idia: The Warrior Queen of Benin* (2009); Foluke Ogunleye (1962-) with *The Innocent Victims and other Plays* (2003), *Nest in a Cage* (1985), *The Broken Edge* (2002), and *Jabulile* (2005). The growing lists also include Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh (1966-) with *A Night of a Thousand Truth*, *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, *Cauldron of Death*, *Every day for the Thief*, *Who Owns the Coffin?* *Forest of Palmtrees*, *Nneora: an African Doll's House* and *Out of the Mask*; and Bunmi O. Julius-Adeoye (1973-2010) a promising and energetic playwright who passed away suddenly on May 16, 2010, after establishing her presence with plays like *Ajarat*, *The Thorn*, *War at Peace*, *I will be Dead by Tomorrow*, *Ibidunni-A Choreo-Musical Drama*, *The Three wives* and *Atunto*. These female playwrights have feminist philosophy permeating out of every fibre of their works. Nevertheless, their works also discuss the issue of survival like material emancipation, economic emancipation, political emancipation, educational emancipation, and so on.

²⁵⁷ See “Dr. Osonye Tess Onwueme” <http://www.writertess.com/>

²⁵⁸ See “Dr. Osonye Tess Onwueme” <http://www.writertess.com/>

²⁵⁹ Perkins, Kathy, A., Amandina Lihamba, *African Women Playwrights* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 249

Apart from male playwrights like Ahmed Yerima, Ben Tomoloju, Sam Ukala, Chukwuma Okoye, Emeka Nwabueze who have distinguished themselves within this generation, there are others who are waiting to break into the mainstream of playwriting. People like Bakare Ojo-Razaki, Biyi Bandele-Thomas, Lekan Balogun, Debo Sotuminu, Segun Ashade,²⁶⁰ Alex Asigbo, Solomon Igunare, Greg Mbajiorgu, Makinde Adeniran, Akpos Adesi, Benedict Binebai, Chris Egharevba, John Iwuh, Victor Dugga and others are quickly making their impact felt on the Nigerian dramatic firmament. Ahmed Yerima and Tess Onwueme parade the definitive works for this generation's dramatists who are bent on re-orientating the Nigerian society to take a new course in order to survive the harsh reality of the Nigerian nation.

Nigerian Theatre in the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century

The turn of the new millennium brought to Nigeria and Nigerians its own challenges and new developments, and these are also reflected in the nation's drama. Democracy seems to be taking a firm root in the country for the first time since its independence in 1960. After being in the grip of military dictatorship from 1983 to 1999, the country transited to an elected government in May 1999 and subsequently had a change of democratic government in 2007. Though the election was characterized with many irregularities, the transition was smooth. However, mounting internal tension and restiveness in various parts of the country resulted in carnage in many parts of the nation especially in the Northern and Niger Delta regions of the country.

Nigerian drama of the first decade of the twenty-first century deals with issues of nationalism. Most of the playwrights who write during this period seem fascinated with the treatment of contemporary societal and gender related problems. Most of the old dramatists are still visible during this period; however, there are new crops of playwrights who were still students of theatre in the 1990's but have now become established as writers. Also of significance is the popular Theatre for Development (TfD) which has somehow replaced the old itinerant or popular theatre; nevertheless, it is not yet professionally constituted because it is geared toward solving a particular social problem within the community, and it is most often agitation-al in presentation. The list of playwrights during this decade soars to a proportion that is difficult to follow as they cover the whole landscape of Nigeria. They are scattered within and

²⁶⁰<http://senatorihenyen.wordpress.com/2009/08/19/a-dream-beyond-the-pyramids-ferment-harvest-bazaar-and-carnival-in-nigerian-literature-of-the-post-soyinka-nobel-prize-era-by-anstine-amanze-akpuda-daily-independent/>. Friday 06 Jan. 2010

without the institutions of higher learning within the country and beyond. Some of these playwrights are quick to publish their plays without first trying them out on the theatrical stage. However, some of them such as Ben Tomoloju and Makinde Adeniran submit their plays for performances without any recourse to textual publication.

Chukwuma Okoye produced large bodies of dramatic works which include *We the Beast* (winner of the 1993 Association of Nigerian Authors Prize for Drama), *Poison*, and *Time*, but had very few of them published. This makes it difficult to follow the volume of available dramatic materials and dramatists of the age. Another significant development in the country's theatre industry is the increase in the number of universities and theatre arts departments. Unlike in the 1950s and 1960s when literary drama crept into the country's theatrical landscape surreptitiously through the UICDS, 1960 Masks, Ibadan School of Drama, etc. to compete with the already vibrant Nigerian or Yoruba Popular Theatre, the first decade of the twenty-first century boasts of over fifty universities and colleges of education offering theatre arts courses.²⁶¹

