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Complexity, Post-Coloniality, Transculturality:

The Birth of Wole Soyinka's Yoruba Tragedy in Nigeria and its Intercultural Presentation in Britain

by

Olabisi M. Adigun

This is a thesis submitted to the University of Dublin (Trinity College) for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,2013.

Department of Drama, School of Drama, Film and Music
University of Dublin, Trinity College

DECLARATION

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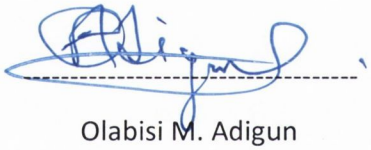

Olabisi M. Adigun

This 5th day of April, 2013



Thesis 9849

DEDICATION

To



Esiaba Irobi
(1961-2010)

Ma j'okun ma j'ekolo
Ohun ti won ba n je lajule orun
Ni ko ma a ba won je.
O d'igba.

(Eat neither millipede nor earthworm,
It is whatever they eat up above
That you should eat with them
Till me we meet again ...Adieu.)

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Arinola Roisin Ifedapo Alari Adigun, the best girl in the whole world. What can I say? All I can say is thank you for remaining the best girl throughout those bad past five years. May the Almighty continue to watch over you.

And lastly, my wife Kate (Adepeju), you are the best wife in the world and the mother of the best girl in the entire universe. Thanks for standing by me through it all and especially when it seemed I couldn't or shouldn't 'go on'. God bless you and Arinola.

To my *Eleda* (Creator) is all the honour, the grace and the praise for this one is not by my might.

ABSTRACT

In 1986, Wole Soyinka made history when he became the first African ever to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Soyinka is a Yoruba man from western Nigeria and he began to write seriously and professionally in 1959 less than a year before Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in October 1960. Although Soyinka writes predominantly and masterfully in the English language, his plays and particularly his Yoruba tragedies are greatly influenced by the cultural paradigms of the Yoruba people of western Nigeria.

However, Soyinka's plays have been produced on the British stage more times than in Nigeria. In fact Soyinka's plays are hardly produced in Nigeria. As far as many Nigerians are concerned, Soyinka's writing is too complex and as such they consider his plays rather impenetrable.

Ironically, the Yoruba metalanguages namely music, songs, proverbs, mime, incantations and various other performance elements, which Soyinka employs in his dramaturgy that a Yoruba man would easily comprehend are the semiological barriers that could pose an intercultural and interpretational threat to an appreciation or understanding of Soyinka's plays when it is transferred from its Yoruba hinterland to the British stage.

The aim of this study is two-fold and that is why it is divided into two parts. First, it is the aim of this study to re-configure Soyinka theoretically by critically examining the man and the writer against the backdrop of the socio-cultural and political landscapes of post-colonial Nigeria and in the context of his intercultural experiences as an immigrant in England in the mid to late 1950s. So in the first part of this thesis the inherent complexity, cross-culturality and post-coloniality of Soyinka's dramaturgy will be critically analysed through the lenses of post-colonial and intercultural theories.

Then in part two, the birth and staging of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy with the writing and world premiere of *A Dance of the Forests* in Ibadan in 1960 will be discussed before we critically analyse four British presentations of Soyinka's Yoruba tragic plays – three of which were presented in London – namely *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* which was produced at the National Theatre in 1973, *The Road* presented by Talawa Theatre Company in 1992 and

finally *Death and the King's Horseman* presented at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester in 1990 and again at the Royal National Theatre in London in 2009. It is the concern of part two of this thesis to analyse the cultural adjustments the four non-Yoruba directors who directed these British presentations had to make in an effort to render Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy accessible to their respective audiences.

Thus, with due regard to post-colonial and intercultural theoretical paradigms, it is the overall aim of this thesis to:

1. Re-configure Soyinka as a person and a Yoruba tragedian and why he is a prophet without honour at home;

2. Critically examine what is gained or lost when a non-Yoruba director directs Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy; and

3. To re-appraise, from an African perspective, the concept of western interculturalism with a view to propose a new intercultural theoretical model.

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INTRODUCTION

Re-Configuring Wole Soyinka

From the Personal to the Nobel; from the Dramaturgical to the Methodological

> *Soyinka has the reputation in certain circles in Nigeria (and also in the popular mind), of being the artist par excellence....a man against the Establishment, a firm believer in the absolute freedom of the individual. This attitude to life is reflected in some of Soyinka's personal habits, for example his attitude to clothes. In an age when the average literate Nigerian tended to ape the European manner of dressing – three piece suit, tie, tails, helmet in spite of the blazing sun – Soyinka was one of the very first to design a 'cool' shirt for himself, the famous Mbari shirt* (Dapo Adelugba 1975, 6).

0.1 The Personal

In this thesis, I examine, from a personal perspective of a Nigerian dramatist and a theatre director who has lived in Europe for two decades, the birth of Wole Soyinka's Yoruba Tragedy and the intercultural presentation of three of his Yoruba tragic plays on the British stage between 1965 and 2009. Same as Soyinka, I am a Yoruba man from western Nigeria.[1] While it was in 2006 at the launch of his memoir, *You must Set Forth At Dawn* in Palo Alto in California, that I first came into contact with Soyinka, it was in 1984, the year I was about to complete my secondary school education in the city of Ile-Ife in western Nigeria, that Soyinka's name and reputation – as a 'radical' – began to determine my destiny. To gain admission into a Nigerian university, one must obtain and fill an application form to sit for what is known as the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) exams. I was excited when my aunt, with whom I had lived since age nine,[2] brought home my own JAMB form; she asked me to fill it in pencil first

---

[1] Nigeria is the most populous African country with diverse people, language, religion and culture. In the course of this introduction and this work generally, I will be discussing in great detail the country, its origin, history, politics and diversity. Suffice it to say here however that the country now known as Nigeria was invented by the British. When Nigeria was first colonised in the early 1900s, it was ruled by the British as Northern and Southern protectorates. Then in 1914, both protectorates were amalgamated to form what is now known as Nigeria. But in reality, Nigeria as a nation state comprises of more than 250 ethnic groups. However, the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the South West and the Igbo in the South East are considered the major ethnic groups.

[2] I was born in Jos city in the Northern part of Nigeria and I lived there until my mother died of a tragic motor accident. (As will be discussed in detail in chapter 6, Nigerian roads are death traps). It was after my mother's

and not until after I had shown it to her and she had approved it, could I go ahead and fill it in pen. For my first, second and third choice of Universities, I filled in: "University of Ife" (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and for my first, second and third choice courses, I filled in: "Dramatic Arts". When I eventually showed it to my aunt, all hell broke loose. "Drama!!", she exclaimed. "You want to do drama?", she queried. "You want to become another Soyinka, *abi* (isn't it)?" With that she erased the "Dramatic Arts" that I had filled in the application form; in ink she filled in 'Law'.

Wole Soyinka was no different to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, William Blake, Ola Rotimi, George Orwell, Efua Sutherland, Camara Laye, Kofi Awoonor, to name but a few writers whose works I had come across during my primary and secondary school days, so I did not understand why my aunt singled him out. Nonetheless, I sat for the JAMB exams, but I did not make the cut-off point for Law. It was in early 1987, when I was preparing to sit for my Advanced Level General Certificate Exams, that another opportunity came to fill yet another JAMB form. I filled in "Law", but this time my aunt advised me to fill in "Dramatic Arts". When I asked her what made her change her mind, her response was: "who knows, maybe one day you will become like our Wole Soyinka". It was many years later that I would come to realise why my aunt, who had thought Soyinka was not someone for me to emulate in 1984, made a dramatic turnaround two years later and began to venerate him.

0.2 The Nobel

It was on October 14, 1986 that Wole Soyinka, a Yoruba writer of English literature, changed the course of the history of world literature when it was publicly announced that he had become the first African ever to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Below is how Soyinka recalls the day in his memoir *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*:

> The Norwegian, or Swede, was interrogating the radio when a man walked into Bernard Pivot's program and handed him a piece of paper. Pivot excused himself, adjusted his glasses, and read it, then faced the discussion panel while the camera focused on him. "Breaking news," as the Americans call it, and Pivot smoothed out his piece of paper and made his statement. The Swedish Academy had announced the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1986, and the winner was – the writer from Nigeria.....and he managed to garble my name (Soyinka 2006, 310-311).

---

burial that I was relocated to Ile-Ife where I began to reside with my aunt and it was there that I completed my primary, secondary and university education.

In the morning of the day the announcement was made, Soyinka had just arrived in Paris from the United States of America to chair the executive meeting of the International Theatre Institute. But the meeting was not meant to be; as soon as the news broke, Soyinka left Paris for Nigeria amidst crowds of international press photographers "as he could no longer cope with the media 'harassment', attendant with world recognition of a Nobel Laureate" (Johnson 2005, 18). When Soyinka stepped on Nigeria's shores, it was "to what came close to being a national mood of euphoria" (Soyinka 2006, 315). He was formally met at the airport by Tony Momoh, the minister of culture who was sent by General Ibrahim Babangida, the then military president of Nigeria. Soyinka was conferred with national honours, and overnight he became the most celebrated Nigerian writer both at home and abroad. As Bernth Linfors points out, "Nigeria exuberantly congratulated herself on having produced a son worthy of the highest international recognition" (Linfors 1988, 475). Among many other events that were organised was an exhibition of Soyinka's works mounted by the library of the University of Lagos for twelve days during the month of November at which a special notebook was provided for guests to record their reactions to the news of Soyinka winning the Nobel Prize. In the words of a student, "Wole Soyinka, to my mind, is the reincarnate [sic] of William Shakespeare". Another guest writes, "You remain a living legend and a star of galaxy of peacock". Any wonder Linfors has described some of these accolades as "ejaculations of praise for Soyinka and what he had accomplished" (Linfors 1988, 485). But it was not all the remarks that were positive. For instance, one guest points out that "Wole Soyinka writes for advanced minds of generation yet to come" and another remark goes: "Soyinka's works I find hard to understand 'cause of its high grammatical content". But out of all the divergent reactions that Soyinka's Nobel Prize engendered in Nigeria, it was Chinua Achebe who, in my view, concisely put the implication of the occasion into context in his presidential speech to the annual convention of the Association of Nigerian Authors held in Lagos on November 27, 1986. In Achebe's words,

> This is the year of Wole Soyinka's Nobel Prize. We rejoice with him on his magnificent achievement. A lot has already been said or written about it and no doubt more will be said. For me what matters is that after the *oriki*[3] and the celebrations we should say to ourselves: One of us has proved that we can beat

[3] *Oriki* is actually a Yoruba word meaning, 'praise name'. Every Yoruba man has a praise name and it is usually invoked when one does what is considered outstanding. When one is called by one's Oriki, the feeling one feels is akin to how, in the Western world, an award recipient would feel when accolades are showered on her or him shortly before s/he is invited to receive her or his award.

> the white man at his own game.[4]

What Achebe was alluding to in his address is that Soyinka had finally demonstrated that literature is not the exclusive preserve of the Occident. Lest we forget, one of the reasons that Achebe wrote his now world-renowned novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 was to challenge the idea that Africa is a continent of savages as Joseph Conrad seems to suggest in his travelogue, *The Heart of Darkness*. It needs to be borne in mind that the Academy of Letters, that selects the Nobel laureates annually, has been awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature since 1901. So, is it possible that Soyinka was selected for the award in 1986 not on the basis of the quality of his work, but because the Academy of Letters thought it was high time that the "heart of darkness" was illuminated and included in the world literature map? "I don't have any false modesty, if I've been selected to win the Nobel Prize", was Soyinka's response when a similar question was put to him by Nii K. Bentsi-Enchill during an interview recorded in Stockholm in 1987. "I have never aspired to any prizes", he added,

> When people offer me prizes, I do not turn them down. I believe it is good for the profession. It is a recognition that is a demarginalisation of the arts among the entire productive corpus of society. So, it's possible. I'm not going to hold brief [sic] for the Academy. But I insist that anybody who thinks that people just go and dig in the dustbin and take out something from a region because they have never considered that region before, I think such people must be mad (Bentsi-Enchill 2001, 141).

That is Wole Soyinka (WS)[5] in his characteristic combatant mode. Just like his muse, Ogun the deity of

---

[4]An excerpt from Chinua Achebe's unpublished presidential address which he delivered at the Sixth annual convention of the Association of Nigerian Authors held in Lagos on the 27th of November, 1986. My source for this passage is Lindfors, 1988, p. 487. Achebe sadly passed away at the age of 82 on March 21, 2013.

[5] Soyinka is known by a number of aliases. Most of the students he taught in the Universities of Ife and Ibadan call him 'Kongi' himself since he played the part of Kongi in an ill-fated film production of his play *Kongi's Harvest* in 1965. Apparently, the play was to be made into a film but it was never meant to be. See Gibbs (ed.), 1981, p. 8; Soyinka is also known as 'Our own W.S'. Yemi Ogunbiyi, a colleague and close friend of Soyinka claims it was Eldred Jones, the Sierra-Leonean English studies' scholar, who gave Soyinka the name in reference to the initials that Soyinka shares with William Shakespeare. See Ogunbiyi, 2005, p. 49. In regards to the 'Tiger', one can only infer that Soyinka is dubbed the 'Tiger' because of his quip: 'A Tiger does not have to display its tigritude', in his criticism of the Negritude movement that began in most Francophone countries in the 1970s. It is in this light that Nadine Gordimer the South African Nobel Laureate (1991) gave her essay, which she contributed to the book *Wole*

war and creativity and the most revered and feared of all the Yoruba gods, Soyinka is an embodiment of a creative and combative spirit. Soyinka "disturbs, he disquietens, he delights, he demands attention and now African letters, indeed Africa herself, cannot do without him" (Gibbs 1981, 15). While Soyinka writes predominantly and masterfully in the English language, his drama – especially his Yoruba tragic plays – are greatly influenced by the cultural paradigms of the Yoruba people of western Nigeria and more especially their rites, rituals, ceremonials and festivals: all of which Soyinka sees as "a rich source of material for drama [as] they are intrinsically dramatic in themselves because they are formalized" (Gibbs 2001, 108). Soyinka is drawn to these Yoruba mores because they are visually clarifying and also because, in his view, "the representation of these ritual ceremonies are so precise that even when the meaning is obscure you are left with form which is so clear that it reifies itself into very concrete meaning for the viewer" (ibid.).

One important question Soyinka's observation raises is: can the notion of 'clarity' that fascinates Soyinka so much about ritual forms be attributed to his own drama especially his so-called Yoruba tragic drama? While Soyinka's tragic plays are undeniably inspired by the indigenous traditions of his people – the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria – these plays are hardly produced in Nigeria. This is due in part, according to Soyinka's critics, to the fact that Soyinka's writing is characteristically complex and elitist; as such his plays are inaccessible to the Nigerian common man. Femi Osofisan, a Yoruba man and one of the foremost Nigerian second generation[6] writers who has often publicly declared: "I have been one of Soyinka's ardent critics", for instance, considers Soyinka as "the greatest living African dramatist," and "a splendid and talented playwright, but one who is seldom produced" (Osofisan 1994, 44). Osofisan's contention is that Soyinka's plays are more frequently encountered on the pages of books in the library

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Soyinka: An Appraisal, as edited by Adewale Maja-Pearce, 'Soyinka the Tiger'. It is for the same reason that South African Mosta Ntombizodwa gave her doctoral dissertation, which she submitted to University of Witwatersrand in 2000 the title 'A Tiger in the Court: The Nature and Implications of Wole Soyinka's interactions at the Royal Court Theatre: 1956-1966'. I must add that we will return in due course to Gordimer's essay as well as Motsa's dissertation.

[6] Nigerian writers such as Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, Efua Sutherland are collectively regarded as the first generation of Nigerian writers who started their literary career around the period of Nigerian independence in 1960. Writers who came after them including Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Niyi Osundare, and Wale Ogunyemi are all known as the second generation Nigerian writers. For an insightful critique of the term 'second generation writers', see Ogunbiyi, 1981, pp. 36-37. See also Irele, Abiola, 1995, p. xi.

than on the platform of stage in theatres simply because they are too esoteric. And "Since we live in a country in which illiteracy is rampant" (ibid.), Osofisan's conclusion is that Soyinka would have been unknown "at least among our people, were it not for his other activities, his noisy and fearless interventions in our political life" (ibid.). While it is worth noting here that, further on in the same essay, Osofisan contradicts himself when he observes that "Soyinka is not for reading but for staging" (ibid., 57), it is the question that his essay has posed that is one of the primary concerns of this thesis and that is: is it truly the case that Soyinka's drama is more suited to pages of books than stages of theatre? Or is it that Soyinka's target audience for his so-called serious plays is simply not among the teeming population of "our people" – the Nigerian people?

0.3 The Dramaturgical

In his essay, 'Aspects of Nigerian Drama', John Pepper Clark suggests two categories into which Nigerian drama can be divided: the traditional and the modern. The traditional, Clark posits, encompasses all the traditional ritual ceremonies and festivals – sacred or secular – and the modern includes the folk theatre and literary drama. While the folk theatre, which is also known as the travelling theatre, will be discussed in detail in chapter three in this thesis, our attention must presently turn to the literary drama, the category "some would say", as Clark explains,

> has its heart right at home here in Nigeria and its head deep in the wings of American and European theatre. The works of Wole Soyinka and my own plays, I am told clearly bear this badge, but whether of merit or infamy, it is a matter still in some obscurity (Clark 1981, 65-66).

I would argue that Clark obviously has no option here but to contend that the "merit or infamy" of the charge that his drama, as well as Soyinka's, is geared towards white audiences is "still in some obscurity." As Frantz Fanon has argued in his book *Black Skin, White Masks,* "Denial is always a retroactive process, a half acknowledgement of that Otherness which has left its traumatic mark" (Fanon 1986, xiii). The conclusion Fanon draws is that it is "in that uncertainty lurks the white masked black man" (ibid.). It is no surprise, therefore, that one of the issues that has preoccupied theatre scholars, particularly within Nigeria, for decades is: why is it that Soyinka's plays do not appeal to Nigerian audiences? This question is, for instance, the central thesis of Femi Euba's essay 'The Nigerian Theatre and the Playwright' in which he provides a compelling comparative analysis of the drama of

Soyinka and Ola Rotimi[7] and the differing relationships they both have with Nigerian audiences. Euba's conclusion is that Nigerian audiences would rather see Rotimi's plays, because he does what a playwright must do: consider his audience. "Ola Rotimi's plays are surface-material with no intellectual depth" (Euba 1981, 393), Euba posits, "it seems that there is a deliberate effort and tendency to win the audience over in his productions with actions, language and theatricality" (ibid.). As regards Soyinka, "there is no such apparent joy for the audience" (ibid.), Euba contends. While Soyinka expresses the same traditional values as Rotimi does in his plays, he, in the process, Euba posits, "puts the audience to task both visually and mentally" (ibid.). As a consequence, "a Soyinka production commands less audience[s] than one of Rotimi", Euba surmises. "But", Euba hastens to add, "it's true that Rotimi is more committed to a Nigerian audience than Soyinka has been" (ibid.). It is this same view, albeit from a slightly different perspective, that Biodun Jeyifo echoes in his essay, 'Literary Drama and the Search for a Popular Theatre in Nigeria'. According to Jeyifo,

> Clark's *The Raft* and *Oziddi,* Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road,* and *The Madmen and Specialists*, are the least performed plays of published Nigerian literary drama. Indeed both *Oziddi* and *The Road*, perhaps the two outstanding literary masterpieces have never to date been performed by the non-amateur leading companies in Nigeria (Jeyifo 1981, 412).

Ironically, when Soyinka's *The Road* was produced in the Victorian building of the Theatre Royal Stratford East at the London Commonwealth festival in 1965 – almost fifteen years before Jeyifo wrote the above words – it was a great success judging by the opening of Penelope Gilliat's review in *The Observer:*

> Every decade or so, it seems to fall to a non-English dramatists to belt new energy into the English tongue. The last time was when Brendan Behan's "The Quare Fellow" opened at the same Victorian building at Stratford. Nine years later, in the reign of Stage Sixty at the same loved Victorian building at Stratford

[7] The late Ola Rotimi was particularly known for his historical tragic plays and was also known for his skill as an excellent theatre director of crowd scenes. His most performed play *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (1971) is an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. I saw the production of the play as directed by the author himself in Ife in 1976 and the 'cathartic effect' the production had on me was what made me decide there and then that when I grow up, I would like to be like Ola Rotimi. It was in homage to Rotimi that the production of his play was used to launch, in February 2004, Arambe Productions, Ireland's first African theatre company that I initiated in 2003 in an attempt to diversify Irish theatre.

> East, a Nigerian called Wole Soyinka has done for our napping language what brigand dramatists from Ireland have done for centuries, booted it awake, rifled its pockets and scattered the loot into the middle of next week (Gilliat 1965, 25). [8]

It is important to note here that the 1965 production of *The Road* was not the first of Soyinka's plays to be mounted on the British stage and neither would it be the last. In fact, the first of Soyinka's plays to be mounted anywhere in the world was *The Swamp Dwellers,* which he produced in 1958 for the Annual University of London Drama Festival. However, as will be discussed in the following chapter, it was the production of his one-act play, *The Invention*, at the Royal Court Theatre in London in November 1959 that is regarded by many critics and Soyinka himself as the Nigerian writer's professional debut anywhere in the world and, pertinently, on the British stage. And to date Soyinka's plays have been mounted professionally on the British stage on nine different occasions. Thus it is high time Gibbs' observation, in the introductory essay to his book, *Critical Perspectives*, was updated: one of the primary aims of this thesis. According to Gibbs,

> In England, where he [Soyinka] produced his first important play, he is still unusual enough to attract experimental university groups, popular enough to have *Brother Jero* toured [....] and established enough to have had major productions though no unqualified success in London. It should be pointed out that, not surprisingly, it has been the committed arts theatres rather than Shaftesbury Avenue and the commercial play-houses which have welcomed him. It is a pity that the sensitivity which prompted the commissioning of the Bacchae of Euripides for the national Theatre did not extend to the production (Gibbs 1981, 10).

Since the first publication (in America) of Gibbs' book in 1980, Soyinka, as mentioned earlier, had become a Nobel Laureate and not only that, his plays have been produced across Britain in theatres such as the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds and The Cochrane Theatre in London. Furthermore, as recently as 2009 Soyinka's most important play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, was mounted to critical and commercial success at the National Theatre in London. So, could it be the case that Soyinka actually does "consider" his audience, contrary to Euba's assertion, which I referred to earlier on, but he does not consider Nigerians to be his only audience?

[8] It is interesting to note that Gilliat in her review has likened Soyinka to the Irish playwright Brendan Behan. In an interview with Gibbs, Soyinka recalls that British Director Joan Littlewood was fond of referring to Brendan Behan as a "white Yoruba" and conversely referred to Soyinka "as a black Irish man". See Gibbs, 2001, p. 84.

0.4 Soyinka's Audience: (Within and Beyond)

As Awam Amkpa has pointed out in his book, *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires*, "Soyinka's revisionist notions of identity, power, and agency unfolded in the course of a versatile body of works spanning well over three decades from the late 1950s through the 1990s" (Amkpa 2004, 24). And for the mere purpose of 'cataloguing,' as Amkpa himself puts it, Soyinka's drama, numbering over 22 to date, can be categorised as "political satire", "metaphysical drama" and "political street theatre". By looking at the range of examples Amkpa has grouped under each of his categorisations, it is clear that Soyinka must have had a purpose for writing each of his plays. Therefore, one can safely draw the inference here that Soyinka is a dramatist who, indeed, considers his audience to be heterogeneously universal rather than strictly homogeneously local.

For instance, when Soyinka was asked the question: "What do you personally conceive of your audience? Are you writing for Nigerians or writing for the world?", in an interview conducted by Lewis Nkosi in 1962, he began by saying: "This may be an unrealistic thing to say, but frankly I do not think of any audience when I write" (Nkosi 1972, 177) before he shed more light on what he meant by saying "I write in the firm belief that there must be at least a hall full of people who are sort of on the same wave length as mine from every stratum of society" (ibid). And to conclude his response, Soyinka's words were: "I don't think I need bother my head, or anybody need bother their heads at all about the audience, whether Nigerian or the European" (ibid.). Twenty one years later when Soyinka was asked: "Has your conception of audience[s] changed from what you once described as minds out there with whom you can communicate?" (Jeyifo 1984, xiii), his response was: "No my conception has not changed about this belief that I cannot write for myself" (ibid.). Soyinka then went on to instantiate his purpose for writing in two of the variety of literary genre in which he writes and for what audience. In Soyinka's words,

> There are various media of expression and one can employ any of these media at any time to reach a public. In the early sixties, for instance, and in Ife in recent times, whenever I've been able to gather groups together, we've been experimenting, indulging in what we call the guerrilla theatre – the political sketches are very different in content, in tone and style from, for instance a novel like *The Interpreters*. *The Interpreters* was an attempt to capture a particular moment in the lives of a generation which was trying to find its feet after independence. By contrast all those sketches, Orisun Theatre sketches, the recent 'Ethical revolution' sketches...are an attempt to reach much larger audience[s] and make statements which are pertinent and even crucial to the ongoing economic and political situation within

the country (ibid., xiii-xiv).

Regardless of Soyinka's purpose of writing and how he manages to oscillate between his target audiences, the fact however remains that British audiences have had more opportunities to see more of his plays on stage than their Nigerian counterparts. *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman* have, to date, all been produced professionally in the UK twice. There has been no professional production of any of these plays in Nigeria in the last decade except when an "abridged version" (Ayorinde 2004, 2 of 40)[9] of the latter was staged at the MUSON Centre, Lagos in 2004 as part of the celebration of Soyinka's 70th birthday. But curiously, as Ayorinde has stated in his review, entitled 'Artistes Celebrate Soyinka with a Play', "When the celebrant, Soyinka, left the presentation midway, nobody could tell why" (ibid., 3 of 4). But one can only surmise that the reason Soyinka left the production half way must be related to the fact that the British-trained veteran Nigerian actor, Olu Jacobs, who was cast to play the lead role of Elesin Oba in the production was not suited to the role, as Ayorinde has accurately pointed out. "In spite of the majestic splendour that Jacob's stature offered his character" (ibid.), according to Ayorinde, "he sounded too Shakespearean for a role that required the most beautiful and down-to-earth of Yoruba identity" (ibid.). Perhaps if the presentation was for a British audience, it would have made sense to cast Jacobs to play the culturally demanding part of Elesin Oba, bearing in mind that he received his acting training and had worked extensively as an actor in Britain for many years. However, this was a Nigerian presentation for a Nigerian audience and the play was specifically mounted to commemorate the writer's birthday; it must have been difficult for Soyinka to comprehend why a Nigerian actor who would embody the role of Elesin effortlessly and culturally was not cast. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, to date, *The Beatification of the Area Boys,* which had its world premiere at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds in 1995, is yet to be staged in Nigeria. Ironically, it is the meta-language, namely music, songs, proverbs, poetry, incantations, chants and other various Yoruba traditional performance elements, which Soyinka employs to 'totalise'[10] his dramaturgy,

[9] This review as written by Steve Ayorinde is entitled 'Artistes Celebrate Soyinka with a Play' and my source for it is online at www.cafeafricana.com/Tributes -Wole-Soyinka.html (accessed on November 24, 2011). All my references are taken from the article but it is paginated along with other articles that are on the site.

[10] The concept of African 'total theatre' is predicated on the notion that African theatre incorporates other medium of communication beyond the verbal by virtue of the fact that African people do not rely only on dialogue in communicating. The art of communication encompasses all other African performing elements such as mime, dance, songs, chants, music, mask and so on and so does African theatre. For further discussion of this concept,

which an average Yoruba man from western Nigeria is expected to easily comprehend that might pose a serious obstacle to the successful understanding of Soyinka's work outside Nigeria and specifically by a British audience. This is precisely the point Martin Banham is trying to emphasise in the essay, 'Playwright/Producer/Actor/Academic: Wole Soyinka in the Nigerian Theatre' in which he writes about Soyinka's contribution to Nigerian and world drama, when he posits that: "The language may be English but the voice and the song are Nigerian" (Banham 1972, 11).

Despite Banham's observation, however, it is pertinent to note that Soyinka's plays – and not only his so-called satires – have continued to be produced on the British stage and, to date, there has not been an in-depth critical study of this phenomenon. This is the main aim of this thesis. Why is it that Soyinka's plays and specifically his tragic plays, which are theoretically and thematically inspired by the cultural paradigms of the Yoruba people, are being mounted on the British stage more regularly than in Nigeria? What are the political implications of staging Soyinka's so-called 'post-colonial' drama on the British stage? What are the intercultural negotiations that a British director must undertake when mounting a production of one of Soyinka's Yoruba tragic plays for a British audience? And more importantly, what becomes of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy when it is presented on a British stage? It is high time all these pertinent questions were raised and critically examined: this is one of the objectives of this thesis.

0.5 Literature Review

In his essay, 'The Six Blindfolded Men and the Elephants: Western Critics versus Productions of Soyinka's Plays in England and the USA', [11] Esiaba Irobi provides a critical examination of the production of two of

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readers are advised to see Ola Rotimi's interview conducted by Effiok B. Uwatt entitled 'Indices of Authentic Nigerian Drama and Theatre' in Uwatt, 2002, p. 137. See also Osanyin, 2007, p. 17.

[11] My source for this essay and the one by South African Motsa, which I reference in the following page as well as many other excellent essays on Soyinka that I have found extremely useful in writing this thesis is the maiden edition of the *Soyinka Journal,* Number 1 (August 2005). When I informed Irobi that I was going to write this thesis on Soyinka's work in Britain, he promptly sent me the first edition of the journal of which he was the Editor. I must say from the outset that from the email that I received with the journal, I doubt it very much if the journal was ever sold or distributed. Sadly, Irobi passed away in 2010 leaving a number of questions left unanswered. For instance, Motsa's essay is inadvertently attributed to Nigerian scholar Abiola Irele, who also contributed an essay to the journal. Despite this inadvertence and other shortcomings evident in the journal, I remain extremely grateful to Irobi for sending it to me. The range of essays on Soyinka's works contained in the journal is second to

Soyinka's plays: *The Road* as directed by the Jamaican-born Yvonne Brewster for London-based Talawa Theatre Company in 1992 and *Death and the King's Horseman* as directed by Wole Soyinka at the Lincoln Centre in New York in 1987 and as also directed by Phyllida Lloyd at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester in the UK in 1990. It is important to note that being an article of about 5,000 words written for a journal, Irobi's analysis is rather cursory, more so because he tries to straddle two different continents and furthermore tries to condense the analysis of three different productions into the one essay. Having said that, Irobi's research into this area is extremely useful and inspiring and it has indeed provided me with the template with which I have approached the present study.

Two important research studies focussing on Soyinka's work on the London stage and specifically in the late 1950s that must be duly acknowledged here are by South African Ntombizodwa Motsa. The first is her doctoral thesis entitled 'A Tiger in the Court: The Nature and Implications of Wole Soyinka's Interactions at the Royal Court Theatre', which she submitted to the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa in 2000. In the thesis, Motsa provides an impressive and in-depth research into Soyinka's work at the Royal Court Theatre in London as well as upon his return to Nigeria from 1960. I have found Motsa's research extremely useful in conducting the present research and I am duly indebted to her for providing a very critical and different (South African) insight into some resource materials on Soyinka that I would otherwise have taken for granted as a Yoruba man and a Nigerian. Similarly, Motsa's essay entitled 'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Exploring the Dialectic Relations among Three of George Devine's "Angry Young Men"' is also an impressive analysis of the critical reception of Soyinka's one act-play *The Invention* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1959. Furthermore, it is in this essay, which was first presented at the second 'Wole Soyinka Congress' held in London in 2004, that Motsa raises a number of important questions that are extremely relevant to my study in this thesis. In the main, it is all of the questions that Motsa has raised that this thesis aims to answer. In answering the questions raised in Motsa's essay, this dissertation concerns itself primarily with Soyinka the Yoruba tragedian and the emergence of his Yoruba tragedy on the Nigerian stage and its subsequent presentation in Britain. I will be focussing my attention first on the 1960 première production of *A Dance of the Forests* in Nigeria and then *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*,

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none. And it is my hope that this *Soyinka Journal* will be re-launched in the not-too-distant future in the fond memory of Irobi, 'the intellectual warrior'. I have attached to this thesis the copy of the email Irobi sent me with the journal as Appendix 1A.

The Road and *Death and the King's Horseman* on the British stage between 1965 and 2009. Although, as already mentioned, some of Soyinka's satires, for example, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *The Lion and the Jewel* and the more recent *The Beatification of the Area Boys* have also all been produced professionally in the UK in the last three decades, the choice of the plays which are examined in this thesis is informed by the fact that they are all considered by Soyinka as his serious plays. Furthermore, the four plays that I am privileging all bear the hallmark of the plays which can be categorised as Yoruba tragedy, at the end of which the tragic hero's eventual demise must rejuvenate the society he leaves behind.

0.6 A Methodological Approach

This thesis is divided into two parts. In the first part, comprising three chapters and entitled 'Soyinka and his Yoruba Tragedy in Perspective', I put Soyinka, the writer as well as his Yoruba tragedy into a theoretical, socio-political, historical and cross-cultural context. In chapter one, I put Soyinka the Yoruba tragedian, into a biographical, historical and socio-political context. I historicize Soyinka by chronicling his background with particular focus on his childhood, his formal education and his 'inter-cultural' experience in the UK – first as an undergraduate student of English at Leeds University and later as a play-reader at the Royal Court Theatre in London. I conclude chapter one with an analysis of how all these personal, educational professional and intercultural experiences that Soyinka had in Nigeria and as a Nigerian immigrant in the UK helped shape his ethics, aesthetics and politics. In chapter two, I discuss post-colonialism and interculturalism as the two theoretical paradigms with which I examine Soyinka's personality, politics, aesthetics, and the intercultural presentations of his tragic plays in Ibadan and on the British stage. The perspectives of three out of the four directors[12] of the British presentations of Soyinka's plays that I examine in this thesis are uniquely western. Therefore, for my critical appraisal of the interculturality of these productions of Soyinka's tragic plays in Britain, I am applying both the 'hourglass' theoretical model as proposed by Patrice Pavis in his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992) as well as Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's model for interculturalism as they have proposed it in their essay 'Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis' published in *The Drama Review*

[12] The directors who directed Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies for the British stage are five altogether including David Thompson who directed the première of *The Road* in 1965, but I am focusing majorly on four productions. And out of all the four productions that are examined in this work, Jamaica-born, but London-trained Yvonne Brewster, who directed the Talawa production of *The Road* in 1992 is the only director who is not English. Having said that, it is worth noting that Roland Joffe, who directed *The Bacchae* at the National in 1973, is French Jewish, but he was born in London.

of Fall, 2002. Nonetheless, to conclude chapter two, I propose a new intercultural theoretical model, which I term the "Talking Drum and Keyboard". The newly proposed model is unapologetically 'Africanist' and should, therefore, be ideal for the critical analysis of western appropriation of an African drama, such as Wole Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, which is the concern of this study. So, to put the efficacy of this new theoretical model to test, I aim to apply it, as much as possible (and alongside the two existing aforementioned intercultural models), to my analyses of the British presentations of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies in chapters five, six and seven. In chapter three, I examine Soyinka and his Yoruba tragedy against the backdrop of the Nigerian theatre as well as the cultural paradigms and religious worship of the Yoruba speaking people of western Nigeria. Furthermore, I particularise the ritual worship of Obatala, the Yoruba deity of creation to illustrate the ritual paradigm that informs Soyinka's dramaturgy. I conclude chapter three with a brief discussion of Soyinka's theorisation of his Yoruba tragedy based on the myth of Ogun, the god of war and iron and Soyinka's muse, as I have already mentioned.

The second part of my thesis, 'Soyinka's Yoruba Tragedy in Performance', is essentially an analysis of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy in practice. It begins with chapter four where I discuss the writing and the staging of *A Dance of the Forests* and how its 1960 première production at the University of Ibadan theatre as directed by Soyinka was the birth of Yoruba tragedy on stage and also the beginning of professional English speaking drama group in Nigeria. Since the staging of *A Dance* in 1960, British audiences have seen five productions of three Yoruba tragedies namely *The Road* (1965), *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1976). While, *The Road* is the first play of the three tragic plays of Soyinka, which I am analysing in this thesis, that was first produced in Britain 1965, I have decided to start my analysis in chapter five, with the presentation of *The Bacchae* at the National due to the fact that in chapter six I aim to focus my attention primarily on the 1992 Talawa Theatre Company's production of *The Road* and less so on its world première in 1965.[13] In 1972, Soyinka was

[13] Inevitably, I could not get adequate materials for some of the older productions; it is for this reason that I will be focusing my analysis on some productions more than the others. For instance, there are insufficient materials on the Stage Sixty Theatre Company's 1965 première production of *The Road*, hence my decision to place more emphasis on the subsequent 1992 Talawa production in my analysis in this work. It is important to add that the dates in parenthesis in front of all the tragic plays under analysis mentioned above are to indicate the year of their world premières rather than the year of publication. As we will see later on, Soyinka wrote *Horseman* in 1974 while he was a Visiting Fellow at Churchill College in Cambridge but the play did not receive its world première

commissioned by the National Theatre of Britain to write an adaptation of one of Euripides' well-known tragic plays; the adaptation was subsequently produced under the direction of Roland Joffe in 1973. Soyinka, as will be discussed, was not pleased with the première production; he has attributed the failure of this production to, *inter alia*, the fact that he left it too late before he started attending rehearsals. Interestingly, reviews of the production were mixed. For instance, Irving Wardle entitled his review: 'Mangled re-write of The Bacchae' in *The Times* of 3rd of August 1973, while W.A Darlington felt Soyinka's adaptation worked quite well in his own review, 'A Case of believe it or not' in the *Daily Telegraph* of 3rd of September 1973. So, my focus in chapter five is to critically examine what went wrong with such a laudable post-colonial and unique intercultural initiative in which a Yoruba tragedian was commissioned by the National Theatre of Britain to adapt a Greek classic tragedy for the most coveted stage in London and whether it was inevitable that the production would get such a mixed review. Then, in chapter six, I analyse Talawa's 1992 presentation of *The Road* with a cursory reference to the 1965 world premiere of the play as directed by David Thompson at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in London during the Commonwealth Arts Festival.

In 1990 Soyinka's most important play *Death and the King's Horseman* was directed by Phyllida Lloyd in the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. Lloyd's choice of producing Soyinka's play, to a large extent, was informed by the architectural and historical suitability of the Royal Exchange Theatre to the setting of Soyinka's play rather than its thematic preoccupation. Lloyd held the view that, since three out of the five scenes in Soyinka's play are set in a typical Yoruba market place, the Royal Exchange Theatre, once "a busy market and distribution centre for goods from the colonies" (Rohmer 1994, 58), would be an ideal theatre to stage its British première. After all, it is in this play that "Soyinka deploys all his artistic power to paint a picture of grandeur and vitality" (Williams 1993, 72), as Adebayo Williams has observed. To throw more light on his observation, Williams reminds us of the Yoruba saying: "The world is a market place; heaven is home", that must have informed Soyinka's decision to set three out of the five scenes into which he has divided his play in a market place. "First, it is a site of political and cultural ferment", as Williams has explained it, and "Second, it doubles as that numinous zone in which distinction between the world of the dead and that of the living is abolished". Could Lloyd, being an English director, truly comprehend this spatial concept in the context of Yoruba sacrificial rites? Did her

until 1976 although it was first published in 1975 by Eyre Methuen. The date of the writing of *Horseman,* more than its publication date, is crucial to my argument. So, for my analysis of the British productions of the play, I have decided to stick with 1974 rather than 1975 that is widely accepted as the date it was written.

audience get it? How was the play perceived and received? What role did the Royal Exchange Theatre's unique arena space play in elucidating the complexity of Soyinka's Yoruba tragic play for the benefit of its Manchester audiences? I aim to address these questions in chapter seven.

It would be exactly fifty years after Soyinka had his debut on the London stage, and thirty two years after the intercultural presentation of *The Bacchae* by the National at the Old Vic before London audiences would have the opportunity to see Soyinka's masterpiece. This time, *Horseman* was presented at the Royal National Theatre's Olivier stage in which black actors were peculiarly 'whitened up' to play all the white characters in Soyinka's tragedy. Essentially, this is an inversion of the old tradition of the black minstrelsy. And it goes without saying that it was a bold move on the part of the freelance English theatre director Rufus Norris, who, as the programme note that accompanied his production reveals, had lived in Nigeria from the age of six months until he was four years old. It is my contention that even if Norris had lived all his life in Nigeria, being an English director, his choice of casting would still be perceived as atypical with serious political ramifications and his production would be no less controversially intercultural. This is clearly evidenced by newspaper headlines such as, 'Blacks to go White: Fear National Theatre show will spark race row' (*London Lite*; March 13, 2009), and 'After Olivier, black actors white up at the National' (*Evening Standard*; 13 March 2009, 7) that greeted the announcement of Norris's black face white mask casting decision for the proposed production of *Horseman* at the National. Loiuse Jury who wrote the latter begins her article thus: "The National Theatre set to spark more race controversy today with a production in which black actors will 'white up'". Although no race riot was reported throughout the run of the play at the National, the presentation, unsurprisingly, engendered an avalanche of divergent views in the British media. I examine a few of these press comments to complement my own personal view of what I term Norris's 'Fanonian' casting in my analysis of the presentation of *Horseman* at the National in chapter seven. In my concluding chapter, I problematise the issue of complexity in Soyinka's aesthetics further by surmising that Soyinka cannot help being complex by virtue of the fact that he is essentially, inter-alia, postmodern. Then, I finally draw curtains on this study by proposing who I believe is an ideal director for Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy going forward solely on the basis of my research.

0.7 Strategy of Analysis; Research Methodology: An Overview

My aim is to critically evaluate Soyinka and historicise the birth of Yoruba tragedy in Nigeria before analysing four presentations of three of his tragic plays as produced by four British directors in Britain

and performed, in most cases, by UK-based multicultural actors. But rather than basing my critical analysis on the play texts themselves, it is my aim to privilege the *mise-en-scène* of each production, including all the performing elements that are required to make a typical African play 'total.' I am using this term *mise-en-scène* as Patrice Pavis has proposed it in his book, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Cultures*, where he defines the term as "the bringing together or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems to an audience" (Pavis 1990, 24). As we will discuss in due course, Soyinka sees the theatre as a big canvas where all art forms – music, dance, mime, painting, architecture, acting – coalesce. Therefore, it would be instructive to see how western directors, who are accustomed to departmentalising all aspects of the performing arts, had endeavoured to adapt to a situation where it was required of them to be a musicologist, an orchestra conductor, a dance choreographer and a theatre director all at the same time. However, to put each production into context, reference will be made, as appropriate, to the text of the play for the purpose of making a comparative analysis of the texts used in production with the original (published) texts of Soyinka's plays. For instance, when the National Theatre presented *The Bacchae* in 1973, there were considerable alterations carried out on the text that was used for the production. It is my aim to analyse some of the changes that were made, why the changes were made, and if these changes served the purpose for which they were made.

For the purpose of my reconfiguration of Soyinka and the concept of his Yoruba tragedy, my primary research material comprises all the available and relevant creative and critical writings by Soyinka. I have also found all the recorded interviews that Soyinka has granted over the years (starting with, arguably, the first interview he granted Lewis Nkosi in 1962) very useful for my research. I tried to obtain an interview with Soyinka but each time I called him as arranged, he was not available. That was when I decided to adopt the position, rightly or wrongly, that in all likelihood Soyinka would not tell me anything that he had not already said in the numerous interviews he had already given others over the years, which are readily available in various publications. Furthermore, Soyinka, to date, has written a total of five memoirs. And while it is Brian Singleton's view, as he has put it during one of my personal consultations with him, that autobiographies are subjective and, therefore, should not be entirely relied upon bearing in mind that they are a "reconstruction of the past to sell in the present for future remembrance", I would argue that being black and the first ever African Nobel Laureate for Literature, Soyinka knew that it was better for him to reconstruct his own past from his own memory than to leave it to others, especially the western hegemony, to do it for him. "Memory establishes life's continuity; it

gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past" (Sturken 1997, 1), according to Marita Sturken in *Tangled Memories.* "As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity" (ibid.), Sturken concludes. Thus, Soyinka's memories of his past as he has written them down himself in all of his memoirs for the sake of posterity (even if some of them later turn out to be 'mangled' memories) must be seen, in my view, as authentic, authorial and much more accurate than any account of Soyinka's past that anyone could give. It is against this backdrop that I have placed significance reliance on a number of Soyinka's memoirs that I believe are pertinent to this present study. It can be argued that this is my strategy of overcoming the methodological challenge of not getting a one-on-one interview with Soyinka. So, I have had to draw the conclusion that what Soyinka has written about himself is as good, (if not better) than anything he would have told me if I had conducted an interview with him. Nonetheless, I must add that I have also found the myriad of critical (and anecdotal) works on Soyinka and his writings extremely useful as secondary research material for my contextualisation.

For the analyses of the British productions and presentations of Soyinka's tragic plays in part two, my primary research material comprise of all written, audio and/or video archival materials available and accessible on all the four productions including prompt books, production notes, programme notes, press releases, newspaper reviews, press interviews and all the critical materials that were written on and about all the productions. The only production – out of the four that I focus on in this work – that I saw was the presentation of the *Horseman* at the National in 2009 bearing in mind that I was still in Nigeria when all the others were presented. Whereas the Victoria and Albert Theatre Museum holds the video recording of 1992 Talawa presentation of *The Road*, the recording was not available for public viewing due to its fragile condition. Furthermore, out of the four directors whose work I am examining in this thesis, only two were available for interview – Yvonne Brewster who directed *The Road* for Talawa and Rufus Norris the director of the *Horseman* at the National in 2009. Nonetheless, I conducted an interview with Nigerian performing artist, Peter Badejo, who, as will be discussed later, was involved in the two British productions of *Horseman* that are discussed in chapter seven. Finally, I had an insightful taped conversation with two actors who were involved in the 2009 production of *Horseman* at the National. In light of all of these circumstances, it is inevitable that while I have excess materials on one production, there are inadequate research materials on another. In such cases, I have had to augment the available resources by relying, to an extent, on secondary materials such as published critical reviews.

0.8 On the Subject of Objectivity

It would be appropriate for me to declare a bias at this juncture. As Edward Said has rightly observed in the 'Introduction' to his seminal book, *Orientalism*,

> No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or member of a society (Said 1978, 10).

As already mentioned, I am a Yoruba man from Nigeria just as Soyinka. Furthermore, since I met Soyinka for the first time in 2006, I have kept in touch with him.[14] While, I would not claim that I know Soyinka very intimately, having corresponded with him on a number of issues – personal and professional[15] – over the years, I have come to regard Soyinka as a mentor and my personal muse. However, it is my hope that rather than being a hindrance, the fact that I hold Soyinka in a very high regard as many Nigerians do, will enhance my objectivity in this thesis. Furthermore, I believe, as a Yoruba man, who has lived and worked both in the UK and Ireland for two decades, that I am in a vantage position to contend that Soyinka might be a true Yoruba man and a proud Nigerian at heart, his outlook to life is 'inter-national' and hence Yemi Ogunbiyi's description of Soyinka as "one of the most internationalist, eclectic and most widely travelled of our artists. An 'Ije- Egba' to the core and yet a man of the World!" (Ogunbiyi 2005, 48). I, too, understand the in-between location, the 'Third Space' in which Soyinka had to operate when he was in Britain and why many Nigerians held the view that he was rather 'bohemian' when he returned to Nigeria. "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable, in itself," as Homi K. Bhabha has asserted, "which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the

[14] To celebrate the 5th anniversary of my theatre company, Arambe Productions in February 2009, I modernised and directed Soyinka's satire, *The Trials of Brother Jero* for a two-week run at the Samuel Beckett Theatre in Trinity College, Ireland. Thereafter, I travelled to Nigeria to direct the adaptation for the National Theatre of Nigeria where the play ran for four week-ends between April and May 2009 after a two day preview at the University of Lagos. In the process of adapting and producing this play, I kept in touch with Soyinka and as a result I got to know him a little bit.

[15] In October 2010, I went to Nigeria to work on a premiere production of *Home, Sweet Home*, a play I wrote to coincide with Nigeria's 50th Independence celebration. I spoke to Wole Soyinka on the phone after the production and he asked me to send him a script of the play. Upon reading the script, he sent me an email correspondence dated 28th January 2011 saying *"I did collect the script, thanks. No substantial feedback, I found it an absorbing piece and hope I see it on stage soon WS."*

meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 1994, 37).

It is, however, worth stressing at this juncture that Soyinka has forcefully rejected the notion that he is a man in between two cultures. For instance, in an interview recorded in 1992, Ulli Beier[16] put the following question to Soyinka:

> Recently a famous commentator on African life referred to you as "the man between," and in his article he expounds that eternal cliché of the African intellectual "between two-worlds, between two languages, two cultures".....I have known you for over thirty years and you have never struck me as somebody who is constantly aware of oscillating between two worlds. Or have you ever thought of yourself as living in a situation of conflict (Beier 2001, 167)?

And Soyinka's response was:

> It is a strange but certainly deeply ingrained attitude that certain commentators hold – and of course it is a very Eurocentric thing. It does not occur to me for instance that you suffer from a conflict: you come to Nigeria, and you are immediately at home. You can sit in a Sango shrine or follow the Agbegijo[17] masquerades, you are just at home. And there are some other Europeans like that (ibid.).

To instantiate his point, Soyinka then went on to mention Susanne Wenger (see footnote 16 again) and one Gerd Meuer , a German who was born in the Rhineland area of Germany in 1941 but lived in Nigeria on and off for many years. Soyinka is not comparing like with like here, I would argue, because he should know, from his own personal experience in the UK in the mid to late 1950s (as will be discussed in the following chapter), that no matter for how long a black person has lived in the western world, s/he will never belong. In other words, for any black African immigrant in a western country it will always be: "The mangrove tree may dwell in the river that does not make it a crocodile". As I would show in the

[16] We will be discussing Ulli Beier when we begin our analysis of *Death and the King's Horseman* in chapter seven. Suffice it to say here that Beier was a German Jew who arrived in Nigeria in 1956 with his Austrian wife Susan Wenger in search of a spiritual home which they found among the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. In fact Susan Wenger became a priestess of Obatala and lived all her life in Oshogbo town where she was known as Adunni Oloosa until her death in 2009.

[17] *Agbegijo* literally translates as 'one who dances with wood'. Here Soyinka is referring to certain Yoruba masquerades who wear specific wooden mask for their dance display.

course of this study, Soyinka is a black man and as such, his experience as an immigrant in the UK cannot and should not be compared with the experience of any European who emigrated to and lived in a society such as Nigeria where the 'colonial mentality' of according deference to the Occident was and still very much prevalent. So, contrary to Soyinka's contention and bearing in mind Jean Baudrillard's assertion that "all hypotheses are possible" (Baudrillard 2004, 371), I would argue that Soyinka is more at home in-between space and it is by knowing what it feels like being a resident of the in-between cultural space that has provided the Yoruba tragedian with the fillip to propound his theory of Yoruba tragedy. As will be discussed in detail in chapter three, the aesthetic concept of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy presupposes the Yoruba ontology that 'in-between' the three known stages of human existence – the living, the dead and the unborn – a fourth stage exists. This fourth stage of existence is what Soyinka calls the 'numinous zone', 'the transitional abyss' or the 'chthonic realm' that must "constantly be diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers that lie guardian to it" (Soyinka 1993, 23). This is the principal role of a Yoruba tragic hero in Soyinka's dramatic cosmos.

In an article, appropriately entitled 'Rebel in Exile', written by Andrew Gumbel for *The Guardian* newspaper of April 8, 2009 to coincide with the run of *Horseman* at the National, Soyinka was quoted thus: "I like to say, I spend one-third of my time in Nigeria, one-third in Europe or America, and one-third on a plane". If these were the exact words of Soyinka, how could he contend that he is not an in-between man? I would argue that culturally and aesthetically Soyinka is neither Yoruba nor British (or shall we say European bearing in mind that the concept of his Yoruba tragedy was heavily influenced by Greek tragedy), but a 'Yorupean' – a hybrid of Yoruba and European. Or why is it the case that Soyinka is considered too abstruse and inaccessible among 'his people' and his Yoruba tragic plays are hardly produced in Nigeria? And why is it that in Britain, where his plays are more regularly staged, he never felt a sense of belonging?[18] And while he may be considered by a number of liberal-minded western scholars as the most prolific writer that Africa has ever produced, he is still relatively unknown to many in the west even in the academy where drama and theatre are taught. I recall, for example, that whilst I was doing my postgraduate degree in drama in Ireland's University College Dublin between 1997 and 1998, I mentioned Soyinka's name casually in a seminar, presuming everyone on my course must know a writer of his calibre, but only one of my Irish course mates, numbering over a dozen at the seminar

[18] For details of how Soyinka describes how he felt like an outsider whilst living in London, see Soyinka, 1994, pp. 26-27.

(including my lecturer), knew who Soyinka was. I was speechless! Whilst I was a drama undergraduate student[19] in Nigeria, I knew Samuel Beckett, J.M. Synge, Harold Pinter, and Bertolt Brecht to name but a few European writers. Thus, it was in an attempt to bring Soyinka to the consciousness of my Irish course mates that I decided to write my Master's degree dissertation on Soyinka. I examined Soyinka's aesthetics in the context of Nigerian history and politics before briefly contrasting his dramaturgy with the Marxist ideological-based theatre of the second generation Nigerian writer, Femi Osofisan, which, interestingly, he has also termed: 'the third force'.[20]

And many years after that, whilst trawling through the history of British theatre, from the mid-fifties onward, I found out that Soyinka, whose theatrical debut was in the Royal Court Theatre in 1959 (as discussed in chapter 3), was not given the kind of recognition accorded to his white contemporaries with whom he made his debut on the British stage. As an African proverb goes, "Unless the lion employs its own historian, the fight between the hunter and the lion will always be won by the hunter". In fact, one can argue that this was the motivation behind Motsa's essay aptly entitled 'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land' in which she wonders if it was not a daring act for Soyinka to have agreed to stage one of his early plays in the heart of England. "Whilst the works of Soyinka's Royal Court's colleagues John Arden and Arnold Wesker did well", according to Motsa, "Soyinka was received in the main with hostility and derision by the London theatre reviewers" (Motsa 2005, 30). Here, Motsa is specifically referring to the 1959 Royal Court production of Soyinka's one-act play, *The Invention* as directed by Soyinka. But since then Soyinka's plays have been produced professionally and by students in Britain more than fifteen times. But still, you will hardly read about Soyinka's productions on the British stage in textbooks about British theatre, including those that focus on the late 1950s.

It is, thus, one of the aims of this thesis to fill the lacunae which the non-existence of extensive scholarly work on the British productions of Soyinka's tragic plays has obviously created. And in the process, it is inevitable that the question will be posed: what has changed in the writing of Soyinka whom the British

[19] I graduated with a B.A (Hons) from the Drama Department of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife in 1990. As will be discussed in a later chapter, Soyinka was the first Head of the department of Drama when it was newly created in 1976 in the then University of Ife. The university's name changed to Obafemi Awolowo in honour of Awolowo a Nigerian elder statesman who died in 1989.

[20] See Adigun, 1999. 'Critical Examination of Wole Soyinka: A New Nigerian Perspective.' M.A. Thesis, University College Dublin.

media accused of "lacking originality" (Motsa 2005, 30), in the late 50s that the production of his plays has become more of a regular occurrence on the British stage than in Nigeria. Could it be because Soyinka won the Nobel Prize in 1986 that British theatres began to consider him as an African dramatist whose plays they could safely (re)present? As will be discussed in detail in chapter three, Soyinka has redefined and theorised tragedy from an African perspective by relying on the myth and cultural paradigms of his people – the Yoruba of western Nigeria. Thus, unlike his other light-hearted plays such as *The Trials of Brother Jero,* which satirises the gullibility of the Nigerian masses who fall prey to religious charlatans such as false prophet Brother Jero, or *The Lion and the Jewel,* a comedy about the clash of modernity and tradition as respectively epitomised by the characters of Lakunle, the school teacher, and Baroka, the Village Head, Soyinka's so-called Yoruba tragic plays are quintessential Yoruba with their ritual sacrifice undertone. At the end of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, the death or demise of the tragic hero must renew the life-blood of the society he leaves behind. This is contrary to the requirements of the cathartic feelings of pity and fear that Aristotelian tragedy, as it is known in the west, is expected to engender in its audience when a tragic hero eventually falls due to his tragic flaw. Michael Etherton is right, therefore, when he notes that "Soyinka's drama is anti-Aristotle" (Etherton 2005, 35). Or as Adedeji has argued, "Soyinka is...not interested in imitation of reality but in suggesting it" (Adedeji 2005, 124). Thus, this thesis aims to also appraise the concept of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy against the backdrop of its human ritual sacrifice motif and how it was first realised on stage in Ibadan before it was subsequently presented on four different occasions on the British stage.

0.9 The Theoretical Context

For my theoretical contextualisation of Soyinka, the basic premise of my argument in this thesis is that he is post-colonial in the sense that he began to write his serious drama less than a year before Nigeria gained its independence in 1960. And it is to further this post-colonial agenda that he has been unavoidably intercultural. However, it should be stressed that Soyinka is not only intercultural simply because he mixes African dramatic elements with western drama techniques in his dramaturgy; he is also intercultural *par excellence* because his theoretical and creative writings, which are significantly resourced from Yoruba culture and mythology, are communicated very effortlessly and effectively in the English language. Myth is a carrier of culture; so is language. Without language one does not have the compass to navigate the culture which the language carries. Thus, for relying on Yoruba myth for his theory and dramaturgy and then writing critically and creatively in English, Soyinka is communicating the 'familiar' through the 'foreign'. This, I would argue, is cross-culturalism within a post-colonial paradigm.

However, to avoid any ambiguity and for the purpose of this thesis, we will term the inherent cross-culturality in Soyinka's aesthetics: 'transculturalism'. "Soyinka's creative writing in all genres draw upon both Western Nigerian traditions", writes Helen Gilbert in her introduction to *Post-colonial Plays*, "and his theatre works," Gilbert adds,

> can be seen as a synthesis of Yoruba and European performance idioms and philosophical concepts. Many of his compelling tragedies explore the connection between ritual and theatre in a post colonial context (Gilbert 2000, 49).

But it is not only Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy that is cross-cultural (within the theoretical framework of post-colonialism); when a Yoruba tragedy is directed by a British director for a British audience, it has been subjected to another process of cross-culturalism that is known in the west as 'interculturalism'. The term 'interculturalism', I would argue, can best be understood phenomenologically and etymologically in the context of 'Orientalism'. This is the concept that Edward Said has used to describe how, for centuries, the west has appropriated and re-presented the culture of the 'Other' – oriental culture specifically. But Brian Singleton has further broadened this concept for us when he argues that:

> As far as the Other was concerned no attempt was made to understand it. If represented, it was only a projection of the Other as an image of the self or more precisely, the ideal of the self. If the other is not me and if "I" am civilized, then the Other must be barbarian (Singleton 2004, 12).

It is not only the Orient that the west regarded as barbarians who needed to be civilized though, this was the premise upon which colonialism predicated. And as will be discussed in the following chapter, if not for the advent of colonialism, Soyinka would not have been a post-colonial playwright and a transcultural theorist. Therefore, the theoretical tools that I employ for the purpose of my strategic analysis in this thesis are post-colonial and intercultural theories. Soyinka, as we will see in the following chapter, cannot easily be pigeonholed: he is cross-culturalism personified and furthermore all the productions of his Yoruba tragedy on the British stage qualify, in the western sense, as intercultural theatre practice. So, to fully appreciate the complexity, post-coloniality and the aesthetics of transculturalism in Soyinka's dramaturgy, it would be important to put the Yoruba tragedian into perspective.

PART I

SOYINKA AND HIS YORUBA TRAGEDY IN PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes, in my most quiet hours, I have often asked myself, deeply and disturbingly: what would have happened to our literary and intellectual history had Soyinka been killed in Gowon's prison during the Nigerian/Biafran civil war? Where else would we have found the ladder to climb the tree from which we now touch the sky?

The only answer I could come up with is this: We are lucky that Wole Soyinka is alive. Lucky that he survived and that, today, we have in our midst a living symbol of our collective will to endure as a people and a race abused by our own leaders and the leaders of other races.

(Esiaba Irobi 2005)[21]

[21] Cited from Editor's Comment entitled 'Soyinka: He Who Is Surrounded by Wizards' In *Soyinka Journal* Vol. 1, Number 1, p. 4.

CHAPTER ONE

Wole Soyinka: In Perspective

(Home and Away)

> *The persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, for a re-definition in terms of cultural or private experience, is at the least Man's recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories; and, of all the subjective unease that is aroused by man's creative insights, that wrench within the human psyche which we vaguely define as 'tragedy' is the most insistent voice that bids us return to our own sources* (Soyinka 1993, 27).

1.1 The Yoruba Tragedian

In his book, *The Drama of Black Africa* in which he surveys the historical development of tragedy in Africa, Anthony Graham White categorises traditional African drama into satiric comedies and historical re-enactments. "Tragedy," he concludes, "does not seem to exist" (White 1974, 42-43). Ketu Katrak in her book, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy* echoes the same sentiments when she claims that "the best that African dramatists who write tragic drama can come up with are adaptations of Greek or Shakespearean plays" (Katrak, 1986, 36). *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (1971), written by the late Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi, readily comes to mind. The author himself is unequivocal about the fact that his play is "a skilful transplantation, to African soil, the theme of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*."[22] So, the argument here is that there was no trace of tragedy as a genre, in its original form, in African literature before the advent of colonisation; and if it appears to have existed in any shape or form, it is a copy of an original, lacking originality. That was however before Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka burst onto the scene to create, both theoretically and artistically, an original concept for a new kind of tragedy, which he terms Yoruba tragedy.

Although often described, especially in the West, generically as an African[23] writer, Wole Soyinka

[22] Rotimi, Ola. 1971. *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Oxford University Press, back cover.

[23] Africa remains the second largest continent with 53 different countries, including the island of Madagascar. From one country to the other, people are different the way people are different from one European country to

regards himself first and foremost as a Yoruba writer. When he was asked: "Do you see yourself as a Yoruba writer?", in an interview in 1985, Soyinka's quick response was: "Well, it's obvious that I am not an Igbo writer!" (Wilkinson 2001, 149). Then he proceeded to explain how a Nigerian writer "is a creature of formation" (ibid.), due to the linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of Nigeria, before affirming: "There's no question at all about it in my mind, I'm primarily a Yoruba writer, just as you have Occitan writers in France, Welsh writers, Scottish Literature ....even when it is written in English" (ibid.). But the fact that Soyinka writes in the English language does not seem to have deterred him from pursuing and ultimately accomplishing his main preoccupation of redefining tragedy essentially from a Yoruba perspective.

As Kole Omotoso has noted in the introduction to his book, *Achebe or Soyinka: A Study of Contrast*, "[Soyinka] has gone on to propose an African (Yoruba) alternative understanding of what tragic drama can be and in contrast to the European Aristotelian theory of tragic drama" (Omotoso 1996, xviii). Soyinka has not only proposed his own unique theory of tragedy, however, he acted upon the theory by writing plays to creatively contextualise his theoretical concept of his Yoruba tragedy. It was perhaps a testament to the fact that Soyinka had eventually accomplished this goal that, in 1986, he was awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature. It was Soyinka's tragic play, *Death and the King's Horseman*,[24] "which is believed to have fetched" him the Nobel Prize, as Steve Ayorinde has observed in an online review of a 2005 production of the play in Nigeria.[25] According to the Nobel Prize's official website, however, Soyinka was awarded the prize for being the writer: "who in a wide cultural perspective and

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the other. Nigeria is Soyinka's country of origin and alone it has a population of about 160 million people. There are three major ethnic (national) groups – the Hausas, the Yorubas and the Igbos. So, to call a writer an African writer simply because he is an African while an Irish or a British writer is seldom referred to as a European writer is essentialist.

[24] More than any of his tragic plays, *Death and the King's Horseman* epitomises the theory of Yoruba tragedy as Soyinka has propounded it in his essay, 'The Fourth Stage'. The theory will be discussed to conclude chapter three.

[25] To celebrate Soyinka's 70th birthday in 2004, a production of his play *Death and the King's Horseman* was mounted. and, as already mentioned, Steve Ayorinde reviewed it online under the title 'Artistes Celebrate Soyinka with a Play' on a website: Café Africana at http://www.cafeafricana.com/Tributes-Wole-Soyinka.html (accessed on the 24th of November 2011).

with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence".[26] Whereas Soyinka regarded his becoming the first African Nobel Laureate for Literature as "a tribute to the heritage of African Literature",[27] for Chinua Achebe, a previous nominee of the same award, it was the perfect opportunity to declare that: "One of us has proved that we can beat the white man at his own game. That is wonderful for us and the white man".[28] Achebe's declaration brings to mind two important dialectical observations which Frantz Fanon has made in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks.* According to Fanon, "There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect"[29] (Fanon 1967, 12). The question that is worth asking, therefore, is: is it possible that all the efforts of African writers and more so Nigerian writers such as Achebe and Soyinka in their prolificacy, whether they are conscious of it or not, is to prove that they are as good as the white man if not better than him?

Omotoso notes that while Achebe is broadly regarded as a writer who is very comprehensible, "simple, and easy to read and understand", Soyinka does not really care whether he is understood or not. So can one argue that by being lucid and easily comprehensible, Achebe has become one of the best known African writers internationally, especially through his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, which has sold over

[26] Cited from http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1986/soyinka.html (accessed on November 17, 2010).

[27] Soyinka made the remark in an interview in the *New York Times,* 17 October 1986. In my view, the irony of the Nobel Prize being won by Soyinka and this remark is that the westerners have used it to further essentialise Africa in the sense that they now see Soyinka as the sole representative of the literature of the whole continent of black Africa. Now if Soyinka's name is included on any list of writers where names of many Europeans appear, the view is that the whole Africa is taken care of.

[28] As already discussed, Chinua Achebe made this remark, upon hearing the news of Soyinka winning the Nobel Laureate, at the annual meeting of the Association of Nigerian Authors that was held in November 1986.

[29] It seems this often-quoted statement is what informed the statement that Chinua Achebe made when he heard that Soyinka had become the first ever African to become Nobel Laureate in Literature. It is worth noting nonetheless, that Achebe himself was a clear contender for the award. In Biodun Jeyifo's lecture entitled "'Oguntoyinbo' Wole Soyinka and 'Igilango Geesi'", which he delivered at Soyinka's 70th Birthday, the same sentiments that Soyinka has taken the English language to a level that the English people themselves least expect are strongly echoed. Jeyifo's essay is reprinted in *Soyinka Journal,* Volume 1, Number 1, (August 2005), pp.18-27. Note however that the pagination of the journal is very erratic and unreliable.

eight million copies worldwide and has been translated into many languages?[30] But the complexity of Soyinka's writing, in the view of many Nigerian critics, is an effort "to demonstrate that he is able to manipulate the English language far better than the owners of the English language, the English in England and also to demonstrate his cleverness" (Omotoso 1996, xv). And if this is indeed what Soyinka had set out to do, one can conclude that his strategy has paid off in the sense that he was the one who eventually became the first African (or Nigerian) Nobel laureate. This, I would argue, is the politics of post-coloniality of African Literature generally and Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, in particular that is, if due consideration is to be given to Frantz Fanon that "For the black man, there is only one destiny. And that is white" (Fanon 1967, 12). To date, Soyinka has written, *inter alia*, two novellas, five memoirs, seven collections of poetry, 23 plays of diverse genres, and numerous essays. Thus it is no hyperbole to say he is a writer who, as Femi Osofisan has concluded, is "endlessly fertile and endlessly inventive" (Osofisan 1994, 44). So, in this respect one can infer that Soyinka had indeed reached his 'destination' and he has the Nobel Prize to show for his effort. It is imperative to ascertain how it all began.

1.2 Soyinka's Early Years

Soyinka was born Oluwole Akinwande on July 13, 1934. In his seminal autobiography appropriately entitled, *Ake*: *The Years of Childhood,* Soyinka paints a vivid picture of his childhood growing up in the 1930s in Abeokuta also known as Egba or Ake in the Yoruba land of Western Nigeria. His father, Samuel Ayodele Soyinka, worked as an Anglican minister and a local school missionary headmaster and his mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka, was, according to Soyinka, "the wild Christian, whose fierce faith enabled her to pour groundnut oil from a broad brimmed bowl into an empty bottle without spilling a drop" (Soyinka 1981, 9). Soyinka had a privileged upbringing and in the light of this family background, he was exposed to the English language and Christian ideas from childhood and like children of the few educated families, he grew up seeing the world, Kole Omotoso notes, "from behind hibiscus flowers and the rose gardens of his father's parsonage" (Omotoso 1996, 1).

[30] According to a report entitled 'Chinua Achebe forces 50 Cent to rename movie' in *The Guardian* of Wednesday 14, September 2011, American rapper 50 Cent (whose real name is Curtis Jackson) was stopped by Chinua Achebe from using the title *Things Fall Apart* for a movie that he was producing on the grounds that he owns the copyright to the title. Achebe reportedly turned down an offer of a $1million made by 50 Cent. Eventually, the movie is entitled *All Things Fall Apart*. It is rather ironic because "Things fall apart" is a line in W. B. Yeat's poem entitled 'The Second Coming', which goes "Turning and turning in the widening gyre/The falcon cannot hear the falconer/Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold/ Mere Anarchy is loosed upon the world...."

Although Soyinka loved donning his robe as a chorister every Sunday, he found it difficult to comprehend the existence of a Christian God. It is no surprise, therefore, that at the young age of eleven, Soyinka was the author of a prize-winning essay titled, 'Ideals of an Atheist'. But while Soyinka's early life was strictly guided "by the power of the written word either through the Bible or the hymnal companion" (ibid), he was still very much fascinated by the culture and traditions of the Yoruba people, which his parents considered 'pagan ways'. In Soyinka's young mind, there was nothing sinister about the *Egungun* (ancestral masquerade)[31] festival, for instance. In fact, young Soyinka would argue that there is no difference between an *Egungun* masquerade going around blessing people and a Christian officiating priest who "gives you a wafer and says: 'This is the flesh of Christ' and he gives you wine and says 'This is the blood of Christ'" (Ulli Beier 1997, 3).[32] The question though is how has Soyinka's exposure to two separate religions in his early years growing up in the Yoruba town of Ijebu Isara in Abeokuta impacted on his young mind and subsequently shaped his artistic sensibilities? In responding to a question in an interview by James Gibbs in Zimbabwe in 1981, Soyinka gave a clear indication of what it was like growing up in a Christian home whilst he was, at the same time, surrounded by the 'paganism' of Yoruba traditional religion:

> This is where the question of being born into two societies, two forms, two levels, two patterns of creativity comes in. I had the advantage of actually being raised in a Christian family in the midst of "pagan" manifestations, so it was quite usual for me to be returning from Church and suddenly find an

[31] The Egungun can best be described as the practical manifestation of the Yoruba ontology that presupposes a co-existence between the living, the dead and the unborn. The annual festival is in honour of the dead and it is regarded by the Yorubas as an important time when the dead ancestors pay the living a visit. An Egungun masquerade is referred to as 'Ara orun', meaning 'a person of heaven' and it is in this respect that an Egungun is faceless and anonymous as they are covered in an intricately designed and multi-coloured garment from head to toe. To assume the personality of the dead, the Egungun communicates with the living with a guttural voice and blesses the living in exchange for gifts of money or other materials. The annual Egungun festival is a celebration as performances are accompanied by traditional songs, music and lots of dance.

[32] Cited from an interview Ulli Beier conducted with Soyinka as published in *Isokan Yoruba Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer 1997).

My source for this insightful interview is online: www.Yoruba.org/Magazine/Summer 97/file 3.html (accessed in December 2006. The six-page interview is not paginated, so for convenience of reference I have taken the liberty to paginate it myself for the purpose of this study.

> *Egungun* masquerade, that's an ancestral masquerade cult parading with lively music [and] drums (Gibbs 2001, 72).

Clearly, it was from an early age, and long before young Soyinka realised he was going to be a writer, that he had been intercultural. One can argue, therefore, that the foundation of interculturalism – mixing together of 'indigenous' and 'foreign' cultural practices – upon which Soyinka's creative writing and particularly his Yoruba tragedy would later be built was laid while he was growing up as a child in Ijebu Isara. As will be discussed later in this study, it is Yoruba religious worship and its malleability that inspired Soyinka to theorise and formalise his Yoruba tragedy. Thus Soyinka cannot but be an intercultural artist in the sense that Yoruba culture itself by its nature is essentially intercultural. "Soyinka was born into a culture of celebration...a culture of dance and song in such a variety, it could be bewildering" (Omotoso 1996, 53), as Omotoso has rightly observed. "But also he had been born into a culture that had always made a virtue of taking from others what it thought useful for its continued self-expression and survival" (ibid.). This, I would contend is precisely the premise of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy. As it obtains in the Yoruba culture in which he was nurtured, Soyinka has made a virtue of taking whatever he felt would serve him from foreign cultures, mixed it up with elements of Yoruba culture to theorise and create his Yoruba tragic plays. It is against this background that Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his essay 'Myth Literature and the African World' posits that:

> In reading Soyinka we hear a voice that has ransacked the treasuries of English literary and vernacular diction with an eclecticism that dazzles without disconcerting, and has found a language that is indisputably his own....Soyinka writes in a way that no contemporary English or American writer could. It is important to understand why this is (Appiah 1994, 98).

Although Appiah goes on to propose that the answer "lies at the root of Soyinka's intellectual and literary project" (ibid.), I would argue that it goes beyond that. Soyinka is able to write in a way that no western writer can write because Soyinka conceives his ideas in the Yoruba language but effortlessly communicates them in English; he is thus both a Yoruba and an English writer at the same time. Soyinka is, therefore, interculturalism personified. It is for this reason that we need to familiarise ourselves with the Yoruba people of western Nigeria and in particular their traditional religious worship which has inspired Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy albeit written in English. However, I shall presently turn my attention to the formal education which Soyinka received both in Nigeria and Britain with special attention to how it influenced his creativity both politically and aesthetically.

1.3 Soyinka's School Days

Soyinka started his primary education at the age of three[33] at St Peter's Primary School Abeokuta, where his father was headmaster. Soyinka began his secondary education before the age of ten at Abeokuta Grammar School where his uncle, Reverend I.O Ransome Kuti, (the father of the late Nigerian music legend, Fela Ransome Kuti) was the principal; "a thing unheard of at that time" (Awe 2005, 59), according to Olumuyiwa Awe in his essay, 'Before My Very Eyes' in which he presents a no-holds-barred account of his personal knowledge of Soyinka from 1945 to 1987. Awe's explanation for Soyinka's admission into secondary school at such an early age is that – "he was a headmaster's son and his uncle was the principal of the grammar school" (ibid.). However, Soyinka spent just two years in Abeokuta before proceeding to the prestigious Government College Ibadan (GCI) in 1946. In an interview with Lewis Nkosi published in *African Writers Talking,* Soyinka recalled that it was during his time at GCI that he made his first attempts at creative writing: "In school, I wrote the usual sketches for production, the occasional verse...short story" (Nkosi 1972, 172). If the seed of interculturalism was sown in Soyinka's young mind whilst he was growing up as a child in his hometown of Abeokuta, his post-colonial outlook, arguably, began when he was admitted to the Government College Ibadan

Bearing in mind Frantz Fanon's claim that, "The tragedy of the man is that he was once a child" (Fanon 1967, 231), I want to suggest that perhaps it was a particular experience that Soyinka has brilliantly described in his memoir, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*[34] that has shaped his outlook on white people and informed the post-colonial preoccupation which permeates his oeuvre. It was Soyinka's first day at school and he had travelled on the train with someone he refers to in his memoir as Nathaniel, who was also a new intake. Nathaniel had been entrusted with the responsibility to look after young Soyinka because he was bigger and older. Soyinka describes the trip from his hometown in Abeokuta to his new school in Ibadan as floating free of everything including "the iron discipline of his father, the Headmaster, and the pious hoops by which his mother had sought to bind him" (Soyinka 2001, 88).

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[33] Soyinka's book, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn: A Memoir* was launched at the Main Theatre of the Cubberley Community Centre in Palo Alto California on the 24th April 2006 at which Soyinka was interviewed by Chike Nwoffiah, a Nigerian theatre producer who founded Oriki Theatre, an African theatre company in the Bay Area of California. I ushered Soyinka on stage with a Nigerian song and drums. I also recorded the interview on video. Soyinka said during the interview that he was a voracious reader from childhood. I will be citing from the interview later in the thesis.

[34] All the references in this thesis are from the Methuen edition published in 2001.

Upon arriving in Ibadan, Nathaniel informed Soyinka that he had to go to an uncle in an area in Ibadan known as *Oke Bola* to deliver a message. The two boys parted ways and young Soyinka, with his box firmly on his head, began to make his way to school on foot. After walking for about half a mile, a car stopped to give Soyinka a ride to school. Soyinka recognised the white man as one of the teachers from the selection interview. A white lady was occupying the passenger seat in the front and a dog, which Soyinka describes as morose, was at the back. Soyinka placed his box at the back of the car as suggested by the white man and he took his seat at the back beside the dog.

As they began to drive along, the white lady "turned and smiled some form of encouragement to Soyinka" before "muttering something to her companion" (ibid.), as Soyinka puts it. But all Soyinka could make out from what the woman had said was the word: young. As Soyinka puts it, "The man nodded and responded with more nasal rumbling" (ibid.). At that point Soyinka began to wonder to himself how long it would take him to be able to understand white people's accent, considering the fact that a fair number of the teachers at his new school were white. Then unexpectedly the white man asked Soyinka how old he was. "Eleven years, sir", Soyinka responded courteously. "But you also claimed last year you were eleven" (ibid.). "Hotly, without pausing to think", writes Soyinka, "the young passenger denied it. 'No, sir, at the interview I was ten. I said I was ten'" (ibid.). It was the first week of 1946 and although Soyinka had said he was eleven at the time of the interview, now under pressure he suddenly found himself insisting that he was ten. Soyinka's conclusion of that episode was that the white man had tricked him to tell a lie. To support my earlier suggestion that this particular episode must have influenced Soyinka's view of the white race, Soyinka's passage in *Ibadan* in which he brilliantly describes this experience is worth quoting:

> Watching the two adults lapse into silence, the boy felt his insides begin to knot. So it was true after all; to these Europeans, all Africans were liars. He had heard it said, heard this prejudice discussed in resentful circles, but his few and brief encounters with those white aliens had never brought him into a direct experience with such attitudes (Soyinka 2001, 93).

It is important to stress here that Soyinka wrote this memoir in a third person narrative and as a result he did not use his real name, but 'Maren' and other aliases. Furthermore, it is crucial to reiterate here that in the above passage Soyinka is recalling his reaction to an experience which happened to him in 1946 at age eleven. It is important to note, however, that *Ibadan* was first published in 1994 and therefore one can posit that while time had passed before Soyinka recounted this experience, apparently the wound is yet to heal with the passage of time. Once, Soyinka was asked by Biodun Jeyifo

to comment on "what sparks off or ignites his creative process". Although he began by saying he did not know, then after giving the question a thought, he said: "I suppose recollection sometimes, sort of intense recollection of a former experience can trigger the need to write" (Jeyifo 1984, xix). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a number of memorable experiences that Soyinka had whilst in Government College have found their way into his creative work. For instance, it was an experience of a lightning episode that Soyinka had during his secondary school days, I would argue, that inspired the explosion that never worked when he had his professional debut with the production of his play: *The Invention* at the Royal Court in 1959.[35]

It is also important to note here that it was during his secondary school years in Ibadan that Soyinka's published first articles appeared in literary magazines. As Bernth Linfors has noted in his pioneering essay, 'The Early Writings of Soyinka', [36] Soyinka's story, 'Keffi's Birthday Treat', which was broadcast on the Children's Programme of the National Broadcasting Service in 1951, "was very likely Soyinka's first public performance in print, if not on air" (Linfors 1981, 20). Soyinka contributed essays regularly to the school magazine and one of his essays 'Ideals of an Atheist' won a prize which outraged some of his schoolmates whose religious sensibilities were offended. And as Awe recalls, "Soyinka was a member of the school Drama Society and he was always ready with recitation, songs and sketches at house and school levels" (Awe 2005, 65). Furthermore, Soyinka was willing to give his time to assist in the school library and in the words of Awe, "Soyinka was a voracious reader of anything in print" (ibid.). Naturally, Soyinka's love of books endeared him to many of his school teachers including his English teacher, A.G. Keay, who introduced Soyinka "to the works of Euripides" (ibid). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in terms of his academic work Soyinka excelled in both English Language and Literature. When the results of his school certificate examinations were announced, Soyinka passed all his subjects, including Mathematics in which he was the weakest. Consequently, Soyinka was deemed to have satisfied the conditions to be exempted from the London Matriculation, which, at the time, was a requirement for the entrance exams to University College Ibadan. So, unlike a number of his classmates who went on to Class Six for a five-month preparation for the University College entry examination, Soyinka left GCI in

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[35] On Sunday 1st of November 1959, Soyinka presented a programme of his work at the Royal Court Theatre in London. The programme included poetry recitation and a production of his one act play *The Invention* which marked his professional debut on the British stage. This production and how it was received will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

[36] For more on Soyinka's early writings, readers are advised to pursue Linfors, 1981, pp. 19-44.

December 1950 and by January 1951, he got a job as a stores assistant in the medical stores of the Government Medical Department. Whilst working, Soyinka continued to engage himself artistically. For instance, he "took part in the Nigerian Festival of the Arts competition and started writing plays for radio" (Awe 2005, 69), as Awe has pointed out. It is worth mentioning that it was during his employment as a store assistant that Soyinka learnt how to type.

In September 1952, Soyinka gained admission into University College Ibadan (UCI) to commence a two-year preliminary undergraduate degree course in English, History and Greek where his mates included Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark and Christopher Okigbo,[37] all of whom went on to become well-known writers in their own right. "In class, Soyinka's essays in English Literature were always the best", in the words of Ifoghale Amata in his essay 'Soyinka of the Jewel not of the Specialist', and "he was top of the class in Greek" (Amata 2005, 28). Amata also recounts that Soyinka also took an active part in the Dramatic Society. Other extracurricular activities with which Soyinka busied himself whilst in college included political activities as well as literary writings. In 1953/54, during Soyinka's second and last year at University College Ibadan, "Soyinka was involved in a number of activities which made demands on his literary abilities", according to Linfors. For instance, Soyinka "was an enthusiastic member of the Progressive Party, a student political organisation set up in opposition to the more powerful student Dynamic party," as Linfors has pointed out and he also "took over the editorship of *The Eagle*, an irregular cyclostyled newssheet of campus commentary and humour" (Linfors 1981, 25). It is important to also add here that it was at University College Ibadan that Soyinka, along with six other school mates (including Awe), founded the Pyrate Confraternity with the aim to, *inter alia*: "(i) abolish convention; (ii) revive the age of chivalry; and (iii) end tribalism and elitism" (Awe 2005, 69). Soyinka was democratically elected as the confraternity's very first captain, which earned him the title, Captain Blood. From the kind of activities that Soyinka was attracted to in school, one could tell what his political affinity would turn out to be: a true progressive, which would later impact on his creative and critical writings. At the time Soyinka was admitted to UCI, the college was not offering a full Honours degree in English. So, the two years Soyinka spent in Ibadan was preliminary and a prerequisite, arguably, for his imminent trip to the UK to complete his degree. Soyinka left Ibadan for the United Kingdom in 1951; three years later he

[37]For Soyinka's story of the events that led to Okigbo's tragic death during the Biafran war, see Soyinka, 2006, p. 117. As will be discussed later in this thesis, Okigbo provides a perfect example of the kind of African intellectuals that Frantz Fanon has pointed out in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, will pick up arms to liberate the African mind.

graduated with an Upper Second in English Honours degree from Leeds University (Gibbs 1981, 5).

Whilst in Leeds, Soyinka continued to get his literary articles published in journals and magazines and he also began to write more creatively. It is worth noting that Soyinka also wrote a good deal of fiction as Linfors has found out in his research into the early writings of Soyinka (before he travelled to the UK and whilst a student in Leeds). "In 1956 for example", to quote Linfors once again, "he was awarded second prize in the Margaret Wrong Memorial Fund writing competition for a fiction entry entitled 'Orji River'"(Linfors 1981, 34). Soyinka's stories also appeared in a University of Leeds magazine, *The Gryphon*, as well as in a London-based Nigerian's Students' journal called *New Nigeria Forum*. In terms of his academic works, Soyinka was greatly influenced by one of his lecturers, G. Wilson Knight so much so that when he wrote his first collection of essays, including his most important essay, 'The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Drama' in 1967, it was in honour of his Professor. Knight however was not only "a critic known for unravelling the imagistic structures of Shakespearean plays" (Katrak 1986, 5), as Katrak has observed, he was also a theatre enthusiast and, apparently, Soyinka was exposed to a wide variety of Shakespeare's plays such as *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* that were performed during the years when Knight was the president of the Leeds University Union Theatre Group.

As can be deduced from the title of Soyinka's essay, Ogun, the Yoruba deity of war and iron, is Soyinka's muse and personal god and it is also well-known that Soyinka's favourite hobby is game-hunting. It is therefore unsurprising that whilst in Britain, he thought it was a good idea to avail of any available military training for the purpose of joining the armed struggle to liberate apartheid South Africa. As a result he enrolled in the Officer Training Corps of his university a year after he began his degree programme. "Alas my membership in that unit was brief" (Soyinka 2006, 39), he declares. He got a call-up letter to serve the Royal Majesty when the Suez war broke out in 1956; "I sent in a letter declining my call up" (ibid.), at the risk of being court-martialed. Soyinka argues that as a colonial, he swore an oath of loyalty to her Majesty after the training but when the proceedings were being conducted, "I put on my thickest Yoruba accent, ensuring that nothing intelligible emerged from my mouth" (ibid., 40). Literally, Soyinka would later abscond from the force writing a letter to explain that there was a mistake "I am a citizen of Nigeria, I explained, not of Great Britain" (ibid.). Eventually no action was taken against Soyinka but he later discovered that it was because he was from the interior of Nigeria and not Lagos, whose citizens had a kind of quasi-British citizen passport. "As such I was a "protected" being not a

colonial subject" he enthuses, "It was the only time I felt grateful to be classified a second-class citizen"[38] (ibid).

Another opportunity would soon present itself for Soyinka to acquire the military training he wanted when a volunteer training camp opened in Nottingham shortly after the news broke that the Soviet Union, taking advantage of the misadventure in Suez, had invaded Hungary. Soyinka joined up immediately, but before being taken to the war front in Hungary, he decided to write to his father, who was back in Nigeria, to seek his advice in case "I was wounded, taken prisoner or even worse" (ibid., 41). Soyinka was disappointed to receive his father's scathingly dismissive letter:

> You were sent to over there to study. In any case, charity begins at home, so if you feel like jeopardising your studies by succumbing to your warlike urge, kindly return home and make this your battlefield (Soyinka 2006, 41).

What Soyinka refers to as this "infuriatingly rational response" (ibid.) was what made Soyinka to start concentrating on the reason he had travelled to England in the first place. So, he started preoccupying himself creatively. Consequently, he wrote the first draft of his comic play, *The Lion and the Jewel* towards the end of his undergraduate years in Leeds; it was inspired by the report of the then sixty-year-old Charlie Chaplin getting married to Oona O'Neill who was about 17 years old. Another play Soyinka began writing at the same period is *The Swamp Dwellers* which he claims was triggered by the first report he read that oil had been found in the Delta regions of Nigeria. Furthermore, Soyinka felt the need to further his studies. Thus immediately after his graduation, he began an MA programme the same year in Leeds University, but he soon abandoned it to become a play reader, for about two years,

[38] Soyinka is originally from Abeokuta and as such he is not a colonial subject. Had he originally come from Lagos which, under the British rule, was considered a colony, he would have carried what he refers to as "a kind of a quasi-British citizen passport". For more on this categorization of Nigerian citizens into colonial subjects and 'protected' beings during British rule in Nigeria which began in 1914 and ended with Nigeria independence on October 1st 1960, see Falola, Toyin and Matthew M. Heaton. 2008. Also for the tragic story of Oluwole, a Nigerian who migrated to Leeds in the 1950s and ended up dead twenty years later after enduring racially motivated attacks for years when he became homeless see Aspden, Kester. 2007. *Nationality Wog: The Hounding of David Oluwole.* London: Vintage. Aspden's book has since been successfully adapted for the stage by London based Nigerian playwright Oladipo Agboluaje.

at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Whilst in London, Soyinka, in his spare time, worked as a bouncer, a barman, a local high school co-teacher of English Language and as a journalist-cum-presenter of a BBC radio programme, "Calling West Africa". And indeed besides writing plays for theatre and "invoking the inner confidence of one's mental superiority" (Soyinka 2006, 37), another way Soyinka was able to cope with the stressful experience of being a black man in the Britain of the 1950s was through "writing poems such as 'Telephone Conversation'[39] – together with the satisfaction of reading it over their own radio station" (ibid.). In the poem, Soyinka relates his experience of speaking to a landlady who was interested in ascertaining how dark he was. Below is an extract from the poem which Soyinka now regards as over-anthologised:

> 'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'
> THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether'
> Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
> The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
> Are peroxide blonde. Friction, caused -
> Foolishly madam – by sitting down, has turned
> My bottom raven black – One moment madam!'
> sensing
> Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
> About my ears - 'Madam' I pleaded, 'wouldn't
> you rather
> See for yourself?'[40]

Considering the fact that this poem was written when Soyinka was a student in Britain in the late 1950s one can argue that Soyinka's politics of post-coloniality began before Nigeria gained its independence from Britain. However, it is not in the genre of poetry but of drama that Soyinka would subsequently excel as a post-colonial writer. Ironically, it was in London, the epicentre of the colonial empire and

[39]'Telephone Conversation' the poem, which Soyinka says is over-anthologised, was inspired by an experience Soyinka had whilst speaking on the telephone to a white landlady when he was trying to rent an apartment. The white landlady was wondering how black her potential tenant was. The poem was one of the items of show that Soyinka performed at the Royal Court Theatre in November 1959.

[40] A copy of the poem was obtained online at <hhttp://www.biancaday.com/telephone_conversation.htm> (accessed on the 24th November 2010).

specifically at the Royal Court, while watching George Devine rehearsing new plays and interacting with emerging playwrights that Soyinka obtained the unique and invaluable opportunity to learn how a play text is transformed into a stage production. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it was in the Royal Court that Soyinka marked his debut as a playwright and a director on the British stage. So, Soyinka may have abandoned his MA programme, the experience he garnered in the late 1950s working at the Royal Court was immense and would later prove invaluable for the budding Nigerian playwright and theatre practitioner, more so, because this was the period that British theatre experienced a radical transformation.

1.4 British Theatre in the 1950s

In the late 1950s, after the Second World War has just ended, London, like many other European cities underwent a fundamental change both politically and socially (Shellard 2000, 37). Although it was a time of unease and it seemed there was a need for theatre to reflect the prevalent mood, what was most noticeable about the London stage especially between 1952 and 1954, as Dominic Shellard has remarked, "is how completely indifferent it was to contemporary events" (Shellard 2000, 37) as audiences kept seeing one production of Shakespeare after another. The situation was so dire that the renowned English theatre critic, Harold Hobson single-handedly reviewed 24 distinct productions of Shakespeare plays in 1953 "with four separate openings in the first week of July" (ibid.). It was against this background that George Devine decided to open the English Stage Company at the Royal Court when he was made the artistic director of the 500-seater theatre that had been reconstructed in 1952 further to the damage it suffered during World War II. Devine's aim was mainly to facilitate experimental theatre that would be different from the old Shakespeare and well-made plays meant to cater for the taste of the bourgeoisie who could afford them. In contrast, as Zodwa Motsa, in her aforementioned essay 'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land.....', has noted, "Devine's avant-garde theatre seeks to cater for the interests of the young and the poor" (Motsa 2004, 29). As a result of this revolution, budding playwrights such as John Osborne, John Arden, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter and several more, who would never have had the opportunity to see their work on a London stage, began to emerge. These were young dramatists who, in the words of Ketu Katrak, "were writing about contemporary issues in language that was vital and forms that were new" (Katrak 1986, 6). Some of these writers, as a matter of fact, ended up being referred to as the 'Angry Young Men'. The reason being the majority of them wrote plays after the very controversially famous and ground-breaking production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and secondly and perhaps more importantly

because their writings reveal a working class perspective on the economic, cultural and socio-political situations of post-World War II Britain.

The English Stage Company's 1956 production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* has been hailed as the dawn of a new era for British theatre by many commentators, especially John Russell Taylor who, in his book *Anger and After*, argues that:

> The whole picture of writing in this country [Britain] has undergone a transformation in the last six years or so, and the event which marks 'then' off decisively from 'now' is the first performance of *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956 (Taylor 1962, 17).

Unlike many plays written by English playwrights that have been produced in Britain, and the third major production of the newly formed English Stage Company, Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* encapsulates the mood of the young who were fed up with their life situation of post-war Britain. In other words, Osborne's play, by employing the character of Jimmy Porter as protagonist, who rants consistently about his disgust for almost everything British culture stood for, "offered a rallying point for a number of post war generation who", as Taylor puts it, "felt that the world of today was not treating them according to their desserts" (Taylor 1962, 45).

There is no doubt that *Look Back in Anger* contributed significantly to the revolution British theatre underwent in the mid-fifties but it is important to stress that prior to the 8th of May 1956, there were a few ground breaking productions, albeit foreign, to which one can also attribute this revolution. For instance, Taylor himself asserts that the plays produced on the London stage, in the early to mid-fifties, that would be considered a big critical success and which were also "felt to add appreciably to the cultural life of the city were foreign" (ibid., 17). Shellard puts this assertion more convincingly when he writes:

> The opening up, after the war, of the London stage to creative contact with New York and Paris, for example, was an event every bit as important for the evolution of the twentieth century English drama as the advent of Osborne (Shellard 2000, 34)

Although the American musical *Oklahoma* (1947), Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1949), Eugene Ionesco's *The Lesson* (1955) and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1956) are some of the

important imported productions to which Taylor and Shellard are referring, Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1955) and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* (1955) deserve our special attention at this juncture in the sense that their contribution to the aforesaid British theatre revolution in the fifties cannot be overemphasised.

1.5 Revolution in British Theatre: From within or from without?

In his book, *1956 And All That,* Dan Rebellato offers a compelling argument that while the writing of John Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger*, was momentous and its première production significantly changed the course of the history of British theatre, it is important not to forget that there was great British theatre before 1956. "Why should it be so hard to remember British theatre before 1956?" (Rebellato 1999, 2,) asks Rebellato. It was with the view to answer his question that Rebellato decided to write his book in which he asserts: "Perhaps one reason is that so many books start with *Look Back in Anger* and ignore what came before" (ibid.). Another work undertaken in an attempt to argue that it was not only the production of Osborne's play that was responsible for the development of new drama in Britain is John Bull's essay 'Looking Back at *Godot'.* Bull draws our attention to the fact that in the same newspaper – the edition of *The Times* of 4th June 1956 – that carried the news of extending, 'due to popular demand', the run of *Look Back Anger*, was also the report of "the imminent first visit to England of Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble" (Bull 2000, 83). The fact that Brecht was bringing three of his epic plays to England was a big occasion but what made it "momentous" as Bull remarks is that it "introduced most of London audiences to a style of theatre and performance quite alien to the native defiantly non-politicized tradition" (ibid.). Unsurprisingly however, it was not only British audiences that found Brecht's visit to England refreshing.

His visit undoubtedly had a great impact on the plays that were written after his visit. For instance, Edward Bond, "the most important of the next generation of new writers", according to Bull, "has said that the key event to shape his early writing was this visit of Berliner Ensemble" (ibid., 84). Similarly, John Arden, one of the 'young angry men' was quoted in the 1960s to have said that "*Mother Courage* was a play he would most like to have written (ibid.). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that some contemporary critics have claimed, as Bull has noted, of seeing traces of Brecht's ideas in Arden's *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*. Perhaps this is why Brecht tops the list of the names of foreign dramatists to whom Steven Nicholson refers when he stresses, in his essay, 'Foreign Drama', that "one of the features of British theatre in the 1950s was the influx and the

influence of foreign dramatists" (Nicholson 2000, 44).

Incomprehensibly enough, Samuel Beckett's name comes last on Nicholson's list. However, one can argue that it is undoubtedly a case of "last but not the least' because if Brecht's visit to England succeeded in providing British theatre practitioners and audiences a fresh approach to theatre making and viewing, respectively, Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* heralded a new era in the history of world theatre. "It was a revolutionary piece of work" (Pinter 2000, 71), was how English dramatist, Harold Pinter, for instance, described the production which he saw in London in 1955. "I never quite understood the definition or the description of John Osborne as revolutionary writer, you know", he continued unequivocally,

> because I thought that that really should apply to Beckett. I mean Beckett was writing originally in French but that wasn't the point, the point was that this was a dramatic literature and it was different, it had never been, what Beckett was doing had never been done before, as simple as that (ibid.).

Bull shares the same views as Pinter in the conclusion of his insightful essay when he stresses that although some critics have attributed the commercial success of *Waiting for Godot* to the fact that it is a two-hander, in his view, Beckett and his play *Waiting For Godot* should be regarded as the real starting point for the new wave of the 1950s and not Osborne. And if anyone is still in doubt, he reminds us that despite the status of Bertolt Brecht and his influence on British and world drama at large, the one ambition the German who posthumously became famous for his politicized theatre could not achieve in life, due to his death in 1956, was to direct Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

1.6 Soyinka and the Royal Court Theatre

Soyinka worked in the Royal Court for almost two years and that makes him, according to Motsa, one of the 'young angry men' and "an equal participant in Britain's memorable theatre making moment after World War II" (Motsa 2005, 29). It is rather 'westocentric' therefore that Soyinka's name is conspicuously absent in most, if not all, of the important materials written about the activities of the English Stage Company in the Royal Court theatre in Britain in the late fifties. As a matter of fact one can argue that Motsa's essay 'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land' was written specifically to set the record straight as regards Soyinka's activities in the Royal Court theatre. "In the late 1950s, Wole Soyinka, then in his early twenties *dared* to stage one of his early plays in the heart of England, London's

Royal Court among the British playwrights of the time" (Motsa 2005, 28; my italics), is how Motsa opens her fascinating essay. She then goes on to compare, in a very insightful way, the productions and reception of John Arden's *Water of Babylon*, Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup* and Wole Soyinka's *The Invention*. Clearly, being a black South African woman, Motsa cannot be said to be biased towards Soyinka in her critical analysis of the lukewarm reception that greeted Soyinka's *Invention* when compared to the way Arden's *Water of Babylon* or Wesker's *Chicken Soup* was received. Nonetheless, Motsa has posed a number of pertinent questions in her essay and, in verbatim, they are as follows:

- Is Soyinka unfairly treated by 1950s England?
- Is it a fair expectation that England should embrace him and treat him like one of her own?
- Is England the right platform for Soyinka to test his excellence of skill or Soyinka is in fact singing the Lord's song in a strange land?
- What is the place of the "other" Englishes [sic] English tongue? What is the place of the African practitioner of English?
- Is Soyinka a case of a good colonial experiment misfired? A case of one who dared to excel in a turf where he was not expected to? (Motsa 2005, 34).

These questions are germane to this present study. So by critically analysing, within the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism, interculturalism and, to a lesser degree, postmodernism, the productions of Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides*, *The Road,* and *Death and the King's Horseman* as presented on the British stage between 1965 and 2009, it is the aim of this thesis to address all the questions Motsa has raised in her essay. As a starting point, however, it is important to first of all ascertain how it came about that Soyinka, a Yoruba man from western Nigeria had the opportunity to debut his play in the company of other emerging British writers in Britain of the 1950s considering the fact that Soyinka has described Britain in *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years,* "as a very racist country still" (Soyinka 2001, 9).

In the early fifties, there was a sharp increase in the number of immigrants from Africa and the West Indies in Britain of which over 30,000 recorded between 1954 and 1955. The majority of these immigrants who were men aged 20-35 years old worked either as miners or with public transportation. "Many encountered prejudice and intolerance and", as Hodgson puts it "those with higher qualifications found it almost impossible" (Hodgson 1989, 31). Soyinka was one of these men. However, the purpose of this twenty-year old Nigerian who arrived in Britain in 1954 was unambiguous: to continue his

undergraduate studies in English in Leeds University. But the fact that, during vacations, Soyinka, as many other Africa students, would head for London to work as a porter in railway stations and post offices to earn extra money meant he was not shielded from the racial prejudice which every other immigrant in Britain of that time experienced.

For example, his poem 'Telephone Conversation', as already mentioned, was a record of his exchange with a white landlady. And according to Soyinka, as he points out in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn,* it "was only one of my many trite encounters with British racism" (Soyinka 2006, 36). On many occasions Soyinka claims he had no option but to sit by himself on the double-decker bus, because a white passenger would sooner stand and "attach his or arm to a strap" than sit down beside a black man. And it was not uncommon for a white person to quickly stand up if Soyinka wanted to occupy the nearest vacant seat on a two-seat bench beside a white person. And in shops in the words of Soyinka, "you turned invisible" (ibid.).

Arguably, one of the most compelling experiences of racism which Soyinka had to deal with whilst living in Britain was shortly after Soyinka's white 'girlfriend', Barbara, gave birth to their first child Olaokun.[41] "While there are circles in which you can move, protected from it all", according to Soyinka,

> You had to go back to that bed-sitter and pass the racist bitches on the landing wheeling in their lily-white, inside-wedlock brats looking down on the woman beside you, with the tanned baby. And of course the first thing they always found out.....was the non-marital situation. *Oh the shameless girl, she's not even married, you know, the nerve of her to walk with that baby* (Soyinka 2001, 8; emphasis is original).

The situation was so drastic that Soyinka felt it was necessary to marry the mother of his child simply to, as he puts it, "reduce the boy's handicap [in] some way" (Soyinka 2001, 9) when it was time for him to return to Nigeria. "Nothing I could do about the milk chocolate but at least I could provide some protection on the other front" (ibid.). While it was rather ironic that Soyinka had to marry the mother of his child, (who at the time he had stopped living with) at the time he was preparing to return to Nigeria, it seemed to him that it was the only way he could protect his mixed-race child from prejudice as he

[41] My source for this information is Awe, 1987, p. 72. It is worth noting that Olaokun means 'the gift of the sea'. Having worked as a medical doctor in the UK and Nigeria, Olaokun is currently the Ogun State Commissioner for Health.

would not be around. Unarguably, Soyinka's personal experience of racism as an immigrant in the Britain of late 1950s greatly impacted on him as a person and his attitude to the west. Therefore, one can surmise that it was through embarking on the post-colonial and postmodern project of redefining tragedy from an African perspective that he commenced the process of his recovery. Adebayo Williams sums this up when he posits in his essay 'The Postcolonial *flaneur* and other travellers', that:

> Soyinka's attempt to evolve an authentic African dramaturgy, in contradistinction to the universalising and imperialising motifs and motives of Aristotelian theatre, represents a crucial phase of this project of recovery (Williams 1997, 388).

I would argue in this thesis that it is in *Death and King's Horseman* that this recovery seems to have been completed for it is in this play that Soyinka's personal experience of racism as a student in Britain is forcefully deployed dramaturgically.

However whilst he was still in Britain, Soyinka did not let, what he calls "these mind-numbingly commonplace incidents" (Soyinka 2006, 36) discourage him from realising his dreams of becoming a dramatist. He wrote the first draft of his satire *The Lion and the Jewel* as well *as The Swamp Dwellers* towards the end of his student days. In fact, it was the latter play that Soyinka produced and directed for the Annual University of London Drama Festival held in 1958. And these two plays were also produced a year after in the Arts Theatre in Ibadan, western Nigeria. It is hardly surprising, then, that Soyinka abandoned the Masters' degree programme which he began immediately after graduating, with an Upper Second class Honours in English in 1957, to become a play-reader in the Royal Court. "My last year and a half in England when I should have been working for my higher degree", Soyinka recalls, "I spent out of preference in the theatre in London" (Anon. 2001, 4). [42] As a play-reader Soyinka's duties included inviting scripts from emerging writers, reading and assessing these new scripts to determine their stageability as well as sitting in during rehearsals of new plays.

In *Ibadan,* Soyinka remembers his days at the Royal Court as well as George Devine, whom he describes "as unique theatre manager and director" (Soyinka 2001, 25), with fondness. "Devine, the English quintessence of the strong silent worker," Soyinka reminisces, "brought promising talents under his wing and then left them severely alone to develop in their own unique way – John Osborne, Edward

[42] See Anon. in Jeyifo (ed.), 2001. *Conversations With Soyinka*

Bond, Ann Jellicoe, Ian Johnstone, John Arden, Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker among others" (ibid.). In circumstances where it was impossible to immediately produce these playwrights' works, "George Devine offered them acting roles or other part-time work in the English Stage Company" (ibid). Furthermore, there was the opportunity of the Sunday night innovation – An Evening without Décor event – instituted in May 1957 by the English Stage Company "designed famously to try out new writing in the raw, so to speak" (Rebellato 1999, 87) or, as Soyinka has put it, "where new plays would be tried out for one night only, freed of commercial pressures and expectations" (Soyinka 2001, 25). Soyinka has acknowledged in his book, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* and in a number of interviews,[43] that it was "the Royal Court Theatre's Sunday-night performance" (Soyinka 2006, 17), otherwise known as: 'Sunday Nights Without Décor' programme, held in November 1959[44] that provided him with the unique opportunity to have a debut as a professional playwright, and theatre director/producer on the British stage. Nonetheless, Soyinka did not consider this important occasion the best treat of his days at the Royal Court. To his mind,

> the best of all treats was to sneak quietly into the back stalls and watch George Devine rehearsing, consulting quietly with the playwright – N. F. Simpson, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller, Sean O'Casey...patiently coaxing the performance of a lifetime from an alcoholic actor in *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Cockle-a-Doodle Dandy* (Soyinka 2001, 25).

From the above and in the light of the couple of years that Soyinka spent at the Royal Court, one can surmise that either directly or indirectly, he witnessed the development of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, Carson McCullers' *Member of the Wedding* and Ionesco's *The Chairs* and *Rhinoceros*, to mention but a few.[45] And the fact that Soyinka was privileged to be acquainted with

[43] See for instance Soyinka's interview with Biodun Jeyifo, conducted in 1983 by Jeyifo but reprinted as the Introduction to Soyinka, Wole. 1984. *Soyinka: Six Plays*. Methuen: London, p.xiii. The same interview is included in Jeyifo, Biodun (ed.). 2001. *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*, pp.117-129. But for reasons that I discuss later in this thesis, all my references from this interview are from Soyinka's collected plays.

[44] Soyinka gives the date as December 1959 in his book *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* but going by the programme note and review of the show that were published after his professional debut, it is clear that the presentation was in November and not December. While this can be regarded as inadvertent, it also proves that the past is usually a reconstruction in the present.

[45] See, for instance, Findlater (ed.), 1981 for detailed record of productions that took place at the Royal Court when Soyinka was there as a play reader. See also Katrak, 1986, p. 6.

renowned playwrights and directors had afforded the young playwright a good opportunity, as Motsa has observed, "to obtain first-hand experience in professional theatre" (Motsa 2005, 30).

Although Soyinka has rated watching Devine in rehearsals as the best treat of all for him at the Royal Court, the significance of having his professional debut on the British stage on Sunday, November 1, 1959, when he directed what was advertised, in the *Daily Telegraph* of 29 October 1959, as *The Invention* and *Other Tales* under the Royal Court 'without décor' programme slot, cannot be overemphasised. As already mentioned, the idea was introduced by George Devine to give new writers, directors as well as actors the opportunity to showcase and partake in a relatively inexpensive production of a new work. Nevertheless, it was a great achievement for budding writers of that time to have their work produced thus; they were bound to get a mention in the arts pages of the newspaper. And Soyinka did just that. For instance, a review, with the title 'African Playwright and Poet' that was published anonymously in *The Times* the day after Soyinka's presentation, reads:

> We must hope that the reception given at the Royal Court last night to verses and songs by Mr Wole Soyinka and to his one-act play *The Invention* will make this Nigerian writer less suspicious of the London theatre than he gives the impression of being. Whenever he allowed a reader or a character to speak directly to the audience, the audience responded.... If he thinks this was prompted by the thing he hates most, a patronizing attitude on the part of a white audience, it will be a pity. It was prompted by respect for his gift for words.[46]

Soyinka was also mentioned in a number of other newspapers including *The News Chronicle* of 2nd November 1959 under the title 'Satire masks an African's bitterness'; *The Daily Mail* of 2nd of November 1959 in which Soyinka's play is mistakenly referred to as *The Inventor*; *The Stage* of November 5, 1959 with a headline, 'One Man Evening At the Court'; as well as the *Jewish Chronicle* of November 12, 1959.

However, it was Alan Brien who, in *The Spectator* of November 6, 1959, wrote the longest and perhaps the most unfavourable review about the show. "Mr Soyinka is a fluent, funny and angry West African" (Brien 1959), Brien writes, "but he has not yet begun to understand how to work out a verse or to organise a play." From Brien's review, it is clear that he felt the idea of Soyinka being given the stage was tokenistic. "I believe in calling a spade a spade but not a bloody nigger." he affirms. "Nevertheless I

[46] An anonymous review published in *The Times,* November 2, 1959.

think it is simply inverted race prejudice to believe that Spades are always trumps." In relation to Soyinka's poems, Brien's claim is: "Mr Soyinka's verse was mainly in the catalogue manner with clumsy pamphleteering phrases". To support this argument Brien cites a few phrases from the performance including, 'untransmuted emotion,' 'venery', 'chillun worse than their sires', "leading", Brien argues, "into unusual and unprecise images (the moon bounds like a fried egg in oil)" (Brien 1959). And in reference to *The Invention*, Brien feels the one-act play only reveals Soyinka's limitations "even more embarrassingly".[47]

Undoubtedly, Brien's scathing review must have been on Motsa's mind when, in her essay, 'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land', she posits that Soyinka's *The Invention* "was received, in the main with hostility and derision by the London reviewers" (Motsa 2005, 30), especially when compared with the kind of reception they accorded Arnold Wesker and John Arden's plays which were also produced under the Royal Court theatre's without the décor around the same period. It is important to note here that John Arden's play received a favourable mention in Brien's review probably to buttress the argument he makes earlier in his review that had Soyinka not been a black writer, he would not have been given the opportunity to present his work at the Royal Court theatre, because, in Brien's view, he was incomparable to playwrights such as Arden. "Still, I can't help admiring the way the Royal Court keeps open ring on Sundays for any unknown challenger who likes to clamber on to the canvass" is the sarcastic tone with which Brien opens the last paragraph of his lengthy review. "I only wish the Couriers in the audience would not behave as if to be knocked out in public were some kind of victory", he continues his polemic. "I also wish that more of them could be persuaded to support the really new and genuine achievements produced here - such as John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*" (ibid).

And in his conclusion, Brien continues his diatribe: "This baffling, haunting sequence of sinister diaguerrotypes defies summing-up in a sentence" (ibid.), he writes. "Whatever else it is, it certainly is not, in the *Observer's* fatuous phrase, 'a ponderous parable wherein Victorian regulars explain military life'. It is a collector's piece – whatever you collect" (ibid.). Arguably, it is in the light of this review that Motsa penned her aforementioned essay in which she makes a compelling comparative analysis of the presentations of Soyinka, Arden and Wesker in an attempt to provide an answer to the question: why was Soyinka treated differently from other white writers by 1950s England. However, Motsa has only

[47] Cited from *The Spectator*, November 6, 1959.

succeeded in raising more questions including, "Could it have been a case of inadvertent segregation against the Minorities?" or "Was it due to the British people's unfamiliarity with Soyinka's foreign subject matter presented in an equally foreign mode of dramaturgy?" (Motsa 2005, 33).

1.7 Soyinka's Debut on the London Stage: *The Invention*

While the aim of this thesis is to critically examine within post-colonial and intercultural theoretical frameworks, the productions of Soyinka's tragic plays that were directed by British directors for a predominantly British audience, it will be worthwhile here to briefly examine the Royal Court's production of *The Invention* for two main reasons. Firstly, this play as Soyinka himself asserted "marked my debut on the stage in London" (Jeyifo 1984, xii). More importantly, however, it is not only the first but the only professional production that Soyinka directed himself on the British stage. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, it was also the only surviving play of Soyinka about the problems of apartheid South Africa which used to preoccupy him before he received, what he calls: (borrowing a Japanese term) 'political satori' in other words: "instant illumination" as Soyinka puts it. This was what made him to change his constituency and started writing about the problems plaguing the then newly independent nation state of Nigeria. "I realised the first enemy was within" (ibid.). We shall examine the particular event(s) that made Soyinka to receive his so-called political satori later on. Suffice it to say here, however, that it was then that he began to think of returning to Nigeria and as he also put it: "It was then that I began to write *A Dance of the Forests* which takes a jaundiced view of the much vaulted glorious past of Africa" (ibid.). Going by the programme note that was printed to accompany Soyinka's presentation at the Royal Court in November 1959, an extract from *A Dance of the African Forests*[48] was one of the array of presentations that were on offer for the first section of the evening and it was after an interval that the main show of the evening, Soyinka's one act-play, *The Invention,*[49] which presently concerns us here, received its world premiere.

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[48] It was this play that metamorphosed into Soyinka's first Yoruba tragic play, *A Dance of the Forests*, which after being selected as the official Independence celebration play was rejected when the officials in charge realised that Soyinka's message is not celebratory but cautionary. Soyinka subsequently produced the play himself. The play is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

[49] It is noteworthy that in a short review of Soyinka's presentation that appeared the following day in the *Daily Mail*, the title of the play was erroneously given as: *The Inventor*. Arguably, this was an error. Considering the fact that this was Britain in the 50s, however, it could also be a subtle suggestion to Soyinka to consider re-titling his play thus.

Although *The Invention* was written in 1959, Soyinka deliberately sets the action of his play in the future date of July 1976 to coincide with the important 200th anniversary of the 'Declaration of Human Rights' in America. However the idea of setting his play on this day is for irony in the sense that it is also the day, in Soyinka's play, that America sends a bomb to Jupiter that will hopefully explode without any harm to mankind. The bomb disappears without trace for a couple of days and nights. But three days after it resurfaces, and after hovering over the Cape of Good Hope for a while, it lands on an abandoned mine in Johannesburg and explodes. It annihilates several people but for those who are lucky to survive, there is a slight problem: the blacks have lost their pigmentation thus it is now difficult to tell whether they are white or black. Consequently, people are made to go for a racial testing procedure being carried out by a group of dedicated scientists in a laboratory. Eventually, one of the scientists working in the laboratory invents a race-detecting machine that can, within seconds, determine whether someone is white or black. Ironically, the new invention, just like the bomb that necessitates its existence, is a failure as it explodes twice and consequently does not justify its invention. Unfortunately however, there was a problem with the special effect during the production of *The Invention* at the Royal Court. "The laboratory of the South African scientists should have shuddered to a resounding explosion" recalls Soyinka,

> But there was no bang, only whimper of despair as the actors waited in vain for their cue, before the SM threw off his paralysis, then threw himself into a frenzy of creating mayhem backstage to simulate some distant explosion....The rest of the one act merely fizzled away but of course the problem had begun much earlier. It lay in his direction...Too bad, it was only a one-night stand, so there was no re-inventing *The Invention* (Soyinka 2001, 29).

So, in a way it is hard to agree with Motsa who suggests that Soyinka's play was met with hostility because of the foreign subject matter it explores. How can an idea that highlights the fact that the notion of superiority of race, especially in a highly segregated society such as South Africa, is determined by the colour of one's skin be foreign in Britain? Because the pertinent question Soyinka poses in *The Invention* is: can apartheid, segregation or racism exist where there is no colour distinction? The same question can equally be asked of 1958 London especially given the fact that the first race riots at Notting Hill Gate happened that same year. And indeed it is "the imperial legacy of Europe which gave birth to

apartheid South Africa, the most institutional form of racism in human history" (Mazrui 2007, 7),[50] as Ali Mazrui has reminded us. Thus, one can surmise that it was not that Soyinka at the end of *The Invention* "figuratively speaking, mumbled" as the anonymous reviewer in *The Times* has put it, it was that Soyinka had not only dared to showcase his work that could probably have done with more time and a hitch-free special effect, he had also presented, on British soil, a play that queries the notion of racial hierarchy based on what Mazrui calls the "doctrines of racial gradation" (Mazrui 2007, 4). And because he was neither John Osborne nor even a 'colonial subject' but an ordinary 'protected' being, Soyinka was merely "singing the Lord's Song in a strange land" and for many years British audiences were spared Soyinka's voice until September 1965, when David Thompson directed Soyinka's *The Road* for that year's Commonwealth Theatre Festival at Theatre Royal Stratford East. So, with hindsight, one can argue that Soyinka's decision to return to Nigeria after his not-too-impressive professional debut on the British stage was akin to a Nigerian maxim which goes: the ram that retreats during a fight is not a coward; it has only gone for reinforcement. Soyinka returned to Nigeria on the first day of January 1960.

1.8 The Emergence of Soyinka's Post-Colonial Politics

It was towards the end of his 18 months at the Royal Court that Soyinka had his professional debut as a playwright and theatre director on the British stage. However, when Soyinka eventually returned to Nigeria in January of 1960, he subsequently became known more for his political activism than his theatrical activities, despite the fact that he is widely recognised as the Nigerian who founded the first professional English language theatre company. But it is significant to note that Soyinka had always been a political person. "It is customary to declare that man is a political animal", according to Soyinka in his book, *The Open Sore of a Continent*, in which he provides a biting criticism of the socio-political state of Nigeria. "It is a definition to which I subscribe, but for purely strategic reasons" (Soyinka 1996, 129). In fact, Soyinka's one abiding religion, as he has pointed out in the *World Authors* entry, is: "human liberty".[51] It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, as a student in the UK in the late 1950s, Soyinka considered the then apartheid South Africa as his main constituency and the liberation of black South Africans as a top priority. "Twenty five years ago, I was almost exclusively concerned with the problem

[50] Cited from 'Race Versus Culture in the New Global Politics: Implications for Africa' an updated version of a paper entitled 'Cultural Forces in World Politics: Implications for Africa." presented by Ali A. Mazrui by satellite transmission at the 5th Annual Public Lecture of the Africa Centre, Dublin Ireland on June 19th 2007. The lecture was dedicated to the year's World Refugee Day the next day.

[51] See *World Authors*, p.1356.

of black liberation from the settler-colonial and apartheid obscenities," was how he put it in an interview recorded in 1983, "I saw the political battleground in Africa as being situated in South Africa, no where else" (Jeyifo 1984, xii).

However, about a year before Nigeria gained independence in 1960, and whilst still studying in the UK, Soyinka received what he calls: "an instant illumination" when he observed at close range the way future Nigerian leaders, who were preparing to take over power as soon as Nigeria gained its independence from the British, were conducting themselves each time they were on a trip to the UK. It was this first-hand experience that compelled Soyinka to turn his political microscope towards Nigeria. In his memoir, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006), Soyinka writes extensively about his observation of the first set of Nigerian political leaders each time they were on their, what he calls, 'British-style democracy' familiarization tours to the UK. "We watched their preening, their ostentatious spending and their cultivated condescension, even disdain, toward people they were supposed to represent" (Soyinka 2006, 42), writes Soyinka. "Some turned students into pimps in return for either immediate rewards or influence in obtaining or extending scholarships" (ibid.). Soyinka actually recalls a particularly humiliating experience that he witnessed in the following words:

> A revered national figure in a highly sensitive political position got carried away with his date that he paid for a one-night stand with a check, at the bottom of which, just in case his scrawl was indecipherable, he had written his name complete with his official position. The girl, a brilliant student from an upper-class British family but notorious nymphomaniac, flounced to our table at the students' cafeteria and flaunted the check in our faces, asking loudly what kind of a would-be independent nation would produce a political leader who could act so stupidly (ibid., 42- 43).

It was a scandal such as this and numerous other instances of Nigerian political leaders shipping home luxury items without making full payment for the purchase in circumstances where the British Home Office, who had sponsored these trips, stood indemnity, that made Soyinka come to one conclusion:

> The writers and artists brigade could wait – first, it was essential to secure our rear. The weapons of confrontation need not be the lethal kind; we could join forces with the progressives, make trenchant use of the pen and the stage, propagate progressive ideas, mobilize the people and expose their betrayers. The contested arena would be strewn with words and polemics, not soaked in gore. My adopted muse would remain Ogun, but only of the biting lyric (ibid., 43).

Soyinka was true to his word. As soon as he arrived back on Nigerian soil in January 1960, he promptly began his political activism personally and through his theatre work. Within ten months of arriving in Nigeria (as will be discussed in detail in chapter four in this thesis) he founded the 1960 Masks, arguably the first semi-professional English speaking theatre group with which he produced his play, *A Dance of the Forests*, which he wrote specifically to take "a jaundiced view of the much-vaunted glorious past of Africa" (Jeyifo 1984, xiii)[52], contrary to the expectation of the organising committee who had commissioned the play to celebrate Nigeria's independence. It was this theatre group that would later metamorphose into the Orisun Theatre with which Soyinka produced several political sketches and revues under the titles, *inter alia*, *Before the Blackout* and *Before the Blowout*. According to Chuck Mike,[53]

> *Ricee* and the other playlets created during 'Ife years' are but a follow-up to a legacy of portable activist dramaturgy spawned by Soyinka, beginning with his Orisun Theatre and 1960 Masks. This era also witnessed political satires performed outside the University of Ibadan campus in unique spaces such as nightclubs, often amidst the putrid air of cigarette smoke and spirits (Mike 2005, 77).

It is against this background that the Indian scholar, Ketu Katrak, has rightly pointed out that "Soyinka is more concerned with the quality of public life, and he speaks openly as the conscience of his nation" (Katrak 1986, 8). This is due in no small part, I would argue, to the fact that, unlike many other Nigerian writers, Soyinka had studied and lived in the UK.[54] Furthermore, he had the unique opportunity to write

[52] It is worth pointing out here the inconsistencies that I have noticed in this interview which Biodun Jeyifo conducted with Soyinka in 1983 for a Nigerian magazine. In Soyinka's *Collected Plays*, Soyinka says: "It was then I began to write *A Dance*, which takes a jaundiced view of the much–vaunted glorious past of Africa". See Soyinka, 1984, p. xiii. However, in Jeyifo's book, Soyinka is quoted as saying: "It was then that I began to write *A Dance*, writing first the lyrics, the verses there." See Jeyifo, 2001, p. 117. It seems to me that Jeyifo is creating gaps in Soyinka's argument. My hypothesis is that, in the academy the detail is in the ... (ellipsis). This is a classic example.

[53] Chuck Mike is an African American who, in 1978, joined the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo) Department of Dramatic Arts and its Theatre Company of which Soyinka was, at the time, respectively the Chair and Artistic Director.

[54] It is interesting to note, for instance, that Soyinka, alongside, Royal Court Theatre's George Devine, Arnold Wesker and other prominent Royal Theatre Court theatre practitioners, took active part in the 1959 Aldermaston March, a protest against nuclear weapons organised by George Devine. For a picture of Soyinka holding the banner during the protest, see Findlater (ed.), 1981, p.16.

and produce a play on the British stage during a period of "stunning significance in British theatre history" (Katrak 1986, 6). It was a time in Britain when "Young dramatists were writing about contemporary issues in language that was vital and in forms that were new" (ibid., 6). Soyinka has, for instance, acknowledged the impact John Osborne, as an actor and a playwright, had on him. For instance, the 'lacerating outrage' and the passionate vigour with which John Osborne in his play, *Look Back in Anger*, had excoriated the "gilded rat-race and hypocrisies of genteel Britain", as Soyinka puts it, touched a chord of response in him (Soyinka 2001, 25). Soyinka similarly describes a scene in *The Making of Moo* and how brilliant he thought Osborne was as an actor as follows:

> *The Making of Moo* by Nigel Dennis unleashed an outcry of blasphemy, but for Maren, it was instant rapport: the not-so-subtly archiepiscopal [sic] figure in a 'primitive' setting, presiding over the new god Moo, and the unforgettable moment that he guessed he would never stop relishing – *a la* Harold Hobson[55] – even into senility. That was the gesture of sheer hyperbolic theatre, after the ritual sacrifice. The incredibly long forefinger of the bishop' – at least nine inches long, illusion or not – dipped into the bucket of blood; it was raised and red tongue slowly extended itself gave a long, lingering and noisy lick from the root of the finger to its dripping nail, and smacked its lips. The actor was John Osborne. When his *Look Back in Anger* eventually seared the English stage, that cannibal image of Osborne's bloody snack would become fused in Maren's mind with a notion of the angry spokesman of a new generation, as a regenerative young Dracula with its fangs fastened on the jugular vein of a bloated British bourgeoisie (Soyinka 2001, 26).

Thus, it is hardly surprising that no sooner had Soyinka arrived on Nigerian soil than he took it upon himself to be one of the 'angry spokesmen' for the soon-to-be-independent nation state. But as Soyinka would later find out, the place of an artist as a social critic in a developed so-called 'first world' democratic country such as the UK was incomparable to how an artist was perceived in a so-called developing 'post-colonial', nascent, democratic nation state such as Nigeria. Soyinka's political stance and outspokenness brought him in direct conflict, on a number of occasions, with both the university authorities with which he worked and the Nigerian government. Thus, Oyin Ogunba is right when he posits that Soyinka "is not just an arm-chair critic of society, but one who is prepared to show the example, at whatever cost, to defend his conviction" (Ogunba 1975, 6-7). It is reported, for instance,

[55] Harold Hobson, who was a celebrated critic with the *Sunday Times,* subsequently wrote a review of the presentation of *The Invention* when Soyinka had his debut with the play on the British stage in 1959.

that Soyinka suddenly resigned[56] his position as a lecturer from the University of Ife in December 1963. I would argue that, Soyinka must have considered it rather draconian, having lived in the UK for five years, for the Vice Chancellor to have called a meeting at which an injunction was issued that all members of staff of the university must support the government of the day that had, at the time, become unpopular. Coincidentally, it was in an effort to avert the same government of Western Nigeria from transmitting a broadcast to declare itself winner of a rigged election two years later, that Soyinka single-handedly commandeered a radio station at gun-point and forced the duty officer to broadcast the tape he had recorded instead.

It was in 1965, Soyinka had just returned to Nigeria from a two-week trip to the UK where his play, *The Road* had its world première[57] at the Commonwealth Festival in London. It was an election period in Nigeria and on the same day that Soyinka arrived back in Nigeria, he was keen to get an update on how the elections in the western region – the part of Nigeria from which he hails – were shaping up. Through a mutual friend (to whom Soyinka refers as Michael Olumide), who was then also the controller of the broadcasting station in Ibadan, Soyinka got to know that the election results had been massively rigged in the West by NNDP (Nigerian National Democratic Party), the political party in government. Soyinka was also told by the said Olumide, his friend that he had been summoned by S.L. Akintola, the leader of NNDP, the then Premier[58] of Western Region, who had masterminded the rigging of the elections, to record his victory speech that would be broadcast that night. Upon hearing this, Soyinka, without any apparent hesitation, thought: "The broadcast had to be stopped" (Soyinka 2006, 79) and with that he immediately swung into action: first, he got a tape recorder and recorded his own message. He then planned and executed a strategy by which he got the duty officers at the radio station to swap his tape for the Premier's. Below is how Soyinka vividly recalls the culmination of his dare-devil escapade:

[56] For further information on how Soyinka suddenly resigned on the spot, readers are advised to pursue Ogunba, 1975, p. 7.

[57] This première production, as already mentioned, was staged at the Theatre Royal East in London and it is discussed briefly in chapter six of this thesis.

[58] After gaining its independence, Nigeria was divided, for administrative purposes into the Northern, Western and Eastern and Midwestern regions. Each region had elected government headed by a premier and the elected central government was headed by a Prime Minister, who had been an Hausa man from the North since independence.

> It all proceeded according to plan. The duty officers responded as any sensible persons would under the gun: they removed the premier's tape and replaced it with mine. It ran long enough for the message to be transmitted: Drop your stolen mandate, leave town, and take your reprobates with you, and so on, and so on. Then a disbelieving senior operator in another control room roused himself from his paralysis and depressed a control button that cut off the transmission. By that time, I had slipped away. My retreat was unhindered (ibid, 84).

But Soyinka would not be on the run for long. He was declared a wanted man and when he eventually surrendered himself, he was charged with armed robbery. After months in police detention, Soyinka was tried but was acquitted on technical grounds.[59] The next time Soyinka fell foul of the law, he was not so lucky.

Less than a year after Soyinka's acquittal of armed robbery charges, the first military coup[60] was staged in Nigeria in which a number of northern military officers and political leaders were assassinated. The most notable two leaders of the latter were Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first Prime Minister, and Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern Region. After the successful bloody coup, Nigeria's first military government led by Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo man from South East Nigeria, assumed power. But Ironsi's regime was short-lived because the Muslim north had always held power since Nigeria gained its independence. It therefore did not come as a surprise when, in July 1966, an equally bloody counter-coup, masterminded by northern army officers under the command of an Hausa military officer by the name Muritala Mohammed,[61] was staged in which many Igbo officers lost their lives, "often in a gruesome manner" (ibid.,100). As Soyinka remembers it, "some of them – suspected participants in the January coup – dragged from prison detention and butchered in the streets" (ibid., 100). The military head of state, General Ironsi happened to be on an official visit to the Western Region when the coup

[59] For full details of the political event that led to Soyinka holding up the radio station, how he carried out the operation and how he managed to avoid being arrested for many months before he finally gave himself up, see Soyinka, 2006, pp. 78-96.

[60] Since Nigerian independence in 1960 the feudal North had dominated the federal government but the first Nigerian military coup of January 15, 1966 that brought Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo man into power would change all that, and this was what ultimately led to Nigeria's civil (Biafran) war that broke out in 1967.

[61] It is significant to note that when Gowon's military government was eventually toppled in a bloodless coup after nine years in power, Muritala became Nigeria's third military ruler. Ironically his government lasted for only six months; he was assassinated in a bloody coup in February 1977.

plotters struck, thus it was at the state house in Ibadan that the coup met him. Ironsi was abducted together with his host, Lieutenant Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi (with whom Soyinka had struck a rapport), who had only been appointed as the first military governor of the Western Region after the coup that brought Ironsi into power barely six months earlier. As Soyinka recalls the event: "They were both taken to a forest outside Ibadan, cruelly tortured, and executed" (ibid., 101). Muritala, the northern military officer who led the coup was expected to take over, but, as Soyinka recalls it, "a young officer from a minority Christian group in the North, Yakubu Gowon, ended up as Nigeria's new head of state" (ibid.). Ironically, it was Gowon who would later become Soyinka's nemesis in the sense that it was within two years that Gowon assumed power that Soyinka was charged with treason for which he endured more than two years of detention.

When Gowon became the head of state of Nigeria, it was assumed that since he was from the north the Northern political hegemony had been restored, but the blood-letting in revenge for the northerners' lives that were lost during the aforementioned first coup of January 1966, did not abate. Soyinka paints the gruesome picture of the carnage thus:

> A progressive pogrom of the Igbo erupted in October in the same year, a hunt for Easterners of all ages who were unfortunate enough to have heeded the call of the new regime to return to their places of work and residence in the North, reassured that all was well. They were gruesomely mistaken. Not merely from the North but from every corner of the nation, the Igbo fled homeward, wheeled contraptions of every kind bearing their dismal remains and possessions into Igboland. The trainloads of refugees from the North bore pitiable cargoes: some survivors with physical mutilations, some women in such a state of shock that they clung to the severed heads of their spouses or sons, cradling them on their laps (ibid.).

It was this systematic and ceaseless killing of the Igbo by the northerners that led to the Igbo's decision to secede from Nigeria under their de facto leader, Oxford-educated Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu,[62] the then military governor of the Eastern Region. On May 30, 1967, Ojukwu declared an Independent State of Biafra. Nigerian civil war was imminent. In Soyinka's words: "When a people have been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide, they have the right to seek an identity from their aggressors' (ibid.). Paradoxically, however, Soyinka would

[62] The Biafran leader, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, suffered a stroke in December 2010 and died in November 26, 2011, at the age of 78, in London where he was receiving treatment.

eventually do everything humanly and politically possible to ensure that Nigeria remained an undivided entity. He was, for instance, the brain behind the formation of what he refers to as "the Third Force". Soyinka explains the rationale behind this force in a characteristic Hegelian fashion:

> In the confrontation between the federal side and the Biafran, a third force, opposed to the civil war and prepared to mobilize against it had become a necessity. If Nigeria was the thesis and Biafra the antithesis, then the Third Force resulted from the synthesis - all impeccable dialectics lacking only an organized movement and the necessary force to back it up (ibid., 114).

Although Soyinka was clearly and genuinely sympathetic towards the course of the Igbo to secede, he felt that it was not a move that was sustainable strategically. As he puts it, "Not for one moment did I consider the secessionist movement itself an act of moral or political felony – it was simply politically and militarily unwise" (ibid., 112). It was on the basis of this conviction that Soyinka volunteered to go to the East to "have a talk with Ojukwu, the head of the secessionist state and meet with Chinua Achebe[63] and other leading writers and intellectuals in Biafra" (ibid., 113) to persuade the Igbo to revoke the declaration of secession and to call off all hostilities. Soyinka clandestinely travelled to the newly declared Biafran state where he met and outlined his mission to Ojukwu, who as Soyinka remembers it, "reiterated his charges against the federal side and painted for me the mood of this people: it was the people themselves, not he who had pressed for secession" (ibid., 119). Soyinka met with other people as Ojukwu had advised and it was upon his return to Nigeria that he was declared a wanted man. He was charged with the treasonable offence of gun-running for the Igbo. Whereas Soyinka was never tried, he was detained for two years and four months between August 1967 and October 1969,[64] a year and ten months of which he spent in solitary confinement. It was without any doubt, the most traumatic experience that Soyinka had undergone for the sake of his country, but rather than breaking him, it seemed to have made him even more resolute as evidenced by his powerful prison memoir courageously entitled, *The Man Died* (1972). Whereas Soyinka stated, in an interview with John Agetua in 1974, that the book is meant for the Nigerian readership" (Agetua 2001, 38), the question is: how many Nigerians have bothered to read *The Man Died* to understand Soyinka's politics and the price he had paid personally to keep Nigeria as an entity?

[63] As previously mentioned, Chinua Achebe is Soyinka's contemporary. He is an Igbo writer and he is best known internationally for his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

[64] For details of the events that led to Soyinka's incarceration and the aftermath, see part II of Soyinka, 2006.

In his paper, 'Between Soyinka and Those Who Came After', Niyi Osundare encapsulates the essence of Soyinka in the following words:

> Soyinka came to this world, to this country with an inexhaustible store of talents, of potentials. I do not know whether our country can ever replicate what happened in the 1960s. Soyinka was also lucky in many ways. He inherited a virgin country, Nigeria, which was making transition from colonial state to post colonial state, of course, from a colonial country into a fully independent country; a country that was making transition from a predominantly oral culture to literary one. We are making transition from the *Abeigi*[65] kind of theatre, open air village square kind of theatre to a proscenium theatre of the university or the enclosed hall (Osundare 2004, 16 of 40).[66]

What is immediately apparent from the above is that Soyinka is an artist of many 'isms'. For being a Nigerian writer, who began writing seriously on the cusp of Nigerian independence, Soyinka is a post-colonial writer; by returning to Nigeria and his Yoruba roots and sourcing materials from indigenous Yoruba traditional ritual festivals and mythology, he is a postmodernist and an inter/intra-culturalist; by theorising his Yoruba tragedy based on the concept of Greek tragedy and by dramatising his quintessential *Ogunian* Yoruba tragedy in the English language, Soyinka is a transculturalist; for appropriating, reinterpreting and representing English culture in his tragic drama (especially in *Death and the King's Horseman* as will subsequently be discussed), I would argue that Soyinka has turned Orientalism (or 'Africanism' if you like) on its head and has, therefore, created the need for a critical rethinking of the politics of what I shall (for the purpose of the present analysis) term: 'Occidentalism'. Thus to properly contextualise the politics, aesthetics as well as the theory of Yoruba tragedy and the implications of its British productions, I propose to analyse the concept of Yoruba tragedy as Soyinka has propounded and formalised it within the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism and interculturalism and to a lesser degree, postmodernism. As an entry point into the bewildering, but enchanting world of theory and its attendant -isms, however, we shall begin with the concept of post-colonialism as a discursive tool and critically analyse the epistemology and phenomenology of the term in the context of Soyinka's dramaturgy.

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[65] Abeigi literally translates as 'under the tree'.

[66] Cited from the Café Africana site where the article of *The Guardian* of 19th June 2004 in which an excerpt of Osundare's paper was uploaded, among others including Steve Ayorinde's review of *Horseman* in Nigeria as already mentioned. See www.cafeafricana.com/Tributes-Wole-Soyinka.html (accessed on 24 November 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

From Post-Colonialism to Interculturalism and Back

(Problematising Post-Colonialism; Interrogating Interculturalism)

One of the earliest contradictions I found while I was studying in England was this: I knew European history, American history and the on-going nationalist conflicts between the Welsh, the Irish, the Scots and the English. These were all tribes and yet the papers and the people never refer to themselves as tribes. But when they are talking about nationalities within African continent they call them tribes. Ashamed of their barbaric tribes they write – who are these people to talk? These people with their much-vaunted European civilisation who inflicted on the world the horrendous evil of human history known as the holocausts! The conduct of colonial powers in Africa was one of brutality. It was marked by a destruction of the cultures of African societies and their replacement by violence.[67]

2.1 Post-colonialism:[68] An 'Other' anti-Neo-Colonial strategy

Post-colonialism is not only a subjective but also a rather deceptive term. Due to the prefix 'post' that is affixed to the concept of 'colonialism', the term post-colonialism is taken to imply the various occurrences that began after a formerly colonised nation state has attained its independence. While this is true, one can argue that post-colonialism has become highly 'onionised', so much so that the closer one examines the term, the less indeterminate it appears. "In many contexts, the term indicates a degree of agency, or at least a programme of resistance, against cultural domination" (Gilbert 2001, 1), writes Helen Gilbert, "in others, it signals the existence of a particular historical legacy and or chronological stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation state" (ibid.); and yet in other contexts "it is used more disapprovingly to suggest a form of co-option into Western cultural economies" (ibid.). For Adebayo Williams, "The problem with postcolonialism [sic]..., is that, lacking a clarity of objective(s)

[67] Cited from 'The Wole Soyinka Interview' in *Africa Today,* Vol. 15; No 6 (June 2009), p. 13.

[68] In this thesis, I have decided to adopt the term post-colonialism with a hyphen because I will be arguing that colonisation is not over in Nigeria and in many other African countries. In my view, by appropriately hyphenating the term, it shows the concept for what it is: a critical tool for academic discourse. See for, instance, Williams and Chrisman Laura (eds.), p. 3.

it tends to take all kinds of baggage on board; its categories becoming elastic, its agenda open-ended" (Williams 1997, 822). In a way then post-colonialism is no different to all the other theoretical 'mantra' that have been affixed with the prefix 'post' for example post-Marxism, post-modernism, post-feminism and all the other post-isms. Nonetheless what distinguishes post-colonialism from the rest is the fact that it concerns itself primarily with the discourse of colonialism and especially how colonisation, as a phenomenon, had impacted and continues to impact on nation states that were once under colonial rule as well as those that were once colonial powers. While "The postcolonial does not privilege the colonial", as Robert Young has pointed out, "Postcolonial theory involves a political analysis of the cultural history of colonialism, and investigates its contemporary effects in western and tricontinental cultures, making connections between that past and the politics of the present" (Young 2001, 6). So how does post-colonialism work as a theoretical paradigm and why is it pertinent to this present study?

In the words of Frantz Fanon, in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*,

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.....nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness (Fanon 1965, 169).

The untold damage that colonisation has done to the African continent as a whole and to the psyche of the African mind specifically cannot be overemphasised. With the exclusion of Ethiopia, no other African country was spared the colonial tsunami that engulfed the whole African continent and no African person on the African soil was left unscathed by colonialism. "Colonialism, which has not bothered to put too fine a point on its efforts", Fanon stresses, "has never ceased to maintain that the Negro is a savage; and for the colonialist" (Fanon 1965, 170), Fanon adds, "the Negro was neither Angolan nor Nigerian, for he simply spoke of 'the Negro'" (ibid.). In other words, the whole of the African continent, in the eyes of the European colonialists, "was the haunt of savages, a country [sic] riddled with superstitions and fanaticisms destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals" (ibid.). Inarguably it was this (mis)perception of the whole continent of Africa as the "Negro's country [sic]" where "the darkest night of humanity lay" (ibid.) that was used as the justification for holding the Berlin conference of 1884, now infamously known as the 'Scramble for Africa', at which the continent of Africa was arbitrarily carved out and divided just as the agents of colonialism saw fit among

participating coloniser-countries, including France, Belgium, Britain, Italy, to mention but a few. As the Kenyan writer and cultural theorist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has remarked, "Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of chalk and the blackboard" (wa Thiong'o 1986, 9). Of course, all the colonised African countries have since gained their independence from their respective coloniser countries, starting in sub-Saharan Africa with Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) in 1957, the reality, however, is that many of these African countries still depend on western financial aid for their development and sustenance, because, as Young has rightly pointed out, "political liberation did not bring economic liberation – and without economic liberation, there can be no political liberation" (Young 2001, 5). And in terms of culture, it is the African who can best ape the coloniser and thereby dress, drink, intonate, look and conduct him or herself like a white person that is revered, respected and emulated by fellow Africans within Africa. It is in this light that Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, posits that "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards" (Fanon 1967, 18), and from all indications, the colonized, as Fanon has contended, will not be contented until he "becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (ibid., 18). The implication of this is simply that the attitude of inferiority complex, on the part of the African, is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Thus, colonialism may have been a phenomenon of the past, its impact can still be felt in the present in the guise of imperialism[69] and without any doubt it will continue to shape the future of many so-called independent African nation states. These are some of the issues that post-colonialism, as a concept, contends itself with.

While it was political activists, in the main, who had championed the course of anti-colonialism when most colonised nation states were clamouring for independence particularly in the continent of Africa, the post-colonial agenda seems to be the exclusive domain of writers who hail from nation states that were once under colonial rulers; hence the label: post-colonial writers. And the reason for this is very glaring: many so-called political freedom fighters of yesteryear who clamoured for independent Africa were only fighting for their own selfish interests. No sooner had the colonialists left than the African leaders began to exploit their own people. Though many African countries are blessed with abundant natural and mineral resources, teeming populations of Africans live in abject poverty. Kwame Nkrumah, himself a former president of Ghana, has put this stark reality into perspective when he asserts that

[69] For an interesting distinction between the terms: 'Colonialism' and 'Imperialism' see Endnote 1 of Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (eds.), 1996, p. 13.

neo-colonialism is the worst form of imperialism. "For those who practice [it], it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress" (cf. Amkpa 2004, 8). Adebayo Williams sums this irony up nicely when he remarks that: "In most African countries, internal colonialism had merely replaced external colonialism, Africans, in the words of some local wits had only exchanged monkeys for baboons" (Williams 1996, 353). Nigeria, for instance, is one of the world's main exporters of crude oil, but one will find Nigerians in every part of the world trying to make ends meet as immigrants. It is against this backdrop that Bode Osanyin, in an interview with Duro Oni, asks:

> What is the problem with the black man? Why is the black man not making progress in the modern world? Why is the black man still hungry while America is destroying food that is exclusively produced? Why is it, that malnutrition and kwashiorkor[70] are still plight of the African child? Is the black man cursed? (Oni 2003, 187-188).

All these pertinent questions that Osanyin poses are the issues that should concern African leaders but sadly they have been the bane of African writers. And if I may quote Osanyin further,

> These and many more nagging problems and questions should be reflected in African literature and African theatre. The onus of African revolution, according to Leopold Senghor, rests, not so much on the African politicians who can choose to be mere prostitutes but on African writers who are usually judged to be the true African patriots (ibid.).

Thus, post-colonialism is "not a naïve teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism," according to Gilbert and Tompkins, it "is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 2). Gilbert and Tompkins further clarify that although post-colonialism may be used as a portmanteau term for any kind of resistance; its central concern is with cultural power. One can surmise here, therefore, that post-colonialism is inherently counter-hegemonic in the sense that it uses culture as a political tool to resist cultural domination either in the form of internal neo-colonialism or imperialism.

It is against this backdrop that Williams describes some of the literature produced by African writers by

[70] Kwashiokor is an ailment that is caused by malnutrition. Usually sufferers are children and the symptoms include protruded stomach and very bony features.

the end of the decade of independence as, "bristling with anger and frustration" (Williams 1996, 354). In Cameroon, Mongo Beti (real name Alexanda Biyidi) became the author of satiric work such as *Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956); in Nigeria we have Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966); in Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote *A Grain of Wheat* (1967); Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah wrote his prose narrative, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) as an allegorical condemnation of the prevalent corruption in Ghana; and in Guinea, Camara Laye authored *A Dream of Africa* (translated in 1968). What all of these literary works have in common is that they are all indictment on post-independent African leaders focusing particularly on how "they had aborted the great hopes and expectations of independence" (Williams 1996, 354). So, if African writers have ceaselessly been preoccupied with the socio-political and economic situations that are prevalent in their respective countries since immediately after independence, the question that is worth asking then is: why are they collectively tagged post-colonial writers? Or to be more specific: if Soyinka's constituency is Nigeria since 1960 that he wrote *A Dance of the Forests*; if the issues in most (if not all of his) writings are about the myriad socio-political problems facing post-independent Nigerian nation state; if Soyinka has gone to the extent of including an 'Author's Note' in the published copy of his play, *Death and The King's Horseman* for no other reason other than to warn would-be producers of the play not to reduce his play to a 'clash of cultures', why then is Soyinka a post-colonial writer?

2.2 From Post-colonialism to Postmodernism to the –culturalisms

In her General Introduction to *Post Colonial Plays*: *An Anthology*, Helen Gilbert, describes the categories of the creative work that have been assembled in the anthology with the following words:

> A great deal of this work, developed within nations formerly colonised by Western imperial powers exhibits a strong urge to recuperate local histories and local performance traditions not only as a means of cultural decolonisation but also as a challenge to the implicit representational biases of western theatre (Gilbert 2000, 1).

It is not the scope of this work to discuss extensively the different kinds of post-colonial nation states there are (see Williams 1997, 823). Suffice it to say here, however, that what obtains in a post-colonial country such as Ireland, a former colony of Britain – but now a member of the European Union – will be different from the issues plaguing Nigeria, an ostensibly 'Third World' country. It follows logically, therefore, that the thematic preoccupations of writers from these two different post-colonial nation

states should not be homogenised. "Ireland may, at a pinch, be post colonial, but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland," as McClintock has rightly observed, "there may be nothing post about colonialism at all" (McClintock 1992, 294). And if the issue of gender inequality, which is still very much prevalent in most (if not all) of these so-called post-colonial (as well as post-modern) societies, is added to the mix, one would be inclined to agree with McClintock's contention that "The term 'post-colonial' is prematurely celebratory and obfuscatory in more than one ways" (McClintock 1994, 298). With respect to women in particular, McClintock regards the term 'post-colonial' as "unstable" and, therefore, inappropriate to describe the predicament of millions of women all over the world for whom "'post-colonialism' has been a history of hopes postponed" (ibid.). McClintock's basic contention is that women are still under men's 'colonisation' bearing in mind that we live in a world in which "women do two-thirds of the world's work, earn 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property" (ibid.). We need to quote McClintock further here to foreground her compelling argument because a lot of men who clamour for intellectual equality (or superiority) among themselves still take it for granted that we still live in patriarchal societies in which women are labouring daily under internal colonisation, for granted. In McClintock's words,

> It has generally gone unremarked that the national bourgeoisies and kleptocracies that stepped into the shoes of 'post-colonial' progress, and industrial 'modernisation' have been overwhelmingly and violently male. No post-colonial state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state. Not only have the needs of 'post-colonial nations' been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but the very representation of 'national power' rests on prior construction of gender power...(ibid.).

The implication of all of the above in McClintock's view is obvious:

> The global militarization of masculinity and feminization of poverty have thus far ensured that women and men do not live 'post-coloniality' in the same way or share the same singular post-colonial condition (ibid.).

In my view, McClintock's insight has demonstrated convincingly that the term post-colonialism is evidently problematic. But thankfully, Gilbert and Tompkins have managed to shed some light on some its ambiguities:

> Postcolonialism addresses *reactions* to colonialism in a context that is not necessarily determined by temporal constraints: postcolonial plays, novels, verse and films then become textual/cultural expressions of resistance to colonisation. As a critical discourse, therefore, postcolonialism is both a textual effect and a reading strategy. Its theoretical practice often operates on two levels, attempting at once to elucidate the post-coloniality which inheres in certain texts, and to unveil and deconstruct any continuing colonialist power structures and institutions (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 2-3).

Thus, it is this deconstructive tendency, the second level, on which post-colonial theory operates as enunciated by Gilbert and Tompkins that leads Williams to argue that "postcolonialism is the dialectic mirror image of post-modernism" (Williams 1997, 824). In spite of the similarity between post-colonialism and post-modernism and the fact that the literary devices of the latter are often found in the former's texts, however, "the two cannot be equated" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 3). The reason for this is clear:

> Part of postmodernism's brief is the dismantling of the often unwritten but frequently invoked rules of genre, authority and value. Post-colonialism's agenda, however, is more specifically political: to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as 'us and them', 'first world and third world', 'white and black', 'coloniser and colonised' (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 3).

The inference that remains to be drawn here is that Soyinka is not only post-colonial but also quintessentially post-modern in the sense that his aesthetics are inspired by the traditional rituals of the Yoruba people and his main intention of returning to his source is for a conscious and creative reappraisal of the conventional European theatre technique.

As Soyinka has stated in an interview Henry Louis Gates recorded in 1975, "I find myself very much preoccupied – if you like, naturally prejudiced – in favour of a wholesale re-examination, re-evaluation of European ideas" (Gates 2001, 52). This, I would argue, is post-colonial and also it is precisely the agenda of postmodernism, bearing in mind Fredric Jameson's assertion in the Foreword to Jean-Francois Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition* that "postmodernism, as it is generally understood involves a radical break, both with a dominant culture and aesthetics" (Jameson 1984, vii). By appropriating the myth of Ogun for his deconstruction and redefinition of tragedy from an African perspective, Soyinka has not merely inverted the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, he has succeeded in altering the

subject/object, signifier/signified, white/black, colonised/coloniser and us/them positionalities. "Invention is always born of dissension" (Lyotard 1979, xxv), as Jean-Francois Lyotard has argued,

> Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy (ibid.).

So, it is Soyinka's inventiveness (as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter) that has enabled him to achieve his aim of formulating a new theory of Yoruba tragedy. But above all, it is this 'postmodernist' agenda within the framework of the post-coloniality inherent in his aesthetics that has also made him 'cross-cultural'. I have decided to opt for the term cross-cultural instead of intercultural because in my view interculturalism is essentially a construct of the western hegemony and what Soyinka does, as I will discuss later, is broader than interculturalism. Suffice it to say here that before interculturalism became a fad in western cultures conceptually and practically, the diverse cultures in Africa always have been interacting with one another. It is against this backdrop that Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert have remarked that "post-colonial theatre usually involves cross-cultural negotiations at the dramaturgical and aesthetic level because of the historical contact between cultures" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 35). Therefore, Soyinka, I would argue, is much more than 'intercultural' in the western sense of the term and this is why I would rather describe him as cross-cultural. Further, he is intracultural in the sense that he borrows from diverse cultures among the Yoruba people while being intercultural at the same when he borrows across cultures within Nigeria. But in this thesis, I would argue that when Soyinka crosses the sea to borrow or adopt western traditions or concepts, he is transcultural. But before we turn our attention to the -culturalism(s), it is important to conclude this present analysis of post-colonialism by stressing that what actually makes Soyinka's work essentially 'post-colonial' is that he has not been overtly post-colonial by virtue of the fact that his aesthetics is conspicuously post-modern and unavoidably cross-cultural. In other words, if Soyinka had been pointedly post-colonial, it is very doubtful that he would have been produced on the British stage. Thus the post-colonial strategy that Soyinka has adopted in his work is to foreground the postmodern and cross-cultural by privileging the metaphysical themes over and above the political message inherent in his dramaturgy. And I would venture to argue further that this is a strategy which Soyinka learnt from the British, which reinforces the point I have made earlier on that Soyinka is as British as he is Yoruba. It is this duality that makes Soyinka's dramaturgy the embodiment of what I have termed transcultural.