These literary theatre study institutions complement the National Troupe of Nigeria and the various State Arts Councils to present drama on a constant basis to both the academics communities and the larger Nigerian societies. However, these performances on many occasions are unlike the traditional performances of the Yoruba travelling theatre or Hausa puppet theatre in construction and in audience command. The dramatists of this period follow the trend of writers of the twentieth century by presenting dramatic texts constructed with Nigerian historical content, the country's civil war of 1967-1970, the incessant ethno-religious crises in the Northern part of the country, the militancy activities of the Niger Delta region, and the corruption within the polity and the nation's political upheavals. Feminist thought finds an outlet in the dramatic creation of some of these playwrights. Adaptation is also a ready material for dramatic creation of this age. A.A. Onukaogu and E. Onyerionwu draw a list of prominent dramatists of Eastern Nigeria in the twenty-first

²⁶¹ The lists of institutions include: University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Ilorin, University of Benin, University of Port-Harcourt, University of Jos, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Calabar, University of Uyo, University of Abuja, University of Maiduguri, Ahmadu Bello University, Lagos State University, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Delta State University, Imo State University, Benue State University, Ambrose Alli University, Anambra State University of Science and Technology, Kogi State University, Niger Delta University, Nassarawa State University, Redeemer's University (RUN), Ogun State, Igbinedion University, Okada, Adekunle Ajasin University, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State College of Education, Osiele, Michael Otedola College of Education, Epe, College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin, Osun State University, Kwara State University.

century.²⁶² Though the list is not comprehensive, it captures to an extent some playwrights that are seemingly unknown in other parts of the country. I believe that the popularity of their plays is based on the acceptability of the performances by the audiences who saw and read the texts within the higher institutions. The analysis of the chosen dramatic text drawn by this duo is eye opening and incisive. These playwrights include Tess Onwueme, Julie Okoh, Emeka Nwabueze, Effiong Johnson, Chris Anyokwu, John Iwuh, Onyebushi Nwosu, Chris Ngozi Okoro, Chukwuma Anyanwu, Ebereonwu, Hope Eghagha, and Helon Habila.²⁶³ The few non-Igbo playwrights mentioned in the book are Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Niyi Osundare, Ahmed Yerima, Bakare-Ojo Rasaki and probably Isiaka Aliagan.²⁶⁴ However, a big downfall of such volume is that the list excludes dramatists like Ben Tomoloju, Sam Ukala, Chukwuma Okoye, Tracie Uto-Ezeajugh, Bunmi Julius-Adeoye, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Biyi Bandele-Thomas, Lekan Balogun, Debo Sotuminu, Segun Ashade,²⁶⁵ Makinde Adeniran, Akpos Adesi, Benedict Binebai, Leke Ogunfeyimi, Toyin Abiodun and Victor Dugga who have distinguished themselves within this generation as serious playwrights. At the time that Onukaogu and Onyerionwu published their book, a renowned poet Helon Habila, and John Iwuh have only published or staged one play each. Helon Habila's "The Trials of Ken Saro Wiwa" appeared as the only play in an anthology *Camouflage: Best of Contemporary Writing from Nigerian*.²⁶⁶ However most of the unmentioned playwrights had their plays both as published texts and manuscripts and performed in many parts of the country.

The thematic preoccupations of the plays of this early part of the century reveal the socio-political, socioeconomic and sociocultural situation of

²⁶² Onukaogu, A.A., Onyerionwu, E., *21st Century Nigerian Literature: An Introductory Text* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2009). Although the work of Onukaogu and Onyerionwu is relevant in as much as it draws attention to the growing lists of playwrights from Eastern Nigeria, they have exhibited a parochial sense of ethnocentrism which lack an indepth scholarship by mainly documenting dramatists much like themselves.

²⁶³ Onukaogu, A.A., Onyerionwu, E., *21st Century Nigerian Literature: An Introductory Text* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2009), 175. The list is based on the importance of these playwrights and the quantities of their plays available to reader-audience

²⁶⁴ The non-Igbo playwrights mentioned in the volume are too well-known within the Nigerian academic institution, so, the authours have easy access to their plays and critical materials written on them.

²⁶⁵ <http://senatorihenven.wordpress.com/2009/08/19/a-dream-beyond-the-pyramids-ferment-harvest-bazaar-and-carnival-in-nigerian-literature-of-the-post-soyinka-nobel-prize-era-by-anstine-amanze-akpuda-daily-independent/>. Accessed on Friday 06 Jan. 2010

²⁶⁶ Habila, Helon, "The Trials of Ken Saro Wiwa", in Nduka Otiono and Odo Diego Okoyendo, (eds.), *Camouflage: Best of Contemporary Writing from Nigerian* (Yenagoa: Treasure Books, 2006), 147-156