2.3 Interculturalism: The Hydra-headed Phenomenon

As already inferred in the previous chapter, the other significant strategy within the post-colonial theoretical framework that one can read in Soyinka's work, as in many other works of the so-called African post-colonial writers, is interculturalism. But before ascertaining the interculturality and cross-culturality (a distinction that would be explained in due course in this chapter) of Soyinka's dramaturgy, it is important to first of all discuss the concept of interculturalism as it is understood in the Euro-American academy. According to Lo and Gilbert, all theatre is arguably cross-cultural in the sense that every performance requires some sort of cultural negotiations either temporally or spatially. In other words, a contemporary production of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, set in America is doubly cross-cultural – socially, culturally and spatially. It is worth noting here however that the scope of cross-culturality in theatre performance has been broadened and 'onionised' further especially by the issues of gender, sexuality, class and diaspora to mention but a few. In 2007 the National theatre of Scotland, for example, presented a production of *The Bacchae* in which Dionysus is portrayed by Scottish stage and film actor Alan Cummins as gay. In his review of the production in *The Guardian* of the 13th of August 2007, Michael Billington commended the theatricality of the production as directed by John Tiffany. "Whatever my reservations the result is spectacular piece of theatre with palpable audience appeal", he writes. And in terms of cross-cultural theatre in respect of the issue of gender, Phyllida Lloyd's all-female production of *Julius Ceasar* that was staged toward the end of 2012 at the Donmar Warehouse in London readily comes to mind. Interestingly, one of Lloyd's cast members was Jenny Jules; she was the actor that was 'whitened' up to play the character of Jane Pilkings in Norris's production of *Horseman* (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven). In Lloyd's production of *Julius Caesar*, Jules played the part of Cassius thereby making Lloyd's interpretation a cross-cultural theatre not only in terms of gender but in terms of race also. And in terms of a cross-cultural theatre that deals with, inter alia, the issues of class, the new version of John Millington's *The Playboy of the Western World* co-written by myself and Roddy Doyle as staged in 2007 at the Abbey (Ireland's national theatre) is illustrative. In this new version, Christy Mahon is a well-educated Nigerian on the run from Nigeria after killing his father with pestle used for pounding yams. "The most significant act of creative intervention within Adigun and Doyle's version", according to Melissa Sihra, "is their interrogation of the outsider through their deeply politicized figure of Christy who here becomes Nigerian immigrant Christy Malomo – polite, well-educated, and looking for work" (Sihra 2011, 229). So, if viewed from the lens of interculturalism, *The Bacchae* with a gay Dionysus, *Julius Caesar* featuring a black female Cassius or the new version of *The Playboy of the Western World* featuring a well-educated refugee from Nigeria is a

cross-cultural theatre. It is in recognition of this fact that Daphne P Lei has remarked in her insightfully entitled essay, 'Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson's HIT productions in Taiwan' that "intercultural theatre has diversified and multiplied as the discourse has been enriched and complicated by other pressing issues like gender, diaspora, ethnicity, and globalization" (Lei 2011, 572). However, what has continued to dominate critical and institutional interest in "cross cultural experimentations", as Lo and Gilbert have noted, is not the historical or social/geographical or any of the aforementioned issue-based cross-cultural theatre, but "encounters between the West and the 'rest'" (ibid.,32), otherwise known as 'western interculturalism', which must remain our focus of attention in this study.

At its heights of representation on European and American stages, interculturalism dominated theatre practice and critical debate. The Editors of the *Performing Arts Journal* noted that, "Interculturalism, as both artistic process and manner of reflection, is a vision of perhaps the most crucial issue of our time: the representation of culture in global perspective" (1989, 7). Interculturalism, they posit, "addresses all of the important contemporary issues in political, economic, cultural and intellectual life - history/memory; fact/poetry; rights of people and nations; the depiction of the 'Other'; the autonomy and interaction of cultures; travel/geography" (ibid.). In the new millennium, according to Ric Knowles, "interculturalism is an urgent topic in the twenty-first century" (Knowles, 2010, 3) and the reason Knowles advances to reinforce his position is very germane to the present study. "As cities and nations move beyond the monochromatic" (ibid.), Knowles posits,

> as human traffic between nations and cultures (both willing and unwilling) increases, as hybridity and syncretism (the merging forms) become increasingly characteristic of cultural production everywhere, and as nineteenth century gives way to twenty-first century *trans*nationalism, it becomes imperative that the ways in which cultural exchange is performed be critically re-examined (ibid.).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that from the 1970s to date, interculturalism has been the focus of many academic essays, journals, conference papers and books. For instance, American scholar and theatre director, Richard Schechner, who ostensibly coined[71] the term, has written extensively about it

[71] In an interview with Patrice Pavis, Schechner said "I believe I began using it in the early or mid-70s when I was editing a special issue of *The Drama Review*". In the same interview, he goes on to explain that he began using interculturalism to contrast internationalism. The difference, as explained by Schechner, is the latter is an

in his books including *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (1985) and *Performance Theory* (1988); Patrice Pavis has analysed and theorised the concept in his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Cultures* (1992) and in his essay, 'Introduction: Towards a Theory of Interculturalism and Theatre' which he contributed to *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (1996) which he also edited; Rustom Bharucha has described, analysed and critiqued the term from a perspective of an Indian-born but American-educated scholar in his books *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* (1990) and *The Politics of Cultural Practice* (2000). In *The Dramatic Touch of Difference* (1990), edited by Erika Fischer-Lichte *et al*, there are celebratory and critical essays on interculturalism penned by scholars and practitioners from Europe and North America, Japan, China, Indonesia and India, and Africa (in that order). Rather than elucidating interculturalism, however, most of the aforementioned critical analyses have only succeeded in further obfuscating the concept.

Patrice Pavis, for instance, has defined intercultural theatre, in the strictest sense, as a theatre that "creates hybrid forms drawing upon a more or less conscious and voluntary mixing of performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas" (Pavis 1996, 8). He then concludes by saying that "The hybridization is very often such that the original forms can no longer be distinguished" (ibid.). In Erika Fischer-Lichte's view, interculturalism is "the transplanting elements of foreign theatre traditions into own productions" (Fischer-Lichte, 1990, 11). A genuinely intercultural theatre in Schechner's words is one "drawing its techniques and examples from within the Euro-American culture area, and from without - from Africa, Asia, Native America, Micronesia: everywhere" (Schechner 1982, 19). It was in an attempt to avoid such 'binaristic us/them' analyses to which interculturalism has thus far been subjected that Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert have carried out what they have referred to as the most comprehensive survey into what they term, "contemporary theorizing of cross-cultural theatre in the global arts market" (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, 32), in their essay, 'Towards a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis'.

"Despite the apparent trendiness of cross-cultural work and academic discourse", note Lo and Gilbert, "there is not yet an integrated body of theory that sets up the perimeters of the field of cross-cultural practices" (ibid.). Although they both admit that their analysis retains a certain Australasian perspective, I would argue that, to a very large extent, they have succeeded in proposing a theoretical model for

exchange on an official level between two nations and the former is an exchange among cultures. For this interview, see Pavis, 1996, p. 42.

analysing cross-cultural (and not only intercultural) practice that is less 'westocentric'[72] in comparison to the only other available theoretical model – the 'hourglass' model as proposed by Patrice Pavis in his 1992 book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Cultures*. The theory of the hourglass intercultural model problematises "how a target culture analyses and appropriates a foreign culture and how this appropriation is accompanied by a series of theatrical operations" (Pavis 1992, 5). In the upper bowl of the hourglass, Pavis explains, "is the foreign culture, the source culture, which is more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological, sociological and artistic modelizations, and the lower bowl is the target culture" (ibid., 4). The grains of the source culture, if they are sufficiently fine, will pass through a number of filters that have been put in place by the target culture. Although Pavis clarifies that "This appropriation of the other culture is never definitive" (ibid., 15) and that the bowl is designed to be turned upside-down in circumstances where "the users of a foreign culture ask themselves how they can communicate their own culture to another target culture" (ibid.), it is my contention that the theory is essentially biased towards western interculturalism. Lest we forget, the words Pavis chooses to introduce his theory are: "In order to reach 'us' this source culture must pass through a narrow neck" (ibid., 14). It is, therefore, in anticipation of being accused of Eurocentricism that he subsequently claims that the hourglass is designed to be turned upside down. The question that begs an answer is: how exactly does the hourglass work when it is turned upside down? Does it mean the target culture is now in the upper bowl and vice versa? If that is the case, is it not reminiscent of one viewing a magnifying glass the other way round? In other words, the hourglass model is made specifically for and only recognizes the intercultural exchange that involves a western appropriation of an 'Other' culture and thereby, it ignores the fact that every culture is inherently intercultural. It is against this backdrop that I consider Lo and Gilbert's essay and their proposed intercultural theoretical model more appropriate and up-to-date for my critical re-examination of interculturalism as it is perceived in the west.

As Lo and Gilbert have pointed out, "western fascination with non-Western performing arts has a long history, beginning in the early part of the 20th century and intensifying over the past three decades"

[72] In my view, the theoretical model that Lo and Gilbert have proposed is much more universally applicable bearing in mind that they are respectively from Asia and Australia. I have used the term 'westocentrism' to highlight the fact that prior to Lo and Gilbert's proposed model, the only theoretical model available is the hourglass model and Pavis himself has admitted that it is a very subjective one in that it is biased towards western theatre practitioners. Having said that, it is my view that while Lo and Gilbert's Australasian perspective is broader in comparison to Pavis' model, it is still important to propose an 'Africanist' model.

(ibid., 32). I would argue that what Lo and Gilbert are saying euphemistically here is that western intercultural theatre practice specifically, is rooted in orientalism, the phenomenon which has since metamorphosed into cultural imperialism. "Interculturalism hinges on the questions of autonomy and empowerment" (Chin 1989, 174) as Daryl Chin has asserted. "To deploy elements from the symbol of another culture is a very delicate enterprise. In its crudest terms, the question is: when does that usage act as cultural imperialism?" (ibid.). If orientalism is a culture-parasite, one can argue then that without culture, the inter-cultural is non-existent. Therefore, one can surmise that western interculturalism has two distinctive roots: phenomenologically, it is rooted in orientalism and colonialism; and etymologically, its root can be traced to culture. A worthwhile appraisal of interculturalism must therefore begin with a deconstruction of the concepts of culture and orientalism. I propose to deal with the phenomenon of culture first.

2.4 Culture and the Inter-Culture-al

Although only introduced as concept into the English language in the 1880s by Matthew Arnold and Edward B. Taylor" (Langness 1974, 1), one would be right to surmise that culture is as ancient as humans, bearing in mind Clifford Geertz's assertion: "Without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly without culture, no men" (Geertz 1993, 49). Culture, therefore, can be loosely defined as:

> a system of symbols thanks to which human beings confer a meaning on their own experience. Systems of symbols, created by people shared, conventional, ordered and obviously learned, furnish them with an intelligible setting for orienting themselves in relation to others or in relation to a living work and to themselves (cf. Pavis 1996, 3.).

In other words, culture is a marker of a people's identity without which all groups of people will be similar and indistinguishable from one another. As Esiaba Irobi has argued in his conference paper, 'When the Spirit Begins to Flower', which he presented in Dublin in 2004,[73] "whether from Ireland, Japan or Senegal, all humans are like computers and it is the software inserted in us that differentiates 'one'

[73]The conference entitled 'African *Griot* in Ireland' was organised by Arambe Productions. On Friday the 5th of November, Irobi delivered his paper. Irobi's presentation was never published but it was video recorded and kept in Arambe Productions' archive.

from the 'other'". This software is what Irobi refers to as our Cultural DNA which has been encoded by the songs we listen to, the books we read, the cinema we watch and all the other things we are exposed to in our 'culture'. Malcolm Gladwell makes the same point in his book, *Blink* when he writes that "We don't deliberately choose our unconscious attitudes ...we may not even be aware of them" (Gladwell 2005, 85). Gladwell stresses that "The giant computer that is our unconscious silently crunches all the data it can from the experiences we've had, the people we've met, the lessons we've learned, the books we've read, the movies we've seen and so on" (ibid., 85). From these two significant perspectives we can conclude that a culture of a people is the total sum of who they are; it "covers the whole of a people's scheme of life" (Idowu 1973, 5) and as a result distinguishes 'us' from 'them' as well as 'ours' from 'theirs'.

However, "No culture is pure", as Richard Schechner has argued. "Overlays, borrowings, and mutual influencings have always made every culture a conglomerate, a hybrid, a palimpsest. So much so, that we probably should not speak of 'culture' but 'cultures'" (Schechner 1989, 151). While one can hardly dispute Schechner's assertion that culture, for instance, British culture is not homogeneous due to the fact that "the influx of former colonials from India, Pakistan, the West Indies, southern Africa and elsewhere", as he has rightly observed, "is changing the cultures of the British islands drastically as the invasion of Normans did nearly 1000 years ago" (ibid., 152), it is important to note that in Africa and in the far East there are many places where certain cultures are still traceable and very synonymous to a group of people. Let us, for example, take *bata* dance from the Yoruba land of western Nigeria. The dance and the drums are ontologically synonymous to Sango, the Yoruba deified god of thunder and lightning. Although one can see a version of *bata* dance accompanied by *bata* drumming, these days, in places such as Haiti, Brazil, the West Indies and all the other parts of the world to which Yoruba culture has spread due to the slave trade, the fact remains that the origin of this dance and rhythm is still quintessential Yoruba. Thus the question is: if one watches a contemporary production of Shakespeare's *Othello* and *bata* dance is introduced, is the production in question an intercultural performance? As we will discuss later on in chapter seven of this thesis, *dundun* (the Yoruba talking drum) plays a pivotal role in Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman,* but, it needs to be reiterated here that what makes Soyinka and many other writers of African literature to be inherently and unavoidably cross-cultural, in my view, is the fact that they are employing foreign languages to communicate indigenous thematic preoccupations.

In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon draws our attention, as Abiola Irele has pointed out,

"to the way in which the battle of words engaged with the coloniser in his own language has had a crucial importance for the outcome of our struggle for an autonomous place in history and an acceptable mode of existence in the world" (Irele 2005, 10). Claire Conceison has also remarked that, "The belief that the deepest intercultural understanding happens outside of language is, quite simply, an illusion" (Conceison 1995, 156). I therefore propose to examine culture and the cross-culturality of African literature generally and Soyinka's dramaturgy specifically from a philological perspective bearing in mind that it is to further distinguish the 'west' from the 'rest' that the concept of 'interculturalism' has been systematically subjected to various semantic permutations by the western academy.

2.5 Language and Interculturalism

In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view, it is language that is the most important when a group of people wants to lay claim to what distinguishes them from another group. "Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" he asserts. Thus, for wa Thiong'o, "Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next" (wa Thiong'o 1986, 441). Levi-Strauss is clearly in accord with wa Thiong'o when he contends that language can be regarded as a condition of culture in two different ways – diachronically and theoretically. Levi-Strauss's argument, in the first instance, is that it is mostly through the language that we learn about our own culture. And on the theoretical level, Levi-Strauss posits that "the material out of which language is built is of the same as the material out of which the whole culture is built" (Levi-Strauss 1968, 68-9). If it is indeed true, as Levi-Strauss has stated, that it is through language that we learn about our culture, it follows logically, I would argue, that the ability to learn about other people's culture is also conditioned on learning the language in which the culture is embodied. "The continuous learning that takes place in the individual occurs in and through *communication*" (Kim 2001, 47; italics are original), according to Young Yun Kim in her book, *Becoming Intercultural*. In Kim's words, "We learn to speak, listen, read, interpret, and understand verbal and non-verbal messages in such a fashion that we and the others with whom we interact can recognize, accept, and respond to those messages" (ibid., 47). From all of these assertions one can safely surmise that most African writers who write in foreign languages have an understanding of the culture that the language in which they write embodies and, therefore, their writings are quintessentially cross-cultural and intercultural.

It is against this backdrop that Irele has remarked that by transferring the peculiarities the Yoruba

language exerts on its native speakers to his use of English language, "Soyinka thus bridges the distance between his two worlds in a way that can only be considered singular" (Irele 2005, 11). And, in my view, what has made Soyinka to be uniquely transcultural is not only his mastery of the English language in which he writes, but the fact that he had the opportunity as a 20 year-old Nigerian to study, work and live in the UK at such a very important time in the history of Britain and British theatre particularly. "Being in the 'beyond', then, is to inhabit an intervening space as any dictionary will tell you", in the words of Homi K. Bhabha, "But to dwell in the beyond is also,...to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*" (Bhabha 1994, 7; emphasis in original). This, I would argue, is what transformed Soyinka into an eternal occupant of the in-between space and an embodiment of cross-culturalism linguistically, psychologically and aesthetically. "Intercultural identity, as such, is not a fixed psychological state but a developmental continuum on which strangers travel" (2001, 65), as Kim points out. "As they undergo adaptive changes in host communication competence (most notably, language competence)", she adds,

> Their internal conditions change from a monocultural to an increasingly multifaceted character. At the same time, the host cultural elements are increasingly incorporated into their self concept. In this process, the strangers' identities become more flexible. No longer rigidly bound by membership to the original culture, or to the host culture, their identities begin to take on a greater interculturalness (Kim 2001, 65-6).

Needless to say that Kim can be referring specifically to the interculturality of Soyinka in the above. Nonetheless it is very clear, as we shall see momentarily, that what the 'west' considers intercultural is different from what the 'rest' consider thus. But before discussing what is considered interculturalism in the west, it is instructive to ascertain how the concept has evolved as a phenomenon from orientalism.

2.6 Orientalism: When the West meets the East

In the Introduction to his seminal book, *Orientalism*, the Palestinian-born cultural historian Edward Said brings the notion of the Orient into academic spotlight in the following words:

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West), as

> its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (Said 1970, 3)

It is in the light of the above that Said has further asserted that,

> Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist and what he or she does is Orientalism (ibid.).

Similarly, in his book, *Oscar Asche, Orientalism, and British Musical Comedy,* Brian Singleton has provided us with an insightful historicity of what he calls: 'theatrical orientalism'. Although written specifically to highlight the prolific and unrivalled pioneering theatrical orientalist activities, on the London stage, of Australian-born actor, Oscar Asche, in the early part of the twentieth century, Singleton's book has also succeeded in achieving two other important aims. First, it throws a much needed light on orientalism as it relates to art generally and the art-form of theatre specifically. And secondly, it provides a convincing argument on how the orientalist movement is the primogenitor of western interculturalism. "The Orient provided a pre-modern escape route...a space for adventure and for cultural renewal" (Singleton 2004, 11), writes Singleton. Thus, in Singleton's view, orientalism provides the west with a blank canvass on which every imaginable and unimaginable western impression of the Orient was projected, *re*presented or *mis*represented. "As far as the Other is concerned, no attempt was made to understand it", as Singleton has contended. "If represented", adds Singleton, "it was only a projection of the Other of an image of the self, or more precisely, the 'ideal' of the self" (ibid., 2004, 12). And to drive this point home, Singleton goes on to identify the two distinct types of orientalist there were from the beginning of the twentieth century until World War II:

> The first type was modernist (such as Yeats, Craig and Artaud) who used the Orient as allegory for new forms of theatre either through high ideal aesthetics or tribal primivitism. The second was pictoralist (like the painter) who subjected the Orient to fantasy in exotic spectaculars (Singleton 2004, 14).

It is the first type, that is the modernist orientalists, that readily concerns us here in the sense that it was their theatrical orientalism that paved way for European post-modern interculturalists such as Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and Ariane Mnouchkine to name but a few. It is important to note that this is the same observation made by Ric Knowles when, in his book, *Theatre and Interculturalism*, he remarks that "the heyday of interculturalism in the west...began with the European modernist movement at the turn

of the twentieth century and this is the period with which most histories of intercultural performance begin" (Knowles 2010, 11).

It was in an attempt to revitalise the western text-based realist theatre that Antonin Artaud turned to Balinese theatre for inspiration. Having been greatly impressed by the performance of the Balinese dancers, whom he had the opportunity to see in 1931 at the Paris Colonial Exhibition, Artaud would later declare that: "We cannot go on prostituting the idea of theatre whose only value is in its excruciating, magical relation to reality and danger" (Artaud 1976, 55). Artaud became so fascinated with the spirituality of Balinese theatre that he eventually advocated for the relegation of narrative and psychological realism for a metaphysical theatre. However, "Artaud is better known for his theory than for his practice" as Knowles has pointed out,

> and among his writings, his best known book, *The Theatre and Its Double* (English translation 1958) in which he articulates his ideas about a plague-like 'theatre of cruelty' that would break through language and touch life, the secret forces of the universe, and the transcendent impulses of the deepest self (Knowles 2010, 16).

Rustom Bharucha sheds light on Knowles' view when he argues that "Artaud's pursuit of 'otherness' can be seen as part of his almost pathological need to escape the strictures of 'Logical Europe'" (Bharucha 1993, 14). In Bharucha's view, it was not Balinese theatre that concerned Artaud *per se*, but its "connection with the 'oriental theatre', a magical store house of ancient rhythms and gestures, hieroglyphs and revelations, cosmic trances and metaphysics, mental alchemy and exorcism" (ibid., 15). This, among other things, is what places Artaud, as Bharucha has put it, "in the familiar category of 'men of the East', who have trivialised non-western cultures on the basis of their own needs and affirmations and truth" (ibid.).

Another influential western theatrical orientalist was German-born director and theoretician Bertolt Brecht. Although one can rightly describe Brecht as one of the 'men of the East' (to borrow Bharucha's coinage), his turning to the East is neither for mere transcendence nor for pathological reasons, but purely for his political ideology. Brecht's ambition was to theorise and create a uniquely political theatre that would enable theatre goers to think rather than emote about what they see in the theatre. Thus, upon seeing a performance of Chinese actor, Mei Lanfang, who was well known for his Peking opera

female role, in Moscow in 1935, Brecht postulated his theories of *Verfremdungseffekt* for the purpose of his Marxist-ideological based theatre, which he termed 'epic theatre'. Based on Chinese theatre's alienation effect, the aim of Brecht's epic theatre was to provide an alternative to the psychological Aristotelian theatre, which requires its audience to be purged of the cathartic feelings of pity and fear and to counterbalance the concept of 'method acting' as made famous by Russian Constantin Stanislavski. "The alienation effect is achieved in the Chinese theatre in the following way," according to Brecht,

> the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place (Willett 1964, 93).

Other notable western practitioners who also turned to the East for inspiration, as Erika Fischer-Lichte has pointed out in her essay, 'Theatre, Own and Foreign: The Intercultural Trend in Contemporary Theatre', included Georg Fuchs, Max Reinhardt, Yevgeny Vakhtangov and Charles Dullin. They all found in Japanese theatre and its conception of space, a new model of theatre that was impossible with the traditional box-set stage. Thus in a lot of ways, western theatre practitioners in the early 20th century found various performing elements from the East which they could adopt to revitalise their theatre work. And as a result, a new kind of theatre emerged in the west; one that laid more emphasis on the corporeal rather than the illusionary, the performative rather than the literary. It is thus for this reason that Fischer-Lichte has remarked that, "The significance of Asian theatre for the European avant-garde and its conception of a new theatre cannot be overestimated" (Fischer-Lichte 1990, 13).

While it is clear from the above assertion that Fischer-Lichte is in awe of the new concept of western theatre that was created by European avant-gardes based on their exposure to oriental theatre practice and forms, it is significant to stress that it is exactly the criticism that Ric Knowles has levied against them in his book, *Theatre & Interculturalism* that Indian Rustom Bharucha has levied against contemporary western interculturalists. Whereas Knowles, as Fisher-Lichte, acknowledges the fact that the 'discoveries' of the orient by the so-called European modernists have engendered new theatrical forms and ideas in the west, in his view, the ways they went about incorporating the oriental performance forms and theatre techniques into their work in an effort to revitalise a decadent western

theatre, "removed them from their social contexts, histories and belief systems, othering them, treating them as exotica, or reducing them to their purely formal or aesthetic properties" (Knowles 2010,13). Based on this significant observation, it is hardly surprising that Knowles' conclusion is equally pointed:

> It was this cannibalisation of forms without respect for the cultures that produced them that early interculturalism most directly participated in the west's colonisation of world's cultures and peoples (ibid., 12).

Brian Singleton echoes Knowles sentiments in his essay 'Interculturalism', which he contributed to *The Oxford Ecyclopedia of Theatre & Performance*. Having first of all acknowledged that interculturalism "is characterised at best by a sharing and mutual borrowings of the manifestation of one theatre practice by another", Singleton then goes on to pointedly posit thus: "At worst it [interculturalism] features the appropriation and annihilation of indigenous, pre-modern practices in traditional societies by a rapacious 'First World' global capitalism" (Singleton 2003, 628). What becomes immediately apparent from reading Knowles' and Singleton's assertions is that it was precisely the role orientalism played in furthering the cause of colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century that contemporary interculturalism has been playing (and has continued to play) from the second half of the twentieth century to date, that is, to further the cause of western cultural imperialism. Singleton has, therefore, hit the nail right on the head when he affirms as follows:

> Interculturalism has its roots in orientalism, a term used to describe a European art movement of the mid-nineteenth obsessed with both realism and a fascination with the unknown, the tribal, non-Christian, and seemingly unregulated societies at the far side of the Mediterranean, from Morocco to the Near East (ibid.).

Thus, western interculturalism is little more than neo-orientalism. To justify the intercultural experimentations that took place in the US from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, for instance, Richard Schechner asserts:

> People didn't question too much whether or not this interculturalism – this affection for Kathakali exercises, the precision of Noh drama, the simultaneity and intensity of African dance was a continuation of colonialism, a further exploitation of other cultures. There was something simply celebratory about discovering how diverse the world was, how many performance genres there were, and how we could

enrich our own experience by borrowing, stealing, exchanging (Schechner 1982, 19).

Any wonder, then, that by the First World War, "imperial powers occupied, or by various means, controlled, nine tenths of the surface territory of the globe", as Robert Young has noted in his book, *Postcolonialism*, "Britain governed one fifth of the area of the world and a quarter of its population" (Young 2001, 3). One can only surmise that when the western colonialists discovered that the world was so diverse and that they could enrich themselves, as western interculturalist such as Schechner puts it, by "borrowing, stealing, exchanging" other countries' natural resources, they must have regarded it as something 'celebratory' too. It is in this light that Daryl Chin argues that, "Taking interculturalism as a specific philosophical and aesthetic issue, it continues the agenda set by postmodernism, pluralism, and marginalism" (Chin 1989, 163). But, as Fredric Jameson has rightly observed in his Foreword to *The Postmodern Condition*, "legitimation becomes visible as a problem and an object of study only at a point in which it is called into question" (Jameson 1984, viii), so I want to argue that it was due to the fact that people did not question too much whether "interculturalism was a continuation of colonialism", as Schechner himself has pointed out, that he (and his co-postmodernists) mistook a period, which in reality, was an 'age of arrogance' for what he calls 'age of innocence'. In other words, if not for the seminal book *Orientalism* by Edward Said that was published in 1978 and subsequent compelling academic polemics notably by scholars such as Daryl Chin and Rustom Bharucha, the west would have continued to regard orientalism and the act of purloining other people's cultures as 'celebratory.'

Daryl Chin's criticism of western interculturalism is on ethical grounds. In Chin's view, interculturalism is simply an agent of globalisation and cultural imperialism. Chin's view is that postmodernism and interculturalism are bed fellows. "Hidden in the agenda of postmodernism is, I think, a rebuke, an insult, a devaluation", he posits. "Instead of recognizing the status of the 'other' as an equal", Chin adds, "there is the undermining of the 'other' by a declared indifference to distinction, while attempting to maintain the same balance of power" (Chin 1989, 165). It is in this light that Chin argues that the ideology of interculturalism "is one which is, in a sense, duplicitous" (ibid., 167) and in his view the "question which must be addressed is the presence of dominant power structure, and the presumptions of that power structure" (ibid.). For Bharucha, interculturalism cannot be separated from a larger history of colonialism and orientalism. In his book *Theatre and the World*, Bharucha argues that the so-called 'celebratory' use of other cultures by the American avant-garde notably Richard Schechner, "amounts to a naïve and unexamined ethnocentricity" (Bharucha 1993, 14). It is against the backdrop of all these

criticisms perhaps that Schechner had sought to modify his statement, quoted earlier, when, in an essay, 'Intercultural Themes', which he contributed to the Interculturalism issue of *The Performing Arts Journal* in 1989, he writes,

> Intercultural themes are present in my directing, my writings, and my hopes for the future of the world. Like many postmoderns, [sic] I've travelled a lot [...] I have exchanged information, ideas techniques, feelings with people I've met. Although I have not consciously on the individual level been a coloniser or exploiter, I have been enriched (yes I know the metaphor) by my trips (Schechner 1989, 151).

But to conclude our analysis of orientalism and how it has metamorphosed into contemporary interculturalism, it is important to note that it is not only in Europe that a new intercultural theatre was emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. As the so-called European avant-garde theatre practitioners were reaching out to the East, a new form of so-called intercultural (or shall we say: 'occidental'?) theatre was also emerging in Far Eastern countries of Japan and China, on the one hand and India and Africa, on the other. And it is rather paradoxical that this was brought about by the adoption of Western theatre traditions in both of these places. It is, however, important to note that the reason interculturalism in theatre emerged in these two distinct geographical and political areas were significantly different.

2.7 Occidentalism (and 'Africanism'): Reverse Orientalism.

Intercultural practice in Japan came about as a result of the conscious decision on the part of Japanese theatre practitioners to look towards the west for theatrical elements they could adopt in order to create the theatre form that would appropriately reflect the socio-political change their society was undergoing. This was post-1868, when Japan was opened to the west and the frenzy for modernisation swept Japan (Ortolani, 1990, xiii); a period when Japanese avant-garde thought it was necessary to advocate for the importance of individualism and rationalism in their society as prevalent in the west (Fischer-Lichte 1990, 15). Consequently, progressive Japanese theatre artists began to look towards the west for appropriate texts and genres, which they could introduce into Japanese theatre. Eventually a new Japanese spoken theatre known as *shingeki* came into being. The two main pioneers of this movement were theatre scholars Tsubouchi Shoyo (1858-1933), who was famous for translating entire dramatic work of Shakespeare into Japanese, and Osanai Kaoru (1881-1928), who directed the November 27, 1909 production of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* in Tokyo, "considered by many as the

first real *shingeki*" (Ortolani 1990, 247). It was this new form of Japanese spoken drama that would later be imported into China by Chinese students and political refugees living in Japan. The Spring Willow theatre which opened in Shangai in 1914 was, for instance, dedicated to "furthering the development of the spoken theatre" (Fischer-Lichte 1990, 15).

In India and Africa, the story was different simply because the form of intercultural theatre which emerged in these places in the first half of the twentieth century was brought about mainly by European colonisation. "Colonisation", as Anthony Graham White has noted, "was not only of territory but also of the mind" (White 1974, 60). Hence the reason the history of foreign theatre on Indian soil can be traced as far back as 1821 when Indian audiences were presented with melodramas that were popular among British audiences. So, naturally when the first type of Indian theatre known as the Parsee Theatre was first established in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was significantly influenced by this type of foreign theatre. The Parsee theatre borrowed elements of English theatre such as the proscenium arch, painted backdrop and various other western theatrical effects and 'Indianized' them (to borrow Rustom Bharucha's term) through dance routines, songs, music and themes drawn from Indian tradition, for their performances (Bharucha 1993, 193).

While I intend to concentrate, for the purpose of this work, more specifically on Nigeria and very briefly on Ghana, suffice it to say that in Africa, the story was slightly different to what obtained in India because intercultural theatre first began in schools that were set up by missionaries and colonial authorities. That is why Graham White has, in fact, posited that "The influence of the missions upon African drama is enormous" in his book, *The Origin of the Drama of Black Africa* in which he traces the first recorded European-style performance by Africans – graduates of a Lagos mission school – to 1866. And between 1880, the year that colonisation of black Africa began properly and 1914, White observes that the number of missionary stations in Africa tripled. Thus, as the battle for the territorial domination of Africa was waged on the battlefield by the European soldiers, the battle for the domination of the African minds were waged within the walls of these missionary schools. The aim of these missionaries, though disguised as converting the natives to Christianity was really to 'civilise' them and to transform them to *evolues*[74] and what surer way to achieve this important aim than by introducing them to western ways. And this was precisely what the missionary schools did. In order for African students to

[74] The French word for an African who has acquired European ways

imbibe western values and attitudes, they were encouraged to perform western dramas and adopt western theatre techniques. As a result, the rich tapestry of African theatre traditions – song, dance, mime and the use of open space – was frowned upon in these set ups so as to make the systemic acculturation easily achievable.

But alongside these missionary-influenced western theatre performances was the emergence of the so-called Concert Party. "This genre of music theatre", in the words of Fischer-Lichte:

> made use of revue style, North American minstrel shows, of English music hall and of Hollywood films in a free dramaturgy close to traditional African theatre in which music, dance, song, talking to the audience, dialogues and slapstick numbers alternated within one performance (Fischer-Lichte 1990, 16).

This movement began in 1922 with the formation, in Ghana, of the Versatile Eight by Alexis Johnson. In the early 1930s the group consisting of Johnson's old schoolmates turned professional and toured various West African countries, including Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Johnson himself eventually became the most famous comic performer in Ghana and in many parts of West Africa. In no time, The Concert Parties group began to emerge in various parts of Africa albeit in a variety of forms. In Nigeria they were known as the Yoruba Travelling Theatre, in the sense that unlike the Concert Parties that fascinated audiences mainly in the cities, the travelling theatre troupes lived up to their name as they physically took their theatrical presentations to audiences in every part of society especially in rural areas. "The Travelling Theatre Movement", as Biodun Jeyifo has noted in his essay, 'By Popular Demand: The Functions and Social Uses of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre',

> cuts across virtually all classes and social strata and embrace a combination of social groupings in the society much as the Greek classical theatre and Elizabethan England (Jeyifo 1985, 107).

In Nigeria, the movement was pioneered by Hubert Ogunde when, in 1945, he founded The Ogunde Concert Party, the first professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre.[75] It is indeed the pioneering work of theatre practitioners such as Ogunde upon which modern Nigerian dramatists such as Soyinka would

[75] The Travelling Theatre Movement and the pioneering theatrical work of Ogunde and how it influenced the work of Soyinka are discussed in detail in chapter three of this study.

subsequently build. And in my view that is one of the reasons why Soyinka's dramaturgy cannot but be inter-cultural. But as we will see in the following pages, Soyinka is not regarded as an interculturalist but a syncretic writer by western intercultural scholars such as Patrice Pavis, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert to mention just a few.

2.8 Interculturalism: The Western Paradigm

According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, interculturalism in "contemporary theatre in the West and Japan can be seen as the result of a deliberate desire to extend their own culture, in the Third World it is the result of colonisation" (Fischer-Lichte 1996, 35). We shall return to Fischer-Lichte later on, because there are a number of shortcomings in her argument that we need to address in this thesis. What is important to note here, however, is that it is not only Fischer-Lichte who has asserted that it was colonisation that brought interculturalism to Africa. Gilbert has also alluded to this when she posits that "critics have often categorised theatre in postcolonial cultures as inherently syncretic" (Gilbert 2001, 1). The question that must be asked here in the light of Gilbert's assertion is: why do western scholars consistently classify black writers as 'syncretic' and not 'intercultural' or cross-cultural even? For instance, it is after Patrice Pavis has identified 'Intercultural Theatre', 'Multicultural theatre' and 'Cultural collage' as the main categories of cross cultural theatre practices, in his Introduction to *Intercultural Performance Reader*, that he adds: "Three more categories which demonstrate the same phenomena, but from quite specific points of view, should also be mentioned." He then goes on to list the three as: 'Syncretic theatre', 'Post-colonial theatre' and the last he terms: 'The "Theatre of the "Third World"'. It is the first (and to a lesser degree) the second categorisations that readily concern us here. In Pavis' words:

> Syncretic theatre is "A term used by Chris Balme" (1995) for the creative reinterpretation of heterogeneous cultural material, resulting in the formation of new configurations (for example, the theatre of Derek Walcott or Wole Soyinka) (Pavis 1996, 9; parenthesis in the original).

It is pertinent to note that by the time Pavis' book was published Wole Soyinka and Trinidadian writer, Derek Walcott had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 and 1993 respectively. But what is really significant about this categorisation, in my view, is that if both writers ever contend that they do not belong in the 'syncretic' category, the only other category open to them is the next sub-categorisation of cross cultural theatre practice that Pavis felt "should also be mentioned:" post-colonial theatre. Postcolonial theatre, as described by Pavis,

> takes up elements of the home culture (that of ex- or neo-colonisation) and employs them from its indigenous perspective, thereby giving rise to a mixture of languages, dramaturgies and performance processes (Pavis 1996, 9-10).

From these categorisations, one can safely conclude that no matter what a black man 'crosses' his theatrical practice with, he would never be considered 'intercultural' by the western hegemony simply because interculturalism is apparently the exclusive preserve of theatre practitioners from the west who have the opportunity, privilege and the means to travel from the west to explore the rest of the world.

To further illustrate this point, let us turn our attention, once again, to Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's essay, 'Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre'. Whereas Lo and Gilbert are not disputing the argument "that all theatre is, in a sense, cross-cultural in that performance work necessitates the negotiation of cultural differences" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 32), their aim is to propose a new theoretical paradigm by which all categories of cross-cultural performance practice can be methodologically analysed. Curiously, however, Lo and Gilbert have decided to take their cue from Pavis's Eurocentric analysis of intercultural theatre practice when they use Cross-cultural theatre as an umbrella term to encompass the range of theatrical practices which they further schematize into: 'Multicultural' 'Postcolonial' and 'Intercultural'. Unsurprisingly they have the sub-categorisation: 'Syncretic' and 'Non Syncretic' under 'Postcolonial'. And under 'Intercultural' they have 'Transcultural,' 'Intracultural' and 'Extracultural'. What is immediately apparent from these schematisations is that it is a reinforcement of Pavis' westocentrism, because, in my view, if Soyinka, the most recognised of African writer in the west has already been boxed into the "Postcolonial Syncretic" corner, no African writer will ever be able to cross from the 'Postcolonial' to the western dominated 'Intercultural' grouping. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott feature prominently in the list of the "Well known examples of syncretic postcolonial theatre" as proffered by Lo and Gilbert.

This is what might be termed inadvertent reductionism, selectivism and academic racialism on the part of western scholars as regards the concept of interculturalism. "You cannot cram African literature into a small neat definition" (Achebe 1994, 429), Achebe has warned. "Any attempt to define African literature in terms which overlook the complexities of the African scene is doomed to failure" (ibid.). In my view, this is precisely what Pavis, Fischer-Lichte, Gilbert and Lo have succeeded in doing by

employing semantics to clone interculturalism. Or is it not this same interculturalism to which Knowles refers when he notes that in Africa and India, "theatrical interculturalism developed primarily in response to, and as a result of colonialism" (Knowles 2010, 9)? Interestingly the group of people in Nigeria that Knowles singles out as an example "out of the four hundred and fifty language and cultural groupings within only one of fifty-two African countries" (ibid.), are the Yoruba. We must quote Knowles once again here to reinforce my earlier argument that interculturalism is not a western invention. "The function of the integration of forms across cultures during this period is clearly site-specific and varies significantly from culture to culture" (ibid.).

This is precisely what Duro Ladipo, a doyen of the Nigerian Yoruba travelling theatre, (as will be discussed later on) did when he incorporated into his production of *Moremi*, "a group of Igbo dancers, the *Otu Osomeze* dancers from Agbor" (Ogunbiyi 1981, 351). It needs to be emphasised that this was in 1966 and Ladipo's reason for mixing the 'foreign' with the 'familiar' was dramaturgical rather than anthropological. "Remember what we tried to do in Duro Ladipo's play *Moremi*", Ulli Beier reminisced during his interview with Soyinka in 1992,

> Because the play deals with the conflict between the Ifes and aboriginal population, I recruited a group of Agbor dancers for the production: so Duro had two languages, two musical traditions and two dance styles at his disposal. It enriched his play enormously and the final scene was spectacular (Beier 2001, 174-175).

Clearly, this production of *Moremi* is intercultural, but the western scholars would argue that it is "postcolonial syncretism" simply because, in their eyes, all black Africans are the same meanwhile there is a clear distinction between the Irish, the Welsh, the Scottish and, indeed, the English. In this thesis, we shall endeavour to discuss the concept of interculturalism from a non-Occidental point of view; furthermore from purely the perspective of an 'Other' (African), a new theoretical model of interculturalism will be proposed and perhaps in the process the west may gain a better understanding of the term interculturalism. And we must begin our proposition here by jettisoning the racialized brush of 'postcolonial syncretism' with which Pavis, Fischer-Lichte, Lo and Gilbert have used to label all writers, Soyinka more so, whose origin happens to be the continent of Africa.

2.9 Dis-avowing Syncretism; De-westernising Interculturalism

It was Richard Schechner who remarked, in his essay, 'Intercultural Themes', that "racism is basically a myth of desired cultural purity played out against others who are perceived as being not only different but inferior" (Schechner 1989, 151). Whenever the term interculturalism in theatre practice is theorised, analysed or discussed – perhaps because it is usually from the narrow perspective of the same set of Western scholars – names such as Richard Schechner, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Ariane Mnouchkine and Robert Wilson are always on top of the list; one will hardly come across names such as Nigerian Ola Rotimi, Tanzanian Julius Nyerere, Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo, Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o, just to mention but a few African writers. Meanwhile, all these African writers, regardless of the chains of post-coloniality with which western scholars have shackled them, had been unavoidably inter-, intra- and trans- cultural in their work long before interculturalism became the buzzword in academic circuit in the western hemisphere; and years before Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* in 1985 and Ariane Mnouchkine's *L'Indiade* 1987. In Marvin Carlson's view, these two productions "provide us with particularly interesting case studies of the contemporary situation of cross cultural work in the theatre" (Carlson 1990, 49). Carlson further asserts that, "probably no other meeting of East and West in the theatre has attracted more attention during the past decade than these two undertakings" (ibid.).

And therein, I want to argue, lies the parochial attitude of western scholars as regards interculturalism in contemporary theatre. The question must be asked: had these two productions been produced respectively by a Nigerian and a Ghanaian theatre practitioner, would they have been thus eulogised? Not at all! Because Carlson would probably have regarded a work created by Ola Rotimi and Ama Ata Aidoo as either 'Syncretic' or 'Non-Syncretic' or a bit of both since both are so-called 'postcolonial' writers if we are to go by Lo and Gilbert's schematisation as already mentioned. It is imperative that we return to Lo and Gilbert's essay later on, but first it is important to ascertain precisely, in the first instance, what syncretism means. *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines 'syncretise' as an "attempt, esp. *inconsistently*, to unify or reconcile differing schools of thought" (my emphasis). So, the question is: is it appropriate for anyone to describe what Soyinka does in those terms? It is important that we address this important question immediately. Firstly, in an article entitled 'Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition', which Soyinka contributed to the 1975 edition of *Transition,* he gives an insight into how he relies on various cultures for his creativity. In his words:

> I cannot claim a transparency of communication even from the sculpture, music and poetry of my own

> people the Yoruba but the aesthetics matrix is the fount of my own creative inspiration; it influences my critical response to the creation of other cultures and validates selective eclecticism as the right of every productive being, scientist or artist (Soyinka 1975, 48).

Then in 1986, Ketu Katrak's book, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy,* was published. The book opens with the words: "Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's leading dramatist, is a most significant figure in contemporary world literature" (Katrak 1986, 3). It is important to note that while the book came out the same year Soyinka won the Nobel Prize, Katrak must have written those words at least two years before. Thus Katrak could not have been biased when, in a later chapter in her book, she writes:

> Through his education Soyinka imbibed the Western intellectual tradition, but in his writing he comes across first and foremost as an African and as a Yoruba. Soyinka's art is eclectic, a successful blend of African themes and traditional forms and Western techniques. This eclecticism results from his Yoruba upbringing and his Western academic education (ibid, 5).

Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who has been the most consistent in his effort to convince African writers to write in their mother tongues, has argued that the work produced by African writers who write in foreign languages cannot and should not be regarded as African literature. Ngugi then goes on to draw his readers' attention to the fact that in their latest volume, the editors of the Pelican Guides to English Literature had included the discussion of African literature written in English as part of twentieth-century English literature. It is against this backdrop that wa Thiong'o, who is unarguably one of the towering figures in African literature, has drawn the following inference:

> What we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages. It has produced many writers and works of genuine talent: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sembene Ousmane, Agostino Neto, Sedar Senghor and many others. Who can deny their talent? The light in the products of their fertile imaginations has certainly illuminated important aspects of the African being in its continuous struggle against the political and economic consequences of Berlin and after (wa Thiong'o 1994, 450).

The only conclusion left to be drawn from all the above is that Soyinka's work cannot and should not be described as 'syncretic' theatre, which leaves us with the term interculturalism but to avoid any further

unnecessary ambiguity we shall borrow a leaf from Ric Knowles who appears to "prefer 'intercultural' to the other terms available – cross-cultural, extracultural, intracultural, metacultural, precultural, postcultural, transcultural, transnational, ultracultural and so on" (Knowles 2010, 4) by ignoring, for the time being, all the various semantic permutations of interculturalism and focus our attention instead on examining who the west considered an interculturalist.

When Schechner was asked in an interview: "Whom would you consider to be doing intercultural theatre?", his response was:

> For better or for worse....Peter Brook has certainly been doing this kind of work since he began his centre in Paris: The fact that a leading British, or English-speaking director would situate his work in France, to start with, is somewhat intercultural (Pavis 1996, 42).

Aside from Brook, Schechner also mentioned Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and Robert Wilson which is more or less a reinforcement of Lo and Gilbert's view of who the real intercultural theatre practitioners are and what part of the world they can be found. "Put simply intercultural theatre is a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 36) as Lo and Gilbert have argued. In their view, interculturalism "is primarily a Western-based tradition lineage in modernist experimentation through the work of Tairov, Meyerhold, Brecht and Artaud" (ibid.). However, Lo and Gilbert hasten to add that "More recently intercultural theatre has been associated with the usual western suspects: Richard Schechner, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Ariane Mnouchkine Robert Wilson [and with a dash of the Orient exemplified by] Tadashi Suzuki, and Ong Keng Sen" (ibid.). And in avoidance of any doubt, Lo and Gilbert add that "Even when intercultural exchanges take place within the "non-West" (such as Africa), they are often mediated through Western culture and/or economics" (Gilbert and Lo 2002, 37). Finally, in Ric Knowles' view, intercultural theatre and performance "is the site for the continuing renegotiation of cultural values and the reconstruction of individual and community identities and subject positions" (Knowles 2010, 5).

2.10 Rethinking Interculturalism: Towards an 'Africanist' theoretical model

It is clear from all of the aforementioned descriptions and definitions of interculturalist in theatre practice that the more interculturalism is defined by western scholars the more difficult it is to decipher as a concept. It is important to add that the problem of defining interculturalism has been exacerbated

further due to the fact that western scholars are unable to discern what the concept really is and what it is not. But above all, the western hegemony would like to lay claim to the ownership of the concept, hence the reluctance to give any consideration to an 'Other' – especially African – perspective in arriving at a universally acceptable meaning of intercultural theatre practice. This must be resisted, at all costs. "Only with the advent of a particularly virulent form of Western European-American exploitative nationalism and its ideological outgrowths was interculturalism foreclosed" as Schechner has rightly pointed out. "We must work to make this foreclosure temporary," (1982, 157), is his advice. We have previously mentioned how African writers and especially Soyinka (who must remain our concern here) are unavoidably intercultural. However, the western scholars would like the rest of the world to accept that interculturalism, both theoretically and practically, is the exclusive domain of western scholars and theatre practitioners. "As the young postmodern discourse of interculturalism is nurtured", writes Claire Conceison, in her essay 'Joy Luck Club and Intercultural Theatre',

> we who participate in the scripting of its vocabulary and shaping of its manifestations must ask ourselves not only *what* we are doing, but also *how* we are doing it. Are such projects actually fostering understanding and cultural sharing or are they merely reifying existing hegemonic structures and painful misconceptions (Conceison, 1995, 151)?

Thus, we shall endeavour to heed Schechner's as well as Conceison's words of advice in this thesis. Furthermore, we shall also seriously take to heart the call made by Ola Rotimi, the Nigerian playwright/theatre director who passed away in 2000, in his essay, 'Much Ado about Brecht' in which he first of all proffers a compelling argument to prove that performance elements which animate the theory of *Verfremdung* were already prevalent in traditional African theatre before the birth of Bertolt Brecht in 1889. In other words, "The bathroom is already wet before the rains" as a Yoruba proverb goes. But the analogy Rotimi uses is much more sophisticated than the foregoing proverb. According to Rotimi,

> The relationship between African traditional theatre (the familiar, from the writer's perspective), and Brecht's epic theatre (the foreign) is reminiscent more of the proverbial dialogue at the first meeting between Sugar Cane, and Tate and Lyle – the world renowned British Sugar cube manufacturers. Tate and Lyle had introduced themselves with appropriate aplomb and flourish, as 'makers' of sugar. To which Sugar Cane replied: 'Fine, but I already had sugar flowing in my veins before you ever knew it!' (Rotimi 1990, 253-354).

Here Rotimi's aim is to debunk the erroneous notion that it was the west that brought 'culture' to Africa. But Rotimi's remark is also useful in the sense that it has provided a simpler way to describe the concept of interculturalism from an African perspective. So, for the purpose of our analysis in this thesis we will take interculturalism to mean the process of mixing (either willingly or forcefully) the 'familiar' with the 'foreign'[76] to create a new aesthetics or a hybridised performance. To conclude his essay, Rotimi also calls for a critical interrogation of the concept of western interculturalism; in this thesis, we shall endeavour to heed the call of the dead by proposing a new intercultural theoretical model. In fact, it will be instructive to quote Ola Rotimi's call here in its entirety to elucidate why it is imperative that an 'Africanist' theory of interculturalism is proposed in this thesis without further ado. In Rotimi's words:

> The essence of this paper is a call to Third World theatre scholars and practitioners to pause and ponder on our past, so as to enable us to confront the present and future on a more informed footing. For a culture long harried by the buffetings of colonial subjugation, the call to pause and ponder seems appropriate, particularly in the present techno-economic lapse into a 'consumer' sub-world. For our young generation of theatre arts students and practitioners, a generation giddy with the 'identity crisis' arising from Euro-American cultural radiations, the call to pause and ponder over what we watch, and what we read and what we are told, seems compelling. Only through pausing and pondering on our past, can we, with a measure of self-confidence, engage in a discussion relating to the foreign and the familiar, on the probabilities of cultural syncretism rather than on the affirmations of cultural imperialism. Only then would, for instance the relationship between our familiar theatre and the foreign be akin to what the folklore of our forbears tell us about the basis of equality between the vulture and the ape (Rotimi 1990, 260).

And to perhaps contextualise his call in 'intercultural' terms, Rotimi cites the folktale of the vulture and the ape. "Day after day" Rotimi writes, "the vulture flaunted his baldness at the ape. The ape got tired one evening and said to vulture:

> Say, mister cut out the display!
> After all when we boil it down,
> What do you have that I don't?
> You're bald in the head?
> Well I am bald in the bottom.

[76] For an interesting explanation of the 'foreign' and the 'family' readers are advised to see Brandon, 1990, p. 94.

So there..... (ibid, 260).

Rotimi's call is explanatory, I would argue. Thus it is precisely to demonstrate that the vulture is not superior to the ape, or to put it bluntly, that the Occident is not superior to the African that a new intercultural theoretical model must be proposed to conclude this chapter. But first, it is worth noting that Rotimi's essay, 'Much Ado about Brecht' from which I have quoted the above call, as well as Biodun Jeyifo's equally compelling essay entitled, 'The Reinvention of Theatrical Tradition: Critical Discourses on Interculturalism in the African Theatre', are the only two contributions from African writers to the book, *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, which was published in 1990 and edited by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley and Michael Gissenwehrer.[77] Nonetheless, when *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, which Patrice Pavis edited, was published six years later only Jeyifo's essay was reprinted in it; Rotimi's was not. We are not going to try and second-guess why that was the case here; suffice it to say that if Rotimi's essay had been reprinted in Pavis's book, perhaps more theatre scholars and practitioners from the so called 'Third World' would have become aware of the important essay and perhaps Rotimi's call for a critical interrogation of the concept of western interculturalism, purely from an African perspective, would have long been heeded before this present research was embarked upon. So, while it is the aim of this thesis to use the available intercultural theoretical models, namely Pavis' hourglass model and indeed Lo and Gilbert's proposed model, for our analysis of the intercultural productions of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies in Britain, it must be stressed that they are not the desirable. It is high time, therefore, that a desirable 'Africanist' intercultural theoretical model was proposed.

2.11 The 'Talking Drum and Keyboard': An Etymology

The name by which the proposed model shall be known is: the 'Talking Drum and Keyboard'. This name is inspired by a Nigerian poem, 'Piano and Drums as written by Nigerian poet, Gabriel Okara.[78] As the

[77] In my view, the Preface to this book and its content page are very symptomatic of my argument here that the Western scholars truly feel they initiated the concept of interculturalism. On page 5, the 'Preface' by the Editors opens, thus: "In Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa, the aesthetically most advanced contemporary theatres...." And the Contents (as listed in pages 7-10) are arranged ethnocentrically rather than alphabetically as follows: Europe/ North America; Japan; China; Indonesia/India; Africa. This shows clearly that to remain the first the west is happy to defy the logic of alphabetical order on which its whole culture of literacy is predicated.

[78] Gabriel Okara is a Nigerian novelist and poet born in 1921, Okara began his writing career as a student in

title suggests, 'Piano and Drums' uses the symbolism of these two musical instruments and the effect the music they respectfully produce have on the listener who is an African in Africa to highlight the inherent differences between African and Western cultures. Below is 'Piano and Drums' in its entirety:

'PIANO AND DRUMS' By Gabriel Okara

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
The leopard snarling about to leap
And the hunters crouch with spears poised;

And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
topples the years and at once I'm
in my mother's laps suckling;
at once I'm walking simple
paths with no innovations
rugged, fashioned with the naked
warmth of hurrying feet and groping hearts
in green leaves and wild flowers pulsing.

Then I hear a wailing piano
Solo speaking of complex ways
in tear-furrowed concerto;
of far away lands
and new horizons with
coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labrynth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle

Government College Umuahia in 1940. He would be regarded as one of the foremost pioneer Nigerian writers. He is aged 91 now and he still writes. I have not been able to establish the date of this poem but I learnt it in Secondary school in the early 1980s and it remains one of my favourite poems.

of a phrase at a daggerpoint.
And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and concerto.[79]

The content as well as the subject matter of this poem, in my view, succinctly encapsulates not only the etymology of but also the rationale behind the propounding a new Africanist theoretical model in this thesis. After all, "A theory is a system of interconnected and generalizable statements taken, together, to increase our understanding of a given phenomenon", (Kim 2001, 29) as Yun Young Kim has claimed in *Becoming Intercultural*, "Just as a good map must accurately correspond to the physical reality", Kim adds, "a good theoretical account must fit the reality it purports to help understand" (ibid.). Okara's poem is rich in imagery and symbolism both visually and aurally and it certainly brings to mind the cross-culturality that permeates all three tragic plays of Soyinka that will be analysed in this thesis, more so, in *Horseman* in which, traditional African drums and Western music play vital roles dramaturgically and semiologically. It is for this simple reason that I have decided to be postmodern by borrowing Okara's title and relying on his poem to challenge the ethnocentricity synonymous with the theorisation of western interculturalism. "It is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence" (Bhabha 1994, 9), as Homi K. Bhabha has argued. It is, therefore, in the in-between space or what Bhabha calls the interstices or what Olaniyan calls 'the gap' or what Brian Singleton refers to as the 'liminal space' and which I designate as the 'Concinnity Zone' that exists between the various indigenous African cultures that have been forced to co-exist due to colonialism as well as the gap that exists between these indigenous African cultures and Western culture that this new theoretical model will be located – hence, the name: inter-cross-cultural theoretical model.

First, we must recognise and highlight, contrary to the attitude of western scholars, the transculturality (one aspect of cross-culturality) that is inherent in the dramatic oeuvre of African writers regardless of the fact that they have all been Euro-centrically pigeonholed as post-colonial syncretic writers. Thus, borrowing from Lo and Gilbert's terminologies namely 'Collaborative' and 'Imperialistic'[80] intercultural

[79] My source for this poem is online at http://winchesterenglish .blogspot.com/2009/02/piano-and-drums-by-gabriel-okara.html (accessed on the 27th of January 2012).

[80] The argument Lo and Gilbert try to advance with these terminologies is that any intercultural theatre can be

exchange, we shall term the drama of African writers, especially those written after independence and in the colonialist's language: 'Recuperative Transculturalism' bearing in mind that African writers have made the best of a bad situation by being creative regardless of the negative impact that colonialism had had on African theatre tradition generally. In this sense, it is for non-Eurocentric critical analyses of the presentations of the drama written by Africans, which we have termed: 'Recuperative Transculturalism', that our proposed Talking Drum and Keyboard theoretical model will be applied.

2.12 The Phenomenology of the Talking Drum and the Keyboard

While Okara has jungle drums in his poem, I feel the talking drum will be more appropriate for the proposed intercultural model, not only because it is also shaped as an hourglass,[81] but because the talking drum is a traditional musical instrument and it plays a very significant role in the culture of many African people. Among the Yoruba, for instance, the talking drum is regarded as a very important medium of communication. The ability of the drum to 'talk' is ontological. It is based on the belief that since most African languages are tonal in nature, the talking drum, when played appropriately, can mimic these languages. Although the talking drum can be played by only one drummer, ideally Yoruba *dundun* talking drum is an ensemble (or a family) of four (or five drums) (see figure 1 again) "reflecting the societal set of the Yoruba", as Peter Badejo has noted in 'Peter Badejo on Talking Drums' in the programme note for the National presentation of *Horseman* in 2009.



Fig. 1 Talking Drum ensemble

positioned on a continuum with Collaborative and Imperialistic at opposite ends. In their view most intercultural theatre occurs in between these two extremes. For more, see 'Toward A Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis' in *The Drama Review*, Volume 46, Number 3 (T175) Fall 2002, p.38

[81]In fact in some parts of Africa talking drum is referred to as the hourglass drum because of its shape

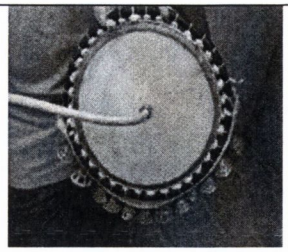


Fig. 2 Talking drum with a stick

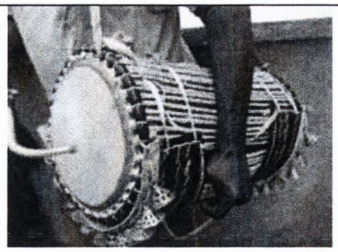


Fig.3 Talking drum being squeezed

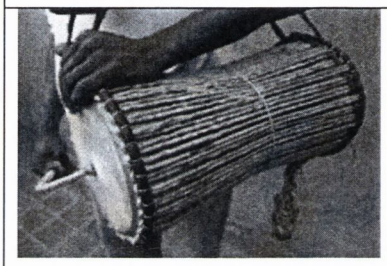


Fig. 4 Omele Ako

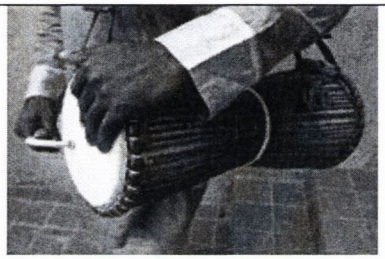


Fig. 5 Omele Abo

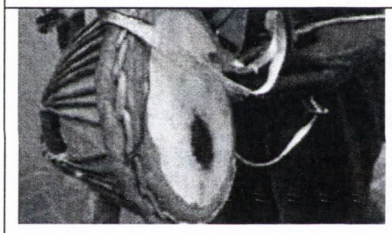


Fig .6 Gudugudu side view

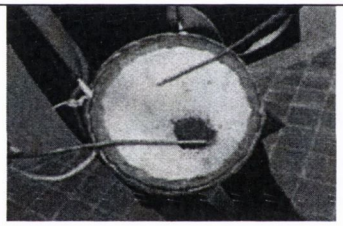


Fig. 7 Gudugudu with beaters

A typical talking drum is made of a piece of wood which has been hollowed out and shaped like hour-glass. The top and bottom of the wood is covered with goat's (kid's) skin held down with rows of twisted strings of dry leather. The rows of twisted leather are flexible enough to be squeezed and released by the drummer as required. To get various tones on the drum, the drummer hits the drum with a curved stick, known as *opa ilu* (see figure 2), and simultaneously squeezes or releases the strings of leather on the side of the drum to either tighten or loosen the skin as the stick comes into contact with it (see figure 3). When the strings are not pressed, the drum gives a low pitch tone (Do) as the stick comes into contact with the skin; when the drummer presses the strings half way, the drum gives a mid-tone (Re); and when the strings are pressed completely, the drum gives a high pitch tone (Mi). Thus, by combining these three musical tones – Do, Re and Mi – the talking drum mimics the tonality of Yoruba language and anyone who understands the language will know exactly what the drummer is saying on his drum.

So if a talking drum wants to say this author's name: OLABISI (pronounced phonetically by articulating the underlined as: '**Or** - **la** - **b** - **c**') all he needs to do is to play Re-Mi-Mi-Mi on his drum. So, if a talking drummer, for instance, wants to welcome Soyinka to an occasion he can play the Yoruba song as shown below by using the 'Do' 'Re' Mi' on his drum to say the words of the song.

SONG

Ka-a-bo-o/O-lu-wo-le/ ka-a-bo

Ka-a-bo o/o-m-o So-yi-n-ka/ ka-a-bo

Iwo lo ba le soro, ti le lanu kaabo

TALKING DRUM LANGUAGE

Mi-Do-Do/Re-Mi-Re-Mi/ Mi-Do-Do

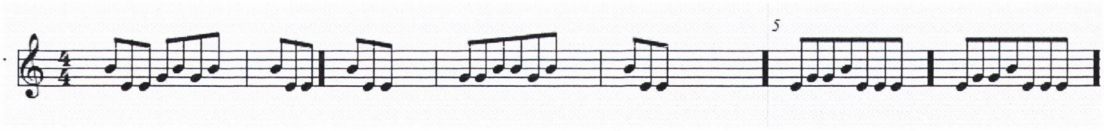
Mi-Do-Do/Re-Re-Mi-Mi-Re-Mi/Mi-Do-Do

Do- Re-Re-Mi-Do-Do-Do

Do-Re-Re-Mi-Do-Do-Do

Mi-Do-Re-Re-Mi-Do-Do[82]

STAFF NOTATION



The *iya-ilu*, (mother drum) also known as *dundun*[83] (see figure 2) is played by the lead talking drummer who is responsible for setting the pattern and rhythm of the music. The next in line in the ensemble are

[82] The song can be loosely translated as 'Welcome Oluwole welcome/Welcome son of Soyinka welcome/You who command the ground to open and it obeys you welcome.' I sang this song to usher Soyinka onto the stage in Cubberley Theatre in Palo Alto in California in 2006. It is important to add that each word is accentuated consonant by consonant. Yoruba words are marked with accents so (`) stands for Do no accents for Re and Mi is marked with (´)

[83] There is a smaller version of the *dundun* known as *gangan*. This type is played with a stick also but instead of squeezing the strings with fingers as it is the case with the *dundun,* the *gangan* is placed under the armpit and the

the *omele ako* and *omele abo*[84] (the male and female baby talking drums see figures 4 and 5). These two drums usually share the phrases of any pattern that the *iya-ilu* introduces. The strings of each of these drums are tied in the middle in such a way that when they are hit with the *opa ilu*, they give respective contrasting high and low pitch tones. To use the example of the song above, if the lead talking drummer (figure 2) starts the song: *Kaabo o kaabo, Oluwole kaabo o* on his *iya-ilu*, the *omele ako* (figure 4) will immediately pick up *Ka-a-bo* (Mi-Do-Do) and he will keep repeating that on his drum in accordance with the tempo that the *iya-ilu* has set, while the *omele abo* (figure 5) will instinctively respond with *Olu-wo-le* (Re-Mi-Re-Mi) on his own drum and keep repeating that phrase. In time the rhythmic pattern between these two drums becomes a call and response or what musicologists have termed: polyphony. The smallest baby of the talking drum family is the *gudu gudu*. Unlike all the other drums in the family, *gudu gudu* is shaped as a bowl (figure 6) and it is played with two leather beaters (figure 7)

This is the time-keeper of the ensemble in the sense that, as its onomatopoeic name suggests, the *gudu-gudu* is played continuously and its rhythm is constant to keep the whole ensemble on time. So, for a song such as the one we are using here, the *gudu-gudu* will keep repeating Mi Mi Mi/ Mi Mi Mi/ Mi Mi Mi. It takes many years to become a lead drummer because to be a professional talking drummer one is expected to spend a number of years on each of the drums in the ensemble, in their hierarchical order starting from the *gudu gudu,* which Badejo has aptly described as "the baby of the family – the continuation of society and of the community because children are the time keepers of our future" (Badejo 2009). One question is worth asking here: why is it that there is no *baba ilu* (father drum)? In my view, it is simply because in Yoruba culture and in Nigeria generally, polygamy is not a crime. A man can have as many wives as he wants as long as he can love them all equally and cater for their needs. So in this sense, one can argue that the sekere (big maracas) that sometimes accompany the talking drum ensemble (figure 8) can be regarded as the father that is seldom around. What this illustrates clearly for us is that the Yoruba talking drums are not mere musical instruments in the sense that they embody Yoruba epistemology. So how does the Yoruba talking drum contrasts with western Keyboard?

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drummer squeezes it with his arm accordingly to get required pitch and tone.

[84] In the course of this study I discover that these two drums are also known as *omele isaaju* (omele that leads) and *omele atele* (the *omele* that follows) but I feel the male and female attributes are much better to reflect the family of drums. My source for some of the information that I have used to explain the talking drum example and the pictures I have used in this section is: www. lagabaja.com/drums/dundun.php.



Fig. 8 Talking Drum ensemble with sekere

According to David C Kelzenberg,

> Keyboard instruments, as the name suggests, are musical instruments which are played by means of keyboard – that is, the pitches are selected by means of set of levers (the keyboard, which is manipulated by the fingers, hands , or feet of the player (Kelzenberg 2000, 1of 4).

Keyboard instruments are varied and they include the organ, the accordion and the piano. It is the keyboard that every keyboard instrument possesses that enables the performer to play western music on them. To get music from a keyboard instrument, the performer presses a series of keys that are on the keyboard.



Fig. 9 Hands playing the keyboard

In nearly all cases in Western music, in the words of Cecil Clutton *et al*, "the keys correspond to consecutive notes in the chromatic scale, and they run from the bass at the left to the treble at the right" (Clutton *et al* 2012, 3 of 8). What is very significant is that on most if not all keyboard instruments you will find rows of white and black keys which the performers press to get music (see figure 9). When

a key is pressed a lever that is built inside the keyboard will hit the appropriate string and it is this string that vibrates to give the desired sound or note. If a long string that is located inside the keyboard is hit, the pitch tone that it produces is low and vice versa. In this sense the keyboard, as a percussion instrument, has a bit of drums in it because, as we have discussed, to get a high pitch on the talking drum the talking drummer needs to squeeze the leather that will tighten the skin of the drum and when it is hit, the drum gives the high pitch tone Mi. But unlike the talking drum, the scale of music, also known as the octave (eight notes) that one can play on the keyboard ranges from A-G. The scale of A, for example, contains the notes A, B, C, D, E, F and G. If the semi-tones also known as sharp or flat notes that one gets by pressing the black keys that are located between A and B, C and D, F and G and A are added one has twelve notes to play with on the keyboard. So, it is how dexterous a keyboard player is and how he can manipulate all these that will determine how good a keyboardist he is. "This versatility enables the modern pianist or organist to play in transcription, any work of Western music", in the words of Clutton *et al* "whether it involves chordal harmonies, independent contrapuntal parts or a single melody" (ibid). In this respect the keyboard shares another similarity with the talking drums in the sense that it is the same way that a talking drum can use the manipulation of rhythm to mimic Yoruba language that a Keyboard instrument can mimic the tune or melody of a song and a listener will immediately recognise the song that is being played on the keyboard. For instance, a church organist can play 'Silent Night' on his organ and one would be able to tell straight away that the song that is being played on the keyboard is the well-known Christmas carol 'Silent Night'. Similarly the song *Kaabo Soyinka kaabo* can also be played on the keyboard. So how can the Talking Drum and the Keyboard serve as the model for our new inter-cross-cultural theoretical model?

What can be inferred from our discussion of the talking drums and the keyboard is that each of these instruments represent the respective culture that produce and use them. The talking drum, on the one hand, reflects the ontology of the Yoruba people in the sense that without the drums most ritual ceremonies would be incomplete. Also African culture is based on orality, so the fact that the drum can mimic the songs, chants and whatever the people say, means that the drum is not a mere musical instrument but an embodiment of the African oral tradition. It is therefore imperative that to be able to talk with the drum or comprehend what the drum says one needs to have a deep knowledge of Yoruba ontology. On the other hand, the music the keyboard produces is considered art and it is not uncommon to see a keyboardist playing on his or her own, which is reflective of the notion of individuality upon which western culture is predicated. A keyboard instrument can be played by anyone with fingers or

anyone who is able to read music or by anyone who has ear for good music. All it takes to play the keyboard is for one to press any or combination of the keys that are clearly laid out in black and white on the keyboard and with practice one will be able to play a melody. To be able to discern how to play the talking drum, on the other hand, even when one is Yoruba, one needs years of tutoring. As we have discussed earlier, one needs the *opa-ilu* to play the talking drum and while the skin of the drum can be hit as hard as possible by a professional talking drummer, it is very common for a non-initiate to break the skin of the drum with the first strike of the stick, simply because there is actually a methodology to playing the talking drum – it must be hit at the centre (see figure 2 again). So, while the mechanism of playing the keyboard is visibly laid down, the talking drum has an invisible playing mechanism – it is non-mathematical, enigmatic and very deceptive. But the talking drum is not as restrictive as it looks and it is also more versatile tonally. As earlier discussed one can get three notes Do, Re, Mi on the talking drum and on the keyboard one can get these same three notes plus Fa, So, La, Ti, Do and the other four semitones. But in reality as Padraic Lavin,[85] an Irish Uilleann Pipes virtuoso and musicologist, has explained to me in person, all keyboards are built mathematically, meaning the twelve notes on every keyboard is of equal temperament and they cannot be altered despite the fact that every keyboard has more than twelve visible keys that one can press (see figure 9). It is in this light that Lavin calls western music "a compromise and very limiting" bearing in mind that, depending on his dexterity, a talking drummer can get, what Lavin calls, "nine microtones" in between each of the three notes (Do - Re - Mi) that a novice can get on the talking drum by pressing the strings of the talking drum accordingly as already discussed. And in terms of appearance, there is no concept of colour associated with the talking drum as it is visibly the case with the keyboard. The colour of the skin is usually beige and the leather

[85] Padraic Lavin plays the uilleann pipes professionally. We used to play together many years ago when the Afro-Irish band De-Jimbe used to do musical shows. One of the instruments that I played for the band is actually the talking drum. For the purpose of this theory I met with Padraic Lavin on the 20th of October 2012, to discuss what I am proposing and to get an insight into how the keyboard operates. I followed the face-to-face discussion with an email in which I asked Lavin to elaborate on our discussions. I owe Padraic Lavin a debt of gratitude for finally explaining what A sharp and B flat mean. I used to think the western stringed instrumentalists were wasting time when we used to practice for De-Jimbe. See www.dejimbe.com for more on the band and Padraic Lavin. Source of the picture of Piano is: http://www.google.com/#hl=en&q=hands+playing+piano+pictures&revid=117510495&sa=X&ei=dVqGUKDSBciXhQf48oDAAQ&sqi=2&ved=0CGcQ1QIoAA&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_qf.&fp=b27ec7a7fa4a966c&bpcl=35466521&biw=1024&bih=622 (accessed on the 23rd of October 2012).

strings and the wood are brownish although the leather with which the drum is held to the wood is usually black and white but it is for functionality rather than for particularity and also one has to look closely to notice this. So in a sense the drums can be said to be multi-coloured exactly as the African people look and dress. But in terms of the keyboard, it is laid out in black and white clearly for all to see (see figure 9).

2.13 The 'Talking Drum and Keyboard' Theoretical Model

For our intercultural model we propose to label the strings of the drum accordingly (see figure 10) Do-Re-Mi and to identify the notes of the keyboard culture accordingly we have Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do. The Talking drum on the left represents the African culture and the Keyboard on the right represents the western culture.

Talking Drum and Keyboard Inter-Cross-Cultural Theoretical Model

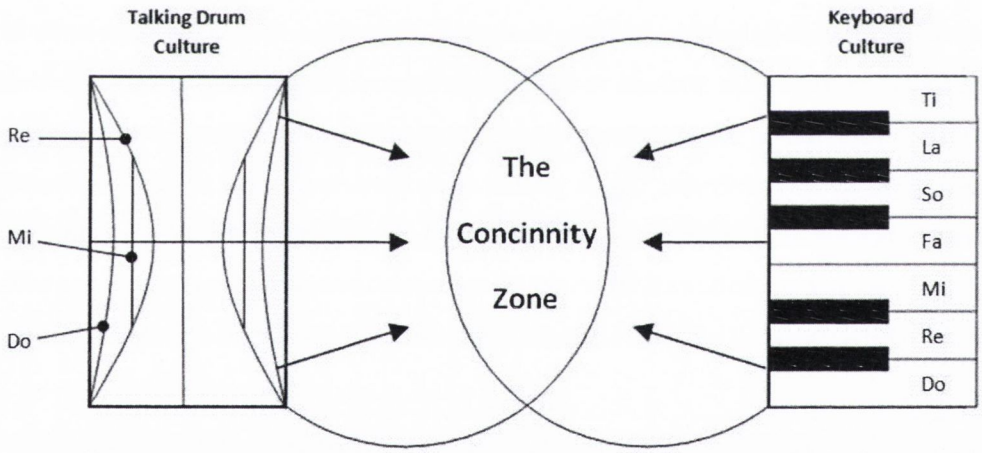

Fig. 10 The Proposed Afro-Western Inter-Cross-Cultural Model

So, for the purpose of our analysis, we will posit that when a Yoruba picks up Soyinka's text such as *Death and The King's Horseman* to direct, it is presumed that he is already familiar with the language of the talking drum and, therefore, he must learn how to read music so as to be able to play the keyboard properly. But that should not pose a problem for a black man since he can already read and write thanks to colonisation. Conversely, when a white man decides to direct Soyinka's play it is presumed that he can play the keyboard but he must learn how to use the drum to talk. Now, this is where the problem lies. Before one can use the drum to talk, one must be able to comprehend the language in which the

drum is talking first. So, an ideal director of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy then will be a director who can read music (score) and at the same time understands the Yoruba language in which the drum talks. The ideal director of, for example, a Yoruba tragedy shall be positioned in the in-between area that I have termed the 'Concinnity Zone' where s/he is in a vantage position to hear, fuse, conduct and coordinate the rhythm and melody that the 'Talking Drum and Keyboard' are producing respectively and simultaneously. And in relation to the cross-culturality inherent in the text of the drama, I would argue that the 'Talking Drum and Keyboard' will also suffice as a model for its analysis bearing in mind that most African literature, and particularly Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, is already an amalgam of the rhythmic language of the drum and the melodic harmony of the keyboard, again, due to the advent of colonialism and hence the appropriateness of the name of the model as Afro-Western inter-cross-cultural theoretical model. It needs to be reiterated here in avoidance of any doubt that this newly proposed theoretical model is unashamedly 'Africanist', bearing in mind that the two theoretical models that are hitherto available for the analyses of any intercultural process of transferring a cultural product from its source culture to a target culture regardless of the direction of the transfer are essentially Western/Eurocentric and Australasian respectively. It is, therefore, my hope that this newly proposed 'Talking Drum and Keyboard' model would prove to be a useful, complementary and/or compensatory critical tool when I begin my analyses of the presentations, on the British stage, of three of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies in part two of this thesis. Although the new model is patently Africanist, its universality cannot be overemphasised. In other words, this model can also be employed for the critical analysis of, for example, a western appropriation of an Asian cultural product and *vice versa*. Thus, if an analyst wants to apply this new model to Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata*, for instance, it is suggested that the Indian *tabla* drum replaces the talking drum and if it was Indian Rustom Bharucha who decides to appropriate *Hamlet* for an intercultural presentation in Calcutta, it is hoped that the '*Tabla* and Keyboard' model will also suffice. Finally, it is worth noting that our newly proposed model, (in the spirit of postmodernism and interculturalism) is loosely based on the hybridisation of the models (see figures 12 and 14) proposed respectively by Pavis and Lo and Gilbert which hopefully will further enhance the universal applicability of the Talking Drum and Keyboard model.

CHAPTER THREE

Nigerian Drama and Soyinka; Yoruba Cosmology and Yoruba Tragedy

> *Well, you can imagine what an exciting, absolutely unpredictable, un-uniform theatre this was and this is the tradition on which we, the so-called modern dramatists, in various forms, have attempted to build – not non-consciously, but this material was there, and we tried as much as possible to make use of it. One of the earliest things that we did after Independence was to run a repertory theatre to bring together the work of Ogunde and Duro Ladipo with the poetic, so-called modern, Westernised drama of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark* (Gibbs 2001, 76).

3.1 Nigerian Drama

In the Introduction to his pioneering book, *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, Yemi Ogunbiyi suggests two broad classifications for Nigerian drama namely traditional and literary forms of drama. The traditional form of drama, he further subdivides into three categories: dramatic ritual, popular tradition and Yoruba travelling theatre. The dramatic ritual form, as the name implies, encompasses all traditional festivals and ritual ceremonies performed in honour of ancestors or particular cults or deities. The annual *Egungun*[86] (masquerade) festival is an example of this form. It is a period of celebration and great festivities among the Yorubas, during which dead ancestors are believed to be visiting the living. The annual Ogun festival and the worship of Obatala, the god of creations, as will be discussed later in this chapter, are other examples of this form.

The second category of traditional Nigerian drama, according to Ogunbiyi, is the popular tradition, which is literally a dramatic art form geared towards the populace. As the name connotes, this form of theatre, Ogunbiyi posits, "is an art that is commonly approved and liked by the 'common' people in an ever-growing urban culture" (Ogunbiyi 1981, 11). All that is required of a performer in this category are a place, time, audience and himself. And unlike in the European tradition where the popular art-forms

[86] Egungun is part of the Yoruba tradition that Soyinka has consistently incorporated into his dramaturgy. As we will see when we begin our analysis, there is Egungun in *The Road* as well as in *Death and the King's Horseman*. For Soyinka's account of the origin of Egungun and how it has evolved over time into a secular performance tradition, see Gibbs, 2001, p. 74.

such as vaudeville, burlesque, circus and musical comedy are distinct from what is usually considered legitimate art, "the popular in our context," as Ogunbiyi has further observed "must be considered complex even as it involves an expression of physical pleasure and joy" (ibid.). Drama presentations in which amusement and entertainment are at their core such as the Annang of Ibibio, the Hausa comical arts of *Yakamanci,* Yoruba *Alarinjo* theatre[87] will serve as a few examples of popular tradition form of Nigerian drama.

Finally, we have the Yoruba travelling theatre – otherwise known as the Yoruba folk opera theatre companies – the category of contemporary professional touring theatre groups founded by artists such as the late Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo as well as other theatre groups that emerged after them. The travelling theatre was greatly influenced by the first two categories of traditional forms of drama, on the one hand, and by European colonisation, on the other. Therefore, one can argue that the concepts of intraculturalism and interculturalism are synonymous with the growth of Nigerian drama from the outset. Further, it is important to reiterate here that it is the travelling theatre in particular that laid the foundation upon which Soyinka and other Nigerian first generation writers who are the pioneers of the literary form of drama (Ogunbiyi's second classification of Nigerian form of drama) built their careers as dramatists. In fact, as Ogunbiyi has noted in his essay, 'The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo', "Soyinka's aesthetics of rearranging history could be traced to the work of Duro Ladipo" (Ogunbiyi 1981, 345). Similarly, Martin Banham argues that "it is a mistake to accept too uncritically a view of Wole Soyinka as being one of leader and led" (Banham 1972, 10). To do so, Banham contends, "would be to overlook the considerable role of the folk opera company ...who work mainly in Yoruba" (ibid.). In the light of these two important observations, a critical analysis of the works of Nigerian literary dramatists such as Soyinka ought to begin with an appraisal of the emergence of the Yoruba travelling theatre and how the movement was shaped to a great extent by the advent of colonisation.

3.2 The Emergence of Professional Theatre in Nigeria

The first professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, The Ogunde Concert Party, was founded in Nigeria in 1945, as earlier mentioned, by Hubert Ogunde whom many would regard as the founding father of

[87] The Alarinjo theatre is the traditional form of Nigerian drama that would later evolve into the Yoruba travelling theatre. For more on the Alarinjo Theatre see Adedeji, 1981, pp. 221-247

modern Nigerian theatre. Ogunde was a policeman by profession. His talents as a man of the theatre, however, came to the fore when as the choirmaster of the Lagos-based Church of the Lord, he successfully presented selected biblical scenes in-between songs he was asked to compose and arrange for the Church's Service of Songs. The following year, Ogunde resigned from the Police Force and concentrated full time on doing theatre work. At first he was performing religious plays but within a short time he began to explore the social issues of the day. One of his earliest plays *Strike and Hunger* (1945) was banned in some parts of Nigeria by the then colonial authorities because of their anxiety that the play could incite workers to go on strike. Similarly, one of his most famous plays, *Bread and Bullet* (1950) was inspired by an actual event in which some coal miners were shot. And his *Yoruba Ronu!* (1965), literally a call for the Yoruba people to use their heads and think, was banned by the then government of the Western Region of Nigeria who claimed the play foregrounded the cause of a rival party.[88] Truly, Ogunde, as Soyinka has rightly observed "must be saying something really dangerous, or something worth listening to" (Gibbs 2001, 108). And, perhaps, something worth emulating, one may add, because by 1947 another travelling theatre troupe known as Ogunmola's Theatre Party was founded by Kola Ogunmola.

Ogunmola was a former school teacher, who concentrated more on the dramatization of Biblical themes and fairy stories and thereby avoiding social or political issues.[89] For a few years, his troupe and Ogunde's remained the most popular until Duro Ladipo National Theatre, the most "artistically ambitious" (White 1974, 150) of all these travelling theatre troupes was founded by Duro Ladipo.[90] Ladipo, just as Ogunde, began his career in the church as a music composer. But in 1961, he caused a controversy in his church when he introduced Yoruba drums, which Church members associated with pagan worship, into his music composition. As a result he began to present his composition outside the church and the fact that he incorporated traditional Yoruba drums into his music was one of the things that ultimately set him apart from his predecessors and peers. Also for drawing upon Yoruba historical legends, Ladipo became the first writer of Yoruba tragic operas. "Duro Ladipo introduced genuinely traditional Yoruba instruments, the *bata*,[91] the *dundun*,[92] the *sekere*"[93] (Ogunbiyi 1981, 341), as Ogunbiyi

[88] For more on Ogunde's Theatre see, Clark, 1981, pp. 295-320.

[89] For more on Ogunmola's Theatre see Beier, 198. pp.295-331.

[90] For Duro Ladipo's Theatre see Ogunbiyi, 1981, pp. 333-353. Ladipo, however, will be discussed briefly in chapter seven.

[91] The Bata drum is shaped like a cone and it is played at both ends simultaneously with a leather beater and the

has noted in his essay, 'The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo'. "He recruited traditional drummers, dancers and singers, and proceeded to immerse himself in the serious study of classical Yoruba music, poetry and history" (ibid.). One real testament to Ladipo's resourcefulness is that his play, *Oba Waja* derived its material from the historical event which inspired *Death and the King's Horseman*, one of Soyinka's most important tragic plays. But it needs to be stressed that these Travelling theatre troupes performed in the Yoruba language and in a way, they significantly helped "the strengthening and confirmation of the cultural identity of the Yoruba people" (Fischer-Lichte 1990, 17), which, one can argue, is also Soyinka's preoccupation in his corpus of drama, though, as already indicated, he writes in the English language.

Drama, be it in its sacred form as it has always existed in traditional African ritual ceremonies and festivals, or in its evolving secularised hybrid form as evident in the theatrical offerings of the travelling theatre groups, has always enjoyed great audiences in Nigeria. As Akinwumi Isola has written in his essay 'Modern Yoruba Drama', "The Yoruba people are great theatre goers. That is why about a hundred professional theatre groups can thrive among them today" (Isola 1981, 407). To reinforce his point Isola goes on to remark on the record number of 14,000 audience members estimated to have watched a single performance of a play titled *Efunsetan Aniwura* when it was staged in Liberty Stadium, a football stadium in Ibadan. (This certainly brings to mind what obtained in ancient Greece, during the time of classical Greek tragedians, namely Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles). And there was no doubt that Soyinka was well aware that Nigerians loved good theatre and would attend in large number if a good performance that resonated with them was on offer. "I come from an advantaged area, one in which people go to see plays" (Gibbs 2001, 93) was how Soyinka began his response, when James Gibbs posed the question: "How can the theatre compete with soccer and music for the attention of Zimbabweans. How can we encourage the public to go to the theatre?" (ibid.), to Soyinka in an interview recorded in Zimbabwe in 1981. "I mean all that one of the folk opera troupes has to do is arrive in the morning, drum through the city," (ibid.) Soyinka adds, "go through the town in a hired lorry with posters on it saying: 'We are appearing at so-and-so place tonight' and believe me two hours before the play is due to

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hand. It is synonymous with bata dance for which Sango, the god of thunder and lightning was famous.

[92] The talking drum, *dundun*, as already discussed in the previous chapter is also known as *Iya-ilu* (mother of drum).

[93] *Sekere* can be translated as 'shakers' or 'maracas' made out of a big gourd that is dried out. The gourd is covered with cowries and by hitting the cowries against the gourd and a wave-like sound is produced. As we discussed in the new theoretical model, sekere sometimes accompany the talking drum ensemble.

begin the place is already full" (ibid.).

In light of the fact that there seemed to be a vibrant theatre audience cultivated by the Yoruba professional theatre groups on which Wole Soyinka could capitalise, one cannot but wonder why Soyinka's plays which are clearly influenced by the dramatic elements of Yoruba ritual do not resonate so much with Nigerian audiences. "The most cursory look at contemporary Nigerian theatre would seem to further confirm the presumed separation between the popular and the literary" (Jeyifo 1981, 411), writes Biodun Jeyifo. "Our most talented, accomplished literary dramatists do not remotely begin to approach the vast popularity of the professional theatre groups", Jeyifo adds, "who, in the main are not writers or producers of lasting dramatic writing" (ibid., 411-412). Needless to say Soyinka is at the top of Jeyifo's list.

Femi Euba, another Nigerian scholar, draws the same conclusion as Jeyifo when he asserts that plays written in English have not enjoyed the kind of reception "that would normally greet an Ogunde play" (Euba 1981, 391). Euba adds that "the general nonchalant attitude of the Lagos audience [for example] towards the plays written in English", means that "most Nigerian playwrights writing in English find it difficult to hold a substantial Nigerian audience or fill the theatre" (ibid.). To support his thesis Euba then proceeds to examine the works of Soyinka and Ola Rotimi[94] whom he refers to as the "two of the leading Nigerian playwrights" (ibid.). In the final analysis, it is obvious that Soyinka's plays (more so, his serious plays including those that are classified as Yoruba tragedy) do not command the kind of

[94] Rotimi was a renowned Nigerian playwright/director, who died suddenly in 2000 at the age of 62. He was Soyinka's contemporary and arguably his plays commanded greater audiences in Nigeria, because his plays are much easier to understand. In fact, Euba's essay demonstrates that among Nigerian audiences, Rotimi was more popular. It is also worth pointing out that Rotimi is the only Nigerian theatre maker who had a formal training in play writing and directing having obtained a B.F.A at Boston University before proceeding to the Yale School of Drama. However Rotimi was not as internationally known as Soyinka and he himself had acknowledged the influence Soyinka's theatre had on his work. Nevertheless, in my humble view Rotimi was the king of Nigerian drama and not Soyinka as Ahmed Yerima had contended in his essay entitled 'Agonies of the would-be potentates: Soyinka and the challenges of New Nigerian dramatists' in which he asserts that "Soyinka is undoubtedly the King of Nigerian drama". For Yerima's essay see, www.caferaficana.com/Tributes-Wole Soyinka.html (accessed on November 24, 2011). And for more on Rotimi, see Uwatt, 2002. See also 'Ola Rotimi Interviewed' *New Theatre Magazine*, Volume XII, No, 2 (1972), p. 5.

audiences as the performances of the Yoruba professional travelling theatre groups did. There has to be an explanation for this and so it will be important to ascertain who Soyinka actually considers to be his audience. "What do you personally conceive of as your audience? Are you writing for Nigerians or writing for the world?", Lewis Nkosi asked Soyinka in 1962. "I do not think of any audience when I write", Soyinka responded,

> I write in the firm belief that there must be at least a hall full of people who are sort of on the same wavelength as mine from every stratum of society and there must be at least a thousand people who are able to feel the same way as I do about something. So when I write, I write in the absolute confidence that it must have an audience; but production is different. I will adapt, I will alter any play in production for the particular audience I am working for [....] But in actual writing, I don't think I need to bother my head, or anybody need bother their heads at all about the audience, whether Nigerian or the European (Nkosi 1972, 177).

Soyinka would lead us to believe that he is one writer who does not bother much about the audience for whom he writes. However, it is apparent that he is prepared to adapt and alter his plays in production to suit the particular audience he is working for. No writer writes in a vacuum. And as Ngugi wa Thiong'o has reminded us it is the, "reception (or consumption) of the work [that] completes the whole process involving that particular artistic object" (wa Thiong'o 1986, 82). One can argue, therefore, that Soyinka's assertion as cited above is inherently contradictory given the fact that he is first and foremost a playwright. Of course, Soyinka is the author of two novels, namely, *The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1973), but he does not regard himself as a novelist. "I am not a keen novelist. And I don't consider myself a novelist," he once declared,

> I turned to it at that particular time because it was not possible for me at that time to function in the theatre..... So I don't consider myself a novelist. And the novel for me is not a very congenial form. Basically, I don't even like the novel (Wilkinson 2001, 158).

So, if Soyinka is unequivocal about the fact that he is a dramatist and not a novelist and also realises the fact that "a play on the page is really dead and cold" (Gibbs 2001, 101) and its writing incomplete until it is fleshed out live on stage, why then has Soyinka never bothered to make the effort to write more accessible plays in order for "our people" (Osofisan 1994, 40), as Osofisan has described the teeming population of Nigerians, to enjoy.

3.3 The Question of Complexity in Soyinka's Aesthetics

In an interview, recorded with Soyinka in 1974, John Agetua asked him if he deliberately writes in a way that it will pose difficulties for his readers:

> Agetua: Some critics say your works are difficult. For, example, the opening sentence in *The Interpreters* "Metal on Concrete jars my drink lobes," would put any average reader off. Is there any conscious effort on your part to blur meaning?
>
> Soyinka: No. I have to concede, since I also consider myself a critic. I tend towards what is called the elliptical style of writing. That's not deliberate, it's just a deliberate quirk about which I cannot do much. But I deny absolutely any attempt to mystify or to create obscurities. Certainly, if I thought that the first sentence of any work I wrote is going to put anybody off, I'd change it immediately (Agetua 2001, 35).

So, it has never been Soyinka's intention to deliberately leave what Osofisan calls "swampy distance between himself and his audience" (Osofisan 1994, 52), but in Soyinka's view, "complex subjects sometimes elicit from the writer complex treatments" (Agetua 2001, 35). The argument Soyinka is advancing here is that certain subject matters that are characteristically supernatural can only be communicated in an incomprehensible or rather metaphysical language. Soyinka's poetry, 'To My First White Hairs'[95] and his non-fiction, *The Man Died* (1972) and *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996) are three examples that come to mind here. However, Soyinka's drama is our concern. And, lest we forget, his tragic plays that we will be focussing on in this thesis are deeply embedded in Yoruba culture and not, as Esiaba Irobi has put it, "a MacDonalds or Disneyland culture" (Irobi 2005, 7). And as Irobi has further explained, "the Yorubas have some of the most sophisticated and complex and metaphysical and performative cultures in the world" (ibid). Soyinka himself has reinforced this point when he stressed that a Yoruba fiction, such as D. O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*,[96] "is a head cracker for indigenous Yoruba speakers" (Agetua 2001, 35).

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[95] The first two lines of the poem read: "Hirsute hell chimney-spouts, black thunder throes/confluence of coarse cloudfleeces - my head sir! - scour brush...

[96] Soyinka translated Fagunwa's fiction to English in the 1960s, but interestingly in the section that I cited from his interview with Agetua, he used his own English title, *A Forest of a Thousand Demons*, as against the Yoruba title that I have used here. Perhaps Soyinka was conscious that many of his listeners would not understand if he gave the Yoruba title of Fagunwa's novel. In my view, it would have been better if he had shed more light, during the

However, Soyinka's medium of expressing all of these complicated Yoruba cultural paradigms is a foreign language, which means he has to first of all transliterate the deeply-coded Yoruba language into English for his diverse non-Yoruba readers and audiences alike. "I will not go back to writing in Yoruba. No Way" (Wilkinson 2001, 142), he once affirmed. "Because within the boundaries of Nigeria, we have at least 200 different languages", he reiterates and then asks:

> Why should I speak only to the Yoruba alone? I will not accept that. I will be willing and ready to use a language that not only reaches all those people within the continent, but actually expands outside the continent (ibid.).

Inevitably the characteristic labyrinthian Yoruba culture, which is hard to discern for an average indigenous Yoruba speaker, becomes much more complex when Soyinka expresses it in a foreign language. And this is perhaps what Biodun Jeyifo is alluding to in his essay '"Oguntoyinbo": Wole Soyinka and "Igilango Geesi"'[97]

Jeyifo is a Nigerian scholar who has devoted a significant part of his career as a scholar to the critical analysis of nearly all of Soyinka's critical and creative works.[98] Jeyifo's argument in this lecture, however, is that Soyinka's work cannot but be impenetrable because Soyinka is not merely a writer, but one who is gifted with extraordinary visionary and prophetic powers. To situate Soyinka's 'predicament' within its Yoruba cultural or metaphysical ambience, Jeyifo asks:

> How does an "*enia ti Edumare fun ni ebun iran riri, enia to nri orisisi iran* not to say *irikuri iran*," how does

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interview, on the fact that the English title is his own translation. For more on Soyinka's translation see Irele, 1981, pp. 45-75.

[97] Oguntoyinbo literally translates as 'Ogun is equal to the white man' and Igilango *Geesi* is an appellation reserved for someone who is considered extraordinarily brilliant in the writing and speaking of the English language more than the English who own the language. Jeyifo has also provided a detailed explanation of his title in his essay. My source for this paper is *Soyinka Journal*, Volume 1, No. 1 (August 2005), p.18. (Note, as already pointed out, that the pagination of the journal is not consistent).

[98] In this essay, Jeyifo mentioned that his study of all Soyinka writings was published and he indicated how difficult it was for him to unravel the layers upon layers in Soyinka's writing. He also wrote how Abiola Irele, the Harvard scholar who was the editor of the series for which Jeyifo wrote the book on Soyinka, kept telling him: "BJ Don't let Soyinka kill you".

> such a person cope with this gift of visionary powers if he or she is not to be physically destroyed or in plain language, go crazy? (Jeyifo 2005, 19).

In other words, how has Soyinka been coping with the burden of the prophetic gift he possesses? What has he been doing that he is not yet physically destroyed or gone mad? Jeyifo's simple explanation is that Soyinka is an artist, an extraordinary dramatist who has "the artistic means to give shape and form to those visionary projections on the basis of his superior gifts of language, specifically the English tongue" (ibid, 20). In essence, what Jeyifo is getting at is that Soyinka is fortunate to have been gifted with the language with which to express his visions otherwise a priest or diviner will have to be consulted to literally delete, through purificatory rites, all the frightful visions with which Soyinka has been bombarded. It is this same sentiment that Irobi echoes with his argument that the complexity of Soyinka's work is a reflection of the challenges of "interpreting the chaotic process of transition that a continent has had to go through in its attempt to battle with and survive a brutal and implacable modernity" (Irobi 2005, 6). Thus, since Soyinka is gifted to see vision and he is fortunate to have the wherewithal to articulate these visions, Jeyifo's view is that:

> Once one has made the effort to diligently engage the complexity and difficulty that are the surface expressions of many of Soyinka's most ambitious works, the yield in aesthetic pleasure in insight into many aspects of our present social malaise is truly staggering especially the aspects that concern our experience of colonialism and the legacies of that experience, not only in our country and on our continent, but in the modern world in general (Jeyifo 1994, 19).

But here is the paradox. Nigeria's population according to the 2006 census now stands at over one hundred and sixty million, 70% of whom have extremely low levels of literacy. So one is compelled to ask: does an average Nigerian even if s/he has a good understanding of the English language really have the time to put in the effort required to diligently engage with an 'obscure' piece of drama such as Soyinka's serious plays? Or is Soyinka doomed to be a 'Prophet' without honour at home?

3.4 Soyinka's Debut on the Nigerian Stage

The Swamp Dwellers and *The Lion and the Jewel* were the first plays of Soyinka ever seen in Nigeria, when they were both presented by the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society in Ibadan in February 1959. The plays were presented as a double-bill and the production was co-directed by Geoffrey Axworthy and Kenneth Post. In 1956, Axworthy and Martin Banham had arrived in Ibadan, "in the

context of a fairly conservative London-oriented university" (Axworthy 1972, 17), as Axworthy has put it, to attempt to "awaken public and official interest in drama and theatre as entertainment, as an art, and as an educational tool" (ibid.). It will be worth quoting Axworthy further here as he has shed some light on how they went about achieving their aim:

> This course we pursued together over a decade, with the voluntary assistance of literally thousands of Nigerians and expatriates from the University and all walks of life. Hundreds of plays, operas and other entertainments were mounted on the small stage of a converted lecture room....This programme brought together staff and students of the University, the Ibadan community, artists of all kinds, professional and amateur, in a common pursuit that surmounted many unwanted barriers (ibid.).

What can clearly be inferred from the above is that it was the Dramatic Society, which Axworthy and Banham had initiated, upon their arrival on Nigerian soil in 1956 that culminated in the Dramatic Society that presented Soyinka's double bill in 1959. And as Soyinka has recounted in *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*, it was a staff member of the English Department of University College Ibadan who was "on leave at his home in England, [who] had heard of a Nigerian who had staged his play at a Student drama festival in London" (Soyinka 2001, 12). According to Soyinka (through his alter ego, Maren), "He tracked him down, obtained copies of his two scripts and took them back to be staged in Ibadan" (ibid.). It is also worth noting that it was the Dramatic Society that would subsequently metamorphose into the first School of Drama in a Nigerian university, when it received a grant of two hundred thousand dollars from the Rockefeller Foundation.

"The Rockefeller Foundation", according to Adelugba, "was encouraged to render the assistance because of the successful ventures of University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (U.C.I.D.S) and the enterprising work of the playwright Wole Soyinka [and the musician Akin Euba[99]]" (Adelugba 1972, 15). It was not by sheer coincidence, therefore, that when Soyinka eventually returned to Nigeria in January 1960, after his five-year sojourn in the UK, it was on a Rockefeller Grant. But what really concerns us here is the fact that it was whilst he was a student in the UK that Soyinka wrote *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* and, more importantly, it was on a British stage that Soyinka's play was first

[99] Akin Euba is a renowned ethnomusicologist who composed the music for the production of Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* in 1960 that will be discussed in the next chapter.

staged, as Soyinka has mentioned in his memoir, *Ibadan* as earlier cited. Anthony Graham White has drawn the same conclusion when he asserts that Soyinka's play "was first presented as part of the University of London Drama Festival in 1958" (White 1974, 125). This was not by sheer coincidence, however. In 1954, as discussed earlier, Soyinka left Nigeria for Leeds where he first attempted to write for the theatre. However, *The Swamp Dwellers* was not Soyinka's first play. Before Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, Soyinka's artistic sensibility was attuned to how to liberate apartheid South Africa, and as a result his first two plays were inspired by the injustice of the racial segregation that was prevalent in the then South Africa. The first one was a full length play about a Boer family who got trapped in their farmstead and slowly eaten to death by black soldier ants. Soyinka said he "had to commit the first auto-da-fe" (Soyinka 2006, 27) of his career and set the play on fire because, as he puts it, "I rode the horses of vengeful symbolism to their knees!" and also because "it owed far too much to Eugene O'Neill" (ibid.), whose works Soyinka was studying at the time. The second play is *The Invention*, a one act play that would eventually mark Soyinka's professional debut, as already discussed. So while *The Invention* marked Soyinka's professional debut, *The Swamp Dwellers* was his first ever play to be produced anywhere in the world.

But it was after Soyinka had armed himself with a B.A Honours degree, an eighteen-month theatre experience and a Rockefeller Research Fellowship grant before he decided to return to Nigeria on January 1, 1960. His aim was to familiarise himself with his native country's culture and traditions as a possible resource for both his theoretical and creative endeavours. It was to this end that Soyinka travelled the length and breadth of the nation of Nigeria witnessing and partaking in many traditional festival celebrations, "worrying out dramatic forms from the mould of rituals, festivals and seasonal ceremonials" (Soyinka 2001, 71). Eventually and unsurprisingly, it was the ritual celebration of the Yoruba people that seemed the most appropriate for him to adapt for the formulation of the new kind of drama which he had in mind. Soyinka's close and personal observation of different worship ceremonies led him to the conclusion that the Yoruba "rites, rituals, ceremonies, festivals are of such rich source of material for drama" (Gibbs 2001, 108). To reinforce Soyinka's assertion, a brief encounter with the Yoruba, with particular emphasis on their ontology and religious practice, will be worth our while.

3.5 The Yorubas

The Yorubas are the people that occupy the South Western parts of Nigeria and they constitute the third

largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Like the other two major ethnic groups, the Hausas in the North and the Igbos in the South-East, that make up the large population of Nigeria, the Yoruba people, numbering well over 30 million, comprise many clans which are bound together by language, traditions and religious beliefs and practices. What set the Yoruba apart from their other two counterparts in the North and South East however, is their strong claim of having one common ancestry in *Oduduwa* who, according to the Yoruba myth of creation, is the first mortal on earth. Myth tells us that in the beginning *Oduduwa* descended, by chain from heaven into a particular location that is now known as the ancient city of Ile Ife. Literally translated as 'the land spreads', "Ile Ife is the origin and centre, not only of the Yoruba world", writes Bolaji Idowu, "but also of the whole world of nations and peoples" (Idowu 1962, 14). If *Oduduwa* is indeed the primogenitor of all men, and if despite years of Western civilization, the Yoruba are still largely positive about this then we can begin to appreciate how deep-rooted and sophisticated is the Yoruba religion – the spiritual and physical demonstration of this worldview. As Idowu has observed,

> The religion of the Yoruba permeates their lives so much that it expresses itself in multifarious ways. It forms the themes of songs, makes topics for minstrelsy, finds vehicles in myths, folktales, proverbs and sayings and is the basis of philosophy (Idowu 1962, 5).

It is hardly surprising, then, that today Yoruba religious practices have spread all over the world. Their traces are in many parts of Africa especially in the West African countries of Sierra Leone, Togo and Republic of Benin. Similarly, they can be found in the Caribbean and South America especially in countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Haiti as well as many parts of North America. This is perhaps why it is said that "no African group has had a greater influence on the culture of the new World than the Yoruba" (Awolalu 1979, xiii). So, what is the basis of Yoruba religious practice that despite the erosive power of modern religions such as Christianity and Islam, it is still practised all over the world and more importantly provided Soyinka with a fillip to redefine the genre of tragedy as it is known in the west?

3.6 Yoruba Religious Practice

"The motive power behind all *religious* behaviour", argues Evan M. Zuesse in his book, *Ritual Cosmos*, "is the yearning for an experience of transcendental meaning" (Zuesse 1979, 4). This yearning is what Zuesse terms: 'transcendental intentionality' (ibid.). In this sense, religion and its practice is human's invention of coming to terms with the irreducible truth of life. Yoruba religion is not an exception.

Although often referred to as polytheistic, Yoruba people, as a matter of fact, believe strongly in only one God, *Olodumare*, also known as *Olorun* (the owner of heaven), the Supreme Being and the Creator of heaven and earth and all things that inhabit them. "It is rare, if not impossible", argued Awolalu, "to come across a Yoruba who will doubt the existence of the Supreme Being or claim to be an atheist" (Awolalu 1979, 3). One of the many ways the Yoruba praise Olodumare for instance is: *Oba loni oba lana oba titi aye,* meaning: He is God today, yesterday and forever. In a nutshell the Yoruba regard Olorun as Omnipotent, Holy, Immovable, All-wise, All-knowing, the Beginning and the End. Therefore, if a Yoruba person's quest (like every everyone's) is to have a happy life, it is imperative for her/him to stay in regular contact with Olodumare, the Supreme Being who created her/him, through religious worship, albeit via "various avenues of regular communication with the supernatural world" (ibid., 92). These various avenues range from a number of divinities to ancestors to other spirits that the Yoruba believe function as intermediaries. And it is because the Yoruba apparently take these intermediaries so seriously and worship them with utmost reverence that many Western observers have come to the erroneous conclusion that the Supreme Being, whom the Yoruba claim to revere, is docile. For instance in his book, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of The Slave Coast Africa,* A.B. Ellis, a British Officer in the late nineteenth century, states that

> Olorun is the sky god of the Yoruba; that is, he is deified firmament, or personal sky.....He is merely a nature god, the personally divine sky, and he only controls phenomena connected in the native mind with the roof of the world... Since he is too lazy or too indifferent to exercise any control over earthly affairs, man on his side does not waste time in endeavouring to propitiate him but reserves his worship and sacrifice for more active agents (Ellis 1894, 36).

Contrary to this assertion, the Yoruba hold their Olorun in the highest esteem and the fact that a Yoruba person will very regularly use His "name in proverbs, in prayers, in wishes, in promises, in planning for the future, in attempts to clear himself [sic] of accusations, in reminding his [sic] opponent of his duty to speak the truth" (Awolalu 1979, 6) is a testament to His omnipresence and awesomeness. Ironically, however, when the time comes for this same Yoruba woman or man to make contact through religious worship, with *Olorun*, s/he has to go through the various avenues – divinities, ancestors and spirits – that the Supreme Being had put in place to serve as His ministers on earth. Hence the erroneous belief that Yoruba religion is polytheistic.

In the Yoruba ontology, there is no clear distinction between divinities, ancestors and spirits. They are all divine and reside in the world of the spirits. While it is difficult to determine the exact number of the divinities that make up the Yoruba pantheon, estimates range from 200, to 600 to 1700 and even more. Some of these gods, for example, *Ogun, Orunmila, Obatala* are primordial divinities in the sense that they are believed to have been with the Supreme Being from the beginning of time; others including *Sango, Osun, Oranmiyan* are historical figures that become deified gods, while the remaining such as *Olokun, Olumo, Oba* would fall under the category of natural forces like trees, ocean, rocks that have been personified or, to use Andrew Horn's term, 'anthromorphised' (Horn 1981, 184). All these gods, together with ancestors and various other spirits, serve as functionaries in *Olodumare*'s theocratic world and every single one of them has a myth as regards their coming into being. Myths after all "arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuitions" (Soyinka 1995, 3). It is Yoruba ritual worship and the myths of *Ogun*, the Yoruba deity of war and iron, and to a lesser degree, of *Obatala*, god of creation, and *Sango* god of thunder and lightning that serve as the resource and inspiration for Soyinka's theory of Yoruba tragedy. But before we attempt to navigate our way through Soyinka's theory of Yoruba tragedy, it is important, in the first instance, to establish the ontology of time in Yoruba metaphysics and the significance of ritual space in Yoruba religious worship.

3.7 Time, Place and Mode of Ritual in Yoruba Religious Worship

In Yoruba cosmogony "traditional thought operates", as Soyinka has noted, "not a linear conception of time but a cyclic reality" (Soyinka 1995, 10), hence the belief in the continuum between the past (the dead), the present (the living) and the future (the unborn). These three stages of existence, according to Yoruba ontology are inseparable or as Soyinka puts it are "denied periodicity" (ibid.). So when a person, especially the aged, dies among the Yorubas, it is believed that s/he has only departed the abode of the living for that of the dead. Hence the saying, *aye lo'ja, ọrun ni le,* meaning 'this world is a market place; heaven is our home'. In other words, the Yoruba people believe that we humans are all on a journey on earth and, as expected of any sojourner, when the time comes we shall all return home just as our ancestors before us have done. And it is based on this rationale that a burial ceremony of an old person in Yoruba land is more of a joyful and celebratory rather than a mournful and melancholy affair. A dead (great) granny or (great great) grandpa means the guarantee of more intermediaries through which the Supreme Being can be reached. In the meantime, while we, the living, are still conducting our 'human business', especially the attainment of happiness on earth, we must continually ensure that there is a harmonious existence between us and those that inhabit the abodes of the dead and the unborn. This,

without any doubt, is the function of religious worship, which John Mbiti in his book, *Concepts of God in Africa* employs broadly "to mean man's act or acts of turning to God" (Mbiti 1970, 179).

When the Yoruba engage, individually or communally, in this 'act of turning to God', normally it is highly ritualistic in the sense that it "is expected to be done in reverence and in an appropriate manner and mood, if the desired effect is to be achieved" (Awolalu 1979, 99). Although Yoruba religious worship could take whatever form, depending on the circumstances that presuppose it, the desired effect is always the same: a person's desire to seek "a divine strength to sustain him in the fulfilment of his [sic] destiny here on earth" (ibid., 98). If, on the other hand, one shirks away from performing these rites and ceremonies accordingly, the consequences to the "individual or to the community" can be calamitous. Thus, it is a matter of adhering to the Yoruba dictum: "do it as prescribed to ensure the outcome is as predicted". Omosade Awolalu sheds more light on this when he posits that for worship to be meaningful, besides the belief in the power and position of the divine that it has to be engendered by, it should also,

> have specialists, who know the approach to the sacred, and who can give necessary guidance to the devotees as to where, when and how worship is to be conducted (Awolalu 1979, 118).

The fact that the location (where), timing (when) and the manner (how) of this worship are so important that they must be overseen by specialists is, arguably, what makes them ritual ceremonies. Each of Soyinka's tragic plays under discussion in this thesis is inspired by one Yoruba ritual ceremony or the other and each is also peppered with all the elements of ritual worship namely music, dance, mime, chants. In fact, one can argue that the highlight of each of these plays is a ritual ceremony that takes place at an appointed time and at the appropriate place (or at the wrong time and in the wrong location as it is the case the second time around in *The Road* as will be discussed in chapter six). In *Dance* the ceremony happened at dawn in a clearing in the forest, the location of the totem that was carved by Demoke; in *The Bacchae*, it is in King Pentheus' palace where his severed head, which is on display, is oozing out wine; in *The Road*, it is initially on the motor road during the *egungun* festival and later on in the Professor's road side shack; and in *Horseman*, the ritual suicide of Elesin begins at midnight in the market place, before its calamitous interruption. One thing that all of these locations have in common (except the Professor's road side shack of course) is that they are the kind of space in which the distinction between the living and the dead or humanity and divinity is indistinguishable. In my view,

these spaces are reminiscent of crossroads in Yoruba towns and villages where sacrifices are usually placed in the middle of the night by individuals who have been asked by their herbalists to offer sacrifice, for one reason or the other, to Esu, the trickster god. In Yoruba ontology, the crossroad is the home of Esu, who is also the god of confusion. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Soyinka relies on setting such as the crossroad as well as various other aspects of Yoruba sacrificial rites for his dramaturgy. For this reason, one would not be far from the mark to actually designate Soyinka's tragic play as a ritual drama and the stage on which it is mounted as a ritual space. Joel Adedeji has summed up this point perfectly with his postulation: "Soyinka's stage space is a broad spectrum and a dynamic environment where humans and gods interact" (Adedeji 2005, 122). Martin Rohmer gives credence to Adedeji's supposition when he points out that,

> In Soyinka's plays with metaphysical implications (as opposed to his satiric comedies), the arena function as a magic microcosm cannot be overestimated. During the performance it is turned into a spiritually energetic space where the actors may re-enact the basic conflicts of Yoruba mythology to regain cosmic hegemony and to bridge the gap between the gods and man (Rohmer 1994, 58).

In other words, Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy is much more of a carefully constructed theatrical re-enactment of Yoruba ritual ceremonies than a mere entertainment. In her essay, 'Transformation of Consciousness, Barbara Myerhoff draws our attention to one of the major functions of ritual performances, when she states that rituals are "reenactments, not original occurrences, and they are repetitive and highly stylised" (Schechner and Appel 1990, 249). Drama, on the hand according to Aristotle's time tested definition "is an imitation of an action". Thus one can argue that in a ritual performance, the performer is being or embodying the part while in a drama presentation an actor is imitating or playing a part. So it would be inappropriate to think that ritual performances and drama presentation are one and the same; they are similar but definitely not interchangeable. Myerhoff draws the same inference when she notes that:

> Acting involves temporary transformation. In personal rites of passage, the performer is permanently transformed rather than being transported from point A to B and back again. This may be in part because in religious worship the line between "performative world" and "ordinary mundane world" is fine or non-existence (Myerhoff 1990, 247).

Richard Schechner clearly shares the same view with Myerhoff when he describes ritual as, among other

things, "a means of conserving and transmitting traditional cultural knowledge and individual patterns of behaviour" (ibid, 258). Yoruba ritual worship and, no less, Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, can be seen from these important perspectives. It is through ritual worship of their gods that the Yoruba reach out in a mimetic way, to their Creator to ensure a harmonious existence and it is also through ritual that they have been able to pass their traditions down from one generation to the other. Awolalu tells us that "as the Yoruba show their love of music [and] dancing in their day to day life, so also do they use these arts in worship" (Awolalu 1979, 107). But the fact that the Yorubas would incorporate activities in which they engage on a regular basis into religious worship does not mean such a ceremony is less sacred. To guarantee the efficacy of any ritual rite, the appointed time for such a ritual must be adhered to and the designated space of the ritual must remain sacred, even in Soyinka's dramaturgic universe. Furthermore, the mode or manner of worship – which might include music, dancing and singing – as prescribed by the specialist(s), must be strictly adhered to in order to guarantee the desired outcome. It is in this light that it is believed, as Awolalu has concluded, "that the more orderliness and correctness brought into worship, the more efficacious and acceptable the prayers will be" (ibid., 109). I would contend that the same thing applies to Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy. In other words, a successful transference of Yoruba tragedy from page to stage or from source culture to target culture requires a peculiar ritual methodology that any director would ignore at his or her own peril. To illustrate, not only the ritualistic, but also the performative characteristic of Yoruba religious worship which has unquestionably provided the fillip for the conceptualisation and theory of Yoruba tragedy, let us briefly look at the ritual worship of *Obatala,* the Yoruba deity of creation.

3.8 The Ritual Worship of Obatala

The ritual worship of *Obatala*, also known as *Orisa nla* happens at different times in various Yoruba towns once a year and it usually lasts two days. On the first day, the deity's devotees led by *Ajagemo* the deity's priest and also the most significant person at the festival will dance in a procession to the market place where they will be met by the town's Oba, the King. After the Oba and his chiefs have welcomed the procession, the women begin to recite Obatala's praise songs. *Ajagemo* then enters the god's shrine and kills a goat as a sacrifice. After the deity, *Obatala*, the *Oba* and his chiefs have received their share of the offering; all present will then partake in the sacrifice. The first day of the festival concludes with the King leading the worshippers in a dance procession back to his palace. The highlight of the second day of the festival, which presently concerns us more here, is a drama presentation and it readily brings to mind Barbara Myerhoff's view of ritual as a performative genre in which "one performs a statement

of belief through gesture" (Myerhoff 1990, 247). Without the spoken words but lots of songs, an enactment of *Ajagemo,* who is now playing *Obatala* the god himself, being taken as a prisoner and carried away by a rival priest, *Jagun* is staged. The conflict is resolved when the Oba intervenes by paying the ransom that leads to *Ajagemo's* release from captivity. The eventual return of *Ajagemo* to the palace is a triumphant one. What is the significance of this ritual drama?

It is believed among the Yoruba that *Obatala* is the god of creation; he is the deity charged with that important responsibility of moulding human beings that the Supreme deity, *Olodumare* breathes life into. According to myths, one fateful day *Obatala* went to work under the influence of the potent drink of palm wine and as a result the intoxicated god's fingers slipped badly and he moulded cripples, albinos and the blind. Because of this error, palm wine becomes a taboo to *Obatala* and his devotees. So the ritual drama of captivity, ordeal, ransoming and triumphal return enacted by *Ajagemo* becomes the highlight of Obatala's ritual ceremony. As Soyinka has noted in his essay, 'Theatre in African Traditional Cultures',

> The high point of the festival of the Yoruba deity Obatala is, for instance undoubted drama, consisting of all the elements that act on the emotions, the excitations of conflict and resolution and the human appreciation of spectacle (Soyinka 1993, 137).

Now, if we recall Myerhoff's assertion, that "it is the re-experience, not merely re-performing of the original source of distress that is essential for catharsis" (Myerhoff 1990, 149), we will understand Soyinka's frustration as he expressed it during an interview with Adolph Appiah:

> I remember my shock as a student of literature and drama when I read that drama originated in Greece. What is this? I couldn't deal with it. What are they talking about? I never heard my grandfather talk about Greeks invading Yorubaland. I couldn't understand. I've lived from childhood with drama. I read at the time that tragedy evolved as a result of the rites of Dionysus. Now we all went through this damn thing, so I think the presence of eradication had better begin. It doesn't matter what form it takes (Appiah 2001, 134).

The form, which the eradication of the Eurocentric notion that drama originated from Greece, took, as we will see anon, was the formulation and theorisation of a quintessential Yoruba tragedy based on the myth of Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and iron.

3.9 The Myth of Ogun

Soyinka strongly believes that the ritual story of the Yoruba gods is tragic in form and nowhere else did he articulate this belief so strongly as in his essay, 'The Fourth Stage', subtitled 'Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origins of Yoruba Tragedy', which in Biodun Jeyifo's opinion, "remains probably the most important and the most richly suggestive of Soyinka's theoretical writing" (Jeyifo 1993, xvii-xviii). Originally written in 1967, the essay is Soyinka's attempt to propound a theory of Yoruba tragedy, which, to Derek Wright, "has become a kind of Bermuda triangle in which many critical commentators have lost their way" (cf. Quayson 1997, 203). It is in this light that James Gibbs remarks that G. Wilson Knight, in whose honour Soyinka wrote the essay "said that he hoped Soyinka would clarify the ideas put forward in it" (Gibbs 1981, 6). And while Soyinka had made attempts to make 'The Fourth Stage' more comprehensible when he wrote in the preface to his collection of essays, *Myth, Literature and the African World,* that "I have tried now to reduce what a student of mine complained of as 'elliptical' obstacles to its comprehension" (Soyinka 1995, ix), the minor additions, did not impress Gibbs. "I think that even Wilson Knight would have appreciated something more extensive than the minor additions that were made" (Gibbs 1981, 6), in Gibbs' view. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to establish the premise of the Yoruba ontology upon which the 'labyrinthian' concept of Yoruba tragedy is predicated.

According to another Yoruba myth, in the beginning there was only one solitary being, the primogenitor of god and man served by a slave known as *Atunda*. *Atunda* had been a loyal servant until the day he, out of rebellion, decided to roll a huge boulder on his master who was tendering his garden on a hill side. As a result, the original god scattered into a thousand and one pieces; arguably, another estimate of the number of the divinities in the Yoruba pantheon. As Idowu puts it:

> The significance of this myth lies in its suggestion that Orisa was originally a unity; that this is the Yoruba way of giving recognition to the process of fragmentation which comes as a result of giving concrete shapes in the mind to certain outstanding attributes of the Deity or, of that renaming, due to circumstances, by which one and the same divinity becomes apparently several divinities (Idowu 1962, 60).

While one myth suggests that it was to take up their various offices on earth that the gods decided to journey towards the earth, another holds that it was really to inspect humanity and to ascertain whether or not the world peopled by the mortal shards from the original godhead, the common

ancestor was thriving. Nonetheless in Soyinka's view, the notion of the gods' journey to earth to meet humans due to being "anguished by a continuing sense of incompleteness" is indicative of the "geocentric bias of the Yoruba" (Soyinka 1995, 27). According to a Yoruba saying, *Bi o si eniyan imale o si,*[100] but whatever the gods' intention was, it is not as important here as the fact that it was the gods who decided to come to earth. But a long separation between the world which is now populated by men and the world inhabited by gods had created an impassable barrier. Each god's attempt to cut down the barrier was futile until *Ogun*, who must have received, from the original Oneness, the shard which contained the creative flint and technological proficiency, stepped forward with the appropriate implement which he had forged from the ore of the mountain womb and cut through the seemingly impossible barrier. But not only did *Ogun* cut through the barrier to create a passageway; he also plunged into the transitional abyss and cleared the path for the other gods to follow him.

On reaching the earth, the other gods offered to make *Ogun* their king for his heroic act but he refused and each of them went their separate ways. *Ogun* found himself in a small town of Ire where he received a warm welcome. Consequently, the deity came to the rescue of Ire people whenever they were up against their foes. In gratitude the people of Ire decided to install *Ogun* as their king though he was reluctant at first, he eventually acceded. Battle after battle, *Ogun* led the Ire people to victory. The Yoruba gods may bear the essence of purity but as we have already seen in the case of *Obatala*, "their history is always marked by some act of excess, hubris or other human weakness" (Soyinka 1995, 13). *Ogun* was not an exception. One fateful day *Ogun*, like *Obatala*, became drunk when he drained the exceptionally delicious gourd of wine which *Esu* the trickster god had strategically placed in his path during a lull in the battlefield. When the battle resumed, the drunken god found it hard to discern friend from foe and as a result, everyone in sight was slaughtered. To put *Ogun*'s tragic state of mind at that moment of tragedy into context for us Soyinka has often cited the experience of Cuban leader Fidel Castro when he lost all his comrades when they first attempted to invade Cuba. "I try to get into the heart of a man like that", Soyinka explained to Biodun Jeyifo in 1983,

> at the moment when he was the *sole* survivor of a band of revolutionaries who try to overthrow Batista, and the rest perished in the swamps or were shot down by Batista's goons; what did he experience? This is the *moment* of tragedy (Jeyifo 1984, xvii; emphases are Soyinka's).

[100] This means 'the gods are non-existent without their human worshippers.'

As catastrophic as this experience was, however, *Ogun*, unlike *Obatala* who forbade the drinking of palm wine among his devotees for erroneously creating abnormal children under the influence, as we have seen earlier on, still allows palm wine to remain an important ingredient during the ritual ceremonies to worship him. This contradictory creative/destructive nature of *Ogun* to be able "to clear the path and open the gate for wealth and prosperity" but if infuriated also able to "cause ghastly accidents and bloody battles"[101] (Awolalu 1979, 32) is very important to Soyinka especially when compared to the tranquil nature of *Obatala*; it is what qualifies the god to become the archetype for Soyinka's tragic heroes.

3.10 The Theory of 'The Fourth Stage'

The fates of the gods, asserts Soyinka, "are in myth and their creative exploiters" (Soyinka 1995, 7). It is the myth of all the primordial Yoruba gods and specifically the myth of Ogun that Soyinka exploits to formulate his theory of Yoruba tragedy. How strongly Ogun's feat of leading the gods on their downward journey to earth resonates with Soyinka is evident in the following assertion:

> Only Ogun experienced the process of being literally torn asunder in cosmic winds, of rescuing himself from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harnessing the untouched part of himself, the will. This is the unique essentiality of Ogun in Yoruba metaphysics: as embodiment of the social, communal will invested in the protagonist of its choice. It is as a paradigm of this experience of dissolution and reintegration that the actor in the ritual of archetypes can be understood (Soyinka 1995, 30).

It is clear from the above assertion that, in Soyinka's eyes, *Ogun* is the only deity that has the qualities that his Yoruba tragic hero can emulate. Now, if we remember the three intertwining stages of existence namely the living, the dead and the unborn that the Yoruba believe in, we will understand why Soyinka regards *Ogun* as his tragic archetype of Yoruba tragedy. Soyinka suggests that although there are three stages of existence, in-between these three stages lies another stage of existence, which he refers to as, the 'transitional gulf', the 'numinous abyss' or the 'chthonic realm'. This transition stage although "less understood or explored" also happens to be "the natural home of the unseen deities, a resting place for the departed and a staging house for the unborn" is, in Soyinka's words,

[101] The point that Awolalu makes here is worth bearing in mind because this is the premise of Soyinka's *The Road* as we will see in chapter 6.

> what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf (Soyinka 1993, 29).

As we have seen in the ritual of *Obatala*, for a ritual worship to be complete, a sacrifice has to be offered. And as Awolalu puts it, sacrifice is the act of presenting on an altar or any sacred place an "offering of animal or any objects to a deity or spiritual being" (Awolalu 1979, 136). Mbiti on the other hand attempts to distinguish an offering from a sacrifice. In the latter's view when an inanimate object is used in religious worship it is an offering and when an animal or human is used, it is sacrifice. While the distinction between an 'offering' and a 'sacrifice' is not particularly relevant to this work, it is worth noting that some rituals, as barbaric as it may seem, require human sacrifices. Schechner cites Rene Girard's belief that violence of ritual such as "human and animal sacrifice, cannibalism, flesh-piercing, initiatory ordeals..." are homeopathic in the sense that a "little ritual violence inoculates a society against more general and anarchic violence" (cited in Schechner 1993, 260). The notion that "it is better to sacrifice one life for the good of the community than for all to perish" (Awolalu 1979, 168) is, I want to argue, what inspired the theory of Yoruba tragedy.

The whole point of any sacrifice, as already established, is to ensure that a person is in close contact with the Supreme Being through his/her ancestors, the deities, or the spirits. Therefore Ogun's act of plunging into the 'fourth stage' of existence so that the rest of the gods can reunite with mankind is a selfless and sacrificial act. This brings to mind Schechner's important definition of ritual as: "bridges – reliable doings carrying people across dangerous waters" (Schechner 1993, 230). This experience of disintegrating within the abyss for the benefit of the society of gods is what qualifies Ogun to be Soyinka's first actor in the sense that he led the others and he is "the first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first challenger and conqueror of transition" (Soyinka 1993, 30). The aesthetic concept of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy can thus be best understood in the context of the experience of dissolution that Ogun had to endure in an attempt to bridge the gap between the world of the living and the world of the dead. As Soyinka has further clarified:

> It is this experience that the modern tragic dramatist recreates through the medium of physical contemporary action, reflecting emotions of the first active battle of the will through the abyss of dissolution (Soyinka 1993, 27).

What can be surmised from the above is that a Yoruba tragic hero in Soyinka's dramaturgic universe is a

contemporary embodiment of Ogun and he or she must be prepared to physically experience and endure on stage the sense of dissolution that Ogun endured metaphysically in the fourth stage. In other words a tragic hero is not an actor on stage but a performer, whose creative responsibility is to re-enact Ogun's feat in the fourth stage as it is encapsulated in Soyinka's ritual drama. Nonso Anozie, the actor who played the lead part of Elesin at the National Theatre's presentation of *Horseman* in 2009 (which is discussed in chapter 7), summed up the point I am advancing here in an interview he granted Siobhan Murphy which was published in London *Metro* edition of April 7, 2009. "When Elesin is being prepared for death he has to go into a trance, so we've got to get me to appear to be in that kind of state", Anozie explained. "We explored different things and one of them was almost like an exorcism – some people got pretty scare", Anozie concluded. This is hardly surprising though bearing in mind that during religious festivals, it is common to see men and women going into trance in response to the intense ecstatic atmosphere that the combination of drumming, music, chants, songs and dancing create. It is in this light that Awolalu argues that "Dancing ritual dances are not mere emotional responses to the rhythm of music, but symbolic reenactment of something sacred" (Awolalu 1979, 109). The same argument can be applied to Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, based on my earlier argument that a Yoruba tragedy is a microcosm on stage of Ogun's experience in the fourth stage. The tragic hero in Yoruba tragedy in stark contrast to what obtains in Greek theatre is, therefore, a ritual sacrifice, who must be willing to lay down his life for the benefit of his society. Thus the stage on which Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy is mounted is akin to what Victor Turner calls 'The limen' or 'threshold', which he explains as, "a no-man's-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future" (Turner 1990, 11). Katrak has insightfully contextualized, for us, the similarity between the dramaturgical act of Soyinka's tragic hero on stage and Ogun's mythological venture in the fourth stage, when she enunciates thus:

> Each tragic actor in Soyinka's universe performs within a dramatic construct what Ogun had performed in the mythic tale of his creation of a road for the divinities to come to earth to be reunited with humankind is paralleled by the tragic actor's feeling of elevation when through his emergence from the transitional gulf he touches the realm of the gods (Katrak 1986, 48).

While it is inarguable that Soyinka's theory is rooted in Yoruba myth and ritual it is also apparent that he is greatly influenced by Greek tragedy. Ato Quayson, for instance, notes that,

> Nietzsche's move in *The Birth of Tragedy* to extrapolate tragedy from ritual... inspires Soyinka in what steps to take in his own efforts at eliciting meaning from Yoruba mythology (Quayson 2001, 205).

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, "every artist is an imitator" (Nietzsche 1993, 18), in the sense that any piece of art is a reflection of either the dream art of the sculptor of Apollo or the ecstatic art of the music of Dionysus. The coming together of these two opposing forces by a metaphysical miracle, of the Hellenic 'will' in Nietzsche's view, is what gave birth to Greek tragedy. He traces the evolution of tragedy to the religious activities of the dithyrambic chorus; a transformed chorus of people "whose civic past and social status are completely forgotten" as they become the timeless worshippers of Dionysus. In Nietzsche's words,

> Enchantment is the precondition of all dramatic arts. In this enchantment the Dionysiac reveller sees himself as a satyr, and it is as a satyr that he looks upon the god: in his transformation he sees a new vision outside himself, the Apolline complement of his state. With this new vision the drama is complete (Nietzsche 1993, 43).

Soyinka recognises that the combination of the principles of Dionysiac and Apolline is important to the form of tragedy. "Proportion in tragedy is governed by an element of the unknown in the forces of opposition", he asserts, "or by a miscalculation by the tragic victim of such powers" (Soyinka 1993, 34). However, it is only in one Yoruba god, Ogun, that Soyinka locates the Dionysiac and Apolline forces as well as the Promethean essence. "In an earlier essay of mine – The Fourth Stage'", Soyinka writes,

> I attempted to illustrate the essential Ogun using Hellenic concepts as a combination of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean principles. In Yoruba metaphysics, no other deity in the pantheon correlates so absolutely through his own history and nature, with the numinous temper of the fourth area of existence which we have labelled the abyss of transition (Soyinka 1995, 26).

We can see from the above that in Soyinka's eyes, Ogun is the one and all embodiment of the principles of Dionysus, Apollo and Prometheus. Soyinka regards Ogun as Dionysus' twin brother and according to him it is in the same way that Nietzsche's Greek tragedy, in its oldest form, dealt only with the suffering of Dionysus that Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy deals with the suffering of Ogun. He sees great similarities in the two gods because, in his view, it was the same way that Dionysus came into being through the fragmentation from Zeus that Ogun became a deity having gone through an elemental fragmentation from *Orisa nla*, the original arch Divinity. Soyinka furthermore parallels Dionysus' thyrsus with *opa Ogun* in their physicality and functionality, but he argues that "Ogun's stave is more symbolic of his labour through the night of transition" (Soyinka 1993, 37), while Dionysus' is all light and running wine" (ibid.).

In this way Ogun is presented as a more serious deity than Dionysus. However, the two gods share a commonality in their destructive/creative nature. Dionysus, we are told, is a cruel savage and a mild, gentle ruler while Ogun is the protector of the downtrodden but at the same time he bathes in rivers of blood. The similarity that Soyinka however finds most significant is the brotherhood of palm and the ivy (ibid.). Dionysus is the god of wine who led people to a state of exalted joy but also drove them to savage brutality. Ogun's act of massacring friends and foes at the head of the Ire army occurred after too much wine. But "after his dark deed" (ibid., 34), Soyinka points out,

> Ogun in proud acceptance of the need to create a challenge for the constant exercise of will and control enjoins the liberal joy of wine. The palm fronds are a symbol of his wilful ecstatic being (ibid.).

Ogun is not only the god of wine, however, he is also master craftsman and artist and that is why Soyinka identifies in him the Apollonian principle. Although Obatala, like Apollo, is the god of creation, Soyinka argues that he is not a god of creativity because "Obatala is a functionalist of creation, not like Ogun the essence of creativity itself" (Soyinka 1995, 28). And it is for this reason that Obatala's art of creating lifeless form of man (ibid.) cannot be compared to Apollonian illusion in the sense that Yoruba art is essential rather than ideational. Ogun's world is the world of craft, song and poetry. And even if Obatala is charged with creating human forms, without Ogun's ingenuity of fashioning the appropriate implement that helps cut through the barrier that separates man from gods, Obatala cannot create. And moreover, it is Ogun who, according to Idowu gives finishing touches to Obatala's work since he is the one in "charge of the work of circumcision, tribal marking, tattooing or any surgical operations that may be necessary to keep man in good health" (Idowu 1962, 87). Lest we forget, Ogun is also the god of iron. He is usually referred to by his worshippers as *Ogun ala da meji, o fi okan sa ko o fi okan ye na,* meaning 'Ogun the possessor of two machetes: with one he prepares the farm, and with the other he clears the road'. According to the Yoruba, he is the divinity who presented iron and steel to mankind and as a result anyone that uses any implement or tool such as hoes, guns, machetes, knives that are made from them is expected to revere and worship Ogun. And it is because there is practically no one that can survive without using these important tools that are associated with Ogun, that Soyinka finally likens him to Prometheus, the god, who, according to Greek mythology, stole fire from heaven and brought it to earth for the benefit of mankind, hence the Prometheus essence that Soyinka claims that Ogun possesses.

But while Soyinka recognises the similarities between the Greek and Yoruba pantheons he is keen to point out some differences in the moral bias between the Greek and Yoruba worldviews to distinguish Yoruba tragedy from Greek tragedy. In Soyinka's opinion, "The morality of reparation appears totally alien to the ethical concepts of the ancient Greece" (Soyinka 1995, 14). He goes further to elucidate this point by remarking that when punishments happen among the Olympians, it means the mortal preserves of another deity have been encroached "and that deity is stronger or successfully appeals to Father Zeus, the greatest reprobate of all" (ibid.). It was not uncommon that "the rape, mutilation, or death of a mortal minion of the offending god could serve to settle the score to the satisfaction of all" (ibid). Soyinka argues that this is the "ethical basis of Greek tragedy but,

> not as it began in the ritual tragodia but as it developed through the pessimistic line of Aeschylus to Shakespeare's "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport" (ibid.,14).

What Soyinka is arguing here is that the Greeks are at the mercy of their gods going by the tenets of Greek tragedy. The concept of the "psychological base – 'tragic flaw' in the hero – was a later refinement", Soyinka argues, "Oedipus the Innocent remained the archetype of Greek tragedy" (ibid.). Augusto Boal, in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*, seems to substantiate Soyinka's argument when he suggests that the fundamental aspect of the Greek tragedy and of the Aristotelian system of tragedy is to repress, if the principle aim of tragedy is to provoke catharsis. "This system functions to diminish, placate, satisfy, eliminate all that can break the balance – all," Boal reiterates, "including the revolutionary transforming impetus" (Boal 1974, 47). The goal of Yoruba tragedy, on the other hand, is not to induce the cathartic feelings of pity and fear, but to rejuvenate the community at the end of it all.

It has already been established that the Yoruba gods are not above mistakes. Obatala who is charged with the responsibility of creating humans, created, as we have seen earlier, albinos, cripples and the blind under the influence. Further, it was due to excess alcohol, that Ogun was unable to discern friends from foe on the battle field. And lastly, another Yoruba myth tells us that it was Sango's obsession for power as the King of the town of Oyo that led him to commit suicide although his sad end was quickly changed to something more dignifying by his cronies. Hence his name *Oba ko so* (the king did not hang). The errors that these gods are guilty of bring them firmly within "human fallibility" (ibid.,18), and as Soyinka puts it,

> Since human fallibility is known to entail certain disharmonious consequences for society, it also requires a search for remedial activities, and it is this cycle which ensures the constant regenerative process of the universe. By bringing the gods within this cycle, a continuity of cosmic regulation involving the worlds of the ancestor and the unborn is also guaranteed (ibid.).

This means that the benefits that the Yorubas (unlike the Greeks) reap from the weakness of their gods are immense. And it is in this light that Yoruba tragedy should be viewed. The tragic resolution, that may mean death or destruction of the Yoruba tragic protagonist, benefits the society that he leaves behind. It is in this light that Katrak posits that "in Soyinka's tragic universe", unlike in Greek tragedy where the resolution is engineered by the gods,

> The resolutions lie in the human hands of the tragic protagonists who must undergo severe trials and tests of their human will for survival, and who must try to emerge out of the tragic suffering through the strength of that same human will (Katrak 1986, 34).

That was exactly what Ogun did for both the communities of man and gods and that is his legacy to the later tragic art; "the tragic hero stands to his contemporary reality as the ritual protagonist on the edge of transitional gulf" (Soyinka 1993, 36). In other words, it is the metaphysical disintegration that Ogun suffered in the numinous abyss that awaits each of Soyinka's Yoruba tragic heroes. "Ogun's action did not take place in vacuum", Soyinka stresses,

> His venture was, necessarily a drama of individual stress, yet even his moment of individuation was communicant, one which enabled the other gods to share, whose end-in-view was no less than a strengthening of the communal psyche.... The actor in ritual drama operates in the same way. He prepares mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin, experiences the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and being. Such an actor in the role of the protagonist becomes the unresisting mouthpiece of the gods, uttering sounds which he barely comprehends but which are reflections of the awesome glimpse of that transitional gulf, the seething cauldron of the dark world – will and psyche (Soyinka 1995, 30).

It must be clear now why Soyinka insists that Yoruba tragedy plunges straight into the chthonic realm in comparison to the Greek tragedy that is based on the principle of illusion by building for Dionysus' "chorus, the scaffolding of a fictive chthonic realm as did Ogun the first actor" (Soyinka 1993, 28), as

Soyinka points out. But before we see how Soyinka patterns his plays as re-enactments of Ogun's "cosmic conflict", (ibid., 32) it is important to stress that in Soyinka's view, "music is the sole art form which can contain tragic reality" (ibid.,31). By music, Soyinka is not referring to the "European concept of music" (ibid.), because, in his view, this "does not fully illuminate the relationship of music and drama among the Yoruba" (ibid.,31). In fact, for Soyinka, "it is unmusical to separate Yoruba musical form from myth and poetry" (ibid.). Soyinka clarifies further that, "The nature of Yoruba music is intensively the nature of its language and poetry, highly charged, symbolic, myth-embryonic" (ibid.). What this illuminates for us is that Yoruba tragedy is an embodiment of the totality of the essence of Yoruba ontologically and epistemologically, and, therefore, it would be inappropriate to separate music from myth or language from its musicality. "Language is still the embryo of thought and music where myth is daily companion, for there language is constantly mythopoeic", Soyinka argues,

> Language in Yoruba tragic music therefore undergoes transformation through myth into secret (masonic) correspondence with the symbolism of tragedy, a symbolic medium of spiritual emotions within the heart of the choric union. It transcends particularization (of meaning) to tap the tragic source whence spring the familiar weird of disruptive melodies. This masonic union of sign and melody, the true tragic music, unearths cosmic uncertainties which pervade human existence, reveals the magnitude and power of creation, but above all creates a harrowing sense of omni-directional vastness where the creative Intelligence resides and prompts the soul to futile exploration (Soyinka 1993, 31).

Thus, for Soyinka, music and language and their musicality are important aspects of Yoruba mythology upon which his Yoruba tragedy is predicated. In Yoruba tragedy, "the forms of music are not correspondences at such moments to the physical world not at this nor at any other moment" (ibid., 31-32) he clarifies. In his theory, Soyinka also provides an insight into the notion of threnodic essence which, we will be discussing particularly in relation to his play, *Death and the King's Horseman* in chapter seven. "Tragedy, in Yoruba traditional drama, is the anguish of this severance, the fragmentation of essence from self" (Soyinka 1993, 30), Soyinka surmises,

> Its music is the stricken cry of a man's blind soul as he flounders in the void and crashes through a deep abyss of aspirituality and cosmic rejection. Tragic music is an echo from that void; the celebrant speaks, sings and dances in authentic archetypal images from within the abyss (ibid.).

And in terms of songs and chants that are essential in any Yoruba tragedy, Soyinka's view is that,

> The singer is a mouthpiece of the chthonic forces of the matrix and his somnambulist 'improvisations' – a simultaneity of musical and poetic forms – are not representations of the ancestor, recognition of the living or unborn, but of no man's land of transition between and around these temporal definitions of experience (ibid., 32)

From the above analysis one can safely surmise that Soyinka has successfully deconstructed Aristotelian concept of tragedy and in its place he has propounded a new theory of tragedy based on Yoruba ontology. It is worth adding, however, that our analysis here must remain cursory. Soyinka's theorisation of his Yoruba tragedy is akin to his dramaturgy and, therefore, one needs time and patience to deconstruct the theory for a more satisfactory cerebral consumption. Suffice it to say by way of concluding our analysis here, however, that Soyinka's theory in 'The Fourth Stage' and the further illumination of the theory that he has provided in a subsequent essay 'Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype' can be regarded as the manifesto for producing Yoruba tragedy. Thus this theory is a must-read for any director – Yoruba or British – who is serious about presenting any of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies. Finally, Soyinka was not contented with only theoretical postulations, he was keen to put his theory to test and to utilise all the western techniques he had acquired whilst in the UK. So, he put as much effort into theatre-making as his research. Less than a year that Soyinka arrived in Nigeria he founded a theatre company with which he produced his first serious play, *A Dance of the Forests* and by so doing the Yoruba tragedy was born and in the process the complex, post-colonial and transcultural Yoruba tragedian earned himself the title of the *Ifa* oracle of Nigerian literary drama as we will see in part two.

PART II

SOYINKA'S YORUBA TRAGEDY IN PERFORMANCE

Soyinka designs his theatre in such a way that it injects a riddle dynamic into his audience. The effect produced is the same as the following statement attests:

Owe ni Ifa n pa;
Omoran ni i mo.

(Ifa speaks in parables;
It is the knowledgeable who
comprehends it.)
(Joel Adedeji 2005, 114-115)

CHAPTER FOUR

The Birth of Yoruba Tragedy with *A Dance*

> ***Nkosi**: In your last play, A Dance of the Forests, which caused a lot of people tremendous amount of agony trying to figure out just exactly what it was trying to do [...] Now as you're the author... we think that you probably might enlighten us about just what you were trying to say in that work of yours.*
>
> ***Soyinka**: [...] I produced it myself – and in trying to see the play take shape on stage, I find that the main thing is my own personal conviction and observation is that human beings are simply cannibals all over the world so that their main preoccupation seems to be eating up one another* (Nkosi 1972, 172-173).

4.1 Soyinka's Homecoming with *A Dance.*

Alain Ricárd whom Zodwa Motsa interviewed in South Africa in 1998 for her Ph.D thesis provides another perspective on why it was inevitable for Soyinka to return to Nigeria when he did. In Ricárd's view,

> If you were in George Devine's place; you are in 1959, Nigeria is going to be independent [soon] so the best things for George Devine to do is perhaps to push Soyinka back to Nigeria. Because may be the problem was that he saw that he [Soyinka] had invented a dramatic language that was really rooted in Africa. Maybe there was an element of that, they [the British] couldn't make use of.... (cf. Motsa 2000, 283)

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when Soyinka was asked what his future plans were, in the interview with Nkosi that was referred to earlier, his response was: "It's simply this – that the sooner we can get a professional theatre going, the better: I would like to be able to work full-time in the theatre" (Nkosi 1972, 177). And true to his word, no sooner had Soyinka arrived in Nigeria than he founded a theatre group called The Masks 1960. However, the idea to set up arguably the first Nigerian semi-professional English drama group was borne more out of necessity for Soyinka rather than design. Whilst Soyinka was still in London, he had submitted *A Dance of the Forests* to be considered as the play to be mounted as one of the events planned to celebrate Nigerian independence on October 1, 1960.

Soyinka's play won the first prize, but when the message of the play hit home the organising committee decided that it would be inappropriate for the planned celebration. So the play was never produced officially and it "was not missed by anyone, dignitary or ordinary", as Soyinka recalls in *Ibadan*,

> a spontaneous drinks party was held by the committee to celebrate the narrow escape the nation had had, thanks to a member who had discovered that the work struck a discordant note in the Independence suite-subversive, cynical, iconoclastic, that it mocked the glories of the past and was pessimistic about the future. The writer 'had been too long away', lacked the patriotic spirit of hope and confidence that was needed for a nation that was taking the first step into a rose-tinted future (Soyinka 2001, 67).

While Soyinka was completely shunned by the Independence officialdom to the extent that his play "failed even to appear on the official programme, which included events that were taking place in all regions" (ibid., 68), he characteristically and single-handedly produced the play with the prize money that he got when his play was selected. To Soyinka's mind, the play "was first performed as part of the Nigerian Independence Celebrations October 1960" as he has made it clear on the cast list page of the published edition of the play in his *Collected Plays: Volume 1.* It was no coincidence that the play was staged at the same University of Ibadan where his first two plays, *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Lion and the Jewel* were staged whilst Soyinka was still a student in the UK. Whereas *The Trials* and *The Lion* are light-hearted comedies, *A Dance of the Forests* is dark and complex. In fact, many commentators have regarded the play as prophesy of the civil war that broke out in 1967 and nearly tore Nigeria apart. Thus, Soyinka is right when he asserts that "I can smell the reactionary sperm years before the rape of the nation takes place" (cf. Gibbs 1981, 11). *A Dance*[102] was written before Soyinka propounded the theory of Yoruba tragedy in 'The Fourth Stage' which he wrote in 1967. Thus, the play is arguably the dramaturgical manifestation of Yoruba Tragedy before the theorisation of its aesthetics.

4.2 *A Dance:* The Progenitor of Yoruba tragedy.

According to Soyinka, "I do not distinguish between gestation (the first idea, its mental formulation, amendments, re-adjustments) and final easy-birth or agonising emergence onto the white sheets of

[102] For an insightful analysis of this play readers are advised, in the first instance, to pursue the chapter on the play in Ogunba, 1975, pp. 69-102. For more differing analyses, it will be worthwhile to see Katrak, 1986, pp.138-150 and Adedeji, 2005, p. 108. I have personally found all the foregoing analyses very helpful in navigating the complexity of *A Dance*.

paper" (Soyinka 1993, 64). But, to many commentators, *A Dance* is Soyinka's seminal play and more significantly it marks the birth of Yoruba tragedy both on page and on stage. In *The Movement of Transition,* Oyin Ogunba tells us that "Soyinka's plays fall into two clear divisions, namely, his pre-1960 writings and the ones starting with *A Dance of the Forests*" (Ogunba 1975, 2). While Soyinka might have demonstrated the potential of a great artist in all the plays that he wrote before writing *A Dance* "in terms of dramatic technique, a sense of humour and even an urge to experiment with new material" (ibid), Soyinka was still essentially an author in search of a theme, Ogunba argues. Prior to writing *A Dance* in 1960, Ogunba contends that "concrete, virile, central idea to unify the experience and give it direction is lacking" (ibid.) in Soyinka's dramaturgy. If we recall what inspired all the plays that Soyinka wrote before 1960, one would tend to agree with Ogunba's assertion here in the sense that none of them can be compared to Soyinka's so-called major works. Dapo Adelugba, for instance, has indicated that it was at his request in 1960, that Soyinka wrote his hilarious farce, *The Trials of Brother Jero.*[103] It took Soyinka three days to pen *The Trials of Brother Jero* as his contribution to two sets of three-one act plays that the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (UCIDS) took on a touring circuit to the various halls of residence when the University College Ibadan Arts Theatre was closed for renovation. In his 1962 interview with Lewis Nkosi, Soyinka declared how joyous he felt seeing people having fun with *The Trials* during its production. However, creating fun was far from Soyinka's mind when he wrote *A Dance*. In his interview with Soyinka in 1981, Gibbs asked: "Why did you write certain plays?" In his response Soyinka provided an insight into how the very first Yoruba tragedy came to be written:

> *A Dance of the Forests*, was of course, triggered by Independence, by my knowledge of the leaders who were about to take over the reins of the country. I realized that after Independence some of those new rulers were going to act exactly like their forbears did, just exploit the people. I was interested in taking another look at that history and saying: "The euphoria should be tempered by the reality of the internal history of oppression."...I thought that Independence should be a sobering look at history, not just euphoria and so on (Gibbs 2001, 83).

[103] Adelugba was the president of the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (UCIDS) during the 1959/60 and 1960/61 academic sessions. Upon Soyinka's return to Nigeria from Britain in the early 1960s, he lent a helping hand. Soyinka did not only attend "every meeting of the society in the first six months of 1960", according to Adelugba, he also made it clear that "meetings should begin on time, no matter how few of the members came punctually". Eventually, Soyinka, in the words of Adelugba, "became infrequent at our meetings as he became more and more involved with setting up his 1960 Masks". See 'Preamble' in Adelugba (ed.), 2005, pp. 1-2.

I would argue that it is the magnitude of the theme which preoccupies Soyinka in *A Dance* and the aesthetics of Yoruba tragedy in which he writes the play that sets it clearly apart from his early plays. As Ogunba has rightly noted, Soyinka had hitherto experimented with traditional African material in *The Lion and the Jewel*, but it was further to writing *A Dance* that the originality, complexity, post-coloniality, and transculturality of Soyinka's dramaturgy began to flower. "In the plays of the second category (his mature plays), the genial atmosphere of some of his early works is no longer very much in evidence", as Ogunba has pointed out (Ogunba 1975, 3). "Soyinka is now in great earnest and he is dealing with matters of great consequence for the life and health of his community" (ibid.), Ogunba observes further. And it is as a result of his earnestness, aesthetically, dramaturgically and linguistically, that the tone of Soyinka's writing changes "from conventional social criticism to acute anxiety about the shape of the present and the fortunes of the future" (ibid.). While the messianic figure in Soyinka's "early plays is often either ridiculous, self-opinionated prig, or a disillusioned morbid character," according to Ogunba, in the plays written after *A Dance*, the messianic figure "becomes a man wide awake to the realities of modern Africa and [he] is often ready to stake everything for the regeneration of his community" (ibid.).

As already mentioned, in Yoruba tragedy, the burden that Soyinka places on the shoulders of all his tragic heroes is to ensure that the society they leave behind is rejuvenated as a consequence of their willingness to dare the 'transitional abyss' from the world of the living to the world of the dead. It is against this background that Joel Adedeji has argued that Soyinka's "theatrical presentation displays a 'rite of passage' – a movement towards the ultimate: through self apprehension to transcendence" (Adedeji 2005, 105). Thus, Ogunba could not have come up with a more appropriate title for his book *The Movement of Transition: A Study of Soyinka's Plays*. Ogunba's hypothesis is that "the central image in Soyinka's mature plays is the road which links the past with the present and continues to the future that is dark, and judging from the present, likely to be grim and cataclysmic" (Ogunba 1975, 3). Soyinka's mature plays, Ogunba argues, are like "a lorry which is being driven along a narrow West African road" (ibid.). On the basis of this analogy, it is inevitable that we return to Ogunba's book for the purpose of our analysis of the British productions of *The Road* (in chapter 6). The task at hand presently, however, is to ascertain the peculiarity of *A Dance,* which Soyinka wrote at the young age of 26, that many Nigerian (especially Yoruba) commentators regard it as Soyinka's canonical work. In fact, Tunde Awosanmi[104] of

[104]Awosanmi is a colleague of mine since my University days in Ile Ife. He is now a theatre lecturer at the University of Ibadan having completed his doctoral thesis entitled 'Mythology and Tragedy: Aesthetic Dimensions in Select Works of William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka', which he submitted to the Department of Theatre Arts

University of Ibadan has argued that it was on the basis of this play that Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize contrary to the notion that is widely held that it was on the basis of *King's Horseman* that Soyinka won the Nobel Prize. Similarly, Joel Adedeji is unequivocal in his assertion that *A Dance* is Soyinka's first major play and "should be regarded as his thesis play in terms of his aesthetics of the theatre" (Adedeji 2005, 108).

It needs to be borne in mind, however, that it is not every scholar that rates *A Dance* as Soyinka's seminal work. Bode Osanyin (also a Yoruba man) has, for instance, contended that it was *A Dance* that ushered in what he has termed 'the university theatre', which, in his view, has tremendous problems. "Chief among these is the problem of communication" Osanyin argues. "The university theatre is still being perceived as academic", Osanyin clarifies,

> It is seen as the sophistry of the ivory tower and heavily disadvantaged in language. English language is its cross, a cumbersome burden which it must carry on its brittle shoulders for heaven knows how long. Starting with indigestible feast of *Dance of the Forests* cooked and served by Wole Soyinka in 1960, the academic theatre seems to have been condemned to non-communication and a cryptic jigsaw (Osanyin 2007, 55).

The question that must be asked is if *A Dance* is indeed an indigestible feast as Osanyin has eloquently portrayed the play, why did it bother the organising committee of the Independence celebration, that they pulled the plug on it. According to a Yoruba saying, "It is in proverbs that the *agidigbo* drum is played; only the wise can dance to it; only the intelligent can understand its message". I am not suggesting here that Osanyin (of blessed memory) is not wise or intelligent enough to decode Soyinka's message in *A Dance* but, for Soyinka, the purpose of theatre, as Adedeji has rightly noted "is to set a riddle, not to tell a story" (Adedeji 2005, 105). Thus, *A Dance of the Forests,* as the title suggests, is more or less an *agidigbo* drum and therefore one needs to apply intelligence, wisdom as well as patience to decode its encoded message(s).

University of Ibadan in 2003. I owe him a debt of gratitude for sourcing and sending me the valuable books *The Movement of Transition* by Oyin Ogunba and *Before Our Very Eyes: Tribute to Wole Soyinka* edited by Dapo Adelugba. It was during one of our lively telephone conversations on Soyinka and his works that Awosanmi mentioned it to me that Soyinka would not have been able to write his most popular play *Death and the King's Horseman* had he not written *A Dance of the Forests*.

A good starting point, in my view, for an analysis of the play will be first to recall our earlier discussion of the Yoruba ontology that presupposes the continuum between the three stages of existence namely the living, the dead and the unborn. Secondly, if it is borne in mind that the living are synonymous with the present, the dead with the past and the unborn with the future and that these three stages of (meta)physical and historical existence will continually impact, whether for good or bad, on one another, we will begin to appreciate the premise of *A Dance*. The 'dramatis personae' (to borrow Joel Adedeji's term) in order of appearance in *A Dance* are Dead Man and Dead Woman to whom Soyinka refers as "The Guests of Honour", the living who are collectively described as "The Town Dwellers" and the "Forest Dwellers" which include all the spirits, the gods as well as the unborn. In this respect, one can argue that it is this play that Ogunba has in mind when he posits that "Soyinka's playground is essentially the Yoruba culture of Western Nigeria" (Ogunba 1975, 1) where,

> he feels at home to choose his situations and characters not only among fellow human beings in a contemporary context but also among gods, spirits and demons as well as dead ancestors, illustrious or otherwise familiarity (ibid.).