the Nigerian nation of the period. For example, in *Who Can Fight the Gods?* Julie Okoh comments on the anti-social activities such as cultism, misappropriation of funds, and immorality. The play is considered a satire of contemporary Nigerian campus realities.²⁶⁷ Chris Anyokwu's *Ufuoma* and Bakare Ojo-Rasaki's *Once Upon a Tower* also take swipes at the Nigerian contemporary realities, especially the decay within the institutions of higher learning. Both plays dramatize the rampant corruption within the institutions, cultism, power politics, sex and money related exploitations.²⁶⁸ John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb* (2007) and the sequel *Spellbound* (2009) take a swipe at the penchant for double standard and hypocritical nature of most African Christians. More common among the Igbo community in Nigeria is, when adherents of the Christian faith are called, almost everyone proclaims their freedom and equality in Christ Jesus but when marriage is to be contracted, the same people are quick to point out the fact that someone who is freeborn cannot marry into the people known as Osu because tradition considers them as social outcast. In both plays the Osu caste of the Igbo's becomes the thrust for the dramatic plots. Separation must be drawn between those of free birth and those belonging to the traditional gods of the people. According to John Iwuh "despite the proclamation of Christianity by the people, it is difficult for non-Osu 'born again' Christians to contract marriage with Osu of the same faith."²⁶⁹ On the other hand, Akpos Adesi's *Agadagba Warriors and Other Plays* ("Ebidein-ere" and "Seiki-ebi") reveal the mismanagement and incongruous sharing formula of the country's resources between the land owners and the supposed lords. It also reveals the supremacy of love over treachery, and the fact that the supreme judge of human action is the creator of the universe. These plays, in contrast to the playwright's confrontational dramas like *When the Table Turns* and *The Leopard of Kalama*, assumes a subtle dialectical approach to the Nigerian Niger Delta crisis despite the playwright's dedication of the plays to the region's militant leaders. Nonetheless, Akpos Adesi is quick to point out that he does not "subscribe to the criminal nose-diving tendencies of some Niger Delta militia who have diverted a rather noble cause to the lure of pecuniary gains."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Onukaogu, A.A., Onyerionwu, E., *21st Century Nigerian Literature: An Introductory Text* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2009), 191

²⁶⁸ Onukaogu, A.A., Onyerionwu, E., *21st Century Nigerian Literature: An Introductory Text* (Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2009), 190

²⁶⁹ John Iwuh revealed this to me in a private conversation on March 31, 2010 in his Redeemer's University's office.

²⁷⁰ Adesi, Akpos, "Author's preface" to *Agadagba Warriors and other plays* (Ilorin: New Art Publishers, 2008)

Nigerian Stage Audience and the Influence of Nigerian Video-Film

Jide Malomo argues the following about the importance of the audience for theatre:

Theatre is an important medium of communicating thoughts and feelings, but without an audience it cannot hope to achieve this objective....Virtually everything in the theatre, including the repertoire, depends on the audience. For it is the audience for which the playwright communicates, while the other elements in the production, from the director, the actors, the designer, the costumer, the make-up artist and the publicist, think first about the audience in executing their creative impulses. Also from [an] economic point of view, the audience is consumer in relation to the producer. For it is the audience that pays directly by buying tickets and indirectly by paying taxes which subsidize and sustain a number of performances. It is the audience which applauds or boos a production and, therefore, represents society in general and public opinion in particular.²⁷¹

Jide Malomo believes that the audience is very important in any theatre, and they determine to a great extent the continuity of a theatrical tradition. Attendance situations at performance venue in Nigeria today are of mixed feelings. Many recent critics of Nigerian theatre believe that there is a lower turn-out of audiences at theatre venues since the advent of the video-film. The issues responsible for this fate towards a one-time African robust theatrical pride are multifarious. In spite of this, there is adequate audience attendance at various performances within the academic institutions in the country. However, outside the confines of the institutions the fortune of the theatre is not very robust. There is a myriad of reasons adduced for this. One fundamental issue as to audience analysis in dramatic performances in both the higher institutions and the non-academic environment is the aim and objective of the performing company. A performance in which the audience does not have to pay to attend, attracts a large audience anywhere in the country, however, commercial performances need to resort to aggressive campaigns for sizable numbers of patronage.

There are nearly two hundred institutions of higher learning in Nigeria where performances take place. Apart from the National Theatre building in

²⁷¹ Malomo, J., "Theatre and Audience Research", in Remi Adedokuns, (ed.), *Arts Administration in Contemporary Nigeria* (Lagos: CBAAC, 2001), 89

Lagos where, of recent, constant performances have been resuscitated and the ill-equipped Terra Kulture, Lagos, where performances have been every Sunday since 2006, there is no other viable performance venue in the country. The thirty-six Arts Councils of the various states in the federation which cater to theatrical performances and other needs prefer to host social and religious events like wedding ceremonies, burial ceremonies, weekly church programmes and so on. Theatre performances can be presented by a private theatre company after full payment has been received for the cost for renting the council hall.

Performances within the Nigerian institutions of higher learning are considered educational (for the purpose of training), while the Theatre/Performing Arts department are seen as “cultural centres dedicated to the promotion of the arts and the human artistic excellence”,²⁷² thus, profit is not of major consideration. However, within the larger Nigerian society apart from Theatre for Development and play performances commissioned by organizations, institutions and private individuals, commercialization remains the sole aim of theatrical performances in the twenty-first century. This commercialization of theatrical performances determines to a large extent the audiences’ attendance at theatrical venues. Another major influence on the dramatic performances and audience attendance in Nigeria is the availability of performing spaces and theatre. However, these influences are not within the purview of this dissertation.

²⁷² Nwamuo, C., *Theatre Marketing Process*, (Calabar: Optimist Press, 2007), 33