A Dance opens with a prologue which Soyinka refers to as "From ARONI, the lame one, this testimony...[105](5)". It is worth pointing out that Soyinka must have deliberately written this 'testimony' for the purpose of elucidating his seemingly complex non-linear plot as well as to put into context the myriad of unconventional characters that people the dramatic universe of his play. "If Soyinka is speaking through Aroni," remarked Ogunba, "it is because, like him, he grasps the essentials of human history in terms of cycle of cause and effect or crime and its attendant punishment" (Ogunba 1975, 70). Thus Aroni's testimony can be seen in the light of the 'Author's Note', which Soyinka has included in the published version of *King's Horseman* (as will be discussed in chapter 7) to warn would-be producers not to reduce his play to a 'clash of cultures'. But Aroni's testimony has a more dramaturgical purpose than Soyinka's 'Author's Note'; it is geared towards an expository summary of the first two parts of the play. Furthermore, it heightens the dramatic impact of the play and thereby serves as a precursor to the metaphysical and non-naturalistic tone that permeates the whole play. To reinforce this point, the opening of Aroni's testimony is worth quoting:

[105] All the references to the play are cited from: Soyinka, Wole. 1973. *Wole Soyinka: Collected Plays 1.* Oxford University Press, pp. 1-77.

> I know who the Dead Ones are. They are the guests of the Human Community who are neighbours to us of the Forest. It is their Feast, the Gathering of the Tribes. Their councillors met and said, Our forefathers must be present at this Feast. They asked us for ancestors, for illustrious ancestors and I said to FOREST HEAD, let me answer their request. And I sent two spirits of the restless dead...(5).

Aroni's testimony then goes on to explain who the characters in the play are and how their past existence will unavoidably impact their lives in the present as well as the lives of their offspring in the future. The stage direction of how the play begins is also instructive:

> An empty clearing in the forest. Suddenly the soil appears to be breaking and the head of the Dead Woman pushes its way up. Some distance from her, another head begins to appear, that of a man. They both come up slowly. The man is fat and bloated, wears a dated warrior's outfit now mouldy. The woman is pregnant. They come up, appear to listen....(7)

From this visually striking, albeit surreal, opening, we can instantly see the coalescing of the past, the present and the future which is the motif of the play both thematically and aesthetically in the sense that Soyinka's main pre-occupation is to employ the past creatively in order to critically comment on the present and to foretell the future. As already pointed out, Soyinka wrote the play to take a jaundiced look at the glorious past of Africa. In Soyinka's view, there is nothing glorious about the African past and perhaps as he himself has noted he 'had been too long away' and therefore "lacked the patriotic spirit of hope and confidence needed for a nation that was taking the first step into a rose tinted future" (Soyinka 2001, 55). In other words, Soyinka is taking a bird's eye view of the situation on the ground and his main reason for writing the play is not to join in the 'meaningless' celebration occasioned by the gaining of independence from the British colonial masters, but to urge "his compatriots to look further back into their own history to discover their own strengths and weaknesses, to recognise the burden of the past in the determining the future course" (Katrak 1986, 138). Even the way the play is structured is to reinforce the notion that the present will always be impacted upon by the past and it is what happens in the present that ultimately shapes the future. As Ogunba has deciphered, "*A Dance* has an overall tripartite dramatic structure" (Ogunba 1975, 95): at the beginning, we are presented with the present as it wrestles with its violent past; in the middle we are given the opportunity to see the past, through a flashback scene which aids our understanding of why the present cannot escape the past; and finally,

through dance, mime, traditional game and symbolism, we catch a glimpse of the future that is indeed very bleak and pessimistic.

In her essay, 'The Staging of Soyinka's Plays', Annemarie Heywood has warned against the danger in regarding *A Dance* as a conventional play. In Heywood's view it is "only if one's expectations are geared to narrative articulation and character development" (Heywood 2001, 44), that the play will appear incoherent. This however does not mean that *A Dance* is devoid of a narrative. As we can deduce from Aroni's testimony the living are preparing for a feast, the Gathering of the Tribes (an obvious metaphor for the Nigerian Independence for which Soyinka wrote the play) and to commemorate this great feast the living have asked the Forest Head, who is the go-between for the dead and the living for illustrious ancestors such as Warriors, Sages, Conquerors and Builders. But instead of sending them past heroes, Aroni the lame one and a deity, whom for the sake of clarity, we may describe here as Forest Head's deputy, has sent the living two restless souls who have suffered injustice in a former life. Ogunba, in his book *The Movement of Transition*, has provided a useful insight into the character of Aroni and why the divinity's decision to send two troubled souls to attend mankind's feast should be seen as a necessary evil. "In Yoruba world-order Aroni, the scarlet-breasted sun bird is an omniscient, ubiquitous and timeless spirit", according to Ogunba,

> Thus when he presents the past and the present and looks ahead to the future he does so as a being to whom the whole of human history has been divinely revealed. We can rely on the accuracy of this knowledge, especially the part which relates to the future (Ogunba 1975, 70).

It is thus to afford the living the golden opportunity to come to terms with the atrocities which they have committed in their past in order to ensure a better future that Aroni has decided to send the living a couple of not-so-illustrious ancestors who, many generations ago, had a connection in violence and blood with some members of the living generation. Demoke, is the most prominent one of the living generation. He is an artist, a carver who has been commissioned to carve the totem to mark the big occasion of the Gathering of the Tribes. However, he was a court poet in a previous life as we are shown later on in the play when we are returned to the past. Rola, a prostitute in her present life, was also a famous prostitute by the name Madame Tortoise in her previous life and she is another of the link that the Dead have with the present. Lastly, there is Adenebi who is presently a Council Orator but was a court historian in his previous life. Each of these three characters has a spiritual journey to make to

atone for the sins they have committed in their past lives and it is for these reasons that they have all been invited to the "empty clearing in the forest" (7) where the violent past as well as the calamitous future will be revealed to them. As Ketu Katrak has pointed out, "the natural environment of the forest, away from society, enables the characters to explore their inner selves and to come to self-knowledge" (Katrak 1986, 140). And the reason why Soyinka regards the forest as an appropriate setting for self-reflection, according to Katrak, is,

> because the forest is the ideal site in traditional religion for the enactment of transformation from one state of being to another, for the meetings with spirits who aid people to come to self realization (ibid.,141).

In a sense the theatre space in which Soyinka's *A Dance* is staged is reminiscent of the forest bearing in mind that the audience is also partaking in the experience the characters in the play are undergoing. So as it is in the religious festival, the audience are not alienated but active participants in the transformation unfolding before it. Thus, one can safely conclude that *A Dance* revolves around the spiritual journey that the three aforementioned characters in the play undertake on behalf of their society as they are guided by the Forest Head who, at the beginning of the play, is disguised as Obaneji. "Forest Head's motive for 'inviting' the three human witnesses – Demoke, Adenebi and Rola – to the dance of the forest spirits", as Ogunba has pointed is to "reveal to them the cause of the present malady and the urgent need for a change of heart if the nation is to live" (Ogunba 1975, 88). In this respect the appearance of the Dead Couple is a symptom of a deep-rooted ailment that needs to be cured for the regeneration of community of the living. And as Ogunba has remarked, the three witnesses – Demoke, Adenebi and Rola – are well chosen in the sense that each of them has indulged in evil in the present as well as in the past (as it is eventually revealed to us in the flashback scene) that must be expiated for the regeneration of the community. Adenebi works as official Orator to the Council and it is through Obaneji's probing that it is revealed to us that Adenebi is vicariously liable for the deaths of sixty five people by the virtue of the fact that he is the council officer who took a substantial bribe and thereafter changed, to seventy, the capacity of a lorry that was built to carry only forty passengers. The following day the lorry was involved in an accident, it caught fire and sixty souls were lost. Rola too is vicariously responsible for the deaths of two men. Although she is not ready to admit it, it was on her account that one of her lovers killed his rival before killing himself. As Rola puts it, "When that one killed the other, was it on my account? When he killed himself, could he claim that he did it for me?" (24). No doubt,

Rola's question is as intriguing as her character, but for the purpose of our analysis here I propose that we focus our attention on Demoke. My reason is that if any character in the play can best be described as the play's tragic hero, it is Demoke although at the end of the play, he does not have to die – as it is the case with, for instance, Professor in *The Road* or Elesin in *Death and the King's Horseman* – in order to transit "through self-apprehension to transcendence" (to, once again, borrow Adedeji's phraseology).

As previously mentioned, Demoke is the artist who has been charged with the important responsibility of carving the totem that the people are hoping will "represent the past and the present as well as the spirit and aspirations of the new Gathering" (Ogunba 1975, 69). By the time the play begins the totem has been completed, but it is not to everyone's satisfaction. Adenebi for instance describes the totem as "rather pagan", contrary to "something more in keeping with our progress" that he was expecting from Demoke. Demoke himself has his reservation about his work. But more controversially, the totem is carved at the cost of the life of Demoke's apprentice, Oremole, who under suspicious circumstances has fallen to his death during the process of carving the totem. Apparently Demoke,[106] who is afraid of heights, has been possessed by Ogun the god of war and as a result the tree that Demoke has chosen to carve is an araba tree which is sacred to the nature spirit, Eshuoro. Oremole, Demoke's apprentice is however an adherent of Eshuoro and it is to avert calamity that the diminishing of the height of the sacred araba tree could bring that he has decided to carve the tree without shortening its height. However Demoke, whose spirit is still being possessed by Ogun, is filled with jealousy as his apprentice carves the tree above him. As a result, Demoke perfidiously pulls Oremole down to his death and thereafter commits further sacrilege when he reduces the height of the sacred araba tree before singlehandedly completing the work. Eshuoro is bent on taking vengeance on Demoke for the triple sacrilege he has committed. The god's anger is evident in the following lines:

> Demoke, son and son again to pious carvers.
> Have you lost fear? Demoke, renegade, beware
> The anger of the silent night. Beware

[106] It is worth noting here that if 'Demoke' can be translated into English as, 'crown reaches the top', Soyinka's naming of the character thus is significantly ironic more so if 'Oremole' can be loosely translated in English as 'parallel with the ground.' It is important to add however that this will be difficult to prove by the virtue of the fact that since none of the names in the play is marked with the required Yoruba tonal accents, it will be difficult to ascertain how the author intends them to be pronounced.

> The anger of the silent wind that rustles
> Not a leaf. I'll be revenged. Esuoro, I,
> I'll be revenged, I'll be revenged.... (44).

It is by paralleling the atrocities that have been committed in the present with those that were committed many generations past but by the same perpetrators that Soyinka attempts to show the repetitious and cannibalistic nature of human beings. In this respect, the real significance of Demoke's crime of murder, (not least Rola's and Adenebi's I would like to add), therefore is that it reinforces Soyinka's view that as things change so they remain the same. As Ogunba has argued, "Demoke far from being the new spirit of energy, is in fact, a guilty, haunted man, the old spirit of death in new clothing". It is this guilt that makes Demoke to query the Dead Man: "Are you the one who fell from the tree?" (25), when he first encounters the dead visitors. While the Dead Man is not the spirit of the murdered Oremole, ironically, he is equally a victim of injustice in the sense that it is exactly the same fate that Oremole suffered at the hands of his master that Dead Man, a warrior in past life, had suffered at the hand of the ancient emperor Mata Kharibu ten generations ago.

How Warrior and his pregnant wife – the Dead Man and Dead Woman – met their untimely and inglorious deaths is revealed to Demoke, Rola and Adenebi through a flashback scene that has been specially arranged by Aroni under the command of the Forest Head. As the stage direction says: "Aroni waves his hand in a circle, the court of Mata Kharibu lights up gradually...." (46). In Ogunba's view, this flashback scene is "the key-stone of the play and is structurally very important" (Ogunba 1975, 97). The reason Ogunba holds this view is pertinent:

> In the first part of the play the action seemed to lack a central point on which to hang all the impressions created by character and situation. This is supplied in the Mata Kharibu scene as the characters in the first part assume their ancient roles and the ancient counterpart of the present crime unfolds itself. Thus the scene functions not only as a clarification of what audience has seen in the first part but also as an essential background for understanding the important scene to follow (ibid.).

Ogunba is right. It is in the flashback scene that the significance of all the respective crimes that Demoke, Rola and Adenebi have individually committed becomes clear. Demoke, many generations ago was the Court Poet and we see how his action led to the death of his assistant when they were both ordered to rescue Madam Tortoise's canary from the roof. When asked by Madame Tortoise where his

pupil was, Demoke's response is: "In short Madame, he was too eager, and he fell" (55). Adenebi is also revealed to us as the Court Historian in his previous life and again having collected a bribe from a corrupt slave trader he testified that the slave ship with which human slaves are transported into slavery was conducive for human shipment. As the stage direction tells us "Behind his back, he (Slave Dealer) passes a bag of money to the Historian, who takes it, feels it and pockets it" (54). It is after pocketing the bribe that the Historian testifies thus: "That is a fact, Mata Kharibu, all his ancestors would be proud to ride in such a boat" (54). It is also revealed to us that Madame Tortoise (Rola) had also caused the deaths of a guard and soldier in the court of Mata Kharibu. When the Court Poet asks Madame Tortoise at the beginning of the flashback "Did not a soldier fall to his death from the roof two days ago my lady?, Madame Tortoise concludes her response with: "He was too eager and he fell" (47). It is also because the warrior refuses Madame Tortoise's sexual advances that he ended up being castrated and sold, along with his heavily pregnant wife, into slavery. Thus Soyinka is telling us that the crime of which each of the characters is guilty in the present is nothing new. It is against this background that Patrick Ebewo has suggested that "In *A Dance*, the man [sic] of today is seen as the man[sic] of yesterday, and just the very man[sic] to be tomorrow" (Ebewo 2002, 81). In other words, humankind all over the world never changes. In fact Soyinka has admitted that while he was writing and producing the play, the uppermost thing on his mind was the evil that human all over the world is capable of. But it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Demoke's transcendental journey in this complicated drama is our primary concern in the present analysis. Therefore, the question that needs our consideration here is: how has the knowledge of his past enabled Demoke to transit from one stage of existence to another as required of a Yoruba tragic hero?

To answer that question we need to briefly return to the present and specifically the point in the play when Forest Head decides that the time has come to relieve Dead Woman of her pregnancy with the following words: "Aroni, relieve this woman of her burden and let the tongue of the unborn, still for generations, be loosened" (63). The stage direction "tells us that Dead Woman is led off by Aroni. Soft rhythmic drumming accompanies Forest Head's last instruction" (63). And when the Dead Woman re-enters a few minutes later, the stage direction tells us that she is "unpregnant leading the Half-Child by the hand" (64). In the meantime Demoke, Rola and Adenebi who have earlier on been led in by the Interpreter are now wearing masks. According to the stage direction,

> The mask-motif is as their state of mind – resigned passivity. Once masked, each begins to move round in

> a slowly widening circle, but they stop to speak, and resume their sedate pace as they chorus the last words (64).

I have decided to quote the stage direction as above in the sense that from the moment of the birth of the Half-Child till the end of the play, Soyinka, with the aid of detailed stage directions, employs not only language but mime, symbolism, dance, traditional game and chant in his effort to drive home his message that as things change in Nigeria, Africa and indeed all over the world, so they remain the same. One can surmise therefore that a would-be producer who ignores Soyinka's stage directions in *A Dance* (and in his other tragic plays, one might add), does so at his or her peril. In fact, Adedeji has pointed out that "Soyinka's method of play composition and construction manifests an architectonic skill which endows it with an archetypal pattern" (Adedeji 2005, 120). Thus Soyinka's stage directions "are cognate with and meaningfully relevant to the 'gestalt' of the play" (ibid.). *A Dance* is a complex drama by virtue of the fact that it was written for the purpose of exploring a complicated subject matter. It is hardly surprising that Soyinka has had to go beyond the bounds of language to powerfully drive his message home. In an interview recorded in 1962, Soyinka has admitted that what he does as a playwright-producer is to try and "interpret a modern theme using one of the idioms of dance or mime" (Mphahlele 1972, 171). Incidentally it is the play under consideration that he instantiates to reinforce his point:

> In a play like *A Dance of the Forests* I tried to use a lot of the rites, a number of religious rites and there's one of exorcism, for instance, which I tried to use to interpret a theme which is quite completely remote from the source of its particular idiom (ibid.).

Ironically it is the fact that *A Dance* is essentially a ritual play thematically, structurally and theatrically that makes it seemingly impenetrable even for "a good many open-minded and theatrically orientated Yoruba themselves" (Cook 2005, 101). But what is important to remember is that regardless of the creative theatricality or cacophonous eccentricity (depending on which side you are on) of *A Dance*, "Rituals are designed to secure man's pathway towards the ultimate transcendence" (Adedeji 2005, 119) as Adedeji has remarked. "A 'rite of passage' demands the cleansing of the concession and man's best way of ensuring an untrammelled passageway is through self sacrifice" (ibid), concludes Adedeji. With Adedeji's remark in mind one can safely assert that *A Dance* is indeed the primogenitor of Yoruba tragedy and if we look closely at how the play ends, Demoke, undoubtedly, is Soyinka's archetypal tragic hero in the sense that it is through his own personal spiritual journey that his society will come to terms

with its past, redeem itself in the present and prepare itself for the future.

After the Half Child has been led in by its mother, we see it playing the game of 'sesan' with The Figure in Red. According to Adedeji, the Half Child symbolises the new nation state of Nigeria and its survival hinges upon winning the game of chance that it is playing with The Figure in Red. As the game is being played, we hear the three masked characters – Demoke, Rola and Adenebi foretelling the future; it is bleak indeed. It does not come as a surprise therefore when the game of 'sesan' is eventually won by The Figure in Red. As the stage direction tells us: "The Figure in Red flicks all the seeds into the hole, the half child scoring none" (66). Shortly after Half Child has lost the game, Forest Head gives the order that the three masked characters be unmasked: "Let them see the rest with their natural eyes, their human sight". As the Interpreter unmasks Demoke, Rola and Adenebi, the first of the Triplets enters. As the stage direction tells us, "It is the lower trunk of a body, with arms. Loose, uncontrolled manner" (69). The First Triplet symbolises the End that justifies the means. When the Second and the Third Triplets enter shortly thereafter, it is revealed to us that they respectively symbolise the Greater Cause and Posterity. The idea here is that it is on account of this trio that human being perpetrates evil on one another all the time all over the world. As Forest Head has said to the Second Triplet's query as regards the identities of the three characters (Demoke, Rola, Adenebi), "Your perversions are born when they acquire power over one another" (69).

As soon as the triplets have made their appearance, the stage direction tells us that "The Figure in Red rips off his head-cover" (70). Unsurprisingly, it turns out to be Eshuoro who, as we might recall, has a bone to pick with Demoke for the murder of Oremole. It is still Eshuoro's mission to avenge the death of his adherent and it is for this reason that he tries to seize the Half Child, as the child goes towards its mother. Although Ogun initially tries to intervene, the Triplets and the Interpreter disarm the Half Child by luring him to join in the 'ampe' dance they have begun. It is in the middle of this dance which Soyinka describes, in a footnote provided in the play, as: "A children's foot-slipping game" (69), that Eshuoro suddenly seizes the Half Child. He tosses the child towards the Third Triplet "who makes to catch him on the point of two knives as in the dance of the child acrobat" (69) before tossing him back to Eshuoro. As the child is being tossed between Eshuoro, the Third Triplet and the Interpreter (who has since removed his mask to reveal himself as Eshuoro's jester), Demoke tries to intercept to no avail. According to the stage direction,

> They keep up this game for a period, with Demoke running between them, until Ogun appears behind the Interpreter, pulls him aside just as the child is thrown towards him, makes the catch himself passing it instantly to Demoke...(71).

As soon as Demoke has the child, everything stops, including the 'ampe' dance that has hitherto ceaselessly been done by the first and second Triplets. The most significant thing is that Demoke decides to give the child back to the Dead Woman. But it seems Demoke has no other choice especially after Aroni's line: "Demoke, you hold a doomed thing in your hand. It is no light matter to reverse the deed that was begun many lives ago" (71). It is a triumph for Eshuoro but he is not done yet in the sense that it is in the very final scene that follows that he aims to avenge the death of Oremole by offering Demoke as a ritual sacrifice. Once again the scene is all conveyed through stage directions. I propose to quote relevant sections accordingly:

> A silhouette of Demoke's totem is seen. The Village people dancing round it, also in silhouette, in silence...Eshuoro's Jester leaps on stage bearing the sacrificial basket which he clamps on to Demoke's head; performing a wild dance in front of him. Eshuoro re enters, bearing a heavy club. Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice, in which Eshuoro and his Jester head Demoke relentlessly towards the totem and his silent dancing figures. Rola and Adenebi are made to sprinkle libation on the scene. Demoke headed towards his handiwork faded away, and reappears at the foot of the totem, the crowd parting in silence. He begins to climb, hampered further by the load on his head. There are only drums, Eshuoro and his Jester have stopped dancing. Slowly Demoke disappears from view....Eshuoro rushes out in a frenzy. Return at the totem with a fire brand; sets fire to the tree. Enter Ogun catches Demoke as he falls. Blackout (72).

All of the above apparently happens overnight; the same period that the botched ritual sacrifice of Elesin as we will see in the subsequent analysis of *Death and the King's Horseman* takes place. But, as can be deduced from the stage direction that I have cited in great detail above, before Demoke hits the ground, he is caught by Ogun the god, who from the beginning has admitted liability for the death of Oremole. Thus Demoke is saved from a most tragic death. When he eventually opens his eyes, it is already the dawn of a new day and all that has happened previously is more or less a dream or hypnosis. But his father, the Old Man is curious to know the knowledge that his son has acquired during his spiritual journey: "Safe! What did you see, what did you see?" (72), he asks Demoke repeatedly, but as a Yoruba adage goes, it is impossible for the mouth to convey what the eyes have seen. This is perhaps

why Soyinka feels that words are not adequate to express the ritual undertone of the final scene of this play. And lest we forget the play is entitled *A Dance* (as against *A Conversation*) *of the Forests*. Having said that, the last words as uttered by Demoke in response to his father's suggestion of a sacrifice to demand "the path of expiation" (73), are very pertinent. When the Old Man realises what his son has seen whilst in the forest overnight, his instincts was to do an 'etutu', the expiatory ritual that the Yoruba believe is required when the living has seen what any living should not see. But in the words of Demoke,

> Expiation? We three who lived many lives in this one night, have we not done enough? Have we not felt enough for the memory of our remaining lives? (73).

In other words, the future of the society will be determined by the knowledge that has newly been acquired through the baptism of fire which Demoke as a tragic hero had undergone overnight and not through any expiation. Against this backdrop one can safely surmise that *A Dance* is Soyinka's template for his subsequent tragic plays including *Kongi's Harvest*, *Camwood on the Leaves, The Strong Breed, The Bacchae of Euripides, The Road*, and *Death and the King's Horseman*. An in-depth analysis of the intercultural presentation, on the British stage, of the three latter plays is the focus of the next three chapters. But to bring this chapter to conclusion I want to argue that although it was Soyinka who directed the première production of *A Dance* for a Nigerian audience, it did not make the production any less cross-cultural.

4.3 Crossing Cultures with *A Dance*

To briefly appraise the various level of cross-culturality inherent in the writing and staging of the world premiere of *A Dance of the Forests*, which is undeniably the first Yoruba tragedy, we may need to part ways with Ric Knowles here as we need to avail of some of the terms with which he claims he would not concern himself in order to "focus on the contested, unsettling, and often unequal space between cultures spaces that can function in performance as sites of negotiation"[107] (Knowles 2010, 4). Lo and

[107] It is my view that here Knowles is being 'Canadacentric' bearing in mind that Canada is a bicultural society where French and English are spoken side by side. But what about a multicultural society such as Nigeria where there are more than 250 distinct groups of nations with their mores, languages, peoples and customs? Would it be right to call the cultural exchange between three or more of these nations intercultural? It is in this light that I prefer the term cross-culturality in the sense that within that term, we can also have interculturalism and all its other semantic permutations as I will argue shortly.

Gilbert, for example, note that "Cross-Cultural theatre inevitably entails a process of encounter and negotiation between different cultural sensibilities" (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, 31). They also point out that "Cross-cultural processes may also be an important part of the working practices, especially in regions with bicultural or multicultural populations" (ibid., 35). It is, therefore, through the lens of cross-culturalism that I propose to view Soyinka's writing and the subsequent production of *A Dance* in 1960. As already discussed in our analysis of interculturalism in chapter two, a performance can be cross-cultural socially, geographically or historically. In my own view, the fact that Soyinka directed *A Dance* with Nigerian-based performers and for a Nigerian audience less than a year after he returned to Nigeria means the production of *A Dance* was unavoidably cross-cultural. Martin Banham, for instance, observes that "Soyinka brought to the Nigerian theatre a sophisticated sense of stagecraft and technique that set a target and an example for other writers" (Banham 1972, 10). Soyinka's experience of and exposure to western theatre traditions, therefore, must have greatly influenced his directorial approach and decisions. In other words, while he was a playwright/director working with fellow Nigerians, their respective cultural and professional viewpoints could not have been entirely at equilibrium. In that sense, Soyinka was a 'foreigner' in a 'familiar' terrain. A passage from *Ibadan* in which Soyinka lyrically recalls how a typical Nigerian father would chastise any of his children who showed interest in joining the drama group Soyinka had formed to produce *A Dance* is illustrative of my argument here:

> yes, we've heard about that upstart and you are having nothing to do with him; you will study medicine and that's that; that no-good is up to no good, just trying to distract you from a respectable course, so don't let me catch you even taking a call from him, and that goes for your mother whom I know has been abetting you in such frivolities. Drama - *ptueh*! - just what is that? Are you now going to join the Ogunde[108] chorus girls, all those prostitutes? Just remember in what sort of a home you were raised and stop trying to hobnob with those types with no background and I don't want to hear anything about him and his bohemian types, that's all they are, dirty bohemians, no background, to speak of. They are dissolute and have no morals (Soyinka 2001, 70).

What the above passage shows clearly is that when Soyinka was working on *A Dance*, his professional

[108] Hubert Ogunde was regarded as the founder of Nigerian modern theatre. His theatrical presentations were famous for their opening glees, in which young female dancers displayed their impressive dance skills. However as we have discussed in a previous chapter of this thesis, the influence of Ogunde and other founders of the so-called Yoruba opera theatre groups on Soyinka and other Nigeria English dramatists cannot be over-emphasized.

and cultural orientations were at odds with that of an average middle-class Nigerian and, as a result, he was considered to be 'riff raff'. In my view, had fortune not smiled on Soyinka in 1986, the year he became a Nobel laureate, it is doubtful if Soyinka would not have remained "a dirty bohemian with no morals" in the eyes of many Nigerian parents. But it was not only social and class boundaries that Soyinka crossed in the process of producing *A Dance*. Soyinka also 'crossed' cultures geographically within Nigeria by incorporating the *Atilogwu*[109] dancers into the production, which consisted of a large cast of about thirty.[110] "When I produced *A Dance of the Forests* for Nigerian independence", Soyinka reminisced in his interview with Ulli Beier in 1992,

> I brought the Atilogwu dancers from the East! And since then, most of my productions have integrated, wherever possible, a wide range of music. My mind goes immediately to whatever is available within my entire cultural milieu (Beier 2001, 175).

From the above it would be safe to conclude that the production and the performance of *A Dance* was both intercultural and intracultural if we recall how James R. Brandon describes both concepts in his essay, 'Contemporary Japanese Theatre: Interculturalism and Intraculturalism':

> Intercultural contacts involve a journey outward from self to a spatially geographical distant other. That distance may be short or far, but the journey crosses racial, national, ethnic, or group boundaries....The intracultural journey also may be short or far, but movement is not outward to other 'cultures', it is inward, borrowing within one's culture (Brandon 1990, 95).

So, clearly the production of *A Dance* was both intercultural and intracultural. But given the fact that Soyinka incorporates 'foreign' elements of Greek tragedy from across the sea into the 'familiar' African theatre tradition to create the first of his Yoruba tragedies, is it appropriate to describe the aesthetic concept inherent in *A Dance* as intercultural?

4.4 Soyinka's Transculturality Defined

In my view, 'transculturality' is more appropriate to distinguish the cross-culturality of Soyinka's

[109] The Atilogwu dancers are from the Igbo part of Nigeria, they are well known for their dare-devil, well-choreographed, energetic display.

[110] See *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*, p. 68.

dramaturgy on page from the interculturality of its performance on stage. Interculturality, as previously discussed, is possible within Nigeria and, therefore, it is not adequate to describe Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy. As a theorist and dramatist, Soyinka crosses intercontinental boundaries to create his Yoruba tragedy and it is on this basis that I have argued earlier that it is condescending to term Soyinka's aesthetics as syncretic. In fact, on the face of the available evidence, I would contend here that it is also reductionism to regard Soyinka's dramaturgy as intercultural. But then again, as previously argued, western interculturalism is too slippery a concept and thus what is hailed as intercultural theatre in the west is completely different from what the concept really is or ought to be. While Brian Singleton, for instance, posits that "intercultural theatre [thus] operates in the space between two or more cultures", he then goes on to argue, in the same breath, that "but those cultures themselves rarely, if ever meet, let alone interact" (Singleton 2003, 630). In a multi-cultural/lingual/religious/ethnic society such as Nigeria, the various cultures – notably the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – that have been forced to live side by side by the colonialists have no choice but to meet, greet and interact; in those circumstances, interculturalism is unavoidable. Likewise if it is true, as Patrice Pavis has argued, that "it is the space between diversities and differences wherein the intracultural is most sharply and productively negotiated" (Pavis 1992, 66), it follows logically also that intraculturalism is also prevalent within a nation state such as Nigeria. Rustom Bharucha tells us in *The Politics of Culture* that he was compelled to invent the term intraculturalism for himself "as a critical shorthand to differentiate intercultural relations across national boundaries and the intracultural dynamics between and across specific communities and regions within the boundaries of the nation" (Bharucha 2000, 6). Obviously India is the nation to which Bharucha is referring in his book, but, as we will see anon, his argument is very pertinent to the present analysis in the sense that it perfectly describes the multiculturality of a nation state such as Nigeria, which the western hegemony would rather portray as homogenous. "The intra is useful precisely because it has the potential to debunk such organicist notions of culture by highlighting", in Bharucha's view, "the deeply fragmented and divided society of India that the multicultural rhetoric of the state refuses to acknowledge" (ibid.,9). If interculturalism and intraculturalism are possible at the same time and in the same place, I would argue, therefore, that the best way to describe Soyinka's dramaturgy is to add the prefix trans- to 'cultural' to get: transcultural, which suggests that Soyinka's idea of fusing the 'foreign' with the 'familiar' transcends or goes beyond the confines of Nigerian nation state and, indeed, the shores of the vast continent of Africa.

Thus, it is in recognition of the transculturality of Soyinka's aesthetics, I would argue, that a review of

the production of *A Dance* in Nigerian *Daily Times* of October 30, 1960 was titled 'Young Dramatist is Earning the Title of Nigeria's Bernard Shaw'.[111] But whether Soyinka is intercultural or transcultural in writing *A Dance* is the least of Ogunba's concerns. Soyinka has "overworked and consequently over-packed the play...with an extravagant number of movements and symbols" (Ogunba 1975, 101), he argues. To reinforce this point Ogunba likens Soyinka's behaviour to "the Okanjuwa character in Yoruba folk tale who," as Ogunba explains, "coming on a rich store of nourishing food, eats more than he can really digest" (ibid.). But in the final analysis, Ogunba acknowledges the importance of *A Dance* when he remarks thus:

> Soyinka has discovered the store of food and, in subsequent meals, he will discriminate more and choose only those items that are most nourishing and delicious (ibid.).

Whether Soyinka succeeds subsequently in not over-packing his plays with unnecessary Yoruba sign systems is a debate to which this work aims to contribute. What is not in doubt is that A *Dance*, as Katrak notes, "foreshadows the dramatic equivalent of Soyinka's abstract theory of Yoruba tragedy" (Katrak 1986, 143) and, more importantly, afforded the Yoruba tragedian the opportunity to regroup, rethink and test – on home-ground – his Yoruba tragedy before it ultimately culminated in an aesthetic that is too esoteric for Nigerian directors to handle and too exotic for British directors to ignore. In this sense, *A Dance* is not only the birth of Yoruba tragedy on page and stage it also set the cross-cultural template for the subsequent intercultural productions of Soyinka's inherently transcultural Yoruba tragedies. With respect to our new Africanist theoretical model, it is my view that it would easily apply to the production of *A Dance* by virtue of the fact that the play was written and directed by Soyinka. As I would argue later on in this work, Soyinka is not an exceptional director, but the fact that he is what I have termed a 'Yorupean' makes him, in my view, an epitome of the kind of director that the Yoruba tragedies that he wrote subsequent to writing and producing *A Dance* require. So, the focus of the next chapter is to analyse the success or otherwise of the intercultural presentation of Soyinka's transcultural

[111] All my efforts to obtain a copy of this important review did not yield any positive result and, therefore, my source remains Endnote 19 of Chapter 5 of Katrak, 1986, p. 167. Why the title of this review is important in the present analysis is that before Soyinka's arrival onto the Nigerian scene, it is the plays of James Ene Henshaw that was considered a well written English play. *This is Our Chance* which was first published in 1956 for instance would rank as one of the most important English plays that was produced before *A Dance*. For more on Henshaw, see Ogunbiyi, 1981, pp. 26-27.

adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides* as produced by the National Theatre of Britain in 1973.

CHAPTER FIVE

Back to Britain for *The Bacchae*

Participant: *If you are embarrassed by the title Black Orpheus, why are you doing a play by Euripides?*

Soyinka: *Oh, that's two different things. I acknowledge the myths. For instance I have subtitled the play The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite. I simply come to it as a writer. This is a play which first of all has always fascinated me. I consider it one of the classics. It is also very uneven and in many ways, rather a crude play. I come to it as a craftsman.* [112]

5.1 The Author, the Text, and the Director in Context

The 1973 National Theatre of Britain's intercultural presentation of Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides* as directed by Roland Joffe[113] will be the focus of this chapter. The primary role of a theatre director is to transfer on to the stage the drama that a playwright has created on page. "Ever since Aeschylus supervised the presentation of his tragedies at the Athenian festivals of the fifth century BC", writes Edward Braun, in his book *The Director and the Stage*, "it is safe to assume that someone has had overall responsibility for the rehearsal of any play that has reached the stage" (Braun 1992, 7). In his interview with James Gibbs recorded in 1981, Soyinka made a number of remarks in relation to how he perceives the role of a theatre director in realising a playwright's work on stage. Below was how Gibbs posed the question and the response Soyinka gave:

GIBBS: To what extent do you regard directing a play or the production of a play as an essential part of

[112] Cited from 'Wole Soyinka: In Person - University of Washington/1973' in Jeyifo (ed.), 2001, p.10.

[113] Roland Joffe is of Jewish descent and was born in 1945. Described as an English-French film director, Joffe began his career as a theatre director at the Young Vic after graduating in the mid-1960s from Manchester University where he studied English and drama. Before being asked to direct *The Bacchae* in 1973, Joffe had directed a number of productions for the Young Vic making him the youngest director to work at the National. He would later leave the theatre to become a TV drama director before subsequently moving on to become an Oscar nominated movie director.

creating that play? Is the production a separate part of the process or merely a continuation of the initial impetus?

SOYINKA: A sensible question and the answer is very simple – for me a play on the page is very cold and dead and my real instinct has always been to see the play fleshed out. I don't feel that the play is completed until I've actually seen it live on stage.[114] I think I am as much a director[115] as I am a playwright and when I begin to direct a play I have no respect at all for my text (Gibbs 2001, 102).

Clearly, Soyinka does not consider a playscript as an end in itself but a means to an end. But this has always been Soyinka's attitude since he started writing going by the statement he made in one of his early interviews which was recorded by Lewis Nkosi in 1962. "I will adapt, I will alter any play in production for the particular audience I am working for" (Nkosi 1972, 177), were Soyinka's words to Nkosi. In previous chapters, we have seen Soyinka in production and what became of his plays that he had directed himself, but in this chapter and the subsequent two our aim is to ascertain the intercultural presentation of his tragic plays as directed by someone else. So it would be useful to ask: what is Soyinka's attitude to another director handling his play? Or as Gibbs had put it to Soyinka: "Do you allow

[114] Soyinka's assertion here brings to mind an email that I received from him in January 2011. For the month of October 2010, I was in Nigeria at the invite of the MUSON Arts Festival in Lagos to produce *Home, Sweet Home*, a play I wrote specifically to commemorate Nigeria's 50th independence anniversary. A couple of days before I departed Nigeria, I spoke to Soyinka on the phone and upon his request, I left a copy of the script of my play for him to collect. When I sent him an email a couple of months later wondering if he had collected the script and if he had any comments for me, Soyinka sent me an email saying: "Yes, I did collect the script, thanks. No Substantial feedback, I found it an absorbing piece and hope I see it on stage soon".

[115] Soyinka might have considered himself a good a director as he is a playwright, but the jury is still out on that issue. What is worthy of note here is that to date there has not been any substantial research done into Soyinka's work as a theatre director, meanwhile as a playwright he continues to generate massive academic interest. In 2008, I attended the African and Afro-Caribbean Performance conference held in Berkeley California, and in a paper entitled 'Soyinka's Samarkand and Other Markets I have Known: Globalization and Nigerian Theatre in Other Markets I have Known' that was presented by Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. of Loyola Marymount University the work of Soyinka, as a director was highlighted. Having said that, one can surmise that in all likelihood Soyinka is not as good a director as he is a playwright. For instance Femi Osofisan's verdict, having worked with Soyinka when the latter directed his play, *Madmen and Specialists* in 1971, was: "As I saw it then, Soyinka was not a good director". It will be interesting to ascertain what Osofisan thinks today but it is important to remember that it was in 1994 that Osofisan made the comment as quoted. For details see Osofisan, 1994, p. 50.

those who are directing your plays the same unsentimental attitude to your text?" Soyinka's response was: "Yes, I stay out", before elaborating further thus:

> That is what caused the problem with *The Bacchae of Euripides.* I stayed out of rehearsals till it was too late. I stayed out till about two weeks before the opening and then only looked in because the actors were sending me S.O.S.es where I was to come to rehearsals (ibid., 102).

Soyinka's response is instructive for our present analysis for two main reasons. In the first instance, it can be inferred that Soyinka, *ceteris paribus*, would rather stay away from the process of rehearsals when his plays are being directed by someone else. Secondly, it can be deduced that Soyinka was not pleased with the National Theatre's presentation of his adaptation of *The Bacchae*. In fact, Soyinka's displeasure with the way his adaptation was *(re)*presented is the subject of a paper entitled 'Between Self and System: The Artist in Search of Liberation', which he presented at a symposium in Aspen Colorado in June 1974.[116] We shall return to the paper in due course, because, in it, Soyinka clearly articulates – albeit from his own subjective perspective – what went wrong with the production that we are analysing in this chapter. What is worth stressing here, however, is that despite the response cited above, Soyinka still maintained that, as a playwright, he believes he no longer has control over his text when it is being directed by someone else. In his words, "I believe that new insights come to a production during rehearsal and also when a play is looked at by somebody else" (ibid., 102-103). What this illustrates for us is that Soyinka is not only a playwright who is comfortable directing his own plays, he is also unlike other notable playwrights such as Arthur Miller and Samuel Beckett[117] who regard the text of their plays as complete and sacrosanct and, therefore, not to be tampered with in any shape or form by any director or a producer. "But, at the same time", Soyinka hastened to add, "I don't believe in undue liberties" (ibid., 103). It is, therefore, to prevent producers taking undue advantage of his flexible attitude towards the text of his plays that Soyinka writes, in the cast list page of the published version of

[116] For all citations from the paper that I use in this chapter see Soyinka, 1993, pp. 40-61. I owe Adam Lecznar a debt of gratitude for drawing my attention to this invaluable material.

[117] There is a famous case of Beckett invoking his moral right when a French director proposed to produce his famous play, *Waiting for Godot* with two female actors. Similarly, it is reported that it took six months of negotiation before theatre director George Devine could get Beckett to change, further to Lord Chamberlain's request, the word "bastard" to "swine" in the line "God, maybe the bastard does not exist" in one of his plays. For more discussion on the text and its performance, see Carlson, 1990, p. 115.

The Bacchae of Euripides: "This version of *The Bacchae* has been conceived as a communal feast, a tumultuous celebration. It must be staged as such".[118]

One crucial point that needs to be highlighted here, however, is that it was in this same interview with Gibbs that Soyinka had earlier made the point that, "Playwrights are a nuisance anyway in the theatre when you are rehearsing, I always lock them out until a week or so to the performance, then their suggestions are welcome" (Gibbs 2001, 102). It appears that Soyinka contradicted himself in this particular interview. I would suggest that perhaps it was the memory of Soyinka's experience at the National and specifically with Roland Joffe, who directed his adaptation of *The Bacchae* that actuated his change of mind as he attempted to candidly articulate his views as regards what he felt about directors handling his plays during his interview with Gibbs. We must not forget that the presentation of *The Bacchae* under reference here was in 1973 and almost a decade later, Soyinka was still citing it as a specific example of an intercultural production of his play that did not go well by virtue of the fact that he had left it too late before he started attending rehearsals. I would argue that rather than insinuating that a playwright must be present at the beginning of the rehearsals of his play for it to be successfully staged, what Soyinka was alluding to here was: being an intercultural project, it was incumbent upon him to ensure, from the outset, that whatever cultural challenges his 'Yorubanised' adaptation of *The Bacchae* would present, were not insurmountable for the English director charged with the responsibility of staging the work; this, he had failed to do.

"For all his constraints, interculturalism is not thrust on us", as Rustom Bharucha has remarked,

> it is a process of exchange that artists, for example, seek out for any number of reasons – curiosity about other cultures and a desire to interact and collaborate with them; a need for spiritual rejuvenation or exotic diversion or perhaps to travel (at someone else's expense) and, thereby, to deflect (or reinforce) the agendas of cultural tourism (Bharucha 2000, 31).

Thus, from whatever angle one looks at it, the idea of the National Theatre commissioning a Nigerian playwright to adapt a Greek tragedy to be directed by an energetic, young English/French theatre director of Jewish descent was a fascinating and a laudable idea. And while it is a fact, as Claire

[118] Soyinka, Wole. 1973. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*. London: Eyre Methuen. All citations in this thesis are taken from this edition.

Conceison has rightly noted that: "No intercultural project is without its challenges, and these challenges provide opportunity for growth and experimentation" (Conceison 1995, 164), the National Theatre's presentation of Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* turned out to be a spectacular failure on stage and at the box office. It is this same conclusion that Adam Lezcnar has reached, in the lecture titled 'Soyinka's Bacchae at the National',[119] which he delivered on June 1, 2011 as part of the National Theatre Archive Talks series. While "Soyinka's text has gone on to become one of the most exciting versions of ancient Greek tragedy to come out of the twentieth century", affirmed Lecznar, "the original performances, directed by Roland Joffe at the Old Vic Theatre from 31st July to 18th October 1973 were an artistic and commercial failure" (Lecznar 2011, 1). But it is not only Lecznar who, after many years, still remembers *The Bacchae* at the National for all the wrong reasons. In a review of a 2007 production of another version of *The Bacchae* at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith in London, Michael Coveney remembers – albeit cursorily – the National Theatre's presentation of *The Bacchae* as directed by Roland Joffe as "dreadful".[120] The question that begs an answer is: why was the production regarded by everyone as "dreadful"? Was it simply because Soyinka left it too late before he started attending rehearsals as he would lead us to believe in his aforementioned 1981 interview with Gibbs? Or was it the case that the production truly lacked "ecstasy and order without which *The Bacchae of Euripides* is nothing" as Harold Hobson has contended in his review titled 'Agony and Ecstasy' in the *Sunday Times* of 5th August 1973. Or could the trouble be attributed to the notion that "in the staging of his play by the National Theatre at the Old Vic, Soyinka has come into direct collision with the unyielding amateurism of the British professional theatre"?, as Albert Hunt has remarked in his review 'Amateurs in Horror' in *New Society* of August 9, 1973. In other words, are intercultural initiatives, such as the presentation of a 'Nigerianised' *The Bacchae* on Britain's national theatre's stage, doomed to fail due to the fact that they

[119] For the purpose of this work, I visited the National Theatre Archive in June 2012; I was shown Adam Lecznar's lecture paper which he presented in June 2011. I have found Lecznar's view very insightful thus I decided to send him an email to ascertain if he had developed the argument further or got the paper published. Lecznar, a doctoral student in Classics at the University College London, responded to my email attaching a copy of the unpublished paper which he presented and it is from this paper that I am citing in this work.

[120] I came across this review online whilst I was trawling the internet to link Roland Joffe, who is now a world renowned filmmaker, with the 1973 production of *The Bacchae* at the National. It is extraordinary that thirty four years later, *The Bacchae* at the National Theatre is still remembered for all the wrong reasons. For the review go to:<www.whatsonstage/reviews/theatre/london/e8821189413513/The+Baccha> (accessed on the 3rd of August 2012).

expose latent weaknesses in cultures that appear unflappable bearing in mind Fischer-Lichte's conclusion that "the adoption of the foreign is sparked off by a problem which has arisen in the own theatre [and in the extreme cases in the own culture]" (Fischer-Lichte 1990, 283)? But what brought the National Theatre of Britain, a Greek classic and a Nigerian playwright together?

5.2 The National and *The Bacchae*

The National Theatre of Britain[121] (as it was then known) came into existence when it was formally incorporated as the National Theatre Company on February 8th 1963, under the Companies Acts of Britain. Located at the Old Vic Theatre on Cut Street in South East London it was the aim of the company, "to give a spectrum of world drama and to develop in time a company which will be the finest in the world".[122] While the overall supervision of the company was the responsibility of a Board of Directors that was composed specifically for that purpose in mid-July of 1962, Sir Laurence Olivier, the well-known British screen and stage actor was appointed the first artistic director of the National, having been invited to join the board in August 1962. In December 1962, Stephen Arlen, who was Sadler Wells' Theatre's administrator joined the National as its administrator-director. It is worth noting here that before the operations of the new National Theatre commenced in earnest at the Old Vic theatre, Olivier had accepted the directorship of the newly-built Chichester Festival with the idea of running the festival to prepare himself for the bigger task ahead. For the opening season at Chichester, Olivier staged John Fletcher's *The Chances* (first produced in 1638) and *The Broken Heart* (1633) by John Ford. And it was after the latter play had opened that Olivier received a letter from Kenneth Tynan, the renowned theatre critic with the *Observer,* asking if the nascent National Theatre needed a literary manager and if Olivier would consider him for the post.

Interestingly, Tynan had given *The Broken Heart* a bad review, a copy of which he had enclosed therein the letter he sent to Olivier "in case it had escaped Olivier's attention" (Callow 1997, 8), as Simon Callow has put it in his book, *The National*. Tynan seemed to know well what he was doing. It was obvious that Olivier needed to have someone by his side as he took on the herculean task of building, from scratch, a new company of such a national and cultural import. And from all indications Tynan perfectly fitted the

[121] Although the company has been permitted, since 1988, to call itself the Royal National Theatre, the full title is rarely used. This is due in part, I would argue, to the fact that the theatre is generally known as the National.

[122] This statement was made by Sir Laurence Olivier at the first major conference he gave on August 6th, 1963 as the first artistic director of The National. I cited it from Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin, 1978, p. 133.

bill of that 'someone'. "Tynan had his finger on the pulse of what was theatrical current" (ibid.), writes Callow,

> Olivier was always haunted by the fear of being left behind by theatrical fashion; with Tynan at his side he could be sure that that never happened. He would moreover, Olivier felt, add intellectual weight to the organisation [.....] The great actor laboured all his life under a painful intellectual inferiority complex, and was almost too eager to listen to the advice of others in matters of intellectual judgement (ibid.).

Thus it was the fact that the National Theatre needed an intellectual heavyweight coupled with Olivier's belief that it was better to keep one's friends (admirers) close and one's foes (critics)[123] closer that Tynan was made the first National Theatre's literary manager on a one year contract at £46 a week further to his appointment being discussed at the National Theatre Board meeting held on February 14th 1963.

Olivier and Tynan, respectively, "the greatest actor of his day and the greatest critic" (Callow, 8) were at the helm of affairs at the new company. To support the team, two young directors by the name John Dexter and William Gaskill were brought in from the Royal Court Theatre. At the first major press conference that was given by Olivier on August 6th, 1963, as Elsom and Tomalin have noted in their book, *The History of the National Theatre*, the aim of the new company was articulated and the list of plays which constituted the company's first season was also unveiled. The production of *Hamlet* with the well-known British actor Peter O'Toole, in the lead role, was the obvious choice of play to open, on the 22 October 1963, the National Theatre at the Old Vic while the rest of the plays, as proposed for the first season of the theatre, was clearly an attempt to reflect the "spectrum of world drama" that had been proclaimed as the company's mission. This included Bernard Shaw's *St Joan*, Anton Chekov's *Uncle Vanya*, George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, Harold Brighouse's *Hobson's Choice*, Samuel Beckett's *Play,* Shakespeare's *Othello* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* to mention but a few. As regards Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, it needs to be borne in mind that it was Keith Johnstone's adaptation of the Greek classic as

[123] According to Simon Callow, Olivier hired Tynan as the first National Theatre's Literary Manager after "candidly admitting that he wanted to silence a potentially dangerous voice ("Anything to get you off that Observer!")". See Callow, 1997, p. 8. Similarly John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin claim that Tynan used to flippantly comment that he was hired by the National because "They would probably rather have me inside pissing out , than on the outside pissing in". See Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin, p. 130.

directed by William Gaskill that opened at the Old Vic on the 7th of April 1963.

Thus, one can surmise that right from its emergence, modern adaptation and presentation of Greek drama had always been on the 'menu' of the National's offering long before Soyinka was contracted in 1972 to write his adaptation, but for one reason or the other it had been impossible for the theatre to put the plan into action. As an entry which Tynan made into his diary on 3rd of August 1971 reveals, "There had been talk earlier in the day of asking Jonathan M. to direct *The Bacchae* for the NT" (Lahr 2001, 57). And Tynan's view of the idea was: "It would be like giving a bomb to a member of the Bomb Disposal Squad" (ibid.). While it is difficult to ascertain whose version of *The Bacchae* Tynan was referring to when he wrote those words in his diary, it is clear from the contents of a letter dated 23rd May 1963, available in the archive of the National that it was a few months after its inception that the National Theatre had begun negotiating an agreement with Neil Curry who had translated[124] *The Bacchae* in 1960. In fact, a close reading of subsequent correspondence between Curry and the National reveal that negotiations as regards the proposed production of Curry's version of *The Bacchae* were at a very advanced stage and the National would have gone ahead with its planned production had the Mermaid Theatre not announced in June 1963 that it was doing a production of *The Bacchae*.[125] It was not until February 1966 that the National decided to revisit its idea of presenting an adaptation of *The Bacchae* but clearly it had lost interest in Curry's version of *The Bacchae*; it had someone else in mind.

5.3 The National, Soyinka and *The Bacchae*

By the time Soyinka entered an agreement, dated 27th January 1972, with the National "to make an

[124] It is hard to ascertain what precisely Neil Curry did with *The Bacchae*. In the letter cited above we are given the impression that his version was a translation but in another letter regarding the appropriate wording in a draft agreement it is suggested that Neil Curry should be credited as the adaptor of *The Bacchae*. Meanwhile Neil Curry's website refers to "A verse translation of Euripides *The Bacchae*" that was performed in Canonbury and at the Edinburgh Festival in 1960". And one can only assume that it was the same translated version that was produced by the BBC Television in 1963 and hence the National Theatre's initial interest in it as far back as 1963. For more, see: www.neilcurry.com /publication.html (accessed on the 6th of August 2012).

[125] The Mermaid Theatre, which was founded in 1952 and is also based in London, went ahead with its production of *The Bacchae*. However the version it presented was adapted by Kenneth Cavander and it opened on the 5th of February 1964.

adaptation of *The Bacchae*" and agreed to "deliver it finished and complete... by 29th February 1972",[126] he had already established himself as a reputable playwright and theatre director both in Nigeria and internationally. A number of his tragic plays had been published including *A Dance of the Forests* (1963) *The Road* (1965), *The Strong Breed* (1967), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967) and *Madmen and Specialist* (1970). Similarly, some of his other literary works, including his first book of poetry, *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967) and his prison memoir, *The Man Died* (1972) had also been published. Furthermore, he had also written his most important essay 'The Fourth Stage' (1967) in which he provides a compelling theoretical paradigm for his Yoruba tragedy. But above all, Soyinka's work had been presented on three occasions in London: *The Road* (which will be discussed in the next chapter), was presented at the Royal Theatre Stratford East in 1965; *The Lion and the Jewel* was presented to a critical acclaim at the Royal Court Theatre in 1966; and *The Trials of Brother Jero* was mounted in June 1966 at the Hampstead Theatre Club in London. It was the latter that earned Soyinka the John Whiting Drama award, which he shared with Tom Stoppard, in 1967. It is worth noting here that the only time Soyinka's name appeared in Kenneth Tynan's published diary, which was edited by John Lahr, it was in the same sentence with Tom Stoppard. Tynan made the entry on the 3rd of January 1973 reading:

> If our (the NT's) planned production of *The Bacchae*, adapted by Wole Soyinka and directed by Roland Joffe is postponed – as it may be, due to various internal stresses in the organisation – the NT will by next October have been in existence for ten years during which it will have discovered one new playwright [Tom Stoppard] (Lahr 2001, 117).

Bearing in mind that Stoppard and Soyinka were the joint winners of the John Whiting Drama award in 1967, the only inference that remains to be drawn from Tynan's entry is that Soyinka's reputation must have preceded him to the National. In his interview with Gibbs in 1981, Soyinka recounted how the project came about:

> I don't think apart from my adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides* which was a straight-forward commission, that I've ever written a play specifically to make money. But *The Bacchae* was a commission from the National Theatre of Great Britain which I had no problem taking up because *The Bacchae* has always been one of my favourite plays. I jumped at it immediately. This again was an opportunity to work at a play from my own point of view, a play which had always fascinated me (Gibbs 2001, 80).

[126] A copy of the signed agreement dated 24th January 1972 that Soyinka entered into with the National Theatre.

Thus, one can safely conclude that it was the National who approached Soyinka and asked him specifically to adapt *The Bacchae*, and not that Soyinka was asked to suggest a play he was interested in working on. Soyinka's affinity for this particular Greek tragedy is palpable bearing in mind that his Yoruba tragedy is predicated upon his supposition that Ogun the Yoruba god of creativity, war, iron and wine and the Greek god of wine, Dionysos, are twin brothers as he asserts in 'The Fourth Stage', and no other classic Greek tragedy gives credence to Soyinka's supposition and theorisation as *The Bacchae.*[127] So, aside from the money and the fact that it was one of his favourite Greek tragic plays that Soyinka had been commissioned to adapt, another important reason he "jumped at it immediately" (Gibbs 2001, 80), was because he saw the project as a unique "opportunity to work on the play from my own point of view" (ibid.). So what is Soyinka's point of view as regards Euripides' play? Soyinka provided the answer in great detail to Gibbs thus:

> *The Bacchae* has to be seen as one which covered the entire spectrum of socio-economic consciousness as well as the religious experience of the people, a condition which applies in a lot of Africa today. That is the relevance that I really want to emphasise. [....] In other words, in this play you had all the makings of a revolutionary movement. You had a statement, if you like, on the integration of the working community into the productive mechanisms of that society and you had the liberation – to go back to the individual – you had an attempt to liberate individual impulses, the total energy of the individual within the workings of society. Therefore the Dionysiac religion was not welcome, it was not welcome to the state power, it was not welcome to the religious hierarchy. But it was welcome to the oppressed masses, the slaves, the women, the harlots. They welcomed Dionysus. He was the Messiah of Liberation, religious liberation, individual-psychological liberation and agricultural-economic liberation (Gibbs 2001, 84-85).

But Soyinka did not stop there. He went on to elucidate how he went about working at the play and more pertinently how he felt he had to change the ending of the play to suit his own end. We will return

[127] A close reading of *The Bacchae* translated by Williams Arrowsmith will reveal that Soyinka was influenced by the play among others, in writing his *A Dance of the Forests*. For instance, the opening with Dionysus setting the scene can be paralleled with the testimony by Aroni. Similarly, the idea of Dionysus taking the form of a human character is analogous with Ogun and other gods being represented in human forms in *A Dance*. And one can also argue that it is the way Agave and the other bacchantes under the spell of Dionysus pulled Pentheus down from the tree which Dionysus had tricked him to climb that inspired the pulling down of Oremole by his master Demoke, who is also being possessed by Ogun.

to Soyinka's explication in due course, because it offers an insight into how he went about adapting *The Bacchae.* First, it would be useful to problematise the art of adaptation so as to situate Soyinka's adaptation in the context of the 'original' *The Bacchae* by Euripides.

5.4 Whose *Bacchae* is it anyway?

The Bacchae was originally written by the Athenian tragedian, Euripides who left Athens for Macedon on a voluntary exile in 408 BC. After his death in 406BC, *The Bacchae* had a posthumous premiere at the Athenian Theatre in 405BC. Not unlike many classic Greek tragedies, the drama is based on a mythological event. It tells the legend of Dionysus,[128] the son of Zeus, who punished the people of Thebes for doubting his divine birth. As myth has it, Dionysus was of divine birth. His mother, one of Cadmus' daughters, was wooed and impregnated by Zeus the Greek god, who had come down to earth, disguised as a mortal. Dionysus grew up as a Greek deity and wherever he went there were bacchantes following him. But in Thebes, where his cousin Pentheus had become king, Dionysus was denied the status of a deity. To Pentheus and his mother, Agave, Dionysus was not a god but a bastard; in their eyes, Semele, Dionysus' mother was a slut. When Dionysus eventually returned to Thebes, it was with the determination to assert his divine authority at all costs. Consequently he severely and mercilessly punished all those, including his mortal relations, who had denied him the recognition and veneration that he believed he truly deserved as the son of Zeus.

"It is through tragedy that myth attains its most profound content, its most expressive form" (Nietzsche 1993, 54), as Friedrich Nietzsche has asserted. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Euripides begins his drama with Dionysus' monologue to put, into context, the calamity that is about to befall Pentheus, Agave his mother and his two aunts Ino and Autonoe. "I am Dionysus, the son of Zeus, come back to Thebes, this land where I was born"(194),[129] he begins and then goes on to give the circumstances surrounding his divine birth and how he is determined to teach the city of Thebes a lesson. It is with the aid of Dionysus' monologue that Euripides recounts the mythic background to his play and also set the scene for the inevitable tragedy that is about to unfold. By the time the drama begins, as Dionysus has

[128] Dionysus is also spelt Dionysos. But it is worth noting that in the version from which Soyinka adapted, Dionysus is used while Soyinka has decided to adopt Dionysos in his adaptation.

[129] All citations in this thesis are taken from *The Bacchae,* translated by Williams Arrowsmith in Grene, David and Richmond Lattimore, (eds.) 1958. *The Complete Greek Tragedies Volume IV.* The University Chicago Press, pp. 529-608.

revealed, the women of Thebes, including Agave and her two sisters have all been stung "with frenzy, hounded them from home up to the mountains where they wander, crazed of mind and compelled to wear my orgies' liveries" (194). Right from the start of Euripides' play there is no room for any ambiguity: his Dionysus is a divinity on a mission:

> Like it or not this city must learn its lesson:
> it lacks initiation in mysteries;
> that I shall vindicate my mother Semele
> and stand revealed to mortal eyes as the god
> she bore to Zeus.
> Cadmus the king has abdicated
> leaving his throne and power to his grandson Pentheus;
> who now revolts against divinity, in *me*;
> thrust me from his offerings; forgets *my* name
> in his prayers. Therefore I shall *prove* him
> and every man in Thebes that I am god
> indeed. And when my worship is established here,
> and all is well, then I shall go my way...(195)

It is very clear from the above that *The Bacchae,* which dramatises the story of Dionysus and his worshippers, would fascinate Soyinka whose muse is Ogun. And that is perhaps why Soyinka was "not content merely to rework *The Bacchae* in terms of either European or Asiatic mysteries". In his words:

> I saw the parallels, as I said, with the many nature mysteries of my own society. I saw Dionysos, for example as a figure of Ogun, as a twin brother to Ogun, who is Yoruba god of creativity, of war, of the lyric. He is the creative-destructive paradox, the two sides of the coin which exist within our nature (Gibbs 2001, 85).

It is worth remembering, however, that in Soyinka's eyes *The Bacchae* is not a perfect play and that was why he thought the dénouement needed reworking. As he explained to Gibbs,

> I was a little bit dissatisfied with the mysterious denouement as written by Euripides. In other words there is this all powerful God: he can hypnotize, he can mesmerize, he can conjure illusions and he uses his power indiscriminately. At the end he dishes out sentences to everybody who is opposed to him in a very

> high handed manner. I felt the play would be far more rounded, far more consistent, if it went along the mystery of communion, if the resolution was within the mystery of communion (ibid.).

Unquestionably, Soyinka's intention when he took up the task of adapting *The Bacchae* was to ameliorate the imperfect ending of Euripides' play. In other words, Soyinka is "using a Yoruba god to correct what he sees as an error in Euripides's portrait of a chthonic essence" (Okpewho 2004, 75) as Isidore Okpewho has argued. And the question is: why not? After all "The purpose of art [and science] is to correct the faults of nature using the suggestions of nature itself" (Boal 1979, 9) as Augusto Boal has observed in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. "Theatre is change and not simple presentation of what exists; it is becoming and not being" (ibid., 28).

It is with Boal's insightful interventions in mind that I would contend that the art of adapting a play is no different to the art of writing a brand new play. In other words, a playwright is an adaptor and an adaptor is a playwright; both are one and the same. In writing a play, a playwright adapts a myth, a true life event or what he/she has imagined and in adapting a play, a playwright brings to bear, a different and unique personal, cultural or dramaturgical point of view, (if we may borrow Soyinka's phrase) to create a new play from a play that has already been written. An article written by Irish playwright Thomas Kilroy, entitled 'Adaptation: a privileged conversation with a dead author',[130] which appeared in the *Irish Times* edition of 13th February 2010, readily comes to mind here. In Kilroy's words,

> The first thing to be said about adaptation, no matter how faithful it is to the original is that it and the original are always two very different, distinct works, sometimes profoundly so (Kilroy 2010, 9).

Nigerian playwright, Ahmed Yerima is clearly in agreement with Kilroy in the chapter he dedicates to the art of adapting plays in his book, *Basic Technique in Playwriting.* "For some people, adaptation suggests no more than one playwright taking another playwright's play and modifying it" (Yerima 2003, 119), Yerima opines. While Yerima is prepared to accept this suggestion, in his view, there is more to adapting than that. "There are playwriting principles to be considered; there are rules and end results which emerge as new drafts of the old play" (ibid.). Thus in Yerima's eyes, adaptation is: "when playwrights

[130] In my view, Kilroy's title is misleading in the sense that it is not only dead authors whose work another playwright may choose to adapt. So, Kilroy's title should have read 'Adaptation: a privileged conversation with another author – dead or alive'.

make suitable, plays already written, for new surrounding or audience, for a greater appeal (ibid.). Melissa Sihra echoes the same sentiments, in her essay 'Re-Location and Re-Locution: Adapting Synge', when she posits that, "adapting a classic play provides an opportunity to flex linguistic and creative muscle and to explore one's capabilities in new ways" (Sihra 2011, 224). It is with this understanding of what an adaptation is that we must approach our analysis of the 1973 National's presentation of *The Bacchae* and perhaps in the process we will be able to ascertain whose version of *The Bacchae* was presented. Was it an English version of *The Bacchae* or Soyinka's adaptation or Roland Joffe's reworking of Soyinka's adaptation?

One is compelled to ask this question in light of the content of a letter dated 24th May 1973 which Soyinka wrote to Anthony Easterbrook, the General Manager of the National Theatre. [131] In the first part of the letter Soyinka explained how he went about using two different translations of Euripides's play to write his own adaption. According to Soyinka,

> A twenty-year rust on my acquaintanceship with Classical Greek made it necessary for me to rely heavily on previous translations for this adaptation of the Bacchae. Two versions which deserve especial mention I have not hesitated to borrow phrases and even lines from them, are those by Gilbert Murray;....and William Arrowsmith....My publishers and I gratefully acknowledge the publishers concerned for the use I have made of these translations.

Thus, Soyinka's adaptation is not of *The Bacchae* by Euripides but an adaptation of a translation of *The Bacchae*. While it is important not to be side-tracked by semantics here, it is worth stressing that no translation can be direct. In other words "audiences, for whom a work has been translated", to paraphrase Susan Bennett in her essay 'Spectatorship Across Culture', cannot "realize the complexity of negotiations, the layers of interpretation, that have necessarily preceded it appearing in their mother tongue" (Bennett 1997, 200). When a play is translated from one language to another it has, in all likelihood, undergone an inter-cultural transformation bearing in mind our previous discussions of language as a signifier and a carrier of a particular culture. "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (Fanon 1967, 38), as Frantz Fanon has reminded us. Thus in the process of translating *The*

[131] This letter can be found at the archive of the National Theatre. I was not allowed to make a photocopy of this letter on the basis that it is covered by copyright, but I was allowed to write the contents of the letter down in my own notebook. All citations in this work are taken from my handwritten note.

Bacchae from Greek into English certain things must have been lost (and conversely gained) in translation. On this basis, one can argue that Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* is an adaptation of an 'adaptation' of *The Bacchae* by virtue of the fact that he had to rely on an English translation of the original in order to write his own adaptation.[132]

However, Roland Joffe was less than impressed by Soyinka's adaptation. According to Soyinka, in the second part of his letter,

> I learnt also from my last meeting with Ken Tynan and Roland Joffe that additional borrowings have been made by the director and that he has written to Arrowsmith for permission to include these. I have yet to see this new version but I would like to ask that in dealing with Arrowsmith over this, he understands that this latest foray into his work is none of my undertaking.

What this letter illuminates for us clearly is that it was before *The Bacchae* went into rehearsals that things have started falling apart between Soyinka and Joffe. Thus it was inevitable that the centre would not hold once production commenced. It is clearly evident that Soyinka delivered his adaptation by the end of February 1973 as he was obliged to do under contract and the play did not go into rehearsal until June. So, the crucial question is: why did Joffe take it upon himself to revise Soyinka's adaptation to create what Soyinka has described in his letter as "this new version"? One would have thought the appropriate cause of action, in circumstances where a director or the National (as the case might be) had reservations as regards a newly commissioned script, would be to discuss it with the writer. The situation between Joffe and Soyinka must have deteriorated by the time rehearsals commenced as evidenced in another letter that Soyinka wrote after he had finally obtained what he calls "a complete script of the director's adaptation of my adaptation" (Soyinka1993, 48). In this letter, which Soyinka has since published, he writes,

> I sense basic timidity in Roland's script. I am distressed that the production should not, from the

[132] As we have discussed in a previous chapter, Soyinka translated D. O Fagunwa's Yoruba fiction, *Ogboju Ode ninu Irunmole* into English and gave it the title: *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (1968). If a non-Yoruba speaking playwright was commissioned to adapt Fagunwa's prose to stage and he used Soyinka's English translation for his adaptation, can it be said that he had adapted Fagunwa's prose? For an interesting analysis of how Esu the Yoruba trickster god in the pantheon of the Yoruba gods has become the Biblical God forsaken devil or Lucifer through translation, see Awosanmi, 2007, pp. 281-285

> beginning, give itself a chance to confront an important divergence from the original, whatever later changes are made. [.....] It seems to me that Roland is crippled by a narrow appreciation of the classic mould – all this continuous reversion to the appearance of Dionysus and some form of literary summation! [....]. So why did you ask me, a playwright, in on the job in the first place? (ibid., 49).

From a close reading of this second letter, one would be inclined to agree with Isidore Okpewho's assertion that in adapting *The Bacchae* it would make sense to see "Soyinka's effort as a translation of culture, not of text" (Okpewho 2004, 56). But It was not Soyinka's text that the National presented. The text that was presented was, to use Soyinka's words again, "the director's adaptation of my adaptation" (Soyinka 1993, 48). It is with this information in mind that Lecznar has concluded that the production of *The Bacchae* at the National,

> was stranded at the crossroads between a Nigerian author, a British theatre company, and an ancient Greek tragedy; the performances failed because the director was unable to decide which path he should follow (Lecznar 2011, 1).

In order to determine the veracity or otherwise of Lecznar's observation, an analysis, within an intercultural theoretical framework, of Soyinka's *The Bacchae* and how it was presented by the National will be appropriate at this juncture.

5.5 *The Bacchae* of Soyinka

As evident in the subtitle: *A Communion Rite* that Soyinka has added to the title of his adaptation, it is clear that one of the most important changes that Soyinka has made to *The Bacchae* by Euripides is to ensure that at the end, the tragic demise of Pentheus, the tragic hero in the play, ultimately benefits the society that he leaves behind. This, as we have already discussed in previous chapters, is the purpose of Yoruba tragedy as against the cathartic feelings of pity and fear that a traditional Greek tragedy must arouse in its audience. As Ahmed Yerima has pointed out in his book, *Discourse on Tragedy*, African people live in a communal society, sharing everything, especially aspects of life, which include both the tragic and also the happy moments too" (Yerima 2009, 13). It is to this end, therefore, that in Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae*, the horror of the killing of Pentheus by Agave, his own mother eventually turns into a purificatory communal rite in which every member of the society partakes for the rebirth of Thebes. In Soyinka's adaptation, just as in Euripides' play, Pentheus is dismembered by his own mother, his two aunts and the other bacchantes when, disguised as a woman and under the influence of wine

which Dionysos has given him to taste, he goes to the mountains of Kithairon to satisfy his curiosity as regards what the possessed bacchantes are doing. Pentheus is mistaken for a mountain lion by the bacchantes; they bring Pentheus down from the tree top that Dionysos has made him climb and they set upon him and literally tear him apart limb by limb. Agave is so proud of the kill that she and the others have made with their bare hands that she brings the head of the game back to the palace to show it off to her son. When she eventually realises that it is the severed head of her son that she is flaunting and not a lion's head, Soyinka decides that all hell should not break loose as it is the case in Euripides' play. In Soyinka's adaptation, the words as uttered by Agave "very calmly" are:

> Let no hand but mine be laid on him
> I am his mother, I brought him to life
> I shall prepare him for his grave (95).

And when Kadmos, Agave's father, asks with a heavy heart: "Why us?" (97) Agave's *quiet* response is "Why not?" (97). The sequence that follows Agave's acceptance of how she has been used by the god to sacrifice her son for the benefit of Thebes is Soyinka's new dénouement and it will be worth our while to quote it here to put Soyinka's adaptation and how it was represented on stage by the National into context. According to the stage direction:

> *The theme music of Dionysus [sic] wells up and fills the stage with the god's presence as a powerful red glow shines suddenly as if from within the head of PENTEUS, rendering it near-luminous. The stage is bathed in it instantly, from every orifice of the impaled head spring jets, spurting in every direction. Reactions of horror and panic. AGAVE screams and flattens herself below the head, hugging the ladder.*
>
> TIRESIAS. What is it Kadmos? What is it?
>
> KADMOS. Again blood Tiresias, nothing but blood.
>
> TIRESIAS *(feels his way nearer the fount. A spray hit him and he holds out a hand catches some of the fluid and sniffs. Tastes it).* No. It's wine.
>
> *Slowly, dreamlike, they all move towards the fountain, cup their hands and drink. AGAVE raises herself at last to observe them, then tilts her head backwards to let a jet flush full in her face and flush her mouth. The light contracts to a final glow around the heads of PENTHEUS and AGAVE*

A slow curtain (97).

This is a clear departure from the way Euripides ends his play in which Dionysos, even after Pentheus has been mercilessly dismembered by no other person than the mother who gave him life, decides to punish the royal household further by sending Agave and her two sisters into exile and turning Kadmos and his wife into serpents. Soyinka had to take appropriate steps in the process of adapting the play to ensure that the communion rite at the end, as indicated above, is dramaturgically justified. In the programme note that accompanied the production, Soyinka has reiterated the fact that he sees *The Bacchae* as "a prodigious barbaric banquet, a man's universal need to match himself against Nature".[133] A close reading of the published text will reveal that apart from creating a sub-plot by adding a few more scenes, the most important element of playwriting that Soyinka has deployed in an effort to justify the communal ending of his adaptation is: characterisation.

Soyinka, lest we forget, spent nearly two years between 1967 and 1969 in solitary confinement in Nigeria. Shortly after his release Soyinka travelled out of Nigeria on a four year (1971-1975) self-imposed exile, spending most of the time in Ghana and Britain. It was during this period of existential angst that Soyinka was commissioned to adapt *The Bacchae*. It is hardly surprising, thus, that Soyinka saw in *The Bacchae* the opportunity to use, as a metaphor, the liberating potential of religion to explore the fundamental issue of human liberty. It is against this backdrop that Soyinka's Dionysos is much more than an angry, vindictive god, who is bent on asserting his divine authority by destroying any mortal who accordingly denies him. In the dramatic universe of Soyinka's adaptation, Dionysos is a force of revolution and the main purpose of this god is to liberate the oppressed even if such a mission can only be accomplished at the cost of a life. In other words, there can be no rebirth if there is no death the same way that construction is usually preceded by destruction. It is thus to emphasise the creative-destructive dual quality of Nature that Soyinka has not only patterned his own Dionysos more after Ogun but has also imbued him with all the virtues that the Yoruba god of iron possesses. We must not forget that Ogun, as Soyinka has reiterated, is similar to Dionysos in the sense that he "is by nature, hard, fierce and terrible. Yet evil is not associated with him", as Awolalu has argued. "Rather it is strongly believed that he demands, justice, fair play and rectitude" (Awolalu 1962, 89).

[133] The 'Adaptor's Note' that was included in the Programme Note of the production has also been revised and included in the published version of the play.

Thus, the mission of Soyinka's Dionysos is not to wreak vengeance on the royal family headed by Pentheus, but to serve as the catalyst for the sacrifice and eventual bloodletting of Pentheus, which is required for the communion rite in which all members, regardless of creed and social status, of the society must partake. It is in this light that Soyinka has suggested that his Dionysos should be "a being of calm rugged strength, of a rugged beauty, not of effeminate prettiness" (2). And what Soyinka's Dionysos says of himself is also a manifestation of the dual nature of the Ogunian quality with which Soyinka has endowed him. "I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and kind. An essence that will not exclude, nor be excluded" (2) is how this Dionysos describes himself. It is this Janus-like quality that Soyinka's Dionysos possesses that makes him, on the one hand, the champion of the down-trodden and, on the other, the tamer of tyrants such as Pentheus.

The character of Pentheus in Soyinka's adaptation reminds one of the successive totalitarian military heads of state in most African countries, who had come into power under the guise of restoring order. As Soyinka has described his Pentheus, "*he is straight, militaristic in bearing and speech*" (26) and his first words are indicative of this rigid personality: "I shall have order! Let the city know at once Pentheus is here to give back order and sanity" (27). It is Pentheus' obsession with orderliness that makes him see only the negative in what, Ketu Katrak has termed: the "Dionysian life force" (Katrak 1986, 75). Ironically, it is this tragic flaw that makes Pentheus to be the ideal sacrifice in the end. As Dionysos says to Pentheus: "Look well in the mirror Pentheus. What beast is it? Do you recognise it? Have you ever seen the like? In all your wanderings have your eyes ever been affronted by a creature so gross, so unnatural, so obscene?" (66) It is ironic that Pentheus cannot see because that is what his mother and the Bacchantes see when he appears to them at the mountains, and that is why they tear him apart. The motif of human sacrifice and its importance for the benefit of the entire society upon which Soyinka predicates his adaptation has been carefully foregrounded from the outset. For instance, the opening stage direction states: "*To one side, a road steeply into lower background, lined by the bodies of crucified slaves mostly in skeletal stage*" (1). In a radical departure from the original, Soyinka has also created a chorus of slaves and it is from this marginalised group of people that a scapegoat is usually selected yearly for sacrifice. From the dialogue between the Herdsman (another character, which Soyinka has created in his own adaptation) and the Slave Leader, we have a foretaste of the rebellion that is brewing and the significance of the yearly human ritual sacrifice is also explained:

HERDSMAN. Someone must cleanse the new year of the rot of the old or the world will die. Have you ever

known famine? Real famine?

SLAVE LEADER: Why us? Why always us?

HERDSMAN. Why not?

SLAVE LEADER. Because the rites bring us nothing! Let those to whom the profits go bear burden of the old year dying (4).

As we see later on, what the Slave Leader wishes for above eventually comes to pass when Pentheus is torn apart limb from limb. In the cast list page of the published version of his play, Soyinka advises that "The Slaves and Bacchantes should be as mixed a cast as is possible, testifying to their varied origins". Furthermore, Soyinka suggests that the character of the slave leader be fully negroid. Although Soyinka claims that his recommendation is based solely on the 'hollering' style that he suggests for the character in the play, it is Isidore Okpewho's contention in 'Soyinka, Euripides, and the Anxiety of Empire' that "the identification of the Slave Leader as a black man has something of a black nationalist impulse behind it" (Okpewho 2004, 60). In fact, Okpewho goes on to argue that it is counter-hegemonic for Soyinka to have afforded a black Slave Leader the privilege of leading the combined multiracial chorus "in singing praises to Dionysos with epithets and lines from the *oriki* of a black African god" (ibid.).

One would be inclined to agree with Okpewho, because, as we shall see shortly, all the important parts of the slaves in Joffe's production as well as the leaders of the bacchantes, to Soyinka's chagrin, were played by black actors. But the skin colour of the actors who played the slaves in Joffe's production aside, it can be inferred that Soyinka's decision to mix the bacchantes up with a chorus of slaves in his adaptation was to further reinforce his Dionysos as the champion of the oppressed in light of Ogun's praise chant: "refuge of the down-trodden/To rescue slaves he unleashed the judgment of war/Because of the blind, plunged into the forest" as he has it in his important essay, 'The Fourth Stage'. The idea of slavery and the clamour for liberation is foregrounded from the opening of the play when the Herdsman and the Slave Leader are seen passing a jug of wine to one another. The Slave Leader tastes the wine and comments: "There is heaven in this juice. It flows through my lips ....And a scant-laden breeze fills the cavern of my mouth, pressing for release. I know that scent, I mean, I knew it once. I live to know it once again" (3). At the end, the Slave Leader and the other slaves are seen together with, Tiresias, Kadmos and the other members of the royal family drinking wine that is spurting, in all directions, from

the orifices on Pentheus' impaled head. Symbolically the freedom, which the Slave could only imagine at the beginning, has become a reality at the end of the play.

Similarly, when we are introduced to Tiresias, the blind priest in Soyinka's adaptation, he is a priest on a quest for the true meaning of life in the same manner that the Professor, as we will see later on in *The Road* is searching for the essence of life by understanding the meaning of death. "I have longed to know what flesh is made of. What suffering is. Feel the taste of blood instead of foreseeing it. Taste the ecstasy of rejuvenation after long organising its ritual" (12), is Tiresias' response to Dionysos' enquiry as to why the priest is playing the flagellant in the place of the slave that has hitherto been selected. But Tiresias, as is revealed later, will experience ecstasy without suffering for as Dionysos has assured him: "Thebes will have its full sacrifice. And Tiresias will know ecstasy" (12). Interestingly, it is precisely the same question that the Herdsman and the Slave Leader ask (as already mentioned above) at the beginning of the play that Kadmos and Agave pose at the end when Pentheus has finally been offered as a sacrifice. "Why us?", asks Kadmos. "Why not?", Agave answers. Clearly, from the way Soyinka ends the play, Pentheus has borne the burden of the old year dying, and the community has been rejuvenated.

In terms of plot, setting as well as the naming of the characters, Soyinka has remained loyal to the original *The Bacchae* by Euripides, but his subjectivity as a Nigerian playwright clearly dominates his adaptation. For instance, Soyinka's preference in highlighting the prevailing socio-political situations in his home country, Nigeria, is clearly evident in his own version. Furthermore, Soyinka has unavoidably relied on his Yoruba background in writing his own adaptation to achieve the purpose of Yoruba tragedy by presupposing the necessity of ritual sacrifice of the Yoruba tragic hero for the rebirth of the society. But while it is the spilling of the blood of Pentheus that has enabled the communal rite, Ketu Katrak has argued that Agave is "the Ogun figure whose daring has taken her through the transitional gulf" (Katrak 1986, 79). In Katrak's words, Agave's "act has challenged nature itself and has defied the boundaries of normal human interaction" (ibid.). Although Katrak's insightful intervention could be regarded as an attempt to give a feminist slant to Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy that is patently patriarchal, it is an analysis that is worth exploring further, I would argue. However, it is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to say, nonetheless, that the point Katrak has raised readily brings to mind the Ogun-like heroic deeds of Moremi Ajasoro, the Yoruba queen of the ancient city of Ile–Ife, who, according to myth, risked not only

her own life to save her people from their invaders, but also at the cost of her only son, *Oluorogbo*.[134] It is not impossible that the myth of Moremi was on Soyinka's mind when he was creating the character of Agave, bearing in mind that Soyinka is a Yoruba tragedian and his "literary playground is essentially the Yoruba culture" (Ogunba 1975). Ulli Beier puts the point I am trying to make here into perspective when, he recounted, during his 1997 interview with Soyinka, an episode that he had with Ooni of Ife, the late Adesoji Aderemi. "The Yoruba people have always been willing to look at another mythology and find equivalents in their own tradition", Beier said to Soyinka,

> For example: when I first met Aderemi, the late Oba of Ife - that was at Easter 1951 - he told me about the different shrines in his town and he said: "You know, in Yoruba religion we know the story of Mary and Jesus" and he told me the myth of Moremi (Mary) who sacrificed her only son in order to save her town. And he said: "Really, Moremi is Mary." I was impressed, because he could see that there was some basic metaphor that remained valid across a variety of cultures: He knew that the basic truth is the same – only the trappings are different (Beier 1997, 2).

So, in the final analysis, Soyinka might have set his adaptation in Thebes and written it with an English audience in mind, but the play is essentially post-colonial Nigerian in terms of its politics and aesthetically, it is a Yoruba tragedy. It is in this light that Okpewho posits that:

> Soyinka may be a broad-based humanist who explores the common ties that bind the human race he is primarily a nativist in the sense of seeing his indigenous culture as the starting point of any such universalist gestures (Okpewho 2004, 74)

One can cite a number of instances to substantiate what Okpewho is alluding to here. For instance, when Dionysos says in his monologue: "Thebes taints me with bastardy. I am turned into an alien, some foreign outgrowth of her habitual tyranny" (1), one will be forgiven to think that Soyinka is being autobiographical here in the sense that he is clearly referring to the tyrannical rulers in Africa who have no qualms imprisoning or sending into exile anyone who raises a dissenting voice against them. Lest we forget, Soyinka himself was a victim of this "habitual tyranny" when he was imprisoned and kept in

[134] The myth of Moremi has inspired a number of theatre productions among the Yoruba travelling theatre. The most notable will be *Moremi* by the late Duro Ladipo as mentioned previously when we discussed interculturalism. My first play, *Moremi: The Goddess* which I wrote for Waterford Youth Drama in the South East of Ireland in 2000 was also inspired by the legend.

solitary confinement (as discussed previously) without charge for nearly two years between 1967 and 1969 during the Nigerian civil war by the Nigerian military ruler, General Yakubu Gowon. It was, in fact, upon his release that Soyinka went into self-imposed exile for almost four years during which he wrote *The Bacchae* as well as *Death and the King's Horseman*. Similarly, Soyinka's abhorrence for military dictators is clearly evident from the line he writes for Kadmos: "Shall I arrest him for his own good do you think? There are still soldiers loyal to me. We could stage a *coup d'etat*" (25), when in discussion with Tiresias, Kadmos is wondering what he can do to save his grandson, Pentheus from himself. Bearing in mind that by 1973, Nigeria had witnessed a series of coups and counter-coups, clearly, Soyinka is ridiculing retired generals in Nigeria and other African countries who believe they can seize power whenever they feel like it by staging a coup to overthrow the government of the day. A close reading of Soyinka's published text will attest to the fact that Soyinka's adaptation is spiced with array of personal, cultural, national and continental references. Ironically, it is what makes Soyinka's adaptation culturally unique and exceptionally post-colonial that seemed to make it problematic for the National and, in particular, Roland Joffe who directed it. Consequently, what was presented by the National was fundamentally different from the adaptation Soyinka had written.

5.6 Soyinka's *Bacchae* at the National

There is no video recording of the presentation of Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* as directed by Roland Joffe in 1973 for the National, so one is constrained to imagine the mise-en-scène as a theatre production. Thus, my analysis of the production, as follows, is based on the prompt script together with all the other archival materials such as the programme notes, production images and press reviews that are available in the archive of the National. It is important to stress here that the prompt script that was used for the production is the most important signifier of the discord that existed between the adaptor and the director as it would later reflect in the presentation of the adaptation on stage. [135] While it is not clear if Soyinka had submitted his adaptation with the title: *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* or not, the title that is carried on the prompt book reads: "*The Bacchae of Euripides* Adapted by Soyinka"

[135] When I visited the archive of the National Theatre I quickly realised from perusing the prompt script that the text that was used for the National Theatre production of Soyinka's *The Bacchae* in 1973 is different from the text of the published script. I was not permitted to photocopy the whole of the script so I only have pages 1-10 and 45-49. To compare the text that was used for the production and Soyinka's text, I will be citing respectively from the prompt script and Soyinka's published text: 1973. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*: Eyre Methuen London.

and this was how the play was billed when it was presented. Meanwhile, Soyinka's preference, as already mentioned, was for the play to be publicised as *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* by Wole Soyinka[136] in light of the new ending he had written in his own adaptation. It is very obvious that the two titles are not interchangeable. In Lecznar's words, "there's a clear difference here between the first one where the emphasis is on Soyinka, and the second, where the emphasis is on Euripides, where Soyinka is lessened in importance" (Lecznar 2011, 7). Therefore, why would the National Theatre of Britain, having commissioned Soyinka to adapt a Greek tragedy, be seen to be encouraging anything that would lessen Soyinka's importance in the process of presenting his adaptation? The answer to that question, I would argue, lies in the paradoxical nature of interculturalism which Claire Conceison concisely illuminates for us in her essay '*The Joy Luck Club* and Intercultural Theatre' thus:

> Interculturalism at its best is a reinforcement of international understanding and friendship, a celebration of common bonds of creativity; at its worst, it is a tangled web of false assumptions and distorted images, a reinforcement of the very hegemonic relationships it desires to eradicate (Conceison 1995, 164).

In all intents and purposes, Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright who had been asked to adapt one of the greatest Greek classic tragedies for the National Theatre's stage. One can only presume that the kind of adaptation that the National was expecting from Soyinka was the 'Africanisation' of the ritual worship upon which Euripides' original drama predicates. But what the National received was completely different from what it was expecting. In other words, the National seemed to be caught off-guard by Soyinka's new ending which is not only based on his idea of his Yoruba tragedy, but also a furtherance of his post-colonial strategy. One can only presume here that the National and Roland Joffe were disappointed that Soyinka did not suggest that the bacchantes should appear in raffia with nothing else on in his adaptation on the basis of the extent they were prepared to go to get the actresses playing the Bacchantes to go on stage naked. Below for instance was an entry Ken Tynan made into his diary on the 19th of July 1972:

> After years of prompting from me, the NT [National Theatre] is at last doing The Bacchae: and having seen

[136] It is important to clarify that according to the Commissioning and Licensing agreement that Soyinka entered into with the National, it was agreed that the adaptation would be advertised as *The Bacchae by Euripides* adapted by Wole Soyinka. Thus it is possible that it was after Soyinka completed the adaptation that he felt it would be necessary to add "A Communion Rite" to the title.

> a run-through (and discussed with the director, Roland Joffe) I now wonder if it was wise to attempt it. This great play is about the need to accept the element of outrage, violence and sexuality in our natures. The Bacchantes, female followers of Dionysus, should be naked. But none of the girls will strip: if *they* cannot come to terms with their own nakedness, how can the play communicate the full blast of its message. Likewise Roland wants Cadmus to wear a false phallus when he dances to Dionysus: the actor a pious Catholic, said he would rather give up the part (Tynan 2001, 146).[137]

Perhaps if Kenneth Tynan had considered the salient point that Patrice Pavis has made in his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Cultures*, he would have probably realised that his point of view as regards what *The Bacchae* is about was at variance with Soyinka's and, therefore, the latter was the wrong author for the kind of exotic (or shall we say erotic) intercultural display that the National had in mind. "The perspective of the adapters and their work of adaptation and interpretation are influenced by high culture," writes Pavis, "that is the culture of a limited subgroup, which possesses (or arrogates to itself) knowledge education and power of decision" (Pavis 1992, 15). In our previous discussions, we have seen that Soyinka, having experienced racism in Britain in the late 1950s returned to Nigeria with the sole intention of redefining tragedy by combining the cultural paradigms of the Yoruba people with European theatre tradition to advance his post-colonial strategy, which includes overcoming "the disabling stresses of our historical condition and to transcend them in a new vision of life" (Irele 2005, 12). Adapting *The Bacchae* was obviously part of Soyinka's post-colonial strategy, but was the national stage of Britain in 1973 the appropriate forum for such a post-colonial undertaking? Roland Joffe did not think so and it is very apparent that he had the backing of the National, which, in my view, explains why he was able to get away with revising Soyinka's adaptation and presenting it as he deemed appropriate.

Going by the prompt book that was used for the production, the Dionysos that was presented by the National was closer to Euripides' Dionysus than the Ogunian Dionysos which Soyinka has written into his adaptation. In Soyinka's script, Dionysos begins his monologue with: "Thebes taints me with bastardy, I am turned into alien....It is time to state my patrimony – even here in Thebes" but the prompt script that was used for the presentation begins differently. Dionysos' line goes: "Dionysos. I am the gentle, jealous joy...." which Soyinka has in his script before going into: "I have led my wild haired women through/The cragged rocks of far Afghanistan" (1), which is a variation of Soyinka's line that goes: "It pounds in the

[137] For a hilarious account of the meeting between Soyinka, Roland Joffe and Ken Tynan where the issue of whether actors should go on stage naked or not, readers are advised to see Soyinka, 1993, p. 51.

blood and breasts of my wild-haired women" (2). I would argue that it was in an effort to align his Dionysos more with Euripides' that Joffe had added the following lines to the script that was used for the presentation:

> All the women in Thebes I have driven from the city.
> Mad/They sit, rich and poor alike, beneath the silver
> Firs on the roofless rocks
> And when my worship is established here,
> And all is well, then I shall go my way
> And be revealed to other men in other lands
> To these ends I have laid my deity aside
> And go disguised as man (1).

It must be noted that all the lines above were taken directly from the English translation of *The Bacchae* by William Arrowsmith, hence Soyinka's letter that I referred to earlier.

Furthermore, we will recall that Soyinka specifically requires his Dionysos to be "of a rugged beauty, not of effeminate prettiness". From the picture of young Martin Shaw whom Joffe cast for this lead part, it is clear that the Dionysos in the stage presentation of *The Bacchae of Soyinka* was of the effeminate prettiness (see figure 11).

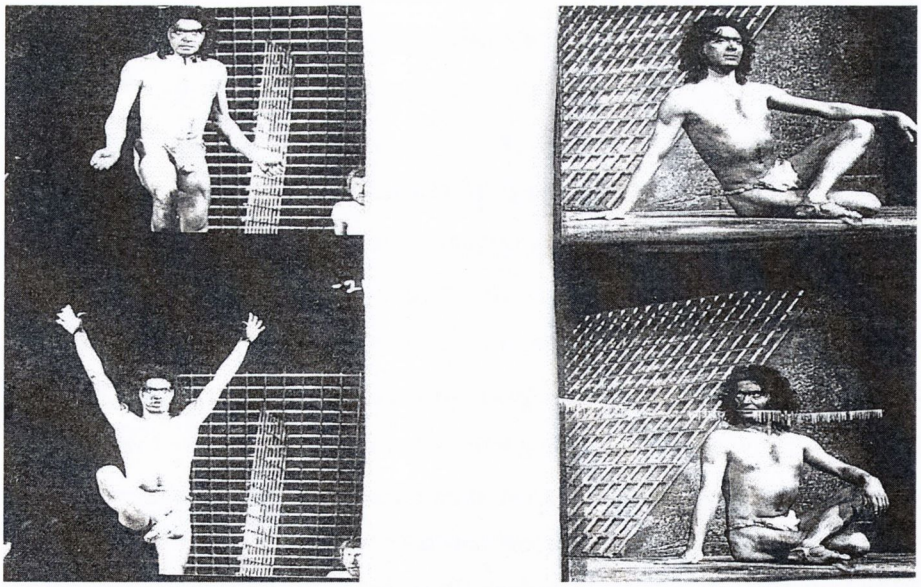

*Fig. 11 Martin Shaw in various postures as Dionysos at the National (*Photo: Anthony Crickmay*)*

He is virtually naked with long hair and, above everything else, he is styled along the line of an Indian guru. "One of the bastardized brothers of Dionysos, wearing the shape of tantra" (Soyinka 1993, 50) is how Soyinka describes him in his essay 'Between Self and the System', which he wrote clearly to rid himself of the hurt that the production had inflicted on him. "Our Dionysos introduced himself onto the stage with the sign of the namaste and the lotus postures" (ibid., 51), Soyinka explains further,

> the gestures which accompanied the recitation of his rout of arjuna. Plus a touch of Kung Fu. I took one look at this peck-feast [sic] of Asian culture and said to me: Well this is one eclectic mind that beats your own (ibid.).

It is not only in terms of Dionysos that Joffe was eclectic though. As already mentioned, all the principal actors among the slaves and the followers of Dionysos were played by black actors. In the words of Soyinka, this is "a reduction along racial lines which neither Euripides nor I his adapter ever indicated" (Soyinka 1993, 54). Perhaps it is to avoid such reductionism that Soyinka has gone on to suggest in the published version of the play that the slaves should be as mixed cast as is possible. But by far the most important difference between Soyinka's adaptation and its staged version is at the end.

As we have established, Soyinka's aim in his adaptation is to present Dionysos as the champion of the downtrodden and the divine facilitator of the ritual sacrifice of Pentheus which is a prerequisite for the rebirth of Thebes as a community. But in the presentation of the play, as can be inferred from the prompt script, all efforts were made by Joffe to ensure that Dionysos comes across as a divinity on a mission as it is in the original and in accordance with the view that Kenneth Tynan has articulated in his diary. I would argue that phenomenologically, this must have caused a lot of problems for the audience. To clarify my point here, one must look closely at the prompt script *vis-a-vis* what Soyinka has written in the published text. After Kadmos has explained to Agave that it was her and the other possessed Bacchantes who were responsible for the killing of Pentheus, her line, as Soyinka has written it: "(*a soft sigh*) A –ah" (48), is left in. And according to the stage direction, "*(She stands stock-still)*" which is why Kadmos says: "Console her Tiresias. I no longer understand/The ways of god. I may blaspheme." It is in this final long speech that Soyinka attempts to explain the ways of god. As Tiresias has put it:

> Understanding of these things is far beyond us.

Perhaps...perhaps our life-sustaining earth
Demands a little more...sometimes, a more
Than token offering for her renewal.
And who, more than we should know it?
For all too many
The soil of Thebes has proved a most unfeeling
Host, harsh, unyielding, as if the dragon's teeth
That gave it birth still farms its subsoil
They feel this, same as I, even through calloused soles
O Kadmos, it was a cause beyond madness, this
Scattering of his flesh to the seven winds, the rain
Of blood that streamed out endlessly to soak
Our land..... (48).

It is after this long speech reminiscent of the authorial voice explaining the significance of sacrifice that Kadmos asks: "Why us?" to which Agave responds: "Why not" Then the red substance from the orifices on Pentheus' impaled head begin to spurt in every direction. That is how Soyinka has it in the published text, but in the prompt script, below is the sequence of events, that immediately comes after Tiresias' long speech:

AGAVE: O Father, now you can see how everything has changed
And that prize I carried home
With such pride was my own curse
Upon these hands
I bear my son's blood.
O gods, what dirge can I sing
That there might be a dirge for every broken limb (48).

SLAVES: Dionysos.

KADMOS: You are too cruel.
(He turns to Kadmos)
DIONYSOS: Only men see cruelty. I am neither cruel nor kind. Neither good nor bad. I am, and cannot be denied. The man who does not love me freely, gently in himself cannot survive.

It is after all of the above additions that Kadmos now asks: "Why us", to which Agave responds: "Why not us?" It is worth mentioning that the word "us" is not in the script written by Soyinka. However, this is a very minor alteration in the scheme of things as we have seen from the sequence above. I would argue that the new line that Joffe included for Agave to say as shown above could only contribute to the incongruity that permeated the presentation. Although there is a stage direction in the prompt script which goes on to describe how "A powerful red glow shines suddenly as if within the impaled head" (49) it is clearly a further departure from what Soyinka has written considering the fact that in Soyinka's ending Dionysos is neither seen nor heard. I would argue here that it was in an attempt on the part of Joffe to, as Soyinka has put it, put things back in the lap of god that Dionysos says the line above on stage to finally assert his divine authority. In my view, the idea of Dionysos saying those lines must have been the final nail in the presentation's coffin if we go with our previous analysis that in a well written play, the end must justify the means. It is very clear that the audience had been presented with an adaptation of *The Bacchae* half written by Soyinka and half written by Joffe. It was inevitable that the outcome would be an intercultural disharmony which Soyinka has described as "that trauma inflicted on performers and audience alike" (Soyinka 1993, 47). It will be useful to ascertain how some members of the audience who not only saw the performance but also had the opportunity to critique it, reacted to the trauma inflicted on them.

5.7 The Critics and Soyinka's *Bacchae*

Aside from one or two critics, who demonstrated the understanding that it is possible to divorce a play script from its performance on stage, most of the critics who reviewed the presentation of *The Bacchae* felt the play text and its performance on stage were inseparable. A few examples of how the presentation was perceived across the board will suffice here to conclude our analysis of *The Bacchae.* In his review as published in the *Observer* of the 5th of August 1973, it is clear that Robert Cushman had a problem with Soyinka's adaptation. "A play with a searingly straightforward narrative development is almost obliterated by clutter – scenic, choreography and even textual", Cushman wrote.

> The adaptor, Wole Soyinka has added scenes to the opening, so that the play never seems to get started, and drastically trimmed the end, eliminating Euripides' savage dénouement for the sake of a ludicrous piece of ritual (Cushman 1973, 26).

But it was not only Cushman who finds Soyinka's opening and ending rather problematic. Irving Wardle in his review entitled 'Mangled re-write of the Bacchae' in the *Times* of 3rd August 1973 argued that Euripides' play which ends on the affirmation that "whatever you turn your back on will get you in the end" (Wardle 1973), has been "shrunk into a needless warning against sacrificing impulse to order" (ibid.). And for Rosemary Say, in the *Sunday Telegraph* of August 5, 1973, "something went badly wrong with Mr Soyinka's 'extravagant rite of the human and communal psyche' in Roland Joffe's disorganised and bitty production at the National Theatre last week". She then commented on the amateurish performance of the bacchantes, whom she describes as six "bare to middling prancing maidens straight off the campus", as well as the acrobatic display of the actors alternated with the use of Kabuki-type flower path built across the stalls", before asking:

> Where, instead was the rhythm, the music, or if you like the 'social therapy', other than the squeaking of a penny whistle and the banging of an African drum?

Although Soyinka himself has remarked that he could not understand the rationale of "a Yoruba talking drum in the heart of Thebes" (Soyinka 1993, 50), it is how Ketu Katrak has responded to the above reviews that I would propose we turn our attention to. In the words of Katrak,

> These critics, are of course, unable to conceive a Dionysos different from the Greek original, a Dionysus specifically fashioned in the image of Ogun....The critics failed to recognise that in Soyinka's play, as it is surely his, the question of Dionysus' justice or cruelty is less significant than the value of Pentheus' death for the Thebians. His sacrifice is the dramatisation of a ritual which is potentially health giving for the community (Katrak 1986, 77).

In light of Katrak's insightful observation, I would like to argue that had Soyinka written a brand new play instead of an adaptation of a very well-known classic, in all likelihood the critics would have seen it differently. In other words, there would not have been an original by which to judge the adaptation. It must be stressed, however, that it is not all the critics that did not 'get' Soyinka's aesthetics of Yoruba tragedy. Felix Barker, for instance, gave the writing as well as the production a glowing review in the *Evening News* of 3rd August 1972. "The vivid adaptation by the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka is free without departing too far from the original", according to Barker, "and Roland Joffe's production is inventive and disciplined". But Albert Hunt disagrees with Barker. In a detailed review, entitled 'Amateurs in Horror' in *New Society* of 9 August 1973, Hunt demonstrates his deep understanding of

Soyinka's aesthetics before taking the national theatre of Britain to task. Below is Hunt's conclusion:

> What this production demonstrates yet again is the stylistic illiteracy of what is generally accepted as the best in British theatre. Faced with a text that calls for precise and strictly meaningful gesture, for narrative clarity, and for theatre language built on ritual, the director has opted for imitation orgies, fake horrors and whooped-up excitement. It isn't much that he has failed to find the right answers as that he has shown himself completely unaware of what questions to ask (Hunt 1973).

In my view the reason why Joffe did not know what question to ask was because he did not understand Soyinka's aesthetics and neither did he possess the humility to find out from Soyinka what his aesthetics were. And if we remember the important function of a theatre director, we will see why the success or failure of *The Bacchae* depended majorly on the ability of Joffe to realise on stage what Soyinka had created on page. Kwame Anthony Appiah seems to have shed some light on this artistic intercultural conundrum in his essay 'Myth Literature and the African World'. According to Appiah,

> Though he writes in European language, Soyinka is not writing, cannot be writing, with the purposes of English writers of the present. And it is for this reason above all that Soyinka's language may mislead. It is exactly because they can have little difficulty in understanding what Soyinka says that Europeans and Americans must learn to be careful in attending to his purposes in saying it. For there is a profound difference between the projects of contemporary Europeans and African writers: a difference between the search for the self and the search for a culture (Appiah 1994, 99).

Soyinka is essentially an author in search of a culture in *The Bacchae* as it is the case in all his other plays but, Joffe, who was contracted to direct the play, could be considered as a writer/director searching for self. There was bound to be conflict of interest. And I would argue that this was inevitable, because, as Soyinka himself has rightly pointed it out that, "between the playwright and the audience stands the director" (Gibbs 1981, 89). Moreover it is common place to engage a director that is white for an intercultural project such as the presentation of *The Bacchae*. In other words, why was Soyinka not asked to direct his play? And the answer, I would argue, is simply because interculturalism is the new form of imperialism and that is why Lo and Gilbert have asserted that: "Even when intercultural exchanges take place within the 'non-West,' they are often mediated through Western culture and/or economics" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 36-37).

The National Theatre of Britain is undeniably part of the establishment[138] and as such, its theatrical offerings, either overtly or covertly, are geared towards maintaining the status quo. And tragedy, more so Greek tragedy, as Augusto Boal has contended in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* is an instrument of repression in the hands of the ruling class. "If there is inequality, no one wants it to be to his disadvantage", writes Boal,

> It is necessary to make sure that all remain, if not uniformly satisfied, at least uniformly passive with respect to those criteria of inequality. How to achieve this? Through the many forms of repression: politics, bureaucracy, habits, customs –Greek tragedy (Boal 1979, 25).

In other words, the cathartic feelings of pity and fear that Aristotle has prescribed a good tragedy must arouse in its audience is to ensure that human beings know their limit in comparison to the gods or their representatives on earth. This is precisely what obtains in *The Bacchae* by Euripides and this is perhaps why Soyinka's adaptation could have been perceived and treated as an inversion. Pentheus, being the King of Thebes, epitomises a classical Greek tragic hero and his tragic death, through his tragic flaw which is the refusal to recognise the power of nature, is understandable within the framework of Aristotelian tragedy, but Soyinka had inverted this in his adaptation. It is clear that the National could not come to terms with the purpose of Yoruba tragedy that dictates that the death of Pentheus should benefit the society he leaves behind as Soyinka had written it. What was eventually presented is fundamentally different from Soyinka's adaptation and the metamorphosis Soyinka's adaptation underwent before it reached the audience can best be explained with reference to Patrice Pavis' hourglass intercultural model.

The hourglass theory can be likened to a funnel and a mill. In the upper bowl we have the Source Culture and in the lower bowl, we have the Target Culture (see figure 12). For the source culture to reach the target culture it must pass through a narrow neck that contains various filters that have been put in place by the Target Culture The risk that the hourglass model seems to present, however, is that whatever passes through it cannot remain the same. As Pavis explains it:

[138] The word 'establishment' was coined by journalist Henry Fairlie, according to Pat Hodgson "to describe those with power who appeared to have stranglehold on politics, art and social attitudes mainly because they had been to the same schools and universities". See Hodgson, 1989, p. 6

If it is only a mill, it will blend the source culture, destroy its every specificity and drop into the lower bowl an inert and deformed substance which will have lost its original modelling without being molded (sic) into that of the target culture. If it is only a funnel, it will indiscriminately absorb the initial substance without reshaping it through the series of filters or leaving any trace of the original matter. (Pavis 1992, 5)

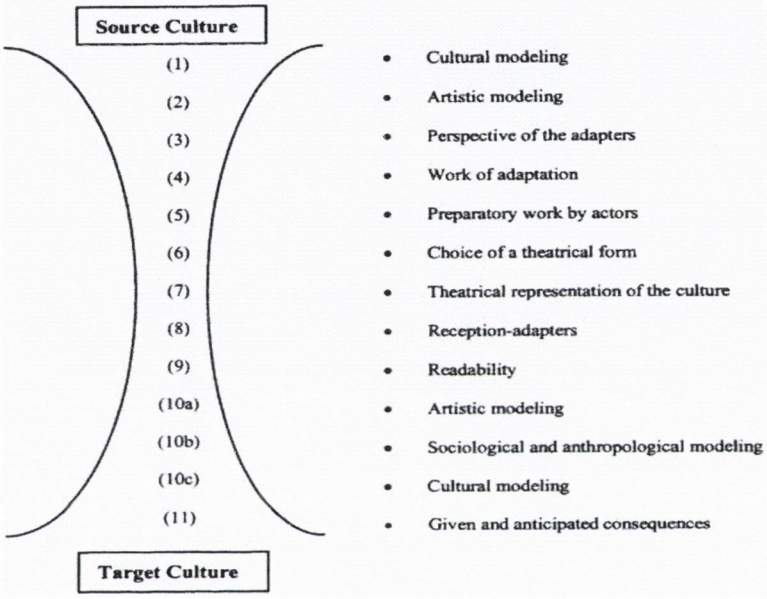

Fig.12 The Hourglass of cultures.

If we apply this model to our analysis of the presentation of *The Bacchae*, one can conclude that Soyinka's adaptation has gone through a mill before reaching the target audience and as a result its cultural specificity and more so the aesthetics of Yoruba tragedy that the adaptation epitomises is no more recognisable.

With respect to the newly proposed intercultural model, it is very doubtful if any attempt to apply it Joffe's production would not amount to forcing a square peg into a round hole. The irony of this situation is that a talking drum was used in the performance, but it was clearly a tokenistic gesture on the part of Roland Joffe. From whatever angle one looks at it, as clearly evidenced by the contents of the programme note that accompanied the production, Joffe's interpretation of Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides* was significantly influenced by Tantra the Indian Cult of, inter alia, eroticism much more than Ogun the Yoruba god of war and iron and the protector of the downtrodden. There are

photographs and excerpts drawn from a number of publications on Indian culture, as well as contributions from experts on Indian culture and religion. To give a few examples: there is an excerpt entitled: 'From Ecstatic Religion' by I.M Lewis; there is a contribution described as: 'Notes on the ancient Indian Cult of Tantra' by Phillip S. Rawson; there is a photograph taken by Pam Jones captioned: 'The Whirling Dervishes of Turkey, whose dances are symbolic religious rituals'; another excerpt is entitled: 'From The Eating of Gods by Jan Kott'; and the last excerpt in the programme note is described as: 'From The Speaking Tree: A study of Indian Culture and Society' by Richard Lannoy. Clearly all of these are geared towards giving Joffe's audiences an insight into Indian culture which inspires his stage interpretation of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy. But the most telling inclusion in the programme note with respect to how Joffe 'tantrically' approached Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy is the photograph taken by Richard Lannoy (see figure 13), captioned: 'Procession of Tantrik Yogis in Banaras, India' .



Fig. 13 Photograph of a procession of Tantrik Yogis in the programme note of The Bacchae

It is this photograph that unquestionably informed how Joffe chose to present his Dionysos as played by Martin Shaw (see figure 11 again). Below is the excerpt, from his aforementioned essay, of how Soyinka recalls the moment Joffe's 'tantricalisation' of his adaptation of *The Bacchae* was first brought to his notice:

> I should, I suppose, have guessed what was going on when I ran into a very depressed member of the cast in the bar who replied to my salutation 'How is it going?' with one word 'Tantric'. I pressed him for an answer less laconic and he added 'Tantrums'. After some persuasion he expanded the whole situation for me by swearing, 'Bloody tantric tantrums!' Well it turned out that for nearly half the rehearsal time, the

> cast had done nothing but receive lectures from the director on Tantric Art (Soyinka 1993, 50).

If Soyinka is not being hyperbolical here, it means the cast of *The Bacchae* must have spent close to four weeks in learning about the Indian tantric art when it was abundantly clear from Soyinka's script that Ogun is the muse for Soyinka's Dionysos and, indeed, the inspiration for his version. But then again it was not only the actors, the set designer, and the movement director who needed what Soyinka calls "all that cram course in Tantric art", but also the music composer. Soyinka recalls that he had requested for "some kind of recognizably Aegean music, specifying some compositions by Theodorakis" (ibid 50-51), but what was composed for the production, as Soyinka recalls it, was:

> A melange of Indian and Japanese music. Hare Krishna silver bells, operated by an admittedly nubile nude, tinkled like demented fairies, drowning every spurt by the actors towards audibility. Bamboo percussions and cymbals seemed to promise the eruption of the fierce ghost of a sumaria from beneath that causeway which ran the whole length of the theatre – another oriental pseudism (ibid).

Earlier on in the essay Soyinka has already described the causeway as Kabuki. So, if the Indian and Japanese music as well as the movement are added to the mix what we have is orientalism in all its glory. But it needs to be stressed, as Soyinka has remarked, that "the bias came down decidedly on the side of India" (ibid.). And it is in light of Joffe's unequivocal Indianisation of a Yoruba tragedy that I believe it will be counter-productive to even attempt to analyse the production through the lens of the newly proposed 'Talking Drum and Keyboard' theoretical model. Of course, I recall that I have stressed the universal applicability of the new model when it was proposed in chapter two, it must be borne in mind, however, that Joffe is a British-born French Jewish director and not an Indian. In other words, if he was a British-born Indian director and had decided to give Soyinka's adaptation an Indian interpretation, that would have been a completely different inter-cross-cultural phenomenon. In fact, that was more or less what Yvonne Brewster did when she directed Soyinka's *The Road* from her Jamaica's background, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In my view, Joffe had no regard for the talking drum culture and in an effort to force Indian tantric cult of eroticism down the throats of his cast and audiences alike he had also neglected the keyboard culture. Thus, the only inference that remains to be drawn is that the presentation of Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* at the National is an epitome of western interculturalism at its worst by virtue of the fact that it was a tokenisation of the cultures of the 'Other' and rather than reinforcing international understanding it ended up reinforcing the kind of hegemonic

relationships that Soyinka's post-colonial drama aims to castigate. In the following chapter, I examine the intercultural stage presentation of *The Road* at the hands of a Jamaican director to ascertain if it provides a different perspective of interculturalism in theatre practice.

CHAPTER SIX

Re-Turning to *The Road* in London

Participant: *Have you assisted when others have directed your work?*

Soyinka: [....].*The closest I've worked with any director was on The Road when it was done in England in 1965 and even there I came in as little as possible – only when the director required some help, then I'd go in and assist him on that specific point.*[139]

6.1 *The Road* on the road to Britain

In 1991, Femi Osofisan, a theatre director and (as previously mentioned) the most prominent of the second generation of Nigerian writers decided to mount a production of *The Road* at the Arts Theatre of University of Ibadan to put to test David Cook's assertion in his essay, 'Soyinka the Potentially Popular Playwright', that, if well produced, all of Soyinka's so-called complex and inaccessible plays have the potential to be popular with Nigerian audiences.[140] Below was the conclusion Osofisan reached after his production of *The Road*:

> A successful production of *The Road* could turn into an actor's delight, into even the favourite of the most fastidious of theatre goers, but it would not for all that, if the director remained faithful to the text, make its meaning less ambiguous (Osofisan 1994, 57).

As not unexpected, Osofisan then goes on to characteristically critique the play from his Marxist-ideological (dialectic-materialist) point of view by pointing out that although the play fascinated theatrically, thematically it was incapable of giving its spectator any sense of hope and renewal in circumstances where Soyinka ends *The Road* with a brutal tyrant destroying his opponents, "and he himself ranting noiselessly into the midst of an orgiastic celebration" (ibid.). Osofisan's contention is very valid. Nonetheless, this needs not bother us here in the sense that it is the intercultural presentation of *The Road* specifically in Britain that interests us and not the ideological ramifications of how the play ends for a Nigerian audience. Suffice it to say, however, that Soyinka, right from the

[139] Cited from 'University of Washington/1973' in Jeyifo, (ed.), 2001, p. 11.

[140] For David Cook's essay, see Adelugba, (ed.), 2005, pp. 89-103.

beginning of his playwriting career, has always been unequivocal in relation to the obligation to which he believes he owes his audience as a playwright, which is clearly at variance with what Osofisan (and indeed Jeyifo)[141] expects from a Nigerian playwright of Soyinka's calibre. "I think my primary duty as a playwright is to provide excellent theatre",[142] Soyinka stated to Lewis Nkosi in 1962,

> I think that I have only one commitment to the public, and to my audience and this is to make sure they do not leave the theatre bored. I don't believe that I have the obligation to enlighten, to instruct, to teach: I don't possess that sense of duty or didacticism – very much unlike Brecht for instance, for, you see, what I like in Brecht is his sort of theatre, its liveliness and freedom, not so much his purpose or intentions (Nkosi 1962, 173).

Soyinka's critics, therefore, can rest assure that the Yoruba tragedian knows exactly why he writes all of his plays – to entertain and not to enlighten. Clearly, Osofisan cannot argue with the fact that Soyinka's dramaturgy is the essence of African total theatre and *The Road*, which must remain our concern in the present analysis, "asserted its histrionic power" (Osofisan 2004, 57) as he himself put it, meaning the play is rich in songs, dance, masquerade and spectacle.

But, by the time Osofisan was presenting his conclusions in his paper which he delivered at a conference in 1994 to mark Soyinka's 60th birthday, *The Road* had already been produced twice in Britain. In fact, the world première of the play was directed by British director David Thompson when it was mounted by Stage Sixty Theatre Company at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in London in 1965 as part of the Commonwealth Arts Festival where, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr., it took the first prize for

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[141] Biodun Jeyifo, a Marxist as Osofisan, has levied the same charge against Nigerian literary drama generally and Soyinka's aesthetics particularly. In his view it is at the point of dramatic climax and thematic significance that communication breaks down in these plays. Thus Soyinka's plays are undeniably theatrical but in terms of thematic significance the dramatic poet lapses into what Jeyifo calls obscurity and indirection. Jeyifo regards the end of *A Dance* and *The Road* as notorious examples. For more, see Jeyifo, 1981, p. 412. For a critical analysis, along class line of *The Road* see Jeyifo, 1985, pp. 11- 22. For Soyinka's response to his critics, including Jeyifo and Osofisan, readers are advised to pursue Soyinka, 1993. pp. 62-81.

[142] As a Nigerian theatre practitioner, I cannot agree more with Soyinka on this issue. In my view, Osofisan's contribution to the development of Nigerian theatre is paradoxical in the sense that he is laying too much emphasis on using the theatre to sensitise Nigerians politically. For more on Osofisan's aesthetics in comparison to Soyinka's see: Irele, 1995, pp. ix-xxxvviii; Ukala, 2001, pp. 29-34.

drama.[143] Soyinka was at hand to help with the production. Penelope Gilliat saw the production and remarked that "A Nigerian called Wole Soyinka has done for our napping language, what brigand dramatists from Ireland have done for centuries" in her review 'A Nigerian Original' published in the *Observer* of September 19, 1965, "booted it awake, rifled its pocket and scattered the loot into the middle of next week" (Gilliat 1965). In my view, Gilliat's review is singularly balanced, well-written and very insightful in terms of the transculturality[144] of Soyinka's drama and the interculturality of its presentation in London in the mid-1960s and, therefore, it would be worthwhile to return to the review in due course. The second British presentation was directed by Jamaica-born Yvonne Brewster, and was no less significant. It was with this production that Talawa Theatre Company, one of the most prominent Afro-Caribbean theatre companies in Britain, opened its home in 1992 at the then newly refurbished Cochrane Theatre located in Southampton Row, Holborn in central London. While it is worth noting here that there was also a production of *The Road*, which was directed by Soyinka for the Goodman Theatre Chicago in 1984, it is the 1992 Talawa production and, to a lesser degree, the aforesaid 1965 Stage Sixty presentation of *The Road* in London that will be the concern of this chapter.[145]

In *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patrice Pavis asserts that "The culture that the spectators reconstitute and which in turn constitutes them is in perpetual mutation; it passes through selective amnesia" (Pavis 1992, 19). Thus, every theatre presentation, even of the same play during a run, is unique and cannot be replicated. It would be erroneous, therefore, to assume that the two London presentations of *The Road* can be analysed as one. In the first place, there was a twenty-seven year gap

[143] My source for this information is Gates Jnr, 2001, p. 65. I must add that it is the only source that I know for this interesting information.

[144] Again, I am using 'transculturality' here to distinguish the cross-culturality of Soyinka's dramaturgy from the interculturality of its performance on stage. If we recall, I made this clear when I discussed *A Dance* in chapter five.

[145] For an insightful analysis of *The Road* as a text and a brief review of Soyinka's production of *The Road* at the Goodman Theatre, readers are advised to see Katrak, 1986, pp. 59-107. According to Yvonne Brewster during my interview with her, (see Appendix 2A) she said Soyinka admitted to her that her 1992 production of *The Road* was better than his production of the play at the Goodman Theatre in 1984. And for an interesting account of an experience of cultural reawakening Soyinka had as regards how animals that are killed on the American highways are treated in comparison to how they will be treated in Nigeria and particularly in the context of what *The Road* is about, as well as what he thinks personally of his American production of *The Road,* see Soyinka, 2006, pp. 287-289. Note that Soyinka in his memoir inadvertently gives the date of the production as 1981.

between them. Furthermore, they were directed, respectively, by a male white director and a black female director. It is a foregone conclusion, therefore, that the presentation and reception of both productions would be different socio-politically, historically and interculturally. For instance, when *The Road* was first produced in 1965, it was the period when a play that would be staged in a Licensed Theatre premises in Britain had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office for censorship.[146] Below was how the play was summarised by the reader by the name C.D. Heriot who was assigned to read and write up a report on *The Road*:

> A play by a Nigerian written half in rhapsodic English and (when the characters have to get on with the plot) half in local dialect plentifully studded with Yoruba words – and the inevitable indecencies. The result is a credit to the Universities of Ibadan and Leeds, where the author was educated, but I would pay large sums not to see it ... The point of the play seems to be that the Road is worshipped as a god by those who use it and that primeval rights of propitiation and sacrifice still muddle the brains of negros who can drive a diesel.[147]

It is very important to add that in this report, Heriot also proposed that a number of cuts be made to the text of the play: "Samson must not urinate on stage ... cut the lines about farting ... a Yoruba song, indecent in translation. ... passenger piss ... cut the menstrual reference"(ibid.). Although Soyinka met with J.F Johnstone, the then Assistant Comptroller at the Lord Chamberlain's office to discuss the possibility of "re-introducing the dialogue on page 58 into the stage play",[148] his request was rejected. "I accordingly represented the author's view to the Lord Chamberlain," Johnstone's note reads, "but must inform you with regret that the disallowance stands" (ibid.). Clearly, Soyinka had to live with the Lord Chamberlain's decision otherwise the license for the production of the play would not have been granted. The tone of some of the reviews that the premiere production received back then could also

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[146] Venues that were regarded as private and for members only did not need to seek the Lord Chamberlain's permission. Apparently it was this loophole that Royal Court Theatre availed of to stage some of the groundbreaking works for which the theatre is now famously known. A case in point is its 1956 production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* as previously discussed in this thesis.

[147] This report is kept in the Lord Chamberlain's archive at the British library in London under reference number: MSS/LCP/Correspondence/1965/145/The Road.

[148] The note dated 9/9/65 was written and signed by J.F.D. Johnstone and it is not clear to whom it was addressed as the addressee was simply referred to as "Dear Sir". This document can also be found in the archive at the British Library under the reference number given above.

serve as a window into Britain of the mid-1960s when artistic censorship was the order of the day and orientalism had yet to metamorphose into interculturalism.

Eric Shorter's review in the *Daily Telegraph* edition of September 15, 1965, for instance, begins with the words: "Maddeningly mysterious, compellingly exotic and crammed with African superstition, 'The Road' by Wole Soyinka begins Commonwealth Arts Festival" (Shorter 1965), before explaining to his readers that, "To enjoy the play to its full extent you probably need to be a Nigerian and even extra patient" (ibid.). It is significant and noteworthy, nonetheless, that Shorter recognises Soyinka's potential:

> The one clear thing about this vivid evening is that in Mr Soyinka, Nigeria has an author, if not a dramatist, of remarkable talent and with a forceful command of the English language in Yoruba terms (Shorter 1965).

In another review that was published in *The Guardian* of September 15, 1965, Gerard Fay similarly recognises Soyinka's linguistic dexterity, but he seems to be unimpressed by Soyinka's play. He refers to the presentation of *The Road* as "one of the early birds of the Commonwealth flock. I cannot think it is going to catch the worm" (Fay, 1965). And in terms of language, Fay's contention is that Soyinka is not articulate but verbose before adding:

> He uses our language, his language, with love and some passion. When he knows, or perhaps more accurately when he can make others know what he is trying to say, he will be going places. On the evidence of this play he is still looking for a destination (Fay 1965).

It would be interesting to read Fay's contemporary review of any of Soyinka's work now. One can only imagine what inference Fay would draw after Soyinka has won the Nobel Prize for Literature. According to Julian Holland in his review entitled 'The Taxicab god' published in *Daily Mail* of September 17, 1965,

> Perhaps the most interesting thing of all about *The Road* is that it is a play with coloured actors that has nothing to do with racialism. It is new and puzzling and if you have any curiosity left in you, go see it (Holland 1965).

Thus for Holland, it was a great thing and a puzzling novelty to see black actors on stage acting in a play that was not about the issue of race. The inference one can draw from Holland's comment is that any

play that featured black actors on the British stage prior to the presentation of *The Road* must have been written or presented to specifically explore the issue of race at the time. Again, lest we forget, this was in the mid-1960s, about five years after Nigeria gained its independence from Britain. So, while Soyinka was by the time a graduate of a British university, his dramaturgy still bore the trace of 'otherness' or what Derrida calls 'alterity' (Derrida 2004, 293). Consequently, it was this that marked him out as an invisible 'Other', albeit a privileged one, whose work could be re-presented on stage. So the important question is: had anything changed by the time a coloured theatre director in the person of Jamaican Yvonne Brewster directed the same play in 1992?

Britain had become much more multicultural for a start. Consequently, London had become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe, but, more importantly, its audience had become much more diverse and sophisticated considering the fact that a few black theatre groups that began in the early 1970s had multiplied as more black writers, most of whom were born in Britain, began to emerge. Correspondingly, there had been an increase in the number of black actors from whom a director could choose. Furthermore, by 1992 Brewster had one less thing to worry about, and that is the office of the Lord Chamberlain's office, bearing in mind that the policy of theatre censorship had been abolished by the Theatre Acts of 1968. But above all, Soyinka had become a world-wide acclaimed 'Other' having become the first African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. However, Brewster still had the critics to contend with. And while Brewster would rather not talk about reviews, because, as she stated, "I don't think I have ever got a good review in my life" (Brewster 2012),[149] what reviewers have said about her presentation of *The Road* is important for our analysis here and, therefore, we cannot ignore them. "I often wonder what would have happened to Yvonne if the critics had been kinder to her work", Brewster writes in her autobiography, *The Undertaker's Daughter* (narrated by her mother), "They often reserved a special kind of spleen for her which might be summed up in the words, 'Who does she think she is?'" (Brewster 2004, 155). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to ascertain who Brewster thinks she is, but to objectively analyse the interculturality of her production of *The Road*, we need to take on board the views that have been articulated in the previews and reviews of the said production, regardless of the fact that most, if not all, of the British theatre reviewers are white middle-class.

Some of the issues that Nick Smurthwaite raises in his review, in the *Midweek* edition of March 12,

[149] See appendix 2A for a transcribed and edited version of my interview with Brewster conducted on the 5th of May 2012 at the Tricycle Theatre in London.

1992, of the Talawa production of *The Road*, for instance, are germane not only to our analysis of the interculturality of the presentation of *The Road*, but also to the politics, ethics and economics of a black theatre production company such as Talawa operating in a capitalistic, 'multi-cultural' and post-modern or 'hyperreal' (to use Jean Baudrillard's term)[150] society such as Britain. Below is how Smurthwaite concluded his review:

> I found a lot of the dialogue hard to pick up, and unlike *Waiting for Godot* which it resembles in many ways, the characters fail to relate to one another in any recognisable way. My feeling by the end of the evening was that Talawa's Yvonne Brewster had been misguided in choosing this difficult play to open the Cochrane, but I'm sure she knows a lot more about the Cochrane's potential audience than I do. Box office receipts will show if she has pitched it right[151] (Smurthwaite 1992).

A number of pertinent questions can be refracted from the above. Was Yvonne Brewster's production of *The Road* a success or a failure? If it was a success, what did she do right semiologically to transfer the text from page to stage and from its source culture to the target culture? Did she heed Osofisan's suggestion that a successful staging of *The Road* requires its director not to remain faithful to Soyinka's text? Or to problematise things even further: who determines when an intercultural production such as the Talawa production of *The Road* is a success or a failure? In other words, is it the box office receipt or

[150] This is the term that Baudrillard uses to describe a situation when a model is used to simulate the real. In most cases the phenomenon that the model represents is itself lacking in substance. For Baudrillard, Disneyland is an epitome of the 'hyperreal' in the sense that it is built as a place of phantasy to distract attention from the fact that the world that we live in is not really real but a simulation of the real. It brings to mind the song that Nigerian Fela Kuti sang when he was released from one of his many prison terms. He argued that the 'outside world' (the real world) was the crazy world and that inside prison was the 'real world'. He then listed all the crazy things that crazy people in government had done in the so-called 'real world' which would not be allowed inside prison, to reinforce his point. It is in this broad sense that I am using this term to describe London. A friend told me recently that a Nigerian man would never be satisfied until he sees London with his two eyes. London as a place, in my view, is 'hyperreal' and a 'simulacra' to distract attention from the fact that London is no more the capital of the world as it used to be during the period of colonialism. For 'hyperreal' and 'simulacra', see Baudrillard, 2004, p. 369.

[151] As will be discussed later on, Brewster singled out this review during an interview that she gave Esiaba Irobi when Esiaba was researching for his essay 'The Six Blindfolded and the Elephants' as published in the *Soyinka Journal,* Number 1 August 2005 in which he analysed productions of Soyinka's *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman* including Brewster's production.

the critics' reviews or the author of the play? It is the aim of this chapter to critically analyse the 1992 Talawa production of *The Road*, which has been widely hailed as a "perfect misreading" (Brewster 2004, 143) by Biodun Jeyifo at a conference on Soyinka's works held in Toronto Canada in 2001.

Brewster is originally from Jamaica, *The Road* is a Yoruba tragedy and Talawa's audiences[152] comprise of middle-class English as well as Caribbean and African immigrants living in London. In this sense I would argue that the production and presentation of *The Road* by Talawa was an epitome of interculturalism at the crossroads of multiculturalism bearing in mind that the term intercultural, as Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert have noted, "suggests an exploration of the interstice between cultures, it draws attention to the hyphenated third space separating and connecting different peoples" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 44). Homi K. Bhabha has made precisely the same point when, in his book *The Location of Culture*, he remarks that "It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experience of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 1994, 2). It is for this reason that I have decided to privilege the Talawa production in my analysis of *The Road* in this chapter. For the production of the play in 1965, the director David Thompson had Soyinka, the author, to consult, but Brewster had to rely, *inter alia*, on her memory of her trip to Nigeria in 1989 when she decided to direct *The Road* in 1992.[153] In her autobiography, Brewster recalls the cultural awakening she had when she travelled to the Yoruba land in Nigeria in 1989 to conduct a research into the work of Ola Rotimi the writer of *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (based on *Oedipus Rex*) a play Talawa was planning to mount at the time. Here is Brewster narrating the experience to her mother, her alter ego in the autobiography,

> I have to tell you what happened on my first morning walking on campus with this group of very distinguished Nigerians (and me!). To my dismay beautiful young men kept falling to the ground in front

[152] During the run of its production of *Anthony and Cleopatra* as directed by Yvonne Brewster and mounted at the Bloomsbury Theatre, Talawa conducted research and after interviewing 580 members of audience, their research shows that majority (68%) of the audience that went to see the show were women many of whom were in full time education. This comprised of employed black people aged 25 – 35 who considered themselves regular theatre goers. There is also white middle class people mostly women aged 25 – 35.

[153] It is worth adding that Talawa actually engaged Nigerian academic and writer Kole Omotoso as text consultant and Peter Badejo as song consultants for the production, but for reasons that were not made clear to me, Badejo was not readily available and Omotoso was based in South Africa, where he lives and works.

of us. At first I thought that some strange affliction was rife on campus. Good thing Professor Elufowoju (I think it was him) explained to me that this was how the young men showed respect to their elders and betters (Brewster 2004, 136).[154]

If Brewster could not read what the sign to prostrate signifies among the Yorubas, what made her consider directing *The Road*, which is loaded with much more complex Yoruba sign systems? But then again it is worth remembering as Patrice Pavis has pointed out that "intercultural communication is often possible only at the price of changing the mode of readability from one culture to another" (Pavis 1990, 67). It would be instructive, therefore, to examine the semiological and intercultural hurdles which Brewster, who is 'black'[155] but completely unfamiliar with Nigerian – and specifically Yoruba – culture had to negotiate in her determination to successfully stage the production of *The Road* for Talawa's "half white/half black" audience as it has been described by Jane Edwards in her article 'Home Truth' in *Time Out* of February 26, 1992 in which she previews *The Road* as Talawa's preferred choice of play to open its new home at the Cochrane. So the main focus of this chapter is to analyse the 1992 Talawa production of *The Road*, but to conclude my analysis, I intend to analyse reviews of the world premiere production in 1965, if only to put the Talawa production into its historical, political and cross-cultural perspectives. But before all that, I propose to briefly historicise *The Road* and situate the play in its sociological and dramaturgical context.

6.2 *The Road*: A Phenomenological/Ontological Contextualisation.

It was inevitable that upon arriving in Nigeria in the early 1960s after his five-year stay in Britain Soyinka would sooner rather than later write a play called *The Road*. In fact, I would go as far as contending that had Soyinka not written the play or had written it and given it another title other than *The Road*, a gaping gulf would have been created in Soyinka's oeuvre. *The Road* had to be written by Soyinka, because Ogun, as we have already discussed, is Soyinka's muse and Ogun is the deity of a number of

[154] I must say that I could not help laughing aloud when I read this passage in Brewster's autobiography. The irony of this cultural misreading is that when Yoruba elders do not want you to bother prostrating yourself to greet them what they would do is exactly what Brewster had done before the sign was explained to her. In a sense her misreading this particular cultural sign could have been interpreted as an understanding of the sign and what it signifies. I would argue that it is this sort of cultural misreading that permeated Brewster's production of *The Road.*

[155] It is important to stress that Brewster is actually of mixed heritage, so in my view she is not completely black and to suggest that she automatically understands Yoruba culture would be inaccurate.

phenomena including the road, (that is, if Ogun is not the road deified) and as we will see shortly, it is the road that inspired the aesthetics of Yoruba tragedy. What is unfathomable, nonetheless, is why *The Road* had to travel to London for its world premiere when Soyinka wrote it in 1965, but we shall return to that later on. *The Road*, as the title implies, is based not only on the ontology but also the phenomenology of the road and specifically Nigerian motor roads, which are notoriously dangerous. As already discussed, Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1960, after what he has referred to as "the five-year interruption in England" (Soyinka 2006, 46), it was as a recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation research grant. It was to this end that he travelled in his most valuable possession, a Land Rover jeep, the length and breadth of Nigeria for the purpose of, as he describes it, "probing its ritual tissues for a contemporary theatre vision or perhaps a mere statement of being" (Soyinka 2001, 197). Nigeria is a vast country with a land mass put at 351,649 square miles. Therefore, if Soyinka is not being hyperbolical when he claims in *Ibadan* that he covered at least two thirds of the country, it means Soyinka must have done a lot of travelling. To have travelled to Akure, Oyo, Oshogbo (west), Jos, Bida, Gboko (middle-belt), Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri (far north) Benin, Port Harcourt and Calabar (south) to mention but a few places Soyinka drove to, he must have been on the road all the time and invariably become very familiar and probably obsessed with Nigerian roads. The fact however remains that it is not possible for any mortal to travel that often on Nigerian roads without coming face-to-face with his mortality a number of times.

Undoubtedly, Soyinka, as every other Nigerian commuter, must have heard of, seen and narrowly escaped death many times on the roads in Nigeria.[156] It is in every Nigerian's psyche that the motor road is a flesh-eating and blood-sucking predator waiting to pounce on its hapless victims whenever it is hungry, and hence the Yoruba saying: *Ka ma rin ni jo ti ebi pa ona*. It is this prayer that Soyinka has translated in *The Road* as: "May we never, walk when the road waits, famished" (199).[157] It is this

[156] In his address to mark the first anniversary of the United Nations (UN) Decade of Action in Abuja, Nigeria 2012, Naira Land Forum, a Nigerian social forum website, the Nigeria Health Minister, Professor Onyebuchi Chukwu claimed that Nigerian is ranked second in road accident fatalities, out of the 193 countries in the world. In his words; "Road traffic accidents, [which] have led to the death of men, women, boys and girls and even the unborn child, impacts negatively on our ability to achieve the MDGs as most people affected are the youths". Cited from: Naira Land Forum:http://www.nairaland.com/936580/nigeria-ranks-second-world-road#10812052 (accessed 31, August 2012).

[157] All citations in this thesis are from Soyinka, Wole. 1973. *The Road* in *Wole Soyinka: Collected Plays 1*. Oxford

propensity of the Nigerian motorway to kill indiscriminately and unexpectedly that has compelled Soyinka to write *The Road* and, more importantly, provided him with the fillip with which to theorise the aesthetics of his Yoruba tragedy. Conversely, the premise of Soyinka's dramaturgy is predicated upon the ontology of the road. The inference that remains to be drawn therefore is that what Soyinka was travelling all the way to Sokoto for could be found in the pockets of his *sokoto* (trousers).[158] This means "the research that was taking him all over the nation, worrying out dramatic forms from the mould of rituals, festivals and seasonal ceremonials" (Soyinka 2001, 71) could actually be carried out on the stretch of road on which Soyinka was doing the travelling.

In the chapter entitled 'Reunion with Ogun' in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Soyinka paints a vivid picture of his "very personal communion" with the road before he travelled to England in the mid-1950s and when he returned to Nigeria on New Year's day in 1960. Although Soyinka recalls how his social bond with the road can be traced back to his childhood, I would contend that it was upon his return to Nigeria after his studies in Britain that he began to fully appreciate the ontology and phenomenology of the road. In fact, the road and Soyinka, in his own words, "became partners in the quest for an extended self discovery" (Soyinka 2006, 47). In this sense, Soyinka is not the only subject in search of discovery the road, is also conducting its own research on Soyinka too because, as Soyinka is fully aware, the road, just like Ogun, is temperamental and extremely violent. It is worth noting that Soyinka favoured setting out early during his travels in the early 1960s and hence the title of his memoir: *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*.[159] With that information in mind, below is how Soyinka describes one of the many accidents with

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University Press: Oxford and New York.

[158] The proverb goes: *Ohun ti a n wa lo Sokoto, wa ni apo sokoto* meaning 'what one is travelling to Sokoto in search of is actually in one's trousers' pocket'. The proverb is a demonstration of the tonality of the Yoruba language. Sokoto (a city in the northern part of Nigeria) is spelt the same way as sokoto (trousers) but respectively pronounced with the musical high tone 'mi-mi-mi' and the low tone 'do-do-do'

[159] As already mentioned, I attended the launch of *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* in April 2006 in Palo Alto in California and I recorded the event on tape. Soyinka read an excerpt from the memoir and during the conversation conducted by Chike Nwoffiah, the Artistic Director of Oriki Theatre based in Mountainview California, Soyinka said the title that he had in mind for the memoir was 'Beyond the Word' but when his editor came across the short poem that is in the manuscript, she suggested to Soyinka to consider changing the title to: *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. Soyinka said he decided to put the suggestion to vote among some of his trusted friends including his Nigerian publisher and *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* was carried with six votes to four and as a true democrat he

which he came face to face one early morning:

> A vehicle or two upended, torn mangled wrapped around a tree,[160] or simply chipped, a fatal slice taken off its corner, or else nothing but a tell-tale swathe through the forest and the camouflage of shrubs and trees that the errant vehicle had pulled round itself like resentful shroud. A jagged opening through the railings on one side of the bridge might narrate the trajectory that ended on the distant rocks below, waters swirling around a few scattered pieces of metal and wooden body frame, all unearthly still. Such tableaux instigate the reconstructing functions of the mind, instantly at work to figure out the progression of events, stringing the vanished sequences together (Soyinka 2006, 50).

It is perhaps to make sense of such accident scenes that Soyinka, as we will see anon, has discursively re/de-constructed them in *The Road*, bearing in mind Adedeji's observation that "Transformation is a functional view of structuralism and its main property is language" (Adedeji 2005, 120). Soyinka continues,

> Those early scenes of death had a solemnity about them, a graceful announcement of leave-taking where the precedent violence is gently absorbed by indeed sublimated beneath that multiple existences that the Yoruba wrap around their consciousness as testament of continuity: the world of the living, the ancestor, and the unborn...The road was old and it was young, ageless as the peoples through whose lives it threaded and young as the same peoples, who were being collectively transformed. Perhaps I assumed the function of the wanderer whose occupation was to bear witness to the road's many phases that mirrored not merely human fate but, more directly and effectively, an immediate entity in formation (Soyinka 2006, 50).

I would argue that in the above passage lies the whole premise of Yoruba tragedy. Furthermore, the passage also clearly illustrates how Soyinka had been selected to be the road's aesthetician (or apostle),

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went with the majority vote. However it is important to note that the title 'Beyond the Word' that Soyinka originally had in mind for the memoir, as he explained to Nwoffiah, address the "obvious question people ask: what do writers do outside the word?" This title is very pertinent to our analysis of *The Road* because, as we will see when we turn to *The Road*, 'the Word' plays a very important role in Professor's quest for the essence of death.

[160] This line finds its way into *The Road* and sounds like one of the Professor's 'gibberish' as will be discussed shortly.

by the road and on the road. [161] So, Soyinka might have received his political illumination in Britain, it was in Nigeria that he received his 'dramaturgical *satori*' for the theorisation and formalisation of his Yoruba tragedy, bearing in mind the Yoruba aphorism: *Aye lo'ja orun n'ile,* which literally translates as: 'the world is a market place, heaven is home'. Nigerian road is a site of conflict as well as a space of transition and, therefore, a metaphor for Soyinka's 'numinous abyss' which his tragic hero must dare for the benefit of his society.

But it was not only through his creative writing that Soyinka endeavoured to combat the malaise on the Nigerian roads. In 1978, Soyinka sold the idea of establishing the Oyo State Road Safety Corps to Brigadier David Jemibewon, the then military governor of Oyo State. At the time, Soyinka was a lecturer at the University of Ife and the road between Ife and Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, was perhaps the most ravenous road in Yoruba land. Soyinka was made the head of the special corps comprised mostly of members of staff of the Universities of Ife and Ibadan. At the formal launching of the Road Safety Corps, which Soyinka called 'Operation Counter Terror', Soyinka's words were: "We are tired of an environment polluted by the stench from slaughter and maiming on the road" as it was reported in the Nigerian *Daily Times* of November, 1978. It would be safe to surmise that after the launch of road safety corps, Ife/Ibadan road became relatively safer. For instance, when Indian Ketu Katrak travelled to Nigeria in 1980 to, inter alia, interview Soyinka for her book, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*, which was eventually published in 1986, she unavoidably found herself on the dangerous Ife/Ibadan road a number of times, which she thought was akin to taking one's life in one's hands. When Katrak mentioned her observation to Soyinka, his response was: "Ah yes, these taxis are flying coffins. But things are much better now than they used to be a couple of years ago".[162]

What this illuminates for us is that Soyinka is right to have concluded in his memoir that his experience of seeing deaths on the Nigerian road was an inoculation against alienation. In his words,

[161] To draw a Biblical parallel here, I must say that I see Soyinka, in one sense, as Saul who gets transformed on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians and eventually becomes Paul. In another sense Soyinka reminds me of Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses is the one that God has chosen to liberate the Israelites from the captivity in Egypt. The next passage I am quoting will perhaps add some weight to my supposition here.

[162] All the reference of Katrak in Nigeria and her conversation with Soyinka, have been cited from the endnote 8 in Katrak, 1986, pp. 102.

> There was a practical reward to my pre-occupation with the road – it was a talisman against alienation, that altering phenomenon that separates the individual from community. This condition had begun to disfigure the social landscape of the nation not long after independence, especially in the cities. Out in the hinterland, one could still wallow in a mystic bond with the land and thus with a people's eternal, collective being. If I was an initiate in this process of the coming-into-being of a nation, the road was my personal mentor, conspirator and – in the growing face of alienation – and unassuming safeguard. Alas, its revelations also plunged me into the parallel politics of its violent being (Soyinka 2006, 52).

It would be safe to infer here that Soyinka must have been traumatised personally by all the ghastly accidents that he had heard of, read about or witnessed when he first arrived back in Nigeria from Britain in the early 1960s. But while Soyinka might have been unfortunate to see what would make anyone go insane, again, he is fortunate to have been blessed with the gift of language and the medium of theatre with which to express his experience. Thus reading it through the lens of structuralism, Soyinka has been able to translate "physical realities to discursive realities" (Rivkin and Ryan, 2004, 55) by constructing for the stage his perception of the road. And as Niall Lucy has also pointed out, "We are therefore subject to, and subjects of language structuring principles and this is no less the case if who 'we' are happens to be the author of a literary text" (Lucy 1997, 1). It is in the light of this that I would contend that literally and symbolically, Soyinka's dramaturgy is predicated on the road and must, therefore, be seen against the backdrop of the inescapability, functionality and spirituality of the road. Oyin Ogunba has succinctly encapsulated the argument I am advancing here when he posits that if the movement of transition and the conflicts of interest inherent therein are Soyinka's overriding preoccupations in all his mature plays, then,

> the central image in Soyinka's mature plays is the road which links the past with the present and continues to a future that is dark and, judging from the present, likely to be grim and cataclysmic (Ogunba 1975, 3).

It would be wrong, therefore, to assume that *The Road* is simply about the ontology of the road. Whatever way one looks at it, Soyinka's mature plays are post-colonial and, therefore, his main preoccupation, while positing that his primary purpose is to entertain, is undoubtedly to employ the immediacy of the theatre to show how Nigeria can get on the road to real independence free from the yoke of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is in light of this that Helen Gilbert in her 'Introduction to Soyinka' in *Postcolonial Plays* has not only remarked on the transculturality of Soyinka's dramaturgy but

also its post-coloniality when she notes that "many of Soyinka's most compelling tragedies explore the connection between ritual and theatre in a post-colonial context" (Gilbert 2001, 49).

Soyinka is a Yoruba man and, therefore, he knows fully well that: "It is through play that the truth is revealed". He has demonstrated this very powerfully right from the very beginning of *The Road*, when we see Samson, as the stage direction tells us, "*goes to a spider's web in the corner, pokes it with a stick*". To my mind, the introduction of the web and a spider at the outset of the drama is highly symbolic in the sense that it brings to mind a vivid picture of network of roads and how Ogun the god of the road waits for its sacrifice as a spider waits for a hapless fly to get entangled in its intricately woven web. It is, thus, from the beginning of the play that the metaphor of the road is foregrounded, albeit in a playful manner. And to take Ogunba's analysis to its logical conclusion, one is compelled to see Soyinka's dramaturgical allegory of a lorry-full of Nigerians desperately attempting to negotiate the bumpy road from pre-modernity (*A Dance of the Forest* 1960) to modernity (*The Road* 1965) to post-modernity (*Madmen and Specialists* 1970). It is in this light, perhaps, that Nadine Gordimer notes that Soyinka's "plays are a different story. Or rather the same story (every writer is actually telling one long story put together serially in her/his own work) told in a medium where comprehension by no means depend on words alone" (Gordimer 1993, 37). It is very important, therefore, to bear it in mind as we begin our analysis of the intercultural presentation of *The Road* that the play itself is one part of a continuum.

In fact, if we recall, as Motsa has rightly pointed out, that "all works of art have parents" (Motsa 2000, 244), one would be inclined to argue that *The Road* is an offspring of Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest*. As we may recall, Nigerian roads feature prominently in *A Dance of the Forest* but not merely for the sake of it. Soyinka highlights and ridicules those who contribute to the danger on the road through the corrupt and negligent practices. In his insightful analysis of Soyinka's *A Dance* in his book, *The Movement of Transition*, Ogunba has drawn our attention to the fact that the reference to the lorry that got burnt in *A Dance* is based on a real-life accident that occurred during the preparation for the Nigeria independence day celebration, around the time Soyinka was directing the premiere production of the play. Apparently, the lorry that crashed and got burnt in reality had as many as seventy passengers, mostly school children, on board on their way to the capital city for the celebration. I would argue that it was therefore in an effort to further his post-colonial agenda to stop the perpetual carnage on Nigerian roads that compelled Soyinka to write *The Road*. In fact in an interview that he gave *Spear Magazine* in Lagos in 1966, Soyinka admitted that *The Road* was one of the three personal plays he had written:

> *The Road* is based on what I might call a personal intimacy which I have developed with a certain aspect of the road. It is a very strange personal experience which developed out of my travels on the road. It was almost a kind of exorcism, writing the play. I first conceived it as a film. And I am still thinking of filming it.[163]

While the interview was conducted in 1966, to date *The Road* remains a stage play. But more significantly the play had travelled to London, a year before Soyinka made the above statement, for its world premiere and then it was staged by Talawa in 1992. So, the question one is compelled to ask is: how did a play about Yoruba gods and the phenomenology of the road resonate with London audiences. In order to put our analysis in its proper dramaturgical and trans-cultural context, it would be necessary, in my view, to deconstruct (or 'de-onionise')[164] *The Road* as a play text in the context of the Talawa production because as Brewster had made it clear, in her interview with Esiaba Irobi in 1992, "*The Road* is not mashed potatoes served up to children without teeth".[165]

6.3 Talawa before *The Road*

Talawa Theatre Company was founded in 1985 by Yvonne Brewster alongside Inigo Espejel, Mona Hammond and Carmen Munroe. According to Brewster the company was formed when, in 1985, she was advised by a colleague, Lord Michael Burkett, to put a proposal for a project together and submit it to the Arts Council of Britain since she had a good chance of getting funded. It was when the application was successful in Brewster's name that Starr, her husband, "pointed out that she had better form a company quickly as if this harebrained scheme went pear-shaped, he had no intention of selling the house" (Brewster 2004, 122). Consequently, Brewster called Mona Hammond and Carmen Monroe and they accepted to be founder members of the company. Talawa is derived from a Caribbean aphorism: *She likkle but she tallawah* (she is little but she's talawah), which translates as 'she is small, little but

[163] My source of this remark is Katrak, 1986, p. 65. I have cited the remark because I think it is very pertinent to the present analysis of the play and it is also interesting to hear it directly from Soyinka that he had originally conceived the play as a film. Although I will be discussing this point later on in this chapter it is worth mentioning here that, in my view, it is the fact that *The Road* is more of a film script than a play text that will always make it difficult to stage.

[164] I am using the term 'de-onionise' here guardedly to emphasise the fact that *The Road* just like any of Soyinka's tragic plays can be likened to an onion which is naturally multilayered and tear-inducing.

[165] See Irobi, 2005, p. 57.

feisty, *don't mess with her*'.[166] After interviewing Brewster and subsequently reading about her colourful life in her autobiography, it became clear that Brewster is Talawa and vice versa bearing in mind that the name Talawa specifically means "don't mess with her". In a sense it is this 'don't-mess-with-*me*' attitude which Brewster has cultivated since her childhood in Kingston Jamaica as she has narrated it in her autobiography coupled with her dogged determination to succeed, despite all the odds against her, when she was admitted to Rose Bruford Drama School in London in 1956. Ironically, it was due to the fact that all her white classmates in Rose Bruford were interested in being on stage that made Brewster opt for directing. In my view it was Brewster's determination to succeed despite all the prejudices she had to endure as a black teenage girl in the late 1950s in Britain that made her suitably qualified to be the founder and the first artistic director of one of the most prominent black theatre companies in London. "The thing about Talawa was to do black classics", Brewster explained,

> Black classics which weren't ever done in this country or if they had done, it was time to do it again. And then afterwards, to give black actors the chance of doing, not just maids and spiffs and murderers...to give them parts in the wide spectrum of life. Okay, you can murder as well, but sometimes you can be king. So, that was how the whole thinking behind it (Appendix 2A).

So, clearly the aim of Talawa from the outset is to present plays that would demonstrate that black people are "just as multifaceted, and just as multi-talented and just as multi-human as anybody else". And, as far as Brewster is concerned, this aim was achieved before she resigned as the artistic director of Talawa in 1995. A range of Talawa's celebrated productions during Brewster's tenure would include C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1986); *O'Babylon* (1988) by Derek Walcott and Galt McDermott; Oscar

[166] I had my interview on the 5th of May 2012 at the Tricycle Theatre in London with Jamaica-born Yvonne Brewster the founding artistic director of Talawa, the London- based Afro-Caribbean Theatre Company. During the interview, Brewster enunciated the "Don't mess with her" part to stress the fact that it is exactly what Talawa stands for and also to illustrate the fact that she does not tolerate any one who thinks she can be messed with. Interestingly, Brewster did not mention to me that she had written an autobiography published in 2004. In fact, she obliged me by telling me all about herself. I guess she felt if I did my research properly I would find out about her published autobiography eventually. She was right, I eventually came across *The Undertaker's Daughter* and when I read it, what she told me about how troublesome she was when she was growing up in Kingston Jamaica in the 1940s made a lot of sense. I also found out from reading her autobiography that she also much prefers anyone who wants to interview her to have done his or research. I must say I am glad I had not done too much research on her because I gained a lot of insight into her personality during our conversation.

Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1989); Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1991). With all these productions, Talawa, since its inception, had created a platform for black actors to play roles they could only dream of and also brought to the attention of its diverse audience a number of classic plays written by black authors. For instance, Talawa produced *The Gods Are Not To Blame* by Ola Rotimi in 1989 and in order to research the play, Brewster had to travel to Nigeria. Some of the inter-cultural experiences that Brewster had when she travelled to Nigeria helped her immensely when she finally decided to produce *The Road.*

It was Derek Walcott, the Trinidadian writer (who subsequently won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993) that recommended *The Road* to Jamaica-born Yvonne Brewster. As Brewster explained, she had neither heard of nor read *The Road* before Walcott told her about the play. Talawa had received a special and substantial grant from the Arts Council of Britain to refurbish an old theatre building known as the Jeanette Cochrane Theatre on Southampton Row in Holborn, Central London with the view to making the building Talawa's permanent home. With the grant money, a London-based Nigerian architect Abiodun Odedina of Robinson Thorne Architects was commissioned to redesign the building and it was completed towards the end of 1991. It was a big challenge for Talawa to make sure that the launch at the Cochrane was done right. Brewster, however felt it would be appropriate to open the theatre with a challenging play.

According to Brewster, she was busy with the production of *Anthony and Cleopatra* at the National around the time she had to make up her mind on what play to do to open the Cochrane Theatre. That was why she asked for Walcott's advice the evening he came to see the performance. Her view, as she told me, was that if she performed a comedy it could be seen as "this is just black people singing and dancing all the time". And she did not want to produce a Caribbean or an English play either. In her words, "I just wanted to do a play that is a challenge to me". According to Brewster, it was at that point that Walcott said to her:

> I'll tell you something, I've seen some of your work...You want a challenge? Do the Road. I tried to direct *The Road* and I failed miserably. I could not understand what the hell it was all about. Let's see how good you are (Appendix 2A).

Brewster took up Walcott's challenge; read the play and even though she could not comprehend what

the play was about, in her words,

> there was something which clicked into me: I love the Professor, because I could see people like Professor out of my own existence in Jamaica, and here in England that Professor is such a wonderful, wonderful theatrical character. So I said okay, I would do it. Well my Board nearly killed me. They said it is not doable, nobody will come and it's going to be a disaster. I said well....that is what I am doing, if you don't want me to do it, you can sack me, that's what I'm doing (Appendix 2A).

So, one can argue that it was on a whim that Brewster decided to direct *The Road* and the fact that she could not understand the play when she first read it was not enough to deter her, because as she puts it in *The Undertaker's Daughter*, "[It] seems the greater the challenge the more she feels she must meet it" (Brewster 2004, 131). So, it is hardly surprising that regardless of what other people thought, Brewster saw the play as her 'Mount Everest' which she had to surmount to prove her mettle as a theatre director. Perhaps it was because her Board knew her or it did not know how to deal with the sheer lunacy of presenting on stage what she could not comprehend on page that made her board reconsider its position and gave Brewster the go-ahead to produce *The Road.*

6.4 De-Constructing *The Road*[167] and its London Presentation(s)

The Road, I would argue, is a philosophical dramatisation of how the conundrum of mortality can only be comprehended through mortality. Using the motif of *Agemo,* a particular kind of *egungun* masquerade, known to engage in the act of illusion, (more discussion on this in due course) as a backdrop and having Professor, who is obsessed with empirical research into the meaning of death, as the protagonist, Soyinka's drama offers an insight into the irreducible truth of our existence and seems to be suggesting that the only way one can truly come to terms with the essence of death is by experiencing death. Professor used to be a highly respected lay preacher and Sunday school teacher but when he was sacked for blaspheming the Bishop and mismanaging church funds, he left the orthodox

[167] I have decided to provide a detailed summary of the text in the following pages to frame my analysis of the Talawa production when I realised that the London-based British Theatre Museum where all the archival materials of Talawa's production of *The Road* are held, could not be persuaded to allow me to view the video recording of the production because they claim the recording is fragile and they do not want any damage to be done to it in the process of viewing. I must admit that I find this rather preposterous in a postmodern age since copies can be made for viewing and while the original is kept under lock and key.

Christian church and reverted to Yoruba traditional religion to continue his quest for the meaning of death. By the time the play begins, Professor has opened, right beside his former church, a shop with a misspelled sign 'AKSIDENT STORE – ALL PART AVAILABUL". What this sign implies is that this is a store where spare motor parts that have been salvaged from cars that have been involved in road accidents are sold to drivers who are in need of spare parts for their vehicles. In Brewster's production, wrecked cars provide the setting for the play as designed by Sue Mayes. But to juxtapose the present decadence in which the Professor operates, with his pious past, there is also a hint of shadow of a church in the background "represented here," as Paul Taylor remarks in his review entitled 'Scrap Mettle' in the *Independent* of March, 4, 1992, "as a fragmentary spider's web of shattered glass". I would argue here that this object was meant to be a huge crucifix, but was probably not well designed or realised in production. From a close reading of Soyinka's text, Brewster was able to discern that Professor's past relationship with the church or what she called "religiosity" was meant to be interfering and intervening with his present. It was in an attempt to achieve this that, as she put, "I speak to the designer, I needed to find a symbol of that church...So we had this big prospect church with this cross almost overshadowing" (Appendix 2A).

But in my own view, one thing that Brewster's production set achieves, regardless of whether the cross was symbolic enough or not, is the fact that it foreshadows the entry and the personality of the Professor before he makes his appearance. Nick Smurthwaite in his review in the *Midweek* picks up on this when he describes the set thus: "Sue Mayes's stunning set design, half a dozen wrecked cars all stylishly heaped on top of one another evokes the right feeling of decadence and carnage from the start" (Smurthwaite 1992). To further his quest for the meaning of death, Professor is prepared to go to any length in pursuit of the 'Word', which to his twisted mind, holds the key to the essence of man's mortality. This is precisely the reason why Professor used to be a very zealous Christian. It was after searching unsuccessfully for the 'Word' within the confines of the Orthodox Church for many years that the Professor decided to explore the traditional religion route by investigating the phenomenon of the Egungun masquerade cult. Furthermore, he sleeps in graveyards among corpses and he considers accident scenes as his laboratory and accident fatalities as his specimen. How the Professor looks and what he says when he first appears on stage are quite revealing:

> *[...Professor is a tall figure in Victorian outfit –tails, top-hat., all thread-bare and shiny at the lapels from much ironing. He carried enormous bundles of newspaper and a fifth of paper odds and ends impaled on*

metal rod stuck in a wooden rest. A chair-stick hangs from one elbow, and the other arm clutches a road-sign bearing a squiggle and the one word, 'BEND'.]

PROF. [*he enters in a high state of excitement to himself.*]:
Almost a miracle....dawn provides the greatest miracles but this....in this dawn exceeded its promise. In the strangest of places....God God God but there is a mystery in everything. A new discovery of every hour – I am used to that, but I should be led to where this was hidden, sprouted in secret for heaven knows how long....for there was no doubt about it, the word was growing, it was growing, it was growing from earth until I plucked it....(156)[168]

In my view, the Professor's appearance is a visual signifier of his mixed-up mind. In this sense, one can argue that for Soyinka, the Professor symbolises both Nigeria's past and present socio-politically, culturally and psychologically. He is dressed as a white man, but he is keen to find the meaning of death in the traditional way. "But however bizarre Professor's search or its method may sound it is at least sincere – the sincerity of a demented man" (Ogunba 1975, 133) is how Ogunba sees it. However, what is worth discussing here is how the character of the Professor, a black man dressed as a quintessential English man was perceived on a London stage. If we recall, it is how the Professor resonated with Brewster being a Jamaican coupled with the fact that she felt the character would be such a wonderful theatrical character in England that made her decide to do the play.

The Professor, I would suggest, embodies the post-coloniality and cross-culturality to which every African has been subjected as a result of colonialism. He is, therefore, the personification of what late Nigerian music legend Fela Anikulapo Kuti referred to as 'colonial mentality'. The Professor is essentially a twentieth century existentialist on the basis of his obsession with the meaning of life. Just like the Occident, he believes God is dead, but the mystery of mortality remains a conundrum. Since the world is created through the 'Word', the Professor's view is that if he can decode the meaning of the 'Word', he will obtain the metaphysical power with which to manipulate his universe. In Ogunba's view, "the Professor's quest is analogous to the philosopher's stone in Renaissance Europe" (Ogunba 1975, 125). So in essence Professor is a personification of the Fanonian 'black skin, white mask' concept. He philosophises like an existentialist, he talks in grandiloquent and often meaningless grammar, and dresses like an English upper class gentleman but beneath all of these façade lies a deeply corrupt

[168] All citations are taken from *The Road* in *Wole Soyinka: Collected Plays 1*

individual and a swindler just like all the so-called independent leaders who took over power from the colonial rulers immediately after independence. Bearing in mind that the world premiere of *The Road* was presented at the Commonwealth Arts Festival on a London stage in 1965, barely five years after Nigeria gained its independence from Britain, one is bound to ask: is the Professor the colonialist in black skin on the London stage? Or is the character of the Professor the harbinger of the character of Simon Pilkings, the colonial officer whose professional duty collided with Elesin's traditional duty in *Death and the King's Horseman* as we will see in the next chapter. These are the questions that we must bear in mind as we analyse how insidious the character of the Professor must have appeared to a British audience in light of the way he uses words in his relentless search for the 'Word'.

From the opening passage (cited above), the 'Word' that the Professor claims is growing from earth is a road sign reading 'BEND' to warn drivers that they are approaching a dangerous bend. But Professor believes he has been led to the spot where the road sign stands specifically to pluck it out of the earth in order to enable more fatal road accidents as required for his experiment. Professor also engages in forging fake Drivers' Licences for incompetent drivers who come to him for his assistance and he also operates a bar where palm wine is sold all in an attempt to ensure that there are more motor accidents on the road caused by either drunk or unqualified drivers. Naturally, the Professor's road-side shack is a haven for employed and unemployed drivers, motor touts and layabouts who are willing to work as thugs in exchange for any sort of gratification especially marijuana. But it is very clear that the Professor needs these hangers on for his quest as long as they need him for somewhere to lay their heads. Below is the passage from the play when Professor comes in to announce that an accident has just occurred:

> PROF.: Come then, I have a new wonder to show you, a madness where a motor-car throws itself against a tree[169]- Gbram! And showers of crystal flying on broken souls.
>
> SAMSON [*suddenly alarmed*]: Wait! What was that about an accident.
>
> PROF.: Are you that ignorant of the true path to the Word. It is never accident never an accident.
>
> SAMSON: Well call it what you will. But you are not taking him to see that sort of rubbish....[....]

[169] This line readily brings to mind the passage from *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* that I quoted above in the section where I discuss the ontology of the road.

KOTONU: Pay no attention Professor, let's go (159).

The above passage provides a further insight into Professor's quest for the essence of death and it also delineates for us each of the characters that are involved in the sequence. But more importantly, one can immediately deduce the Nigerian motor park low-life that the play depicts and that is why Annemarie Heywood has rightly observed that "*The Road* is localised and must aim at verisimilitude in evoking Nigerian community life around a motor park" (Heywood 2001, 41). And it is thus our focus in the present analysis to ascertain how all the cultural signs that are specific to Yoruba culture with which the play is peppered were interpreted on the British stage for a British audience when Talawa presented the play in 1992.

Right from the very beginning of the play, one cannot but notice Murano who, as the drama unfolds, turns out to be a god-apparent and hence Professor's most important specimen. Murano wakes up at exactly five every morning goes out to tap wine and comes back at five at dusk. Murano is presented in such a way that he must stand out like a sore thumb against the backdrop of the setting of the play and all the low life characters it contains. Below is how Murano is presented in the play's opening stage direction and the effect he has on the people around him:

[.....*Murano lies coiled under the Professor's table.*

Murano gets up. Goes and washes his face from a pot just showing among rubble of worn tyres, hubs twisted bumpers. Picks up his climbing rope his gourd and his 'osuka' and sets off. Samson wakes off half way though his [Murano's] ablutions and watches him furtively. As Murano disappears he considers following him but thinks better of it, returns to his mat ...] (151).

To an audience who can read the signs contained in the above stage direction, it immediately becomes apparent that Murano is a palm wine tapper. The rope he carries is used to climb the palm tree, and the gourd he carries will be placed at the neck of the tree and the 'osuka' is used to cushion the head before one rests any load on the head. How did Brewster signify this character? Did the fact that Murano's enigmatic 'being' and presence in the road-side shack has a back story help?

Through a flash back scene the background to Murano's surreal existence is revealed. Murano is an

Egungun masquerade at the Drivers' Festival and having been possessed by the spirit of Ogun, he gets knocked down by Kotonu's vehicle as he tries to cross the road. This is a sacrilege, but fortunately for Kotonu and Samson the Ogun revellers are too busy revelling to immediately realise that their masquerade has been knocked down and rendered unconscious. Kotonu and Samson know that the moment the revellers become aware of the accident they will be lynched. So to avoid jungle justice, they quickly place the unconscious masquerade into the back of the vehicle and cover him up with a tarpaulin. But before Kotonu and Samson could drive off, the revellers return wondering where their masquerade has gone. Samson urges Kotonu to quickly don the Egungun mask as he distracts the attention of the revellers. The moment during the flashback scene when Kotonu dons the mask is worth quoting at some length, because it provides the background to Murano's paranormal existence, but, more importantly, it epitomises the kind of complicated culturally specific scenarios in *The Road* that can pose a challenge for a Yoruba theatre director let alone a British director:

> [*The maskers come in again, performing the dance of the whips, darting off again and back, looking for the missing god. One of them dashes to the lorry and lifts up the tarpaulin. With desperate speed Samson snatches a whip from the nearest person and gives him a cut across the legs. The man readily accepts the invitation, and a contest follows.*]
>
> SAMSON [*shouts above the din.*]: Now Kotonu, now! [*Kotonu hesitates, visibly frightened*] Kotonu! Strip the mask and get under it! Kotonu it's the only way.
> [*As if suddenly wakened, Kotonu starts, climbs into the lorry. The whip-dance grows fast and furious. Samson manoeuvres himself near the tailboard from time to time.*] Hurry Kotonu! For heaven's sake hurry!
>
> [*There is a sudden violent movement against the canvas and Samson scared, rushes there. Almost at the same time, the masquerade comes through in violent throes, figure in torment. There is a loud yell from the dancers and the whipping and chanting becomes more violent, aiding the god's possession.*]
>
> KOTONU [*tearing at the clothes, demented.*]: It's all wet inside. I've got his blood all over me. [*They dance and whip one another around the masquerade, leaving a clear space for his frenzy.]* It's dark Samson I can't see. His blood has got in my eyes. I can't see Samson. *[Samson, wildly irresolute, battles on with his latest challenger.*] Samson where are you? My eyes are all clammed up I tell you. Samson! Samson! Samson!

His struggles become truly frantic, full of violent contortions. Gradually he grows weaker and weaker, collapsing slowly on the ground until he is completely inert. The dancers flog one another off the scene] (208-209).

Although the flashback scene ends as indicated above, it becomes clear as the drama unfolds that Murano is the man under the masquerade that was knocked down at the Drivers' Festival and it was whilst he was still lying unconscious at the back of Kotonu's lorry that Professor stole his body, nursed him to health and charged him with the responsibility of wine tapping. It is important to note that Ogun is also the god of wine. So Murano may be mute, to the Professor's mind, it is a clear sign that Murano holds the key to the meaning of the 'Word'. Lest we forget, Murano was knocked down on the road at the point that he was possessed by Ogun, therefore he is neither of this world nor the other world and furthermore, he embodies the spirit of Ogun. This is the reason that Murano is significant for the Professor's quest. He is a denizen of the ontological interstice (the chthonic realm) in which he is perpetually suspended and this makes him an ideal custodian of the 'Word' in the eyes of the Professor. As the Professor explains to Samson:

When a man has one leg in each world, his legs are never the same. The big toe of Murano's foot – the left one of course – rests on the slumbering chrysalis of the Word. When that crust cracks my friends – you and I, that is the moment we await. That is the moment of our rehabilitation. When that crust cracks (187).

In Brewster's production, Murano is presented as "a mute who crawls on all fours", as Robert Gore-Langston has pointed it out in his review, 'Crash of symbols' in *The Telegraph* of September 5, 1994. While it is hard to discern how someone who crawls on all fours will be able to climb the palm tree as Murano is required to do, one can understand that to decode the 'foreign' sign systems contained in the play, Brewster had to rely on what was familiar to her. It is against this backdrop that Brewster saw Murano in the light of Bolom, a character in Derek Walcott's play *T. Jean and His Brothers*[170] (1970) and Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and hence her decision to signify Murano in her interpretation of *The Road* as a half human creature and not a full human. One would be inclined to agree with this

[170] *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* is a fairy tale that tells the story of a contest between three brothers and the devil, Bolom, that whoever gets angry will pay a prize. The first two brothers could not control their anger but the third born manages to control his anger and for his prize asked for Bolom a half child to be born. Thus a half child is more or less like a half human, half animal in Caribbean culture.

interpretation considering the fact that Murano is suspended between the world of the living and the dead. But it is important to note that in terms of the theory of Yoruba tragedy, Kotonu is the one who experiences disintegration in the chthonic realm – albeit temporarily – when he got under the mask at the accident scene. This is perhaps the reason why Kotonu wonders who Murano truly is as play approaches its tragic end.

When Kotonu confronts Professor to ascertain Murano's true identity, Professor seizes the opportunity to take his empirical investigation to its logical conclusion. After giving a characteristic long winded response to explain how Murano has held god captive, he suggests that perhaps Murano should try on the mask of the Agemo and that way, the truth of Murano's identity will be revealed. In the published version of the play, Soyinka explains the phenomenon of the Agemo as a "religious cult of flesh dissolution" and the significance of the Agemo dance:

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

To confirm Murano's enigmatic identity, Kotonu follows the Professor's advice and helps Murano to don the mask of Agemo. Against the background of the organ music that can be heard from the church and the drumming of the band on stage, below is how the stage direction indicates the beginning of the sacrilege that culminates into the tragic end of the Professor:

> [*From inside, the canvas is pushed aside, emerging silently, the egungun. The laughter dies out gradually all eyes on the apparition. One by one the hands splutter and die on the instruments*.] (226)

As already discussed, there is time and place for every ritual ceremony and hence the Yoruba saying: *Enikan o ki n bu Sango ni gba erun*, meaning 'one should not invoke the spirit of Sango during the dry season' (Sango being the deified god of thunder and lightning, the two forces of nature that are associated with the raining season). It is against this backdrop that Salubi, as he is "trying to sneak out", according to the stage direction, says: "No one is playing around with my sanity. I'm not staying to witness this" (226). What this shows clearly is that the Professor's road side shack might be a place where palm-wine is drunk but it is not a space for any ritual, let alone the ritual of Agemo. Say T. who is the head of the thugs and the self-avowed animist also protests against such sacrilege because he is fully

aware that appropriate rituals need to be performed for an Agemo masquerade to display its cultic dance, otherwise the end result could be calamitous. "[Y]ou're fooling around where you have no business", he says to the Professor (226). But the Professor is indignant: "Let No one move!" he barks. And as soon as the drumming resume, again on the orders of the Professor, the Agemo masquerade begins its cultic dance. In no time, "the dance of the masquerade becomes wilder", as the stage direction indicates, "racked by spasms, the gradual build-up of possession" (227). "Stop it! Stop it!", Say T. shouts at his gang who are playing the drums, "I say stop playing along with this sacrilege" (227). But it is too late, the Agemo is already possessed, and in an effort to stop the sacrilege, Say T. begins to wrestle with the masquerade; in the middle of the chaos that ensued, Salubi stabs the Professor with a knife. In Brewster's production the stabbing was done "symbolically instead of making it seems real", which in Irobi's view, "did not help the audience" (Irobi 2005, 55). However, one can argue that in a ritual drama such as *The Road,* it is better if performance is stylised and non-naturalistic simply because realism would not have worked. In fact, it is important to stress that one of the reasons that western directors are looking to places such as Africa is to sever the umbilical chord of realism with which western drama was tethered. Furthermore, most African scholars would argue that African theatre is about its performativity and not the western idea of trying to reflect reality on stage. Demas Nwoko, for instance, argues that "Realism as we know it in the Western theatre is vulgar to the African sensibility, hence they react to it with laughter" (Nwoko 1981, 477). One can argue, therefore, that if Brewster had opted for realism in her presentation of *The Road*, Irobi would have perhaps remarked that it would have been better for the stabbing to be suggested symbolically after all ritual itself is a symbolic action representing reality.

But it must be stressed that Brewster had more important semiological challenges to deal with including how to signify all the Yoruba symbolisms that permeate the play. Furthermore, the play is non-linear. "The play begins in the middle and uses sophisticated flashbacks to expose what has happened before", as Irobi has remarked. "In it, Time is cyclical and at certain moment it looks like the plot is totally suspended", Irobi adds, "It is this cinematographic technique that makes it confusing to the uninitiated theatre goer" (Irobi 2005, 54). One would not be far from the mark to regard majority of Brewster's audience as 'uninitiated theatre-goers' in terms of the plot structure of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy. The plot goes back and forth all of the time and if this is not handled carefully the present that is unfolding in time and the flashback which is a re-enactment of the past might collide and thereby obfuscate rather than elucidate what the play is about. But it must be borne in mind that this is one of the elements of

Yoruba tragedy. "The Yoruba is not, like European man, concerned with the purely conceptual aspects of time", according to Soyinka,

> they are too concretely realized in his own life, religion, sensitivity to be mere tags for explaining the metaphysical order of his world. If we may put the same thing in fleshed out cognitions, life, present life, contains within its manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are vitally within the intimations and affectiveness of life, beyond mere abstract conceptualization (Soyinka, 1993, 29).

But that is Soyinka's theory in his 1967 essay, 'The Fourth Stage'. Our present concern is how *The Road* translated on a London stage in 1992. In Benedict Nightingale's view in her review, 'Proceed, but with caution' in *Life & Times* of Wednesday March 4, 1992, the flashback scene was not clear in Brewster's production. And also she feels that Ben Thomas the actor who played the part of the Professor is too young for the role, more so, "when someone explicitly calls him what the script makes implicitly clear he is: 'an old man in a tuxedo'" (Nightingale 1992). But I would argue that if the Professor's age is that significant, Brewster would have either cast a sixty-year old actor or directed the young actor she cast appropriately. So, in that respect, I disagree with Nightingale's remark that "Yvonne Brewster, his director, should have done everything possible to minimise the confusions" (Nightingale 1992). It is worth noting that Thomas who played the part of the Professor in the Talawa presentation is of mixed race parentage. Thus, one can argue that in terms of his skin colour he is neither black nor white and at the same time black and white, which was visually compelling bearing in mind that the character of the Professor he was portraying is more or less a caricature of the white man if we view it strictly through the lens of post-colonialism. But, Nightingale has another concern:

> Judging from the comments in the interval, her production sometimes seemed to encourage audiences to flounder. For instance, we need to understand that a trucker has knocked down an Egungun dancer, or masked ancestor-worshipper and then taken his place. But this incident re-enacted at one point is neither clear in itself nor is it obvious that we are watching the past not the present (Nightingale 1992).

Perhaps Brewster should have attempted to present the plot linearly. It is my view though that Nightingale would have found that approach problematic too, in the sense that she must have obtained and actually read the text of the play before writing her review because as I have quoted above she cites from the text to reinforce her argument that the actor who played the part of the Professor was too young. The question this poses for us is: what role does a text such as *The Road* play in the process of

presenting it on stage?

In *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life,* Marvin Carlson remarks that:

> The interpretation of signs is of course culturally generated, but so is the recognition of signs *as* signs, and this semiotic dimension seems impossible to avoid in any performance in our culture recognized as such as a performance (Carlson 1990, 8)

The conclusion Carlson seems to have drawn in the light of the above is that the dramatic text as written by an author usually contains "gaps" that are filled by performance. Carlson's view is echoed by Peter Brook when he stresses that,

> there exists a big misunderstanding which frequently blocks work in the theatre, and which consists in believing that what the author or the composer of the play once wrote is a sacred form. We forget that the author, when writing dialogue, is expressing hidden movements deeply buried in human nature, that when he writes stage directions, he is proposing production techniques based on playhouses of his day. It is important to read between the lines (Brook, 1993, 52).

With Carlson's observation and Brook's intervention in mind, I am inclined to agree with Yvonne Brewster's assertion that Soyinka has over-written *The Road.* In fact I would argue that the play is overwritten in such a way that there are actually no gaps left in the text to be filled by a performance. Ketu Katrak who saw Soyinka's production of the play in Chicago in 1984 has expressed the same view in her book, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy.* In her words, "The dramatic structure of *The Road* is much more powerful in the written text than in actualization on stage" (Katrak 1986, 61). This is due in part to the fact that while Soyinka may have devised a method of how to lock the author in him outside while he is directing his play he has yet to come up with a strategy for how to successfully ignore the director in him when he is writing his plays. It is as a result of this conflict, I would argue, that Soyinka's dramaturgy is more cinematic than dramatic[171] and therefore most of his plays will be better served if they are interpreted as screen plays rather than stage plays. In my view, the spider and the web which Soyinka has included in the stage direction of *The Road* is powerful symbolically but such an innovation

[171] Heywood has made a similar point when she observes that Soyinka's *The Interpreter* is cinematically rather than theatrically conceived. See Heywood, 2001, p. 42.

belongs to the medium of film or should be left for a director to imagine. Clearly, Soyinka is not oblivious to this fact and hence the following remark he made during an interview in 1990:

> When I am directing I see myself first of all as creating images in the space. The book, the text, is one thing, but the whole business of translating the text onto the stage is moving to a new dimension I think. I have said that the dimension has to be strong, otherwise one might as well read the play (Wilkinson 2001, 150).

This explains why Soyinka does not seem to mind if his plays are edited. In fact in another interview with Chike Nwoffiah in California in 2006, Soyinka admitted that when he directed *The Road* for the Goodman Theatre, he had to drastically edit the play before he was happy with the production. Is this not the precise point Osofisan made when he concluded that a successful production of *The Road* would require a director not to remain faithful to the text? In other words, a director who wants to do justice to *The Road* must be ready to create gaps in the text to be filled by the performance.

Admittedly I cannot help but being subjective here as a Yoruba man, but I would argue that it is not only with overwritten dialogue that Soyinka has filled all the gaps in the text of *The Road*, but also with the detailed stage directions bearing the myriad of Yoruba traditional performance idioms. But here is the paradox: for a non-Yoruba person all these cultural specificities could create intercultural as well as interpretational gaps in the text that can only be filled by its performance. In light of this, one can perhaps argue that a play such as *The Road* is better served at the hands of a non-Yoruba director such as Yvonne Brewster bearing in mind that being a non –Yoruba she must have devised a strategy to amplify, in her presentation, whatever transcultural nuances she could find in the play with her Jamaican's eyes rather than busying herself with how to decode or re-interpret all the Yoruba indigenous semiotics in the play. Thus Brewster's decision to cut the play without rewriting it is highly commendable. "Some say that to direct Soyinka you must have a Ph.D in Yoruba Culture!", writes Brewster in her autobiography,

> As a mere theatrical interpreter of text I had to have the courage to ignore some of the more abstract theoretical and philosophical aspects of the Yoruba gods. Too much of this threatened to kill the play dead (Brewster 2004, 210)

Brewster insisted that she was not in the business of putting 'culture' on stage. In other words, she does

not believe that her responsibility as a theatre director should be likened to that of an anthropologist who is interested in studying and presenting culture unmediated. But even if it was Brewster's aim to transfer *The Road* on to the stage as it is written on page, she would not have succeeded because Yoruba culture is not her culture. "But I can take a play which is supposed to be a piece of theatrical work which you know is dramatic," she added, "and I can take it, I can look at it through my eyes; I don't have Nigerian eyes I have Caribbean eyes. I can take it and see what I find in it through humanity and that is what we did" (Appendix 2A). In this respect, one can surmise that it was a 'creolised' version of *The Road* that Talawa presented in 1992 and the production was the better for it since Londoners would be more familiar with Caribbean culture through, for example, the yearly Notting Hill Gate Carnival much more than the Ogun festival that one can only experience in Nigeria. This is what Brewster refers to in her autobiography when she narrates how elated she felt when, at a conference in Canada in 2001, Nigerian scholar Biodun Jeyifo praised her for her efforts in staging *The Road*, which he described as a perfect "cultural misreadings". In Brewster's words,

> The misreading bit, I was made to understand, was in fact a compliment, as the directorial choices I had made were thought to have been the result of my cultural background, you know, my "broughtupsy". The design of the mask we used had overtones of Johnkunu and Carnival, not the Egungun. It would apparently have been quite different in a Nigerian interpretation (Brewster 2004, 212)

However, Esiaba Irobi has commented that the mask that was used was not representative of Ogun. In his words,

> The mask that Brewster used looked synthetic and artificial. But in the director's understanding, it was more representative of Ogun, the god at the centre of the play since the mask was covered all over with a shiny metal which looked more like an aluminium than iron. A more awesome even if wooden mask with Ogunian configurations, I think would have brought out the deeper meanings and mystical resonances associated with the god through the medium of the mask (Irobi 2005, 57).

In my view, Irobi has a point, but I disagree with his conclusion that this was an understandable oversight by virtue of the fact that Brewster comes from Jamaica where, as he puts it, "some of the cultic characteristics of these artifacts have been lost due to the cruelty of history" (ibid.). It would have been different, I would argue, if the play was produced in Nigeria. Furthermore, it needs to be borne in mind that "one of the most fundamental reasons for the use of masks is as a method of harnessing the

power of supernatural forces for communal benefit" (White 1974, 24). Thus, one can argue that being a non-Yoruba director, what was clearly important for Brewster was the functionality of the mask rather than its cultural specificity. Brewster interpreted *The Road* from her own Jamaican perspective and Soyinka, who wrote the play, acknowledged her effort and also admitted that Brewster's production was better than his in Chicago. It is hard to say if Irobi had produced *The Road*, Soyinka would have commended him thus, because on the basis of his criticism of the mask and the symbolic stabbing, , Irobi, in all likelihood, would have been too faithful to a text that needed to be mis-read for it to travel well. This, then, begs the question: are Soyinka's plays better served at the hands of non-Nigerian (or Yoruba) directors? That question will be addressed in due course in this thesis but to conclude this present analysis, we need to briefly return to a couple of the reviews of the 1965 world premiere production of *The Road* which was directed by David Thompson at the Theatre Royal Theatre Stratford East in London if only to ascertain whether or not Londoners of the mid-1960s understood *The Road.*

6.5 When *The Road* first travelled

Most of the reviews that are available would indicate that while the performance of Soyinka's play might have been considered puzzlingly exotic in the main, the meaning of the play was not lost on its audience. Harold Hobson, for instance, gives a perfect summary of the play in a few words in his review 'Africa: mask & face' which appeared in the *Sunday Times* of 19 September 1965, before hitting the nail on the head by remarking that "There is something real here: the impinging on a modern problem in a convincing atmosphere of old but still powerful ways of thought" (ibid.). It is important to note that while Hobson has a few reservations regarding Soyinka's propensity "to apply a Royal Court technique, to introduce melodrama and dispense with preparation and development", other than that, his conclusion is that "the whole company is good" (ibid.). Jeremy Kingston in his review in the *Punch* of September 22, 1965, however, claims that he did not find the play comprehensible. "I found it difficult to follow this story of Nigerian long distance truck drivers, living in superstitious dread of a God on the road who demands his regular sacrifice of victims either from accidents or otherwise", writes Kingston before commenting that Bari's portrayal of Samson was convincing as well as Horace James portrayal of the "crazed old Professor, once a lay preacher, now a forger of driving licenses" (ibid), which makes one wonder what would Kingston have written, if he had found the play comprehensible. Kingston's ignorance of the continent of Africa becomes apparent when he hypothesises thus:

> West African audiences may find the development of his (Soyinka's) drama logical and its climax proper

> and satisfying. To an audience knowing nothing or little of the cultural setting the play's meaning must remain impenetrable (ibid).

In fact, had Penelope Gilliat's comprehensive and balanced review[172] appeared in the *Observer* after the 22nd of September 1965 one would have been forgiven to draw the inference that her review was written in response to Kingston's euro-centric review. In her review appropriately titled 'A Nigerian Original', Gilliat is not denying the fact that "The Road in performance is tough for local hearing, but", in her words, "after cleaning my ears out and reading the scripts I am quite sure that it is the work of a man with an interesting body of plays to come who already writes like an angel". We must quote Gilliat further because it seems to me that out of all the critics who reviewed *The Road* in 1965, she was perhaps the only one who could tell that Soyinka would one day become a world renowned writer and furthermore she has made a very important observation in her review which is very pertinent to this thesis as a whole. "If the accent of Soyinka's actors is unfamiliar", Gilliat writes,

> then the answer perhaps is we might learn it as Americans are learning Merseyside and as every filmgoer in England long ago mastered the voices of Chicago and Bronx. The foreignness of the matter is something else: it is the jar of originality distinct and audacious.

I would argue that what Gilliat has articulated in her review is the cornerstone of interculturality in the theatre. And it clearly illustrates the fact that it is not that a black man is not capable of writing good and quality theatre but it is simply that the western hegemony will always be reluctant to acknowledge it. But what I personally found perplexing about all the reviews of *The Road* is that none of the reviewers picked up on the intertextuality of the 'Word' especially Kingston who has spelt god with a capital G in his review. It is enunciated in John Chapter 1, Verse 1 that "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1.1) and verse 14 of the same chapter reads: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us". Is this the 'Word' with which the Professor is obsessed? Or is it the 'Word' to which Fanon alludes in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* in an effort to describe the kind of Africans who took up the rein of power when most African countries first gained their independence. "Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants", Fanon writes, "five hundred million men, and one thousand five million natives. The former had the Word; the others had the use of it" (Fanon 1965, 7). In my view, it would have been an intercultural triumph had

[172] For this review see, Gilliat in Gibbs (ed.), 1981, p. 107.

one of the reviews alluded to this fact or asked the question but perhaps all the critics (with the exception of Penelope Gilliat of course) were busy trying to comprehend the 'foreign' and in the process the 'familiar' that the play contains was de-familiarised.

But the pertinent question, as Patrice Pavis has posed it, is: "Can the most complex case of theatre production i.e interculturalism be of any use for the development of deblocage of the current theory of performance?" (Pavis 1992, 5) And in Pavis' view the answer is yes, in the sense that: "It [Interculturalism] certainly forces the analyst to reconsider his cultural parameters and his viewing habits" (ibid.) and furthermore "to accept elements he does not fully understand, to complement and activate the mise en scene" (ibid.) What Pavis has enunciated in answering his question, I would contend, was Yvonne Brewster's directorial approach when she directed *The Road* in 1992. In other words, unlike the critics who reviewed *The Road,* Brewster did not allow what she could not comprehend to cloud her judgement or appreciation of what she could comprehend in the play and as a consequence she presented *The Road* from her own cultural perspective. At the board meeting of Talawa that was held on 23rd of March 1992 Brewster expressed her thanks to the Board of Talawa for their support during the busy time of the opening of the Cochrane Theatre and as regards her production of *The Road*, her view, as she articulated it to her Board, was,

> it did not appeal to the sensibilities of the critical coven but Soyinka has long been detested by Americans and the British. As he says, 'They have never forgiven him for the Prize....Peace, yes, but not Literature'. Wole was pleased.[173]

In my view, Brewster had drawn her conclusion simply because over all the years that she had spent working in Britain she knew that as an Other whatever she produced would always be criticised for one thing or the other. In this sense Talawa's production can thus be considered a perfect example of the intercultural model which Lo and Gilbert have proposed in their essay. In their model (see figure 14), as against Patrice Pavis hourglass model, intercultural is a two-way traffic. Lo and Gilbert have what they call 'Source Culture A' and 'Source Culture B' and it is in the middle of these sources that Lo and Gilbert locate what they have called the 'Intercultural Process for Target Culture'.

[173] The source of this is Minutes of the meeting of the Board Meeting of Talawa Theatre Company which is held as part of the archive materials of the company kept under file number TTC/1/2/1 at the Victoria and Albert Museum located at the Blythe House, 23, Blythe Road, London.

So, in a sense, Lo and Gilbert recognise the fact that every culture that is involved in an inter-cultural exchange brings elements of their own culture into the mix. Furthermore, Lo and Gilbert are not ignoring the imperialistic nature of western interculturalism. Thus, they posit that every intercultural exchange is along a continuum in-between two extreme poles. "One pole of the continuum is characterised by a collaborative mode of exchange", according to Lo and Gilbert, "while the opposite pole is characterised as imperialistic" (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, 38). Lo and Gilbert's contention is that,

> Most intercultural theatre occurs somewhere between these two extremes and specific projects may shift along the continuum depending on the phase of cultural production. It is vital that the continuum is conceived in processual rather than fixed terms in order to foreground intercultural exchange as a dynamic process rather than a static transaction (ibid.).

It is against this backdrop that Lo and Gilbert have positioned their Target Culture in the middle of their two Source Cultures A and B.

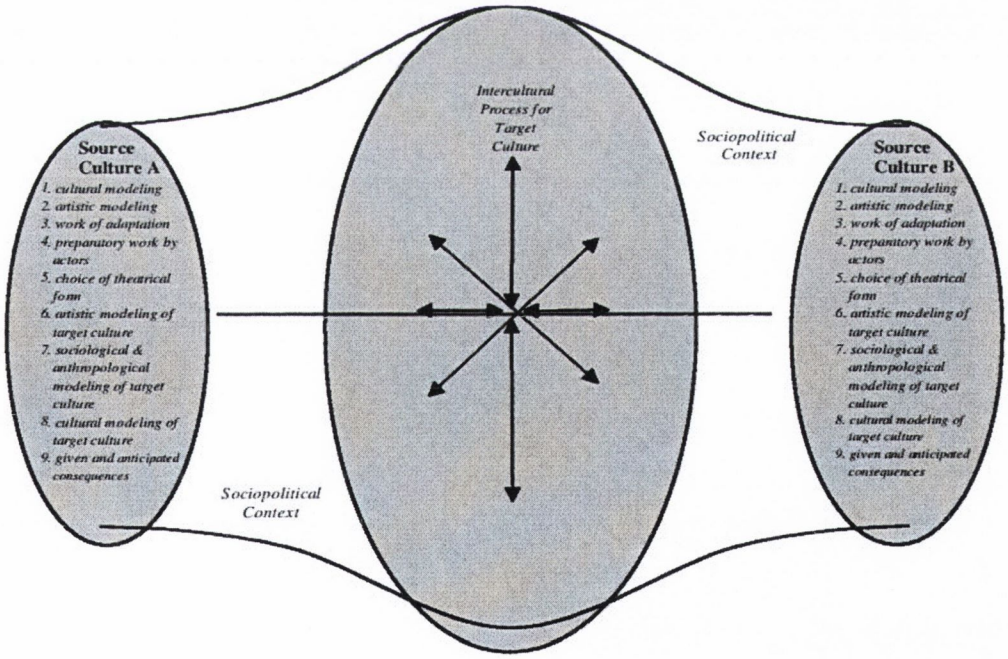

Fig. 14 Lo and Gilbert's Proposed Intercultural Theoretical Model

Lo and Gilbert consider the process of producing a performance on stage as the Target Culture while the

cultures that have come together to participate in the theatre exchange are the Source Cultures. Nevertheless, each of the participating cultures operates within, and is heavily influenced by, its own socio-political context. To apply this to our present analysis, I would argue that Brewster's Jamaican Culture and Yoruba culture are the source cultures and the British culture is the target culture. And, as I have discussed, Talawa production of *The Road* is not fully Yoruba and neither can it be regarded as completely Caribbean. In this sense, one can argue that "cultural apparatuses" from Yoruba and Caribbean cultures, shaped by their respective "sociocultural milieux", including colonialism, were brought to bear in the presentation of *The Road* on the London stage for a mixed audience of black and white. Lo and Gilbert's proposed model rightly "locates all intercultural activity within an identifiable socio-political context and in their view this is not only to foreground the inseparability of artistic endeavours from socio-political relations", they explain, "but also to remind us that theory and reading strategies are themselves deeply imbricated in specific histories and politics" (Lo and Gilbert, 45).

With respect to our new Talking Drum and Keyboard theoretical model, I believe Brewster's production of *The Road* has provided us with the unique opportunity to test its dexterity and universal applicability. As we have already discussed, Brewster seemed to know from the outset that she would be barking the wrong tree if she decided to approach *The Road* as a Yoruba person would. Therefore it made complete sense for her to rely on what was culturally familiar to her to interpret a culture with which she is not familiar. "The performance does not come into our culture, like the painting, as an external object to be understood", as Marvin Carlson has pointed out,

> but if it is to exist for us at all must be created again from within our own culture and using the tools of our own culture, with correspondingly far greater risk that the product will in fact ultimately be a reflection of our culture rather than of its own culture (Carlson 1990, 119).

It is in light of Carlson's insightful observation that one must view Brewster's production of *The Road.* Yvonne Brewster consciously chose to give her production of a Yoruba tragedy, a Jamaican interpretation based on, as she explains it in her autobiography (as previously quoted), "my cultural background, you know, my 'broughtupsy'. The design of the mask we used had overtones of Johnkunu and Carnival, not the Egungun", she clarifies. "It would apparently have been quite different in a Nigerian interpretation (Brewster 2004, 212), she adds. Thus, to accommodate what I term Brewster's *Jamaica*pretation of Yoruba tragedy, I propose that we adapt our model slightly by replacing the talking

drum with a steel pan. A steel pan is a musical instrument made out of steel that is played with two beaters. The fascinating thing about this percussion instrument is that it is reminiscent of the xylophone while it also reminds one of a keyboard by virtue of the fact that one is required to be able to read music to be adept at it. So we will presume that while Brewster is originally from Jamaica, having lived in Britain since she was a teenager, she must have become adept at the keyboard culture. And instead of learning the talking drum culture to get herself into the zone, she took a cultural short cut by relying on her Jamaican background as evident in her choice of mask for the Agemo masquerade in the play as well as her interpretation of the enigmatic character of Murano through the character of Bolom with whom an average Jamaican is familiar. So, one can argue that the steel pan encapsulates the Jamaican culture and it is this that Brewster has brought into her production with which she infused the keyboard culture. The result, as already discussed, is a celebrated cultural misreading of a Yoruba tragedy. But what Brewster's approach has clearly demonstrated, in my view, is that there are indeed many cultural avenues to the concinnity zone as long as one is comfortable within one's skin and have respect for whatever culture one is replacing or infusing.

So in the final analysis, I would surmise that Brewster's presentation of *The Road* has provided a model of interculturalism at its best because while she was ready to create gaps that she had to fill during the process of its production she also treated Soyinka's text with the respect it deserved. "I edit like a beast" (Appendix 2A), were her words when I interviewed her, but further to reading her autobiography I discovered that she does her editing methodically and respectfully:

> I don't approve of changing playwrights' words to suit other purposes. We, the interpreters must find a way of making the work. If this is beyond us, then we should leave those plays alone. Or go write our own (Brewster 2004, 166).

This is Brewster and I would argue it was the same attitude she showed towards *The Road* and that was why its presentation worked in intercultural terms if not in critical terms. But as we have seen in the previous chapter when we analysed Roland Joffe (mis)directing Soyinka's version of *The Bacchae*, it is clearly not all directors who think like Brewster.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Horseman mounts two British Royal Stages

> **Appiah**: *I'd like to talk a little about* Death and the King's Horseman. *Is this a political play, or would you rather read it as relatively apolitical,..?*
>
> **Soyinka**: *Of course there's politics in* Death. *There is the politics of colonization, but for me it's very peripheral. The action, the tragedy of* Death *could have been triggered off by circumstances which have nothing to do with colonial factor – that's very important to emphasize. So it's political in a very peripheral sense.*[174]

7.1 *Death and the King's Horseman*: Wole Soyinka's *Hamlet*

Death and the King's Horseman (hereinafter: "*Horseman*") is widely regarded as Soyinka's most important play. A few examples would be useful to reinforce this point. In his book, *Critical Perspectives*, published not long after *Horseman* was published in 1975, James Gibbs, for instance, remarks that Soyinka's play *Horseman* "wins through to a new clarity of action and contrast, and a new subtlety of language" (Gibbs 1981, 9). Similarly, Olabimpe Aboyade, in her essay 'Down from the Abyss of Transition: Oral Tradition and the Creative Writer', claims "*Horseman* reads like one long piece of poetry, whose every line is a lesson in understanding" (Aboyade 1987, 141). In Joel Adedeji's words, "*Horseman* is Soyinka's best illustration of the ritual theatre paradigm" (Adedeji 2005, 121). And lastly, for Tejumola Olaniyan', "*Horseman* best embodies the multiplex dimensions of Soyinka's construct of an African poetics. This is not only in its character as a ritual tragedy – Soyinka's privileged form in 'Fourth stage'" (Olaniyan 1995, 49), Olaniyan hastens to clarify, "but also in its concern with the historic issue of the African encounter with Europe" (ibid.).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it was the choice of play for the National to present on its main stage in 2009, when it finally decided "to produce a major African work" (Appendix 2B)[175] as Rufus Norris

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[174] See Appiah, 2001, pp. 132-133.

[175] I conducted, via email correspondence dated 28th May 2012, a written interview with Rufus Norris who directed the National Theatre production of *Horseman* in 2009. I owe Norris a debt of gratitude for obliging me and truthfully responding to all my questions in the middle of an apparently busy schedule. I have found his comments quite instructive in reaching certain conclusions in this study. I have attached the interview here as Appendix 2B.

explained. But that was not the first time that the *Horseman* mounted a mainstream British theatre stage. In 1990, the play was presented in Manchester by the Royal Exchange Theatre where it received great critical acclaim. Jeffrey Wainwright, for instance, hailed it as "a transfixing work of modern world drama" in *The Independent* of December 1, 1990"; Michael Schmidt, in the *Daily Telegraph* of November 28, 1990, describes it "as an explosive marriage between Nigerian folk and ceremonial drama and European Theatrical conventions"; and in Albert Hunt's (re)view, in *The Guardian* of November 24, 1990, "Soyinka uses the full resources of theatre – song, dance, emblematic costume, fable, parody, as well as intellectual argument – to put a dramatic bomb under Western perceptions". Of course, it was not all the critics who approved of the play when it was produced in Manchester, and rightly so, but that needs not bother us here.

What is worth stressing at this juncture is that while *Horseman* had proven to be a masterpiece on page and on stage and a success commercially and critically in Nigeria, America and Britain, it is also arguably the last of Soyinka's so-called Yoruba tragedy.[176] So, could this be the reason why Soyinka appeared not to be in a hurry to write the play, considering the fact that it was since the early 1960s that his attention was first drawn to the historical event upon which he based the drama in *Horseman*? One can only speculate that perhaps Soyinka had a feeling that the play could be his own *Hamlet*, that is, his singularly most important Yoruba tragedy and being a wine lover,[177] he decided to leave the best wine till last, or as the Yoruba aphorism goes: *Eegun nla lo kehin igbale*, meaning, 'it is the most revered of the Egungun masquerade cult that takes to the stage last'.

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[176] As will be discussed anon in this chapter, the world premiere of *Horseman* as directed by Soyinka was in 1976 at the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and in 1979 Soyinka directed the American premiere at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago before it transferred to John F. Kennedy in Washington D.C. Then in 1987 Soyinka directed another American presentation in New York.

[177] Soyinka is very well known for his wine. At the book launch of his *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* that I attended he expressed it publicly that buying bottled water is a waste of money when a bottle of wine costs almost the same. And when I interviewed Peter Badejo for this thesis (attached to this thesis as Appendix 2C) who has worked and travelled with Soyinka for many years, he confirmed to me that Soyinka does not drink water but wine and if he is thirsty, he would ask for a glass of beer. In *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years,* Soyinka recounts an episode where he was returning to Britain from Paris and when he was asked, by a French Custom Officer, to pay tax duty on a bottle of wine he was carrying he decided to drink it all. See Soyinka, 2001, p. 31. See also Ricárd, 2005, pp. 29-31.

The source material for *Horseman* was based on a real life clash of cultures featuring a colonial officer and his colonised subjects. In his interview with James Gibbs in 1981, Soyinka was asked: "Have you ever been anxious to write a play about the clash of cultures?", the response he gave was:

> No. I don't know that I ever have been consciously anxious to do that – except perhaps in *Death and the King's Horseman*, which is, they will tell you, of an actual piece of history in which European colonial officer's ethos came into conflict with the practices of the society of which you are a part. Apart from that I have never been really interested in the clash between cultures, culture conflict, and seemed to agree with one when he said: "OK, you've got conflict. The whole point of society is to resolve conflict. So if you have got a conflict don't make so much noise about it, resolve it!" (Gibbs 2001, 107-108).

This remark does not only provide a useful insight into Soyinka's attitude to the issue of 'clash of cultures', but it also demonstrates why Soyinka was initially reluctant to engage with the historical material which he refers to as the "actual piece of history" that inspired *Horseman*. Rather than concerning himself with cultural clash on a societal level, Soyinka would rather write a play about conflicts that are located in the transitional realm and of cosmologic proportion. It was probably to avoid being pigeonholed as a playwright who is a specialist in 'clash of cultures' that he postponed the writing of *Horseman* until he was properly established internationally as a Yoruba tragedian. One can also argue that it is precisely for the same reason, and in an abundance of caution, that he took pains to include an 'Author's Note' in the published version of the play to specifically warn would-be producers of *Horseman* not to reduce the play to a 'clash of cultures'.[178] "One of the more obvious alternative structures of the play would be to make the District Officer the victim of a cruel dilemma", Soyinka enunciates,

> This is not to my taste and it is not by chance that I have avoided dialogue or situation which would encourage this. No attempt should be made in production to suggest it. The Colonial Factor is an incident,

[178] In the aforementioned (in the introduction) article entitled 'Rebel in Exile', by Andrew Gumbel published in *The Guardian* on Wednesday 8th April 2009, Soyinka clarified why he felt it was necessary to warn would-be producers not to reduce his play to a 'clash of cultures'. His view is that around the time he wrote the play, the tendency – in the theatre, the cinema and the novel – was to present everything that deal with things outside western culture only as 'clash of cultures'. In an 'Exclusive' interview with *Africa Today*, Vol. 15, No 6, which was published in June 2009, Soyinka reiterated that his play is much more than a clash of cultures.

> a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind – the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all; transition. *Death and the King's Horseman* can be fully realised only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition (145).[179]

Perhaps it was also in an effort to demonstrate that indeed a full realisation of *Horseman* is possible if a director adheres to the instructions contained in his 'Author's Note' that he decided to direct the world première of the play in 1976. It is important to add that it was the year Soyinka was made a full professor[180] and was thereafter appointed the first Head of the Department of Drama that had been newly created that year at the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) University.[181] Furthermore, it was Soyinka who also, in 1979, directed the American premiere of the play at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago before it transferred to the John F. Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts in Washington D. C.[182] The production, as Soyinka remembers it, "proved to be an aesthetic and critical success, a rare combination" (Soyinka 2006, 290). And he is quick to also point it out that "It earned a

[179] For the sake of clarity, Soyinka wrote the play in 1974, but it was first published in Great Britain by Eyre Methuen in 1975 and it received its world premiere, as briefly discussed in this chapter in Ife in 1976. Note however that all the citations from the play in this thesis are from Soyinka, Wole 1984. *Soyinka: Six Plays*. London: Methuen, pp. 143-220

[180] When Soyinka returned to Nigeria after his four-year self-imposed exile, he did not return to Ibadan where he was working before he left because before Soyinka was imprisoned by Gowon in 1967, as discussed in a previous chapter, he had been offered an appointment as director of the University of Ibadan School of Drama and upon his release he resumed his post. But after a year he took a leave of absence and travelled on a self-imposed exile out of Nigeria to England and Ghana. Shortly before Soyinka returned it was decided that the School of Drama should be transformed to a drama department which a professor should head. When Soyinka's suitability was assessed for professorship, the university's Appointments and Promotions Committee decided to offer him Associate Professorship which he refused. In 1976, Soyinka was offered full professorship at Ife and he accepted and became the first head of department of Drama. My source of this information is Awe 2005, pp. 78-81.

[181] It was this production that marked the beginning of the presentation of the Ife Convocation plays that has since become a yearly ritual in the University. Every year the head of department is commissioned to direct a play and the opening performance will coincide with the first day on the calendar that has been earmarked for the yearly graduation ceremony. Each convocant is given two tickets to invite guests of their choice to the opening. For a list of plays that have been produced over the years from 1976 to 1998, see Ogunleye, 2001, pp. 18-27.

[182] For a critical review of the première production as directed by Soyinka, readers are advised to see Moore, 1981, pp. 126-127.

New York Times accolade as one of the twelve best productions of that year" (ibid.). It is also worth noting that when the play was seen again in America in 1987, it was at the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts in New York City and also directed by Soyinka who by then had become a Nobel Laureate. It is worth mentioning that this American revival was not as well received as the 1979 production.

However, how Soyinka went about interpreting *Horseman* for a Nigerian or American audience is not the focus of this chapter. The aim here is to critically analyse, within the framework of interculturalism whether or not it is possible for a British director to do what Soyinka has eloquently prescribed in his 'Author's Note'. In other words, can a white British director resist the urge of presenting *Horseman* as a 'clash of cultures', and instead direct his or her, as Soyinka puts it, "vision to the far more difficult and risky task of eliciting the play's threnodic essence"?[183] (144). This question is very pertinent here because it was not until 1990, as already mentioned, that British audiences first saw what was considered the British première[184] of *Horseman* at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. The production which was directed by British theatre director Phyllida Lloyd was, from all indications, a critical and commercial success. Then in 2009, that is, uncannily fifty years after Soyinka had his professional debut on the British stage at the Royal Court Theatre and precisely 36 years after the catastrophic presentation of his adaptation of *The Bacchae* at the National, *Horseman* was presented at the National and specifically in the Olivier Theatre for thirty-four performances (including seven previews) over April and June. It is the aim of this chapter to analyse these two presentations.

My analysis of the 1990 presentation in Manchester will focus on the 'intercultural' relationship that existed between Phyllida Lloyd, who directed the production, and Peter Badejo, the London-based Yoruba performing artist who worked on the production as, *inter alia*, Nigerian Cultural Advisor. My aim is to problematise the interculturality of the production, which Martin Rohmer has described as

[183] In his review, 'When Filial acts take a fatal turn' in *The Times* of 25 November, 1990, Robert Hewison insightfully points out that "A threnody is a song of lamentation". So what Soyinka feels a director should concern him or herself with is the pathos of Elesin's action or inaction and its resonance on a communal level. This is the essence of Yoruba tragedy.

[184] It is worth noting here that there was a production of *Death and the King's Horseman* at the Department of Drama in University of Hull in 1980 as directed by Chris Kamlongera who is now a Professor of Drama in Malawi University.

extensive *mise-en-scène*. I want to argue that the process, from conception to exhibition, exemplifies 'western interculturalism' or the artistic genre that Daphne P. Lei designates as "hegemonic intercultural theatre (HIT)"[185] (Daphne 2011, 571). For this analysis, I intend to place reliance on my interview with Badejo as well as all the relevant and available critical and press reviews written about the production. With regards to the presentation at the National in 2009, my contention is that it would not have been semiotically and interculturally different from Lloyd's 1990 presentation had the director Rufus Norris not presented it with an all-black cast. Thus for my analysis of *Horseman* at the National, I intend to focus my attention on Norris's 'Fanonian' casting. I want to argue that while it was imaginative, on the part of Norris, to have presented *Horseman* with an all-black cast in the sense that it did lessen the chance of the play being perceived as a 'clash of cultures', the fact remains, that it is still a dramatisation of a true historical event of how colonialism had impacted on the indigenous culture of the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. Therefore, one cannot ignore the intercultural, interpretational, post-colonial and political ramifications of presenting such a political play on the main stage of the national theatre of Britain with black actors who were 'whitened' up. For instance, upon reading Georgina Brown's review on the play, a letter written by a concerned member of the public to Shrewsbury's *Shropshire Star* was published in the newspaper edition dated 29th April 2009. "I was surprised to read of black actors 'whitening up'", the letter reads, "Since then I have read of no report of the director being fired or of thousands, of complaint to the Race Relations Board". And another short piece entitled 'Why Actors need to play their part', which appeared in the edition of *The Voice* dated 23rd March 2009, asks: "Is this some kind of April Fools' Day prank? Talk about barmy! Has the world gone completely mad? There's no need to turn a serious play into a farce". So, it is clear that as theatrically fascinating as Norris peculiar choice of casting seemed, it was perceived as a fundamental problematisation of the politics of intercultural and racial representation. But while all the cast who took part in the production was black, it needs to be borne in mind that nearly all the creative team – the director, set, costume and lighting designers – was white. So it is also my aim to analyse the collaborative process by which Norris de-constructed *Horseman* interculturally and how this led him to conclude that the most theatrical strategy

[185] In her inspired essay, 'Interruption, Intervention, Interculturalism: Robert Wilson's HIT Productions in Taiwan' as published in *Theatre Journal* of December 2011, Lei gives the definition of HIT as, inter alia, "a specific artistic genre and state of mind that combines First world capital with Third World raw material and labour" (Lei 2011, 571). I would argue that Lloyd's intercultural production of *Horseman* is a perfect example of HIT given the fact (as will be discussed later on) that Phyllida Lloyd was a maestro director in the making when she collaborated with Nigerian dancer/choreographer Peter Badejo to mount Soyinka's *Horseman* in 1990.

to adopt in order to avoid reducing Soyinka's play to a 'clash of cultures' would be to present it with an all-black cast.

I should add that I saw the National presentation myself on the 22nd of April 2009, making it the only one out of the four presentations under analysis in the present study that I saw. Thus, while I intend to rely on the impression the presentation had on me for the purpose of my analysis of the production, I will be making reference to a selection from the myriad of press reviews/comments that the production unsurprisingly engendered. But to complement my personal views as well as the press reviews that I will be citing, I aim to make reference to the interviews that I conducted with the director of the production, Rufus Norris; Peter Badejo who worked on the production as an associate director; Giles Terera, who played the part of Praise Singer; and Lucian Msamati, the black actor who was whitened up to play the part of Colonial Officer Simon Pilkings in the play. My aim, however, as already mentioned, is to first of all examine the 1990 production of the play at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, more so, because to many critics it was the British première production of *Horseman.* But before any analysis of the play on the British stage, it is important to first of all contextualise how *Horseman*, not only the most post-colonial and intercultural within Soyinka's corpus, but also the one that "has achieved the status of a classic" (Williams 93, 72), ended up on page in the first instance.

7.2 From Head to Page: Historicising the *Horseman*.

As I have mentioned earlier, it was during the early 1960s that Soyinka's attention was first drawn to the historical event upon which *Horseman* is based, but Soyinka did not write the play until 1974. Why is the date significant? First, it was the year after his disastrous production of *The Bacchae* at the National Theatre in Britain (as already discussed in a previous chapter). Secondly, it coincided with the four-year period (1971-1975) during which Soyinka was on a self-imposed exile from Nigeria.[186] But above all, it was the year that Soyinka spent as a Visiting Fellow at Churchill College in Cambridge, where his

[186] After Soyinka was released from prison in 1969, he went back to his post as the director of the School of Drama but after a year he applied for a leave of absence and left Nigeria on a self- imposed exile. According to Olumuyiwa Awe in his interesting if rather unusual essay, 'Before My Very Eyes', what Soyinka said was that, in Awe's words, "he wanted to get away from it all. He said he had to get something out of his system. Later when *The Man Died* was published", Awe concludes, "I had an idea of just what he meant about getting something out of his system". See Awe, 2005, p. 79.

"lectures were consigned to the Social Anthropology Department".[187] It is against this backdrop that Adebayo Williams, in his essay 'The Ritual and the Political Unconsciousness', notes that *Horseman* was "written during a period of exile and existential angst" (Williams 1993, 72). Soyinka had just been released from detention and the period he was incarcerated coincided with the Nigerian civil war that raged for three years during which Nigerians were killing one another with reckless abandon. It was on the foot of this that Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi, a contemporary of Soyinka (as previously discussed), wrote *The Gods Are Not To Blame* in which he uses questions of identity and fatalism in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to forcefully dramatise the futility of the Nigerian civil war. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in writing *Horseman*, Soyinka employs the historical event of how an Elesin Oba shirked his traditional responsibilities in the early 1940s as an allegory to probe the psyche of a nation that appears to be lacking in direction. It is against this backdrop that Williams asserts that:

> It is in the *Death and the King's Horseman* that we find Soyinka's most explicit deployment of ritual both as an organising principle and as a surgical instrument for prizing open a people's collective consciousness at a crucial moment of their historical development (Williams 1993, 69).

In his book, *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires*, Awam Amkpa echoes Williams' view when he remarks that, "Wole Soyinka in his *Death and the King's Horseman* depicted a people navigating the slippery terrains of 'intra-modernism' and 'inter-modernism' as they struggled to determine who they are and where they belonged" (Amkpa 2004, 7). However, it is not only the Yoruba people that Soyinka has depicted in his play who were trying to determine who they are in relation to the world, it is the same question that Soyinka had been asking on a personal level, since his experience in Britain in the mid to late 1950s.

7.3 Face to Face with the White Man: Soyinka De-Masked.

As we have discussed previously, Soyinka travelled to Britain at the formative age of twenty and lived

[187] In his review, in *The Financial Times* of 26 November 1990, of the presentation of *Horseman* at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Alistair Macaulay points it out that the reason it took the British Theatre almost fifteen years to stage the play was because "Britain has been slow to accept African Literature" and hence the reason Soyinka was not deemed appropriate for the Literature Department when he was a fellow in Churchill College, Cambridge. It is in fact on the basis of his experience in Cambridge and to highlight the significance of African Theatre that Soyinka published his book of essays in 1976 with the title, *Myth, Literature and the African World*.

there between 1955 and 1960. Being a creative person, all the experience – good or bad – that Soyinka had undergone in the UK must have contributed, in no small measure, to what made him become the kind of 'intercultural' postmodernist writer that he has eventually turned out to be. In *Becoming Intercultural,* Young Yun Kim, argues that when one migrates to another country, even for a short while, when one returns (if one returns), one is not the same as one was before one left. "Indeed the process of crossing cultures challenges the very basis of who we are as cultural beings," writes Kim,

> It offers opportunities for new learning and growth. Being 'uprooted' from our home brings us understanding not only of people and their culture in our new environment, but of ourselves and our home culture...Despite, or rather because of, the hardship and ambivalence we undergo when we cross cultures, we gradually find ourselves uniquely privileged to define ourselves and others anew with clarity and insight that we could not have cultivated without leaving home (Kim 2001, 9).

If Soyinka is viewed through the lens of Kim's analysis, a different perspective of Soyinka must emerge. In other words, on the basis of Kim's insightful theorisation of how one becomes inter-cultural when one crosses geographical borders, one can argue that it was not the same Soyinka who entered Britain at the age of twenty that returned to Nigerian soil on the first of January 1960. He had become five years older, for a start; a husband to a white woman; a father of a mixed race boy; a holder of a BA Honours in English; a career playwright; a professional theatre director/producer; and above all, a Nigerian who had had a first-hand experience of Britishness. In his memoirs *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1994), and *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006), Soyinka has been unequivocal on how racist Britain was as a country. And as Kim has reminded us, "Adapting to a new and unfamiliar culture is more than survival. It is a process of 'becoming' – personal reinvention, transformation, growth reaching out beyond the boundaries of our own existence" (Kim 2001, 9). His poem 'Telephone Conversation' is arguably the only creative writing of Soyinka in which a white character features since 1959, the year he stopped focussing on apartheid South Africa and started writing assiduously about the post-independent Nigerian nation state. [188] It is also significant to stress that Soyinka has never really written any drama set in Britain, perhaps because his poem 'Telephone Conversation',[189] as he once claimed, has been over-anthologised. But then in 1974 Soyinka wrote *Horseman*, which is set in Nigeria during colonisation. I

[188] See Soyinka, 2006, p. 37.

[189] Copy of the poem was obtained online at <hhttp://www.biancaday.com/telephone_conversation.htm> (accessed on the 24th November 2010).

would argue here that writing this play for Soyinka, in a way, is (to borrow Sigmund Freud's term) 'the return of the repressed'[190] (Freud 1939, 129). In other words, Soyinka could not do anything about it. Soyinka had succeeded in not dramatising his British experience for more than a decade, but when he found himself in Britain again in 1974, he could not help himself. The question is had Soyinka not lived, studied, worked and, more importantly, experienced racism in England in the late 1950s would he have been able to come up with the line: "You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand" (192), for the character of Olunde in *Horseman*? No, because, in my view, it would not have rung true.[191] "It should be noted that playwrights, like all creative artists, are known to be very individual, private and sensitive people", writes Femi Euba in his essay, 'Theatre and the Playwright' (Euba 1981, 388). "Perhaps, playwrights are more so than any other artist" he clarifies,

> because they deal with "felt-life" experiences which surface in the consciousness, and which they heighten to such intense moments for their audience to see, feel, recognise and identify with or objectify critically (ibid.).

With Euba's clarification in mind, an interview which Soyinka gave Ulli Beier in 1997 in Bayreuth in Germany becomes much more revealing. In the particular section of the interview that is relevant to us

[190] This is the psychoanalytical term that Sigmund Freud uses to describe the neurotic symptoms that occur as a result of the reappearance in one's consciousness of a traumatic experience that one has tried to forget. In my view, most creative process and writing bear the sign of this neurosis. So in a sense one can argue that it is not what a writer knows that he or she writes about but an experience or memory lodged in the subconscious. For more on this term readers are advised to pursue Freud, 1939, pp. 129 and pp. 151-153

[191] Later on, we will be discussing how Soyinka has manipulated the factual event that inspired his play. But it is pertinent to note that this is the scene in the play in which Olunde, a medical student in the UK who has returned home to bury his father according to tradition is conversing with Jane, the wife of colonial officer Simon Pilkings, who is dressed in a Yoruba traditional masquerade attire in preparation for a ball. It is important to also mention here that in the real story that inspired Soyinka's play, it was from Ghana that the son of Elesin has returned but for his dramaturgical purpose Soyinka has made Olunde to return from Britain. I have already argued somewhere else (in my MA thesis of 1999) that Olunde is Soyinka's authorial voice; in this thesis my aim is to go as far as arguing that Olunde is actually a dramaturgical reincarnation of Soyinka. For an insightful variation of my argument, see Williams, 1993, p. 74.

here, Soyinka explained to Beier how he came to write the *Horseman* in 1974, considering the fact that it was since the early 1960s that Beier had drawn Soyinka's attention to the actual material that inspired his *Horseman*:

> BEIER: By far the most important statement you have made about Yoruba culture is your play "Death and the King's Horseman". I don't know whether you remember this, but it was Pierre Verger who found out about this famous incident in Oyo. He was even able to verify it, by writing to the District Officer, who was then living in Canada.
>
> SOYINKA: I do remember that you gave me a kind of summary of the story–
>
> BEIER: I thought that the material was crying out for a play. But for several years, you didn't do anything with it.
>
> SOYINKA: Well, I wasn't ready for it.
>
> BEIER: I then gave the material to Duro Ladipo who produced "Oba Waja" in 1964. Then maybe a decade later you wrote the "Horseman". What was it then that prompted you to go back to this material finally? What new insight had occurred? What new preoccupation with Yoruba religion maybe?
>
> SOYINKA: That's a question that's always very difficult to answer. Because it has to do with the entire active creative process: gestation, something that takes place on different levels of consciousness or sub-consciousness. But don't forget, I wrote this play in Cambridge, when I was there for a year as a fellow in Churchill College. And it could have been the resentment of the presumption! Because you know in a Cambridge College named after a personality like Churchill, you have encapsulated the entire history of the arrogance of your colonizers; the supercilious attitude towards other cultures, the narrowness, the mind closure, it could be all of that. It was not a year which I enjoyed particularly....*I felt like a representative; a captured, creative individual having to deal with another culture on its own terms, in its own locale*. And passing the bust of Churchill on the top of the stairs almost every day - with all that Churchill meant. The big colonial man himself! *It could have been all of this that brought back the memory of this tragic representation of the way their culture would always impinge on ours*. I suspect that is the way it must have been. *I must have been tempted to challenge this: How dare this smugness be*! How dare it be exported...!(Beier 1997, 5; my emphases).

I have taken the liberty to quote the passage at length, not only because it reveals how Soyinka came by

the historical material which inspired *Horseman* since the early 1960s, but also because, in my view, it illuminates Soyinka's explicit attitude towards the British and, more importantly, his implicit view of the white man in general. In fact, I would venture to call this particular section of the interview, as cited above, as 'Face to Face with the Occident', because, in my view, Soyinka's vulnerability became very apparent and, if only for a moment, he was 'de-masked'.[192] To reiterate, the passage above is from an interview which was conducted in Bayreuth in Germany and it was later published in *Ishokan Yoruba Magazine* in 1997.[193] It was a long interview that ran to six pages, and while the rest of the interview can be described as good-natured, the passage I have cited above, to my mind, is more than what meets the eye.

Ulli Beier, as previously indicated (in chapter 2) is a German Jew, who along with his Austrian wife, Susan Wenger, arrived in Nigeria to teach Phonetics at the University of Ibadan in 1956.[194] Beier and Wenger lived in Ede, Ilobu and Oshogbo, which are typical Yoruba enclaves. As a result, they became interested in traditional Yoruba arts and heritage. During 1956, Beier attended the first 'Congress of Negro Artists and Writers' in Paris and upon his return he co-founded, with another German colleague, Janheinz Jahn, *Black Orpheus* arguably the first African literary journal. In an interview at the University of Washington in 1973 Soyinka remarked that he found the title of the magazine "very embarrassing even though it was a very good magazine and brought out a lot of literature, not merely of Africa, but of black America the Caribbean, and Latin America".[195] It is not only in the area of literature that Beier was a pioneer, however, he contributed immensely to the development of culture, modern arts and theatre in Nigeria

[192] I am using the term 'de-masked' here guardedly bearing in mind that the premise of Fanon's book *Black Skin, White, Mask* is that an African intellectual is invariably a black man wearing a white mask.

[193] The interview is printed in *Isokan Yoruba Magazine* (Summer 1997), Vol. 3 No 3, But my source was online at www.yoruba.org/Magazine/Summer 97/ file3.tm (accessed on September 21, 2005).

[194] It was while I was conducting this research that I discovered that Beier passed away in April 2011and, as not unexpected, a lot of tributes have been paid to him from all over the world. See for instance, Whiteman, Kaye 2011. 'Ulli Beier Obituary' in *The Guardian* of Tuesday 24 May, 2011 online at www. guardian.co/uk/culture/2011/may/24/ulli-beier-obituary (accessed on the 20th September 2012); 'Ulli Beier' in the *Telegraph* online:www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/8508079/Ulli-Beier.html# (accessed on the 20th of September 2012).

[195] The name of the magazine was derived from Jean-Paul Sartre's 1948 manifesto of the same name. Soyinka's view is that negritude as a movement in Africa has no place, because, as he puts it "the African people have never lost their negritude, never". For more on this, see Anon, 2001, pp. 9-10.

and his contribution to the establishment of Duro Ladipo's travelling theatre in Oshogbo cannot be over-emphasised. It is rather surprising, therefore, that in his memoir *Ibadan*, Soyinka describes Beier as "the German Austrian who came to Yorubaland for want of any other idea at the time and stayed for ever" (Soyinka 2001, 208). On the basis of this description, one would be forgiven to draw the inference that when Soyinka was responding directly to Beier in connection with the issue of the historical material that inspired *Horseman*, he was also talking indirectly about Beier, who, as the passage I have quoted above reveals, drew Soyinka's attention to the historical event that inspired *Horseman.* I must pause here to make it abundantly clear that it is not my intention to belabour this issue. However, it is important to substantiate my hypothesis that how Soyinka got to know about the historical material upon which he based *Horseman* and who directed his attention to the material contributed in no small measure to why it took him so long to write the masterpiece.

If Frantz Fanon is correct in asserting that "Alterity for the black man is not the black, but the white man" (Fanon 1967, 97), then, in Soyinka's eyes Beier might be a naturalised Yoruba man, a white man he would forever remain. "A few of us might appear quite at ease in both cultures but one should not be deceived", according to Demas Nwoko, "because we are not only very good actors and mimics, and it works well for surface fun. Under this apparently easy adaptability, lies only one personality – that of the African" (Nwoko 1981, 475). With Fanon and Nwoko's assertions in mind, if one casts an objective eye on the passage from the interview that I have quoted above, it will begin to read as if Beier was indeed interrogating Soyinka as regards why he did not do anything with the material that he gave him until a decade after. Furthermore, it is also important to note that Beier did not allow Soyinka to finish his first statement in that passage before he interrupted him with: "I thought the material was crying out for a play" (Beier 1997). We must remember here that, at the time of this interview, Soyinka had been a Nobel Laureate for more than a decade. So, if Fanon is right again when he asserts that "Face to face with the white man, the Negro has a past to legitimate; a vengeance to exact" (Fanon 1967, 225), one would be right to surmise that the actual reason Soyinka was reluctant to write *Horseman* for almost a decade had to do with the fact that it was Beier who introduced the historical material to him. If we recall that in the same interview Beier said to Soyinka: "I then gave the material to Duro Ladipo who produced *Oba Waja* in 1964" (Beier, 1997), the argument I am advancing here will immediately gain some credence. In other words, could Soyinka, at that instant, be thinking to himself: 'is this white man telling me that if not for him, Duro Ladipo would not have written *Oba Waja*?' To illustrate this point, it would be necessary to digress a little.

In his essay 'The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo', Yemi Ogunbiyi raises a number of interesting points that are germane to the argument I am advancing here. Ogunbiyi's purpose in the essay, I would argue, is to set the record straight as regards the kind of relationship that existed between Beier and Duro Ladipo. As previously discussed, Ladipo was one of the most popular and innovative founders of the Yoruba travelling theatre who died on March 11, 1978. So in the essay, Ogunbiyi painstakingly articulates all the achievements of Ladipo as a veteran of the Yoruba travelling theatre. However, it is the part of Ogunbiyi's argument where he provides a critical rebuttal of some of the assertions made by Demas Nwoko in his own essay 'Search for a New African Theatre', that interests us here. The premise of Nwoko's argument is that it was Beier who suggested the historical theme that Duro Ladipo adapted to create his most important play, *Oba Koso*. In Nwoko's words,

> Through further suggestions during production, original indigenous music and appropriate dances were used. Added to this, for décor, were black-cloths of typical modern art school colours which were the result of the art workshops he had organised. The result was an exhibition of slices of customs and traditional art forms, loosely linked by improvised dramatic movements and speech. Oba Koso, as the play was called, was a very exotic presentation and it was sent round Europe as a demonstration of our fine culture (Nwoko 1981, 470).

It is in light of this that Nwoko affirms that "The salient danger in this type of art is that the artist cannot claim honest responsibility for what has come to be known as his" (ibid.). The inference that Nwoko has drawn is what Ogunbiyi fundamentally disagrees with and hence his essay in which he first of all chronicles Ladipo's theatre work long before he (Ladipo) came into contact with Beier in 1959. In Ogunbiyi's unequivocal view is as follows:

> The whole argument smacks of pedantry and so hardly useful in our assessment of the artist. How much was suggested? How much was accepted or rejected? All right, so Beier "suggested" historical themes to Ladipo. But then the question is: so what? Did Ulli Beier actually compose the historical plays for Duro Ladipo? Did Ladipo not write these plays himself, composing the music, while falling back largely on the tradition of Yoruba theatre....(Ogunbiyi 1981, 339).

In my view, this unresolved matter as regards how much Beier, an Occident, should be credited for the achievements of Ladipo, a doyen of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre movement, must have made Soyinka exercise caution in writing *Horseman*. It would have been an entirely different matter for Soyinka if

Beier had been an African man. In other words, it is one thing for the British press to claim that Soyinka was heavily influenced by European theatre tradition when he wrote his first plays in England,[196] it would be a different matter altogether if Beier went about claiming credit for how Soyinka came about the historical material upon which *Horseman* is based. So Soyinka, may appear to be "receptive to a number of new and different ideas" (Ogunbiyi 1981, 340) as Duro Ladipo was, but unlike Ladipo, Soyinka seems to care "whether these ideas came from 'foreigners' or his own kinsmen" (ibid.).

With this background in mind, Soyinka's 'Author's Note' is bound to assume a different complexion. I have already quoted the concluding part of the 'Author's Note', below is how it opens:

> This play is based on events which took place in Oyo, ancient Yoruba city of Nigeria in 1946. That year the lives of Elesin (Olori Elesin), his son, and the Colonial District Officer intertwined with disastrous results set out in the play. The changes I have made are in matter of detail, sequence and of course characterisation. The action has also been set back two or three years to while the war was still on, for minor reasons of dramaturgy. The factual account still exists in the archives of the British Colonial Administration. It has already inspired a fine play in Yoruba (*Oba Waja*) by Duro Ladipo. It has also begotten a film by some German television company....(44).

It does not end there, however. Soyinka goes on to state very clearly that he would rather the play's threnodic essence be elicited by any would-be director instead of presenting it as a 'clash of cultures'. If one reads between the lines of the 'Author's Note', the phrase, "The Colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely" (145) could be interpreted as an indirect reference to Beier in an attempt to put him in the 'them' category.[197] In my view this is an interesting hypothesis that deserved a more

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[196] For an insightful analysis of how the media attributed Soyinka's early works to western theatre traditions, see Motsa, 2000, pp. 243-245.

[197] To avoid being misunderstood here, I believe it is imperative that I make it clear that I am not insinuating that Soyinka had been jingoistic or ethnocentric towards Beier. It is evidently clear from the numerous materials that are available on Beier that he was well respected by Nigerians and Soyinka did not only work with him but he also held him in high esteem. Furthermore Soyinka had a lot of admiration for Susan Wenger, Beier's first wife who had become irreversibly Yoruba until her death in 2009. Nonetheless, it is my argument that Soyinka's 'white mask' slipped albeit, for a moment when he was articulating what eventually compelled him to write *Horseman* in 1974. Lest we forget, Beier was a white man who was able to realise his full potential in Nigeria as he was warmly welcome by Nigerians, Soyinka did not enjoy such warmth when he travelled to Britain.

detailed academic investigation, more so because when Beier travelled to Nigeria in 1956, he received a warm welcome and decided to stay, meanwhile Soyinka travelled to England a year before but had to return to Nigeria less than five years later due, in no small part, to the racism that he experienced personally and professionally. That is why it is untenable in my view, as I have argued previously, to put a white immigrant living in any part of Africa in the same category as a black immigrant living anywhere in the western world as Soyinka has attempted to do (ironically) in another interview with Beier in an effort to jettison the description of being an in between man. But, what is important to highlight here is that what inspired the writing of the play as Soyinka had explained it to Beier in that interview as quoted above and how Soyinka would rather the play be portrayed as he articulates it in his 'Author's Note' are clearly at variance. This is perhaps what Williams is alluding to when he argues that "The playwright's contemptuous dismissal of 'hidebound chronologues' notwithstanding, *Death and the King's Horseman* is the creative equivalent of the return of the repressed" (Williams 1993, 72). Williams' argument is that "by exploring the sacred terror of ritual suicide within the context of the cynicism and cultural desiccations of the colonialists Soyinka is engaged in nothing less than a sublime cultural battle" (ibid).

Nonetheless, the important question that is worth asking is: if Soyinka had written in his 'Author's Note' that it was his resentment towards the British which manifested itself when he was at Churchill College in 1974, coupled with the temptation to challenge their smugness that compelled him to finally write *Horseman*, would the play have been mounted professionally on the British stage? And, more importantly, would Soyinka have been considered for the Nobel Prize? In my view, it is a post-colonial strategy on the part of Soyinka to have stressed that the confrontation in his play is largely cosmological rather than cross-cultural. To my mind, this strategy can be likened to what Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins have described as "an example of theatre's politicality in a post-colonial context" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 1) in their analysis of the way some astute Filipinos, back in 1907, when their country was still under American rule, used politicised colourful costumes in a choreographed way during a performance to momentarily form a "living, moving, stirring picture of the Filipino flag"[198] to the delight of all the Filipinos in the audience whilst the Americans in the audience did not understand what was going on.

As I have previously contended, Soyinka is both Yoruba and British and he knows both cultures very well.

[198] For more on this see Gilbert, Helen and Joanne Tompkins (eds.), 1996, p. 1.

"Soyinka's English is only 'Nigerian' when he is listening to 'Nigerian English'", as Kwame Anthony Appiah has pointed out in his essay 'Myth, Literature and the African World'. "But with the same precision he captures the language of the colonial, matter and manner" (Appiah 1994, 98). Abiola Irele draws the same inference when he posits, in his essay, 'The Achievements of Wole Soyinka', that "One of the strategic areas of our confrontation with Western imperialism has been that of universe of discourse" (Irele 2005, 10). It is very doubtful that the colonialist would have succeeded if he had arrived on the African soil and announced to the native that his mission was to colonise and not to 'civilise' them. "The oppressed, because they are obliged by circumstances and the imperatives of survival to know both the dominant and the marginal culture", as Robert Stam tells us in his insightful essay, 'Bakhtin, Polyphony and Ethnic Representation', "are ideally placed to deconstruct the mystifications of the dominant group" (Stam 1991, 259). Thus, it is the same strategy that the coloniser had used for his colonising mission that Soyinka has adopted dramaturgically to engage the colonialist in a discourse, no less on the British soil, as regards the legacy of colonialism. Lest we forget Soyinka's important pastime is hunting and being a Yoruba man, he knows that to catch a monkey, one must act as one. In other words, Soyinka's post-colonial strategy is not to proclaim his post-coloniality and clearly it is in *Horseman,* more than any of his tragic plays, that this strategy is most sublimely and effectively deployed. It is worth noting however that *Horseman* is as straightforward as the historical material upon which it is based in spite of some of the alterations and re-historicizing Soyinka has made in his drama. It would be instructive at this juncture to provide a brief outline of the historical material which inspired *Horseman* and how Soyinka uses the material dramaturgically. In my view, this would aid a better understanding of the drama when we begin the analysis of its British presentations shortly, but it would also serve as a summary of Soyinka's plot.

7.4 Elesin Oba: Historically and Dramaturgically

In 1946, in the ancient city of Oyo in the Yoruba land of south west of Nigeria, Oba Siyanbola Oladigbolu, the reigning Alaafin (King) of Oyo died. Although the king was buried that night as custom demanded, his Horseman, Olokun Esin Jinadu was also obligated to commit ritual suicide within thirty days in order to lead the way for the King's favourite horse and dog as they go through the passage of transition, which, according to Yoruba ontology, links the worlds of the living and the dead. At the time of this event, however, Nigeria was a colony of the British Empire. So when the then District Officer, one Captain J. A. MacKenzie, realised what the ritual was really about, he thought the idea of a man killing himself in the name of a ritual was savage and barbaric and therefore he prevented Olokun Esin Jinadu

from performing the ritual suicide. To the Yorubas, as we have already discussed, this is an abomination based on their ontology, which presuppose that an important ritual sacrifice must be performed at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner, otherwise inappropriate occurrences will follow. It is to avert this unpredictable and inevitable calamity that Murana, Olokun Esin Jinadu's last born son took his own life. Aside from some of the changes that Soyinka has made in his drama, this, in a nutshell, is the historical event that he dramatises in *Horseman*. Some of the changes Soyinka makes in his drama are worth mentioning. First, he changes the name Olokun Esin Jinadu to "Elesin Oba", which literally translates as the 'King's Horseman' and hence the title of the play. Murana[199] is changed to Olunde, and for a greater dramatic effect Soyinka makes Olunde the first son as against the last born son that Murana was in the actual story. Furthermore, and perhaps very significantly, Olunde is a medical student in England and not a trader in Ghana as Jinadu was. Another important change that Soyinka has made "for minor reasons of dramaturgy" (144), as he has spelt it out in his 'Author's Note', is to set the play back to when World War II was still going on. This is clearly to help him highlight the significance of Elesin's cultural obligations in the context of the professional obligations of a European soldier at war whose statutory duty is to lay down his life to defend the honour and integrity of his people. "Considered in the light of Soyinka's theory of tragic art, the play yields its peculiarly rich insights and ambiguities", as Tejumola Olaniyan has noted (Olaniyan 1994, 49). Olaniyan notes further that "all the tragic ingredients are there: a protagonist who embodies the will and aspirations of the collective, and a tragic issue of cosmic proportions for the community" (ibid.). However, *Horseman*, I would argue, is the least complex in the corpus of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies and this is probably due to the fact that the drama is based on true events and also because Soyinka allowed the play to gestate in his head for a long time before he decided to write it. This is clearly evident in the way Soyinka responded to the question: "Do you know what will happen in a play when you sit down to write it or do you just have a basic idea?", posed to him by James Gibbs during the insightful interview that Gibbs recorded in 1981. Soyinka first commented that it was "a very good question and one which is answered "yes" and "no" before responding thus:

[199] This is the name Soyinka gives the god-apparent that got knocked down in *The Road* as discussed in the previous chapter. This means Soyinka must have been itching to use this material around the period he wrote *The Road* in 1965, which gives credence to my argument that when he finally wrote *Horseman* in 1974, there was nothing he could do about it. My source for the concise summary of the historical event is Gates, 2001, p. 68. It is important to note however that Henry Louise Gates, put the date of the real historical event as 1944. It is also worth mentioning that Soyinka's first born, Olaokun studied medicine.

> "Yes" There have been plays in which the idea was so compact from beginning to end, everything was set and it followed the pattern in my mind, straight all the way through. An example is *Death and the King's Horseman* – there was no doubt at all (Gibbs 2001, 90).

Horseman is a straightforward five-act drama. The play begins with Elesin's entrance into the market place in the company of a retinue of drummers and his Praise Singer (Olohun Iyo). Soyinka describes Elesin "*as a man of enormous vitality, speaks, dances and sings with that infectious enjoyment of life which accompanies all his actions*" (147). Right from the beginning of the play Soyinka displays his linguistic dexterity. Through riddles, poetry, storytelling and jokes between Elesin and the Praise Singer, it is revealed that former is preparing for the most important task of his life, which is to dance to death at the appointed time at midnight in order to ferry the dead King's favourite horse and dog to the world beyond. All the dialogue, banter and action in this scene are to the accompaniment of music and songs provided respectively by the drummers and the market women, including Iyaloja the leader of the market women. In essence, this first act can be described as the exhibition of the rich tapestry of Yoruba culture linguistically, musically, kinetically and sartorially. But, more importantly, the first act serves the dramaturgic purpose of exposition, akin to the testimony from Aroni in *A Dance of the Forests* or the opening monologue by Dionysos in Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides*. The impression one immediately gets of Elesin is that this is a man who enjoys life but not afraid to die at the appointed time. But before Elesin bids the world of the living good bye, he feels he has to be appropriately honoured.[200] First he requests for new and richer clothing. And as soon as he is clothed in *alari*,[201] Elesin catches a glimpse of "a beautiful young girl" (157) passing: "I embrace it. And let me tell you, women – I like this farewell that the world designed" Elesin meows. Even when he is informed that the young girl is betrothed to Iyaloja's son, Elesin still insists on marrying her before he departs the world of the living. In his words,

> Do me credit. And do me honour.
> I am girded for the route beyond
> Burdens of waste and longing.
> Then let me travel light. Let

[200] One cannot help seeing Elesin Oba in the light of a man who is on a death row who has been asked if he has any last wishes. The difference however is that Elesin Oba has always enjoyed life simply because it is his duty to die.

[201] This is a type of fabric that the Yorubas consider expensive.

Seed that will not serve the stomach
On the way remain behind. Let it take root
In the earth of my choice, in this earth
I leave behind (160).

Iyaloja appreciates the importance of Elesin's ritual suicide. "The voice I hear is already touched by the waiting fingers of our departed", she says, "I dare not refuse" (160). And with that, and despite protestations from the market women, Iyaloja agrees to meet Elesin's demand, but her warning to Elesin is pertinent: "You wish to travel light. Well the earth is yours. But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no curse" (162). It is in the middle of Elesin's impromptu honeymoon that the first act ends. So, going by Soyinka's theory that "The actor in ritual drama" is required to prepare "mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin" (Soyinka 1995, 30), one can safely surmise here that it is from the outset that Elesin's tragic wheel has begun to spin towards a calamitous dénouement.

The second scene is set in the "verandah of the District Officer's bungalow" and it opens, according to the stage direction, as follows,: "A tango is playing from an old hand cranked-gramophone" (163). We see the colonial officer, Simon Pilkings and his wife, Jane, in Egungun masquerade costumes getting ready for a fancy dress ball at the Resident's house in honour of H.R.H The Prince, who is on an official visit to the colony. Through the information they could get out of Joseph, their house boy, and Sergeant Amusa, a colonial police constable, Pilkings realises that the drums that have been "going all evening" is a ritual ceremony and, more importantly, Elesin is required to commit ritual suicide at midnight. Pilkings cannot comprehend the logic of a man killing himself in the name of some barbaric tradition, so he gives an order for the arrest of Elesin.

Scene three begins with Sergeant Amusa and another policeman arriving at the market to arrest Elesin in accordance with Pilkings' order. But the market women overpower the two policemen and shortly, thereafter, Elesin, having completed his last important earthly business, begins the ritual. With the aid of incantations, drumming chants and movement, Elesin begins his dance of death. Below is how scene three ends:

...ELESIN dances on, completely in a trance. The dirge wells up louder and stronger. ELESIN's dance does not lose its elasticity but his gestures become, if possible, even more weighty. Lights fade slowly on the

scene (186).

Scene four opens with the fancy dress ball at the residency, but the most significant aspect of this scene is when we are introduced to Olunde, Elesin's eldest son, a medical student in England who has returned home from his studies to bury his father, having received a telegram informing him of the king's death. The dialogue between Jane Pilkings is the essence of Soyinka's politics of post-coloniality in the sense that it is more or less a comparative analysis of indigenous and foreign cultures. So, while Soyinka insists that the play is not a clash of cultures, the scene is inarguably a clash of Yoruba and British cultures linguistically, musically, philosophically and dramaturgically. To reinforce this point, it would be worthwhile to quote a section from the play. We join the scene at the point where Olunde in an effort to explain the importance of the ritual suicide that his father must commit to Jane Pilkings, is drawing a comparison between Elesin's responsibility and that of the Prince who has risked his life to travel to the colony:

> JANE: I see. So it isn't just medicine you studied in England.
>
> OLUNDE: Yet another error into which your people fall. You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you.
>
> JANE. Not so fast Olunde. You have learnt to argue I can tell that, but I never said you made sense. However clearly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse – it's feudal! The king dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get!
>
> OLUNDE (*waves his hand towards the background. The PRINCE is dancing past again – to a different step – and all the guests are bowing and curtseying as he passes*). And this? Even in the midst of a devastating war, look at that. What name would you give to that?
>
> JANE. Therapy, British style. The preservation of sanity in the midst of chaos.
>
> OLUNDE. Others would call it decadence. However it doesn't interest me. You white races know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilization for all time and reverting to state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us (195).

It is in light of this dialogue and others just like it that many critics have maintained that *Horseman* is nothing but 'a clash of cultures'. For instance, Nicholas De Jongh's four-star review of the 2009 National theatre production of the play, which appeared in the *Evening Herald* edition of April 9, 2009, was headlined: 'Dazzling display of a clash of cultures'. Similarly the headline of Aleks Sierz's review, which appeared in the edition of the *Tribune* newspaper dated April 24, 2009, reads: 'Hit and myth clash of cultures in colonial showdown'. If one bases one's analysis purely on the scene between Olunde and Jane Pilkings and other scenes[202] in Soyinka's play in which Yoruba and British cultures come into direct conflict, one would be inclined to agree with the critics. But Soyinka's view is that the tragedy of *Horseman* is that Elesin fails to fulfil his traditional duty for which he has enjoyed a lot of privileges over the years. "It is a play about human faults and human weakness; moment of triumph which turn to ashes, the loss of honour, the failure to achieve one's goal in life", Soyinka insisted in the interview he granted *Africa Today* in June 2009. "So the fact that where the event took place is now supposedly free from colonial makes no difference at all" *Africa Today*, 12), he added. Thus, Elesin is very much like a Greek tragic hero and his main tragic flaw is that he lacks focus and, therefore, is irresponsible. It is in this sense that the play is essentially post-colonial. Clearly, Soyinka sees in Elesin most African leaders, and particularly Nigerian rulers, who are happy to enjoy the luxury and privileges that come with their offices, but are not prepared to serve the people who revere them. That is why Olunde is left with no choice but to right his father's wrong by taking his own life as it is revealed towards the end of the last act in the play. Praise Singer's words below succinctly illuminate for us the implication of Olunde's premature, but seemingly essential, death:

> Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin (218).

Although Olunde's ritual is a belated replacement, since it happened after mid-night the appointed time for the ritual, "such a replacement, accompanied by appropriate rites," in the words of Tejumola Olaniyan, "is well within the 'accommodative wisdom' of the Yoruba mind" (Olaniyan 1995, 55). So, Olunde is essentially the Yoruba tragic hero in *Horseman*, because his death is crucial for the rejuvenation of the society he leaves behind. In other words, "it is Olunde's death that evokes tragic

[202] I discussed some of these scenes later on in the context of the questions that I posed to Rufus Norris, who directed the production at the National, when I conducted an interview with him.

feeling, winning," as Olaniyan has remarked, "the people's sympathetic knowledge of the protagonist's foray into the psychic abyss of the recreative energies" (ibid.). So, while Olunde has begun to experience disintegration in the transitional abyss, Elesin Oba is earth-bound, languishing under the protection of the white man. A Yoruba saying readily comes to mind here: "it is better to die than to live in shame". It is with this in mind perhaps that, when he is finally confronted with the corpse of his eldest son at the end of scene five, Elesin is left with no alternative than to strangle himself to death with the chains with which the white man has tied him down to earth like a wild animal. Here, Soyinka is querying, from a quintessential Yoruba point of view, what he describes as the "ultimate pessimism of existence as pronounced by Nietzsche's sage Silenus: it is an act of hubris to be born" (Soyinka 1993, 35), because as he argues, "It is a challenge to the jealous chthonic powers, to *be*" (ibid.; italics original). So if it is an act of hubris to *be*, to the Yoruba mind, Soyinka posits, "it is no less an act of hubris to *die*" (ibid.; italics original). Nonetheless, Elesin's suicide is a selfish and futile act; it does not benefit his people in any way by virtue of the fact that the time and space are inappropriate, and more importantly, Olunde has taken his place, because, as Praise Singer puts it, "he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors" (218). It is in this sense that the way the play ends is a pole opposite to how it begins which also provides an insight into how the threnodic essence of the play can be realised. Further, the way the play ends also emphasises the philosophy of the Yorubas that because one is crying, does not mean one has lost one's sight. In other words, there is always tomorrow. The last words in the play appropriately belong to Iyaloja and it is worth quoting here to bring this brief summary of the play to a close: "Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn" (219) and as Iyaloja goes off accompanied by Elesin's bride [or widow], according to the stage direction, "*The dirge rises in volume and the women continue to sway, lights fade to a black out*" (219).

From this brief summary of the *Horseman*, I would argue that this play is the least complex of all the four Yoruba tragedies analysed in this thesis. However, Soyinka does not do 'simplicity', and hence his insistence that the play "can be fully realised only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition" (145). Let us pause a moment here to consider the word '*only*' in the foregoing statement. According to a Yoruba saying: *Ona kan o wo'ja,* meaning 'there are usually more than one entrance into a market'. It is very paradoxical, therefore, that Soyinka a Yoruba man to the core, asserts that there is *only* one way to fully realise a play which is predominantly set in a Yoruba market place. Soyinka's assertion brings to mind Yvonne Brewster's interesting response to my question as regards what she thought a Nigerian director could bring to a British production of Soyinka's *The Road*:

> Well now, you put me in a funny plug, because I think it depends on the Nigerian director. Now you mustn't quote me ...you know, but I don't think that somebody who is going to stick to the complete letter of the law how this must be done - There's no way a play must be done. If anybody says "well this is the only way a play can be done", I don't want to even talk to them, I don't have any time of day for them because that means that they should not be in the business, because they are lacking in: (a) confidence, and (b) imagination (Appendix 2A).

But, as far as Soyinka is concerned, there is *only* one way to fully realise *Horseman.* Thus, going by Brewster's assertion, does that mean Soyinka is lacking in confidence and imagination? On the contrary, I would contend. In fact, the reason Soyinka can unequivocally state how he believes his play can only be fully realised is a testament to not only his imagination, but also his innovation as evident in his theorisation of the Yoruba tragedy in his essay the 'Fourth Stage'. "At the charged climactic moments of the tragic rites we understand how music came to be the sole art form which can contain tragic reality" (Soyinka 1993, 31), Soyinka hypothesises,

> The votary is led by no other into the pristine heart of tragedy. Music, the embodiment of the tragic spirit, has been more perceptively exhausted in the philosophy of Europe; there is little to add, much to qualify. And the function and nature of music in Yoruba tragedy is peculiarly revealing of the shortcomings of long accepted conclusions of European intuition (ibid.).

What this shows clearly is that the theoretical compass to navigate the seemingly dramaturgical impasse of what Soyinka means by the "evocation of music from the abyss of transition" can be found in his theory of Yoruba tragedy.[203] And as regards the issue of confidence, I would argue that if the injunction contained in the 'Authors Note' is viewed through the lenses of post-colonialism and interculturalism, it is clear that Soyinka had, over the years, become more confident and comfortable in his black skin. Lest we forget, Soyinka wrote *Horseman* in 1974, that is, a year after the harrowing experience he had at the hands of Roland Joffe who 'adapted' rather than directed Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae*. It is very

[203] I would argue that this is perhaps a sub-conscious inversion of the Biblical injunction that the 'only' way to salvation is through Jesus Christ. Lest we forget, this was the message that was used to colonise the natives and why most Africans turned their backs on their indigenous culture having been brainwashed to consider ritual worship backward and barbaric. In fact, it needs to be stressed that if there was no colonisation, there would not have been any need for westerners such as Beier or Susan Wenger to come to Nigeria to help de-westernise the Yorubas in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

doubtful if Soyinka would ever forget that particular episode of his playwriting career going by Femi Euba's remark that "The Playwright is usually not quite happy with the director's interpretation which appears to falsify his own artistic visions" (Euba 1981, 285). So, if after his debilitating experience at the National Theatre of Britain in 1973, Soyinka appears to have adopted the kind of rigid attitude for which western playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Arthur Miller (as previously mentioned) are known, one can surmise that it is a case of Soyinka borrowing a leaf from the Yoruba saying: *Bi oni'gba ba se pe igba e la ba a n pe*, meaning 'it is precisely how a hawker portrays his/her wares that they will be perceived'. And if we recall the advice Brewster offers her fellow director, which we must quote here again, "We, the interpreters must find a way of making the work. If this is beyond us, then we should leave those plays alone. Or go write our own" (Brewster 2004, 166), it would become evidently clear that Soyinka knows precisely what he is doing when he enunciates that there is *only* one way to realise *Horseman,* which in my view can be interpreted as: 'Do not Misinterpret' my *Horseman* (as your colleague, Joffe, did my *Bacchae*) "Making the foreign familiar is, after all, the basic process of education" (Brandon 1990, 95), as James Brandon has put it in his essay 'Contemporary Japanese Theatre: Interculturalism and Intraculturalism'. In this respect, the 15 year-delay of the first major British production of the play before it was presented in the Royal Exchange Theatre in 1990 was not merely a reflection of "the insularity of the British Theatre" as Albert Hunt has argued in the *Guardian* of November 24, 1990,[204] but also a testament to Irving Wardle's observation, in his review in the *Independent* of November 25, 1990, that *Horseman* "is clearly a masterpiece that time has last yielded a company, a director, and a performance space to do it justice" (ibid). Here, Wardle is, respectively, referring to the Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, Phyllida Lloyd and the award winning theatre's arena space.

7.5 *Horseman* at the Royal Exchange Theatre.

The very first time *Horseman* was staged in Britain was in July 1983, according to Martin Rohmer in his article, 'Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester'.[205]

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[204] In his review Albert Hunt argues that the idea of having to wait for 15 years to see the play "says a lot about the insularity of the British Theatre". It is noteworthy that he was the same reviewer who gave *The Bacchae* a glowing review and was very scathing of the British theatre of the 1970s.

[205] The article is published in *New Theatre Quarterly,* Vol. X, No. 37 (February 1994). Readers are advised to pursue this article for a detailed and balanced critique of the production of *Death* in Manchester, pp. 57- 71. By virtue of the fact that I did not see the production and no video recording of the performance exists, I have had to rely

However, it was a production staged for the Drama Department of the University of Hull, which was directed, as previously mentioned, by Malawian Chris Kamlongera. But going by the press coverage that greeted the Royal Exchange Theatre's (RET) production, it was the first time ever that British audiences would see Soyinka's *Horseman* on stage.[206] But by the time the Manchester-based theatre decided to present *Horseman* in 1990, the theatre had been in existence for 14 years. The theatre's overarching vision as it is spelt out on its website is "to be an internationally recognized centre of excellence for theatre in the UK and a vibrant cultural centre for Manchester and the region".[207] One of the two significant ways in which the theatre strives to achieve this is:

> To inspire audiences by creating and presenting excellent work which showcases wonderfully diverse approaches to storytelling in our unique spaces (ibid.).

Aside from its internationally eclectic programming, the most peculiar thing about the theatre is its unique arena theatre space, constructed inside the old Cotton Exchange in Manchester. The historicity of the building in which the theatre was built and the peculiarity of its performance space contributed, in no small measure, to Phyllida Lloyd's decision to direct *Horseman* in 1990. "This is obviously a very particular theatre space, a particular design", she explained,

> I've been directing a lot of classical plays in the last couple of years, and I was looking for a modern play that had something important to say and also did it in a way that would do justice to the physical life here. And the fact that part of this play is set in a market-place, and this theatre is built in a nineteenth century market just seemed somehow too good to be true. [208]

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extensively on Rohmer's critique more so because it includes excerpts of Rohmer's interview with Phyllida Lloyd. I must add that I tried to get in contact with Phyllida Lloyd for an interview but all my efforts did not yield any tangible results.

[206] It would be inappropriate to lay the full blame at the doors of the press though in the sense that the Press Release that the Royal Exchange Theatre Company circulated was headlined: "British Premiere!". It is probably to set the record straight that Rohmer has insisted on referring to Lloyd's presentation as the second British production. But it seems RET is bent on muddying the water further by listing its 1990 production of *Death* on its web site as "WP" and not 'BP', both of which to my understanding stand for "World Premiere" and "British Premiere", respectively. See: www.royalexchange.co.uk/uploads/ premiere % (accessed on 21st September 2012).

[207] See: www. royalexchange.co.uk/page.aspx (accessed on 17, September 2012).

[208] My source for this quote is Rohmer, 1994, p. 58.

Lloyd was the director of the Old Vic Theatre in Bristol for a year before she joined the RET as an Associate Director in 1989. She moved to Manchester because the theatre had a reputation for striving to "maintain a challenging repertoire",[209] she explained to Robin Thornber of *The Guardian*, and to avail of the "opportunity to work in its unique space" (ibid). Thus, no sooner had Lloyd joined RET than she began to make her mark as a director of note. Her production of Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* is described, by Thornber, "as widely imaginative" (ibid) and her modern dress version of Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, was hailed as "highly original and critically acclaimed" in the press release[210] circulated to publicise her production of *Horseman*. It is also worth noting that shortly before Lloyd began rehearsing *Horseman,* she had just returned from a six-week tour of the Soviet Union where she met some of the country's premiere theatre companies. The trip was made possible because Lloyd was the 1990 recipient of the John Fernald Award from the International Foundation for Training in the Arts. This detail was also included in the press release reading: "Straight into rehearsals on her return, Phyllida is now set to inject her exciting experiences of international theatre into the Royal Exchange in the coming weeks" (ibid). Unsurprisingly Thornber included this information in his article in *The Guardian,* but surprisingly he did not ask the pertinent question: what has Russian theatre got to do with a Yoruba tragedy?

To my mind, this would have been a valid question to ask, considering the fact that in all the press coverage it was insinuated that *Horseman* was Lloyd's biggest challenge thus far in her directing career. But above all, *Horseman* marked the very first time that RET would stage a play "from outside the European and American mainstream drama" (*The Guardian* November 22, 1990, 34), as Lloyd herself had noted. So, would it not have made more sense if Lloyd had travelled to Nigeria[211] (instead of the

[209] See Thornber 1990, p.34.

[210] I obtained a copy of the Press Release from Victoria and Albert Theatre Museum in London when I first visited the reading room in 2007.

[211] I would argue that one reason Phyllida Lloyd would not contemplate the idea of travelling to Nigeria was because of the reputation of Nigeria as a dangerous place to visit. But the reality tells a different story. Yes, Nigeria is dangerous in many ways but, no more than many other countries of the world. This is the issue that Brewster eloquently touches upon in her autobiography, *The Undertaker's Daughter* when she writes about her visit to Nigeria in 1989 to do some research on Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi and his work. Apparently Brewster's mother was concerned for her daughter's safety in Nigeria, forgetting that in reality Kingston in Jamaica where her daughter grew up could be considered more dangerous than Lagos. See Brewster, 2004, p. 133.

Soviet Union) to, at least, familiarize herself with the Yoruba culture upon which the play she would be directing immediately upon her return is based, more so when the award she had won was set up, as Thornber has remarked, "to promote exchanges of cultural skills" (ibid.)? Nonetheless, even if it was Nigeria that Lloyd had gone for the six weeks she spent in the Soviet Union, she would not have had enough time to conduct the research required for a thorough understanding of the Yoruba meta-language in *Horseman*. This is where Peter Badejo comes into the picture.

Badejo is a Yoruba performing artist who has lived in England since the 1990s. Although his area of specialization is African dance and choreography and hence the establishment of his dance-led company Badejo Arts in 1990, Badejo is also a drummer, a storyteller and an actor. As an actor, Badejo played the part of Esu in *Esu's Faust* written by London based Nigerian/Irish writer Gabriel Gbadamosi, he also featured as an actor as well as a consultant in the Talawa Theatre Company's critically acclaimed production of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* in 1989. It is against this backdrop that Badejo's name was on everyone's lips further to Lloyd's enquiries regarding a Nigerian who could help her with her proposed production of *Horseman.* When Badejo and Lloyd met for the first time, Badejo asked her "what was her interest in this African play? I mean, there are several plays she could pick from" (Appendix 2C). [212] In response, Lloyd explained to Badejo that she had read a number of African plays and she chose Soyinka's work not because he is a Nobel Laureate but because she thought that the play, as Badejo put it, "is a stereotype [sic] of understanding different cultures" (Appendix 2C), and that her intention was to present the play "in such a way that people are able to see other cultures and appreciate them rather than evaluate them from superior/inferior point of view"(ibid.). On the basis of my earlier discussion as regards how Soyinka would rather his play be portrayed, this is an apparent cultural misreading of *Horseman*. And it is for this reason that Lloyd needed Badejo.

Going by the press release that the RET circulated, Badejo is, inter alia, "the son of a Yoruba prince, an actor, master drummer, dancer, and choreographer of enormous presence". Further it is indicated that

[212] I had a taped conversation with Peter Badejo at his home in London on the 8th of July 2012 in regards to his involvement with the production of *Horseman* in Manchester in 1990 and then again at the National in 2009. My first sets of questions to him were in respect of his involvement with the 1990 production at Manchester and then I asked him questions as regards the National theatre's production in 2009. I have attached an edited version of my discussion with Badejo to this thesis as Appendix 2C.

Badejo has directed productions in Nigeria, the U.S.A and Britain.[213] But for the theatre's production of *Horseman*, Badejo played the part of the Praise Singer, choreographed the dance, worked as the Nigerian cultural advisor, and also played a very integral part in composing the music and songs that were used for the production although Muraina Oyelami was credited as the production's Musical Director. If the RET was aware of Badejo's directing experience; if the only way that *Horseman* could be fully realised, as already established, is through the evocation of music from the abyss of transition; if dance is very integral part of *Horseman*; if Yoruba songs are vital to elicit the threnodic essence in the play; if Yoruba sayings and incantations are, more or less, what Soyinka has transliterated as the text of *Horseman*; if all the white characters in *Horseman* are caricatures, as some critics have argued,[214] why then, one is compelled to ask, was Badejo not asked to direct the production and have Lloyd as either his British cultural advisor or co-director? [215] "By her admission, Lloyd had little experience with African theatre in general or Yoruba culture in particular", is how Rohmer puts it. However, in Rohmer's words,

[213] I have had the privilege of working with Peter Badejo when I lived in the UK from 1993 to 1996 the year that I moved to Ireland. I believe Badejo can do all of these things and much more but it must be said that his strength is in the area of dance and choreography. But when I interviewed Yvonne Brewster, she did not only rate Badejo as an exemplary and extremely generous performing artist, as far as Brewster is concerned Badejo is a director. I am inclined to agree with Brewster, because, as a director myself, I know that if he is given the opportunity and encouragement Badejo would make a very good director. But the question remains: would the western hegemony make such opportunities available to Badejo? That is the question that we must focus our attention on in the present analysis of the production of *Horseman* in Manchester in 1990.

[214] See, for instance, Grevel Lindop review in the *Times Supplement*, 7-13 December, 1990. Also see Jeffrey White's 'Deadly Ceremony' in *The Independent*, 26 November 1990.

[215] It would be interesting to investigate how Phyllida Lloyd has fared in comparison to how Peter Badejo has done since they both collaborated on the production of *Horseman* in 1990. Lloyd first became a well- known opera director before moving on to become a film director. Two of her well known movies, to date, include *Mama Mia!* and the more recent *The Iron Lady*. And only late last year (2012) Lloyd directed an acclaimed all-female cast of *Julius Caesar.* Peter Badejo, on the other hand, founded a dance company Badejo Arts in 1990 and after being the recipient of an annual Arts Council Grant for over a decade and an OBE from the Queen in 2011, his grant was suddenly cut completely. Now, he spends most of his time in Nigeria directing cultural events and when he is in Britain he is busy doing everything including workshop facilitating and being a Nigerian Advisor.

> She was encouraged by Peter Badejo who agreed to participate by acting as Nigerian cultural advisor as well as playing the Praise Singer. He was in charge of the choreography, while Muraina Oyelami was 'Musical Director and 'Composer' (Rohmer 1994, 57).

Rohmer calls the above arrangement "an extended mise-en-scene" (ibid.) and he describes the production as 'an intercultural event'. I would call the arrangement between Badejo and Lloyd "an extractive mise-en-scene" and the production, I would describe here as Orientalism (or 'Africanism', if you replace Orient with Africa). The project of Orientalism was to appropriate the culture of the Orient by proxy, according to Brian Singleton. "This appropriation was fuelled by a vision of the Orient as a nostalgic space of lost ritual, formalism, and religion," in Singleton's words, "a nostalgic space for the authentically pure and sometimes barbarian, for everything the European was not" (Singleton 2004, 16). What Singleton's remark has illuminated clearly again is that interculturalism is Orientalism in disguise the same way that imperialism is essentially colonialism. Ric Knowles elaborates on Singleton's position in his own words:

> Intercultural performance had unwittingly participated in the commodification of the 'Other' and thereby the perpetuation of the colonial project, in which the raw materials of the world (including its culture and peoples) were and are grist for the colonial mill of western industry and capitalist production (Knowles 2010, 22).

With Singleton's and Knowles' interventions, Leonard Pronko's observation in his book, *Theatre East and West: Perspectives towards Total Theatre*, becomes even more pertinently revealing. "The traveler who has feasted on the theatres of Japan, China and Bali", according to Pronko,

> cannot repress the feeling, when he returns to the West that the actors are exceedingly loquacious singularly capable of doing anything than talking. Our hypertrophied rational faculties have led us in the past three hundred years and particularly since the Industrial revolution and the late nineteenth century age of science, to theatre that is most often as small as life itself, a theatre that requires careful listening and intelligent understanding. We sit in plush seats, fatigued after two or three hours of dialogue interspersed with a bit a movement, then disperse to discuss the 'issues' of the play, if it was a drama of significance (Pronko 1967, 1).

The notion that western theatre is cerebral and boring is a forgone conclusion for a while now, and how to revitalise it has been a major concern of many western practitioners for decades. Antonin Artaud,

Bertolt Brecht, Peter Brook, Robert Wilson, Richard Schechner, Max Reinhardt and Ariane Mnouchkine, as previously discussed, are some of the Euro-American avant-garde theatre artists who, in their attempts to inject life into their theatre making, have had to look towards either Asia or Africa for inspiration. "We may be sick and tired of the familiar – and indeed, that is surely one explanation for Western interest in Asian and African performances at the present time" (Brandon 1990, 95), writes James Brandon. "Time and again", he adds,

> we read that because of the narrow confines of realistic Western theatre practices, Western actors, writers, and directors can find new visions, or can broaden their horizons, by experiencing the highly theatrical and often ritual theatres of the non-Western cultures (ibid.).

If indeed, "there is much truth to this view" (ibid.), as Brandon has concluded, one can safely surmise that Lloyd's decision to take on Soyinka's *Horseman* has an orientalist subtext, whether she was conscious of this at the time or not. I must stress that, from the point of view of a theatre director, I fully appreciate the argument that one does not have to come from a culture to be able to direct a play the culture in question produces. I would argue, however, that the understanding of *Horseman* in particular requires a deep understanding of Yoruba culture and Yoruba cosmology. But can one really describe the intercultural arrangement that existed between Badejo and Lloyd as collaborative? The photograph that accompanied Robin Thornber's article in *The Guardian* of November 22, 1990 (see figure 15)[216], for instance, shows an animated Badejo explaining a point while Lloyd listens very attentively, but the caption under the picture reads: "Phyllida Lloyd directing *Death and King's Horseman: 'It's about what a society has to do to preserve its cohesion*". Rather conspicuously Badejo's name is missing in the caption; meanwhile the photograph is appropriately credited to "DON Mc PHEE"



Fig. 15 Badejo and Lloyd in rehearsals

[216] Source of this illustration is *The Guardian.*

Can we call this an oversight? In my view, it was insidious and I would call it 'ethnocentric selectivism'. Is it possible that Lloyd really understood the lines in *Horseman*? For instance, was she able to decode the meaning of the Yoruba proverb: "If there is a dearth of bats, the pigeon must serve us for the offering" (218) upon which Soyinka's drama is predicated? Bearing in mind that the play is loaded with Yoruba ontological sayings such as this, did it have any relevance for her as an English theatre director? And if it did not, what resonance would it have for her audience? If Soyinka is correct in insisting that "between the playwright and audience stands the director" (Gibbs, 2001, 89), then one can safely surmise that, as a text, *Horseman* must have remained impenetrable for Lloyd's audiences otherwise she would not have made the remark long after her production:

> If I'd had any time with Soyinka beforehand, I would have said, "Why don't we perform that whole opening scene in Yoruba?" Because then the audience will stop trying to decode it. And they will relax as they would if they were watching an opera. Or if they went to Nigeria and were watching a procession go past (Rohmer 1994, 66).

I have already pointed it out that it would have made more sense had Lloyd travelled to Nigeria instead of the Soviet Union before she began rehearsing *Horseman*. That would perhaps have afforded her the opportunity to witness Yoruba culture first-hand, commune with Soyinka and ask him if he was happy if the opening scene of his play was performed in Yoruba, because it is actually an innovative idea. It must be stressed however, that there was actually a sequence of the play in Lloyd's production that was performed bilingually – in Yoruba and English. It is in the third act when Elesin is being led into trance by the Praise Singer with incantations to the accompaniment of music, songs and choreographed dance movement. It was the success of this sequence, I would argue, that made Lloyd think retrospectively that it would have been better if the whole opening scene had been done in Yoruba. However, it was Badejo who came up with the idea as he explained when he gave a response to the question I put to him regarding what he would have done differently, had he been the director of the production rather than an actor, choreographer and advisor:

> BADEJO: Let me tell you some of the things I would have done, which Phyllida Lloyd adopted. And I was surprised that oh, she took my advice.
>
> ADIGUN: That's interesting.

BADEJO: The scene where the alter transformation started with Elesin.....where the Praise Singer....took on the vision of the other world for Elesin. When he was trying to hype Elesin to this alter state of consciousness. I told Lloyd, I said this is the Egungun communication in my culture. There are two things in African traditional performance; they have what they call the possession level and they have the trance level. The trance level is still a level where you communicate between the two worlds; at that point you are not totally absorbed yet.

ADIGUN: Okay.

BADEJO: And to use that, I said we should try the ancestral voice and straight she just said: 'fantastic'. So, that is why in that scene I was doing it in Yoruba... (in a guttural voice) "*Elesin Oba, so n gbohun mi*" and the drum was going, *pekele/pekele/ pekele* [217] they were playing the drum of death and he was answering in English "slowly, slowly"

ADIGUN: You were doing it in....

BADEJO: Yoruba *ni,* Yoruba *la se.*[218]

ADIGUN: Did you translate it?

BADEJO: I translated it into Yoruba

ADIGUN: You're joking me.

BADEJO: Yes. I translated that English part into Yoruba. When this guy saw it.... Martin Banham, he wrote a letter to Soyinka that I don't think I have seen any *Death and the King's Horseman*'s production that is as good as this (Appendix 2C).

[217] At this point during the conversation, Badejo was on his feet, first he did the guttural voice of the Praise Singer, then he uses his voice to do the sound of the drums and at the same time he was swaying to show me how the market women were moving and then he does the part of Elesin answering slowly. To put it simply, it was mesmerising to watch Badejo going down memory lane.

[218] Here, as he does a number of times during my interview, Badejo reverted to speaking Yoruba. The translation of what he said here is: "It was Yoruba. It was in Yoruba that we did it."

It needs to be borne in mind that by 1990, Soyinka had directed three different productions of *Horseman* in Nigeria and America. Clearly, Soyinka had never thought of the idea of changing some parts of his play into Yoruba simply because the lines in question were originally in Yoruba. And lest we forget, Soyinka had made it clear that English is his preferred choice of language in his writing. Thus the idea of ever performing a scene in *Horseman* bilingually had to be made by an innovative director. Badejo came up with the idea, albeit it in his capacity as a cultural advisor, and the production was described by Martin Banham,[219] as the best he had seen. In Rohmer's view also "bilingualism as it was employed in the trance scene was dramatically effective" (Rohmer 1994, 67). So, one can argue that if Badejo had been the director or co-director of the production, he would have come up with more and better innovative ideas such as this to make the production an intercultural success. In my own view, it was Badejo who clearly demonstrated the kind of vision that a successful staging of *Horseman* requires and it would have been more appropriate for him to be credited as the co-director of the production rather than its 'cultural advisor'.

There is one more inference to be drawn from my conversation with Badejo, as quoted above, in light of an observation made by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his essay 'The African Writer and the English Language'. "Africa actually enriches Europe, but is made to believe that it needs Europe to rescue it from poverty" (wa Thiong'o 1994, 451), wa Thiong'o asserts. "Africa's natural and human resources continue to develop Europe and America", he continues, "but Africa is made to feel grateful for aid from the same quarters that still sit on the back of the continent" (ibid.). Clearly, Badejo contributed enthusiastically and passionately to the production, but curiously he found the fact that Lloyd actually listened to him and used his excellent ideas rather surprising. "The feeling of inferiority of the colonized", Frantz Fanon has argued, "is the correlation to the European's feeling of superiority" (Fanon 1967, 93). So, could the deep-seated and well-reinforced erroneous western ideology that the west is better than the rest of the world be the reason why Badejo was completely oblivious to the fact that without his knowledge, skill and wealth of experience as a Yoruba performing artist based in Britain, it would be semiologically and linguistically impossible for Lloyd to even contemplate the idea of presenting *Horseman* without

[219] It would be appropriate to describe Martin Banham as a Soyinka scholar considering the amount of work that he had produced on the works of Soyinka. Some of these have already been referenced in this thesis. Undoubtedly it is in recognition of his expertise in the works of Soyinka that he was asked to contribute an essay on Soyinka that was included in the program note that accompanied the presentation of *Horseman* at the National. Banham's essay is entitled: 'Wole Soyinka: His Life and Work'.

fundamentally contravening its author's aesthetic sensibilities? Patrice Pavis' theory of the hourglass (see fig. 11 again) would be useful here to answer this question.

The theory of the hourglass intercultural model as previously discussed in chapter five was proposed by Pavis in his 1992 book, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Cultures*. It problematises "how a target culture analyses and appropriates a foreign culture and how this appropriation is accompanied by a series of theatrical operations" (Pavis 1992, 5). In the upper bowl of the hourglass, to refresh our memory, "is the foreign culture, the source culture, which is more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological, sociological and artistic modelizations, and the lower bowl is the target culture" (ibid.). If we pause for a moment and look at the Royal Exchange Theatre's production of *Horseman* through the lens of the hourglass, Yoruba culture is the source culture; the play text of *Horseman* becomes the cultural product, which has been encoded with artistic tradition and signs of representation of the Yoruba people; and the British audience would be our target culture. In accordance with Pavis' theory, for a cultural product such as *Horseman* to reach the target culture, it has to pass through the narrow neck of the hourglass as well as a dozen filters put in place by the target culture. Following on from my earlier point, it would be fair to surmise that Badejo and Muraina Oyelami who played the talking drum were two of the indispensible filters that Lloyd had put in place in her attempt to transfer *Horseman* not only from page to stage, but also from its source culture to a foreign soil and this, I would argue, was the main reason why Badejo was not considered a suitable director for the production.

In his book *The Play Produced,* John Fernald, identifies the ability to detach him or herself from a play text as the greatest asset that a producer, (his preferred name for a theatre director) possesses in comparison to an author. It is "this very quality of detachment", in Fernald's words, "which makes him [or her] able to view the play and its performers with a fresh perception, *from the point of view of the audience*" (Fernald 1933, 5; italics are original). Therefore, the advantage that Lloyd, (whom I would like to regard here as the hourglass itself here) over Badejo was the fact that being a westerner she was deemed in the first instance to have the same point of view as the audience for whom RET production was mounted but more importantly could afford to be solely a director – nothing more, nothing less, while Badejo had to literally be a renaissance man to make ends meet. As a result, it was easy for Lloyd to be considered an experienced and professionally trained director, who could cast her expert eyes on *Horseman* from a completely different perspective for the purpose of presenting it to a predominantly

white audience. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the hourglass presents two risks,

> If it is only a mill, it will blend the source culture, destroy its very specificity and drop into the lower bowl an inert and deformed substance which will have lost its original modeling without being moulded into that of the target culture. If it is a funnel it will indiscriminately absorb the initial substance without reshaping it through series of filters or leaving any trace of the original matter (Pavis, 1992, 5)

What this means is that whenever a cultural product is transferred from a source culture to a target culture, that product has unavoidably gone through a fundamental transformation and, therefore, cannot be regarded as it was prior to its transference. I would argue that this is exactly what happened to *Horseman* at the hands of Lloyd in 1990. In my view, the essence of *Horseman* inevitably got lost in the process of its transformation and what was presented was an 'exoticised' version of *Horseman* in which the issue of clash of cultures took precedence over and above the issue of responsibility that Soyinka would rather have foregrounded (see figure 16). Lest we forget, Lloyd decided to produce *Horseman,* because, to her mind, it is a modern play that has something important to say in a very theatrical way. But the fact that the play is set in a market place and the Royal Exchange Theater is located in a stock exchange building was really what influenced her decision. Or if Soyinka had set the play in a forest or road side-shack as it obtains respectively in *A Dance* and *The Road* or if the theatre was not constructed in an English market, would *Horseman* have had the same attraction for Lloyd? Having said that, the architectural design of the RET did contribute significantly to the stageability of *Horseman* there, bearing in mind the theatre's inner space, as Rohmer has noted, "corresponds to Soyinka's intentions for his play" (Rohmer 1994, 58).



Fig. 16 *Simon Normandy as Simon Pilkings Horseman at The RET* (Photo: Ian Woodlams, courtesy of RET)

As a matter of fact, if viewed strictly in terms of space, one can argue that Lloyd's production was an intercultural triumph much more than the subsequent production of *Horseman* at the National. Soyinka's theatre, as already discussed, is designed for audiences to feel and experience the kinetic energy of the theatre as a community. In this respect Soyinka's plays are more suited to theatre in the round more than a theatre with a proscenium arch. At the Royal Exchange theatre, the play began from the foyer and when it eventually moved into the arena space, audience members are sitting around the performance area (see figure 17).



Fig. 17 The Royal Exchange Theatre arena space

In such sitting configuration, the audience members were not passive onlookers but active participants who are deeply implicated in the tragic scenario unfolding in front of their eyes. "The spatial conditions of the RET," as Rohmer has rightly observed,

> thus perfectly match Soyinka's aesthetic concept in relation to tradition as an Exchange or market, with a colonial history which correlates ironically with part of the play's setting; and owing to the building's roots in the city's community, the functioning of its stage as a 'magic microcosm' which positions the protagonist in the centre, surrounded by the choric circle of audience, and through its huge foyer, which allows spatial extension of the play's action and so intensifies its dynamics (Rohmer 1994, 59).

While the architectural design of the theatre inarguably contributed to the *mise-en-scène* of Lloyd's production, the fact that her audience was not familiar with the Yoruba culture, which inspired the play, remained a semiological challenge for Lloyd to overcome.

The programme note that accompanied the production is geared towards giving the audience some context of Yoruba culture, thus going by the hourglass theory this is another filter put in place for the purpose of transferring *Horseman* from its Yoruba source culture to the target culture in Britain. I would argue, however, that the programme note did little to illuminate the meaning of the play for the RET's audience, hence Lloyd retrospectively thinking that had she sought Soyinka's consent, she would have done the whole opening scene in Yoruba so that "the audience will stop trying to decode it" (Cited from Rohmer 1994). According to Michael Coveney's review, in the *Observer* on Sunday, December 2, 1990, "The opening incantations are obscure and undramatic, the structural plotting clumsy, and the message of cross-cultural insensitivity increasingly banal" (ibid). One, therefore, wonders how a critic such as Coveney would have responded had the whole opening scene been performed in Yoruba. Interestingly in Coveney's (re)view, it is the play that is problematic and not the production. "The talented team of designer Anthony Ward and director Phyllida Lloyd ...do what they can, but it is never enough" (ibid.) he writes. But Grevel Lindop's review in *The Times Supplement* of December 7-13, 1990 paints a different picture. "By the end of the first act it is not hard to feel that Soyinka's play is approaching a great tragedy", Lindop writes, "and to reflect that this is surely very much how the theatre of Sophocles must have appeared to its original audience"(ibid.). Clearly, and as one would expect, the play and how it was presented resonated with reviewers differently, but it is my view that if Badejo, with his wealth of knowledge in Yoruba culture and an experienced dancer/choreographer had directed the play with the help of Lloyd as his co-director the production would have been a proper intercultural exchange, and, therefore, resonated much more positively across the board. But above all, had Badejo been allowed to concentrate on one major thing instead of doing everything, some of the intercultural problems that Lloyd had to deal with on her own whilst Badejo was learning his lines, composing music, choreographing or advising (on Nigerian cultural matters) would not have arisen. What compounded the problem for Lloyd further, however, was the fact that the Yoruba culture upon which the play is based is also alien to all of her actors. Obviously Lloyd was not oblivious to this fact because as Rohmer has written in his review,

> According to Phyllida Lloyd, a basic problem in Manchester was that the actors were unequally experienced in the language and metaphysics of the play. Peter Badejo is a brilliant dancer and choreographer, familiar with the Yoruba metaphysics – but he lacked the actors' training and experience, and had to struggle with the complex English language, while the other participants had the opposite problem (Rohmer 1994, 68).

So, since it was Lloyd herself who alluded to some of these cultural obstacles that militated against the successful transference of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy to Manchester for her, in spite of the rave reviews that greeted her attempt, we must quickly examine a couple of these obstacles to conclude the present analysis.

As already discussed, Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy deals with conflict in the metaphysical realm and it also transcends verbal language. In other words, his plays require a deep understanding of Yoruba cosmology and its attendant traditional non-verbal performance idioms. Thus, a director of a Yoruba tragedy is required to have a basic understanding of all the performance elements contained in a play such as *Horseman*. "Although Phyllida Lloyd expressed difficulties mainly as concerned with the dualism of dialogue these existed on other levels" (Rohmer 1994, 68), Rohmer notes,

> The dance and music of the Yoruba culture were as alien to her as they were to the actors of the ensemble and this was likely to have an effect on her role as a co-ordinator of the various levels. Although thanks to Badejo and Oyelami she could rely on specialist help her ability to control the correctness of the communicative pattern in its totality was limited since she herself was only partly familiar with Soyinka's theatrical language. She agreed that in some crucial cases she was *uncertain about what the drum was actually saying* (ibid.; my emphasis).

The implication of this is that Lloyd could not have been in the position to direct the drummers and the dancers at all since she has little or no understanding of these performance idioms and Badejo who could assist her had other things to concentrate on such as learning copious lines and his stage movements. How then, one needs to ask, can a director prevent an intercultural fiasco in such a production? It needs to be stressed that it is not all Yoruba speakers that understand the language of the talking drum, so it is no surprise that Rohmer has cited the misinterpretation of the drum language by one of Lloyd's non-Yoruba actors as an obvious example of how Lloyd's lack of co-ordination between the different expressive levels in *Horseman* inevitably led to what he terms 'intercultural misunderstanding' (ibid). Rohmer cites two crucial moments in the production where Lloyd decided to employ the drum for dramatic effect contrary to the author's stage direction. The first time was to emphasise the moment that the dead body of Olunde is revealed to Elesin and the second time was after Elesin's suicide. "We actually use music as a sort of action itself", Rohmer quotes Lloyd as saying. "I'm trying to think of an example: the moment where Iyaloja throws back the cloth over Olunde, and the drum really goes into 'batata'" (cf Rohmer 1994, 63). In Rohmer's view, altering the ending of the

play thus lessens "the acoustic contrast with its beginning as suggested in Soyinka's script" and consequently, "the production was deprived of a definite interpretation of the community's future fate" (ibid.). Furthermore, "Soyinka's powerful dramaturgic sense of the dichotomy between silence and dirge in the end was to some extent lost in the production" Rohmer concludes. It is worth adding nonetheless that, for Rohmer, "the ending could also be understood as a more optimistic interpretation" (ibid., 64). But that was one aspect of the production. Can the dance movement in the production, for instance, be interpreted in the same optimistic terms?, bearing in mind that Elesin is meant to dance to his death.

In Esiaba Irobi's brief critique of the production, which he describes as "rather impressive", he points out that Elesin's trance dance had been totally cut largely because George Harris, the black actor, playing Elesin had two left legs" (Irobi 2005, 58), meaning he could not dance. But it was not that the dance was completely cut going by Rohmer's review, it was more than likely that the movement was choreographed in such a way to accommodate the dancing ability of the actor who played the part of Elesin. According to Rohmer, "The Horseman and his Praise Singer start jumping on the spot, panting heavily" (Rohmer 64), meanwhile the sort of dance Soyinka has in mind for Elesin's dance trance, according to his script, is "one of solemn, regal motions, each gesture is made with a solemn finality. The women join him, their steps a somewhat more fluid version of his" (182). While it is true that "there is no definite way for a trance to look" (Rohmer, 64), I would argue that jumping up and down and panting could not have been a compelling trance dance to watch. Irobi sums it up nicely, albeit in his characteristic fashion, thus:

> The actor playing Elesin kept leaping up and down while emitting strange, guttural grunts that reminded you of an he-goat trying to indicate his desperate desires for several uninterested she goats (Irobi 2005, 58)

While one can argue that if Badejo had directed the play, he would have cast someone who can dance and not automatically presume that all black people can dance, the fact remains that the part of Elesin also requires a very good actor. So, should Lloyd have privileged a good dancer over a versatile actor? This question is pertinent, bearing in mind that in the west, art-forms are essentially compartmentalized contrary to what obtains in African total theatre. In other words for the Occident, a dancer is a dancer, an actor is an actor, a musician is a musician, and a singer is a singer; never shall these quadruplets meet (except perhaps in a musical). Interestingly, Soyinka himself encountered the same problem when

he directed *Horseman* for the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in 1979. When one of the African American actors involved in the production quit the project two weeks into rehearsals on the basis that he could not master the text of the play, Soyinka availed of the opportunity to tell the rest of the cast a few home truths. "I told them they were just as ignorant of African culture, African politics, African rhythms as everyone else", Soyinka recalled the episode in his interview with Andrew Gumbel for the aforementioned article that appeared in *The Guardian* of April 8, 2009. "When I told them they couldn't dance, that shocked them", Gumbel quotes Soyinka further. Apparently Soyinka, with the help of his choreographer, had to, as he put it, "break their bodies into little pieces and then put them back together" before the African American cast of *Horseman* in the Chicago production could move as the Yorubas. But I doubt it very much if it is possible for a non-Yoruba to move like one because, in my view, while Nonso Anozie the British-born Igbo actor who played the part of Elesin at the National gave a compelling performance, in terms of his dance moves, he was off the mark, as I intend to argue when we turn our attention to the National production of *Horseman*. But to complete the present analysis of the *Horseman* at the hands of Lloyd, it is worth stressing that the production was different but far from perfect in intercultural terms. Her production demonstrates that if any non-Yoruba director wants to do justice to *Horseman* or indeed any other Yoruba tragedy, it is important to bear in mind Irobi's advice:

> If we are going to take on Soyinka's tragedy, we need to do our research into the culture that the rituals sculpted into them come from and approximate, not necessarily replicate them in our international productions (Irobi 2005, 58).

Obviously, this advice was a little too late for Lloyd but from all indications it was an advice that Rufus Norris took seriously when, in 2009, the National Theatre of Britain asked him if he would be interested in directing *Horseman*.

7.6 Elesin at the Royal National

During 1976 and 1977 the National Theatre moved from the Old Vic in Waterloo to the purpose built National Theatre complex located next to the Thames River in the South Bank area of central London. In 1988, Prince Charles described the building as "a clever way of building a nuclear power station in the middle of London without anyone objecting".[220] The building houses, *inter alia*, three separate theatres,

[220] My source for this quote is the information onThe National on Wikipedia. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_National_ Theatre (accessed on the 30 August 2012).

namely the Olivier Theatre with its high tech revolving stage with an audience capacity of 1,110; the Lyttelton Theatre with a proscenium stage and its auditorium that can seat 890 people; and lastly, the studio Cottesloe Theatre with a flexible staging and seating capacity of approximately 300 people. Befittingly, it was in the Olivier Theatre that Soyinka's *Horseman* was presented in 2009, arguably making it the first time a major work of an African writer is mounted on the main stage of the National. During the run of the *Horseman*, British educated Ghana-born writer and broadcaster Margaret Busby held a 'Question and Answer'[221] session with Rufus Norris, who directed *Horseman* for the National, and when the issue of why it had taken the National that long to present Soyinka's *Horseman* was raised, Norris responded that the National had been thinking about it for a long time. Ben Okri, the London-based Nigerian novelist and winner of the 1996 Booker Prize, however, argued that it was due to 'cultural laziness'.



Fig. 18 Horseman on the National stage (All pictures are used Courtesy of National Archive)

However, in an interview[222] that I conducted with Norris by email, he shed some more light on the National Theatre's decision to present 2009 and how he came to be asked to direct the production.

[221] I attended the public interview which was advertised as 'Rufus Norris on *Death and The King's Horseman*: Rufus Norris talks about his new production of Wole Soyinka's play. Chaired by Margaret Busby' that was held at 6pm on the 22nd of April 2009 and on the same night I saw the presentation. The audio recording of the public interview is available at the National Theatre archive.

[222] I contacted Norris when he was directing *Horseman* and he agreed to grant me an interview whenever I was ready. When I contacted him in 2012, he was very busy with a number of productions that he was directing consecutively. As a result I sent him my questions and about two months later, he sent me his detailed and well thought out response. I have attached the interview to this thesis as Appendix 2B.

> The NT were very keen to produce a major African work and Soyinka was the obvious writer to look at. My own personal connection with Nigeria (I was there for several years as a child) and interest in a broad theatrical spectrum made it a very happy marriage, I hope (Appendix 2B).

As I have argued previously in my analysis of *The Road*, every presentation of a play is unique. So, one cannot expect the 2009 production of *Horseman* and the 1990 production of the same play in Manchester to be the same. However, it is worth mentioning that the Trinidadian actor Claire Benedict (see fig 19), who played the part of Iyaloja in Lloyd's production in 1990, ended up being cast to play the same part again at the National in 2009.



Fig. 19 Claire Benedict as Iyaloja in the National's Horseman

Similarly Peter Badejo who played the part of the Praise Singer and also worked as the Choreographer and Cultural Advisor in Manchester was the consultant for the production of the *Horseman* at the National. In fact, when I had my conversation with Badejo, I could deduce that while he was able to rationalise Norris's decision to cast an actor to play the part of Praise Singer, he could not fathom why he was not asked to choreograph the dance movement for the production as he did for the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre in 1990. When I asked Badejo if Norris specifically asked him to be his consultant, the response he gave was:

> Actually he was specific. He wants me to be a consultant. Then I said who is going to be the

choreographer? He said there's one guy.....that it's going to be this guy who is going to be the choreographer. I said mmmm, that's interesting, but the play is culturally specific. Choreography, there are two styles of choreography. There is the English, the waltz but also there's the tradition which underpins the whole production. He said to me: "Yeah. You are going to be consultant – consultant on movement, consultant on music". So it was general consultancy which in quote, I was a bit skeptical in the beginning, because there is a difference between being a consultant and being a consultant/performer or consultant choreographer.

ADIGUN: As you did with Phyllida Lloyd?

BADEJO: As I did.

ADIGUN: Would you have preferred to do consultant/performer?

BADEJO: I would have preferred to do consultant/choreographer (Appendix 2C).

From the above, it is clear that Badejo felt he was being under-exploited by the fact that Norris had decided to delegate someone else to choreograph the dance sequence required for the production. In my own view, however, Norris's approach was the correct one, because it is evidently clear that he had done his homework and he knew precisely what Badejo could bring to the production if he were to concentrate solely on supervising the process of transferring *Horseman* semiologically, linguistically and culturally to the national stage (see figure 20).

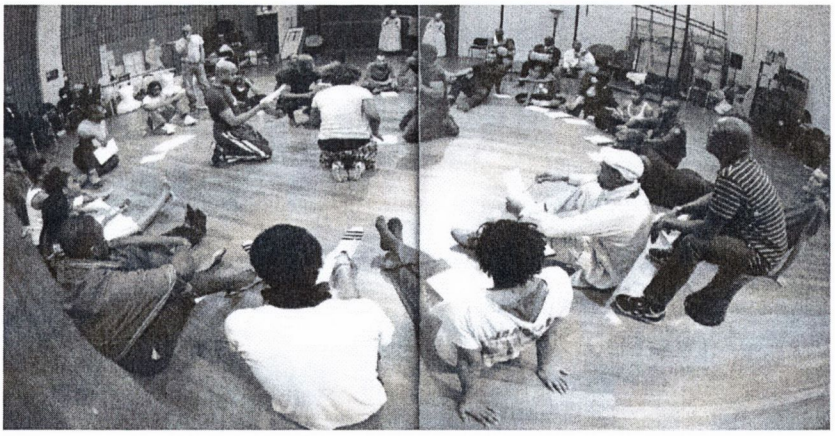

Fig. 20 *Photograph of a rehearsal session of Horseman at the National – Peter Badejo sits on a drum and behind him is Rufus Norris watching the rehearsal.*

It is no surprise, therefore, that in the programme note that accompanied the production, Badejo is credited as "Associate Director/Consultant/Lyrics". Furthermore, the picture of the company in rehearsals suggests to me that the intercultural process of producing *Horseman* at the National was more collaborative than imperialistic and, in my view, this was down to the fact that Norris seemed to be clear as regards what precisely was required of him as the director of Soyinka's quintessential Yoruba tragedy.

In his essay 'Aesthetics of Soyinka's Theatre', Adedeji has provided a constructive de-construction of Soyinka's theatre, which, in my view, is another must-read for any theatre director – be it African or Euro-American – whose aim is to successfully direct any of Soyinka's so-called complex plays without offending the Yoruba tragedian's artistic sensibility. In the words of Adedeji,

> Soyinka's theatre presents a background of unique cultural experiences and the artistic forms that emanate from his creative activities appear complex. The complexity is found in the style, structure and form of the play element as a work of art and the effect they produce on the audience during performance. Composition is basic to Soyinka's concept of dramatic play as a work of art. In this activity, he brings together disparate elements to cohere and form a meaningful whole. But his whole is a gestalt, that is to say, the totality of the theatrical product is more than the sum of the disparate parts. *It is the way and manner of bringing disparate parts together to project a coherence that reveals the basis of the aesthetics of Soyinka's theatre* (Adedeji 1987, 104; my emphasis).

It is doubtful if Soyinka's theatre can be explained any better than this, because what Adedeji has clearly illuminated for us is that Soyinka's theatre requires more than a director who specializes in directing actors on stage in the European sense of the word. And that is perhaps why many directors appear to find Soyinka's theatre peculiarly undirectable. To direct Soyinka's play is much more than merely realizing the *mise-en-scene* on stage; it is to undertake the challenge to cohere the different semiological components in which it has been written with the sole aim of presenting all these divergent parts as a dramaturgic whole, which Adedeji refers to as 'gestalt'. This is the precise argument Martin Rohmer advances in his critique of Phyllida Lloyd's 1990 production of *Horseman* when he points out that,

> Soyinka's plays not only demand well-trained and highly specialized artists as musicians, dancers, drummers, etc., but need to be understood in their metaphysical dimension. The task of the director therefore is to integrate the various levels of expression in the play as well as the different personal

backgrounds of the artists (Rohmer 1994, 68).

It would make a lot of sense, therefore, to surmise that it is not a director that Soyinka's theatre requires but a 'coherer', an 'integrator' or a 'co-ordinator'. In my view, Norris's production of *Horseman* was more successful than Lloyd's in intercultural terms not simply because he was imaginative in his casting or because he did his research, but because he quickly discovered that rather than attempting to direct Soyinka's *Horseman*, his responsibility was to perceptively identify the various components of the play and thereafter appropriately delegate and patiently co-ordinate the various activities of every member of the company – from the cast to the creative team – who was partaking in Soyinka's theatrical 'gestalt'. To reinforce this point, it might be instructive to return to my interview with Norris and specifically the section where he explained how he went about interpreting the seemingly impenetrable Yoruba world of *Horseman.* First, I asked Norris if he was familiar with any of Soyinka's works before he was approached by the National to direct *Horseman:*

NORRIS: In truth I was not very familiar with his plays. I had read several articles by him, knew him of course by reputation and had read a couple of plays – *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* – but was no expert (.....).

ADIGUN: After you have agreed to direct *Death* can you recall what your next course of action was in preparation for the challenges ahead given the fact you are English and the play is set in colonial period in Nigeria?

NORRIS: Most crucial was to find the key person – someone who could be our touchstone and authority into this history and culture in an accurate and profound way. I found him in Peter Badejo....He is a fantastic man and a wonderful artist to work with. Beyond that, the job was to assemble the team, particularly the designer and choreographer, and start our research. I did a certain amount of reading and we managed to track down several documentaries that were very informative; not only historical and geographical terms but more importantly in spirit. There's a celebration, an ease about African performance that is very different to our literal and more formalized western traditions, and it was important we try and tap into that....

ADIGUN: Further to reading *Horseman* with a keen eye of a director, what was your first impression of the play?

> NORRIS: That there was an underlying theatrical world to discover, in order to honour the complexity that sits under the text. One of the challenges was to make what is perhaps a natural sensibility to a Nigerian audience accessible to a western audience (Appendix 2B).

The challenge Norris is alluding to here is the essence of western interculturalism. However, it would be inaccurate to tar Norris with the brush of 'culture tourism' considering the fact that he has a bit of Nigerian sensibility in him. In fact, one can surmise that it was one of the reasons that the National thought he would be the ideal director for its presentation of *Horseman* bearing in mind the intercultural fiasco with Roland Joffe back in 1973. Norris was born in England in 1965, but at the tender age of three months, young Norris and his parents moved to Nigeria when his father was posted to Zaria, a northern Nigerian city, to work for the overseas civil service. As a consequence, Norris spent his first three years in Nigeria and subsequently in Tanzania where his father was employed by the then new Tanzanian government. This background explains why Norris did not have any qualms travelling to Nigeria with his creative team shortly before commencing rehearsals for *Horseman*; in a sense, he was more or less returning 'home'. "I had distant but profound connections with Nigeria, having spent the first three years of my life there", writes Norris in the programme note of *Horseman* at the National. "In February 2009 I returned to Nigeria for the first time landing in Lagos with several fellow members of the creative team that were poised to start rehearsals on this great play the following week" (Norris 2009).[223] It would be useful to quote Norris some more because, in my view, Norris's trip to Nigeria played a very significant role in the process of how, along with his creative team, he went about deconstructing the Yoruba sign systems in *Horseman.* "Oyo today is far removed from the Nigeria of 1946", according to Norris in the programme note,

> but for a group of European theatre-makers, the opportunity to be with Yorubans [sic] hearing the language, feeling the heat and the bustle, walking the streets and markets where the story happened was, unbeatable. You could slave for hours to fashion a stool for a Yoruban [sic] market woman to sit on and it will never have the energy of the real thing (ibid).

It means that Norris and his team did not only visit the market where the historical event occurred in

[223] In the programme note that accompanied the production of *Horseman* at the National, Norris writes about his trip to Nigeria under the title 'From Rufus Norris Notes'. The piece is complemented with pictures of Norris at the age of two in northern Nigeria and of his recent trip in 2009 with his creative team.

1946 they also used the opportunity to buy (or collect) all the traditional Yoruba costumes as well as all the stage and set props that were used for the production. "And who would have thought that a bog-standard Oyo chicken basket would light so fantastically on stage?" Norris asks, "I didn't even know what one was 'til we were there and surrounded by thousands of them" (ibid). It is no surprise then that what Badejo found most impressive about the presentation of *Horseman* at the National was the design. "I think they did wonderful work in terms of the theatrical setting, the costumes, the props", as he put it,

> And the stage setting is incredible. It is so simple and it is with the things I witnessed us buying or collecting and the way the designers and the builders built them and used them technically, it became life moving (Appendix 2C).

Suffice it to say, nonetheless, that it was not because of the National's big budget that the production was sleek, but because Norris saved himself an intercultural headache by returning to the source culture to collect or purchase the culturally authentic Yoruba props and materials for his production. As Norris has rightly pointed out, nothing beats the real thing, but why then did he decide to cast black actors to play all the white parts in the play instead of getting real white people?

In the published edition of *Death* in *Soyinka: Six Plays*, the page that follows the two-page 'Authors' Note' contains the following:

CAST

PRAISE SINGER
ELESIN, Horseman of the King
IYALOJA, 'Mother' of the market
SIMON PILKINGS, District Officer
JANE PILKINGS, his wife
SERJEANT AMUSA
JOSEPH, houseboy to the Pilkingses
BRIDE
H.R.H THE PRINCE
THE RESIDENT
AIDE-DE-CAMP
OLUNDE, eldest son of Elesin
Drummers, Women, Young, Girls, Dancers at the Ball.

> *The play should run without an interval. For rapid scene changes, one adjustable outline set is very appropriate* (146).

If we recall, in the Cast page of *The Bacchae*, Soyinka is very specific about the fact that the cast should be mixed as much as possible. So, could it be that it is because Soyinka is not explicit about the fact that white actors should play the white characters in *Horseman* that Norris decided to cast and 'whiten up' black actors to play the colonial officers and the rest of the white characters in Soyinka's drama? "Theory and reading strategy", as Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert have argued, "are themselves deeply imbricated in specific histories and politics" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 45). Therefore, a brief critical analysis of the political and intercultural ramifications of black actors being 'whitened' up to portray all the white colonialists in Soyinka's drama would best be achieved through a historical context.

7.7 White Parts, Black Cast: A Theoretical and Historical Context

In Homi K. Bhabha's words "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (Bhabha 1994, 86). Jean Baudrillard puts Bhabha's assertion into context when he posits that "Representation starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if the equivalence is Utopia, it is a fundamental axiom)" (Baudrillard 2004, 368). This is perhaps the reasoning of controversial dramatist Jean Genet when he wrote his play *The Blacks: A Clown Show* in 1957, which was first performed in Paris in October 1959. The prefatory note of Genet's play is worth quoting:

> This play, written, I repeat, by a white man, is intended for a white audience, but if which is unlikely, it is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female, should be invited every evening. The organizer of the show should welcome him formally, dress him in ceremonial costume and lead him to his seat, preferable in the first row of the orchestra. The actors will play for him. A spotlight should be focused upon this symbolic white throughout the performance. But what if no white person is accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theater. And if the blacks refuse the masks, then let a dummy be used (Jean Genet 1960, 6).

Originally written in French, *The Blacks* employs a play within a play mode to highlight the issues of racial bigotry and stereotypes and how they impact on black identity. All the white characters in the play, including the Queen, are 'whitened' up actors. It is important to reiterate that this play was written

in France in 1957, thus it was not only a contentious play it was fundamentally counter-hegemonic thematically and theatrically. According to Genet's note that is included in the published version of the play he wrote the play further to a request of an actor, who one evening "asked me to write a play for an all-black cast. But what exactly is black? First of all what's his colour?" Genet asks. It was perhaps in an attempt to provide answers to these pertinent questions that *The Blacks* was written, which, in my view, is more or less a dramatization of Fanon's compelling post-colonial analysis of racial identity in *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is hardly surprising then that "In 1961, the play received its American premiere when it opened at the St Mark's Playhouse where it ran for 1,408 performances, becoming the longest running non-musical off-Broadway".[224]

In 2007, *The Blacks* was translated by Robert David Macdonald and performed at the Theatre Royal Stratford East. The production which was co-directed by Excalibah and Ultz was timed to coincide with 200 years of the abolition of slavery in the UK. In an article headlined ''The Blacks': Genet's contentious play returns', in the *Independent* of October 18, 2007, Elisa Bray sheds some light on the personality of Jean Genet and why no one else but him could have written a play that still has power to shock almost five decades after it was written. In Bray's words,

> The French playwright and novelist associated with Theatre of the Absurd, Genet had a controversial background. He himself was an outsider, a homosexual who started his life as a petty thief, was imprisoned, and corroborated his image as an outlaw until he befriended Jean Cocteau, who admired his writing. Genet once said: "I recognise in thieves, traitors and murderers, in the ruthless and the cunning, a deep beauty - sunken beauty" (Bray 2007).[225]

Perhaps when Norris read Soyinka's *Horseman*, he asked himself the same question: what colour is white? And as a consequence he decided to go the 'Fanonian casting' route. When I asked Norris if he could recall how his idea of "whitening up" black actors came about, his response was:

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[224] See ''The Blacks': Genet' Contentious play returns' in *The Independent*, Thurs day, 19 October 2007; http://www.independent .co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/the-blacks-ge (accessed August 24, 2012).

[225] My source for this article is online: See www. Independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/the-blacks-ge.... (accessed on 24 August 2012).

> The idea came from a conversation with Katrina Lindsay, the designer. We were searching for a theatrical solution to a double-headed challenge with the white parts in the play in the context of a production in London at the National Theatre. Firstly, for a literal-minded white audience, the presence of white characters ruling over an indigenous population would immediately reduce the play to the simplistic culture-clash interpretation that Soyinka was keen to avoid. Secondly, to be a little blunt, the white characters are not very complex to my mind. They are ignorant and unsympathetic, and while this may be accurate it would again make a white audience feel like they were being judged, thus negating the broader power of the play....(Appendix 2B).

So, to a large extent, one can argue that it was in an effort to ensure that Soyinka's wish was done and that the predominantly white National theatre audience did not feel that they were being attacked or judged that made Norris to revert to the 'black skin, white mask' casting strategy. Lest we forget, Soyinka has insisted that his play should not be reduced to a 'clash of cultures'. In fact, in an interview he recorded with Appiah in Washington in 1987, Soyinka elaborated on how he sees Elesin Oba, the tragic hero in *Horseman.* When Soyinka was asked if Elesin is a traitor and whether he does have any redeeming qualities, he responded thus:

> I do not believe that Elesin is a traitor. He's a weak man. All cultures, all societies have their weak people. They are people who undertake more than they are really capable of delivering, who divide themselves along the way to a goal and find themselves thereby weakening towards the fulfilment of an undertaking. Not only do I think that Elesin is a product of that environment but I also happen to think he's a universal figure ....I don't consider him a traitor as such; he's a failed man. He's a man who failed. That's all (Appiah 2001, 137).

In other words, Elesin Oba could as well be any man from anywhere, who shies away from carrying his traditional/professional obligation when it matters most. It is in this light that Soyinka has insisted at every given opportunity that the 'Colonial Factor' is a catalyst incident merely. The question is: did Norris' casting decision help obfuscate or elucidate Soyinka's intentions in his powerful drama?[226]

[226]I posed this same question to Badejo, who, as already discussed, was the production's Consultant and Associate Director; Giles Terera, who played Praise Singer; Lucian Msamati, who played Simon Pilkings; and last but not the least, Norris when I interviewed all of them.

7.8 Norris's 'Fanonian' Casting: A National Controversy and the Politics of Representation

To illustrate the national furore that Rufus Norris's decision to 'whiten up' black actors to play all the white characters in his production of Soyinka's *Horseman* engendered across the spectrum in the British press media, it would be worthwhile to quote a section from an interview, which, as previously mentioned, Soyinka granted *Africa Today's* Bunmi Akpata-Ohohe during the run of *Horseman* at the National.

> *Africa Today*: The play has attracted controversy and condemnation especially in the UK press over Rufus Norris's decision to "white up" the black cast members to play white colonialists thereby some say making a thorough mockery of the Anglo-Saxon, upper middle class. Is the use of white masks and make-up remotely provocative in your viewpoint?
>
> Soyinka: It doesn't bother me at all. Theatre is a place of illusion. There are various techniques of creating illusions. It is legitimate for black to play white and vice versa as long as it is handled sensitively and without pandering to gimmickry because there's a lot of gimmickry that goes on in the theatre....When the director told me about masking black actors as white, I had no trouble with that at all and after seeing the play it appeared to have worked well with the audience (*Africa Today*, 12-13)

The first inference that can be drawn from the above is that though Norris's 'Fanonian' casting caused a lot of controversy in the English media, the fact remains that the approach did not bother Soyinka in the slightest, which meant the National Theatre had nothing to worry about. Soyinka, being the author of the play, was the only one, I would argue, who had the *locus standi* to raise an objection to Norris's decision to cast black actors to play white characters in *Horseman*. Thus, whatever controversy Norris's decision might have engendered in the British media could only be seen by the National as a welcome publicity for its production of *Horseman.* For the purpose of my analysis of Norris's black face white mask casting decision, it is essential to examine a few of the reactions it engendered in the British press. But to broaden the scope of my analysis here I aim to intersperse the press coverage of the issue with excerpts from the interviews that I conducted with members of the crew and cast who partook in the production as already indicated.

For Badejo, black actors being 'whitened' up to play white characters in the play "lightened the weight of what happened". Badejo clarified what he meant by using the word 'trivialised' by recalling the impact the presentation of Ola Rotimi's play *Ovenramwen Noigbasi* (1974) when it was presented in

Benin, south west of Nigeria in 1970. Badejo argues that Benin people would not have reacted to the white actors who played the white invaders the way they did had the parts been given to whitened up black actors.[227] So, in Badejo's view, the fact that white characters in Soyinka's *Horseman* were played by black actors lessened the impact of the play. Giles Terera,[228] the actor, who played the part of the Praise Singer (the part Badejo played in 1990), would agree with Badejo that by casting black people to play the white parts, the audience were let off the hook. In his words,

> I think we are in danger of letting our audience of the hook to a certain extent and the reasons I said that is when we were in rehearsals a lot of our decisions were influenced by, as I said, 'the audience are not going to get that (....) that is not going to be palatable to the audience', which I think is fair enough. But why do the play? Why do the play if you are not going to do it completely one hundred per cent truthfully for what's written there? I wonder whether we do dilute the power of this story by having an all-black cast do it (Appendix 2D)

Although Terera also raised a number of issues as regards some of the lines that were cut to support his contention, that issue is beyond the scope of the present analysis. What came out very strongly from my discussion with Terera, however, was his feeling that Soyinka's play was well-written and that Norris should have presented it as it has been written and allowed his audience to make up their minds after all. As he put it,

> If you are going to do something about the Holocaust, the fact that the world let that happen, you don't dilute that down. Let the audience see it for what it is, because that is the whole point of drama; that is the whole point of theatre. We go to the theatre, we see ourselves, our own behaviour and then we can take stock and change (ibid).

In my view, Terera's point is very valid, but it is important to recall that Soyinka's aim, as he has stressed

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[227] The play is similar to *Horseman* in a way as it is also based on a historical event of the invasion and looting of the old Benin Kingdom. According to Badejo, the white actors who played the parts of the white invaders had to leave the stadium where the performance was held under police escort. For more, see Appendix 2C.

[228] I interviewed Giles Terera on the 22nd of April 2009 the day I travelled to see *Horseman* at the National. See Appendix 2D. Terera's mother is from the Caribbean and his father is from Zimbabwe. I worked with Terera when he played the part of Christopher Malomo in the première production of the aforementioned new version of *The Playboy of the Western World* at the Abbey (Ireland's National) Theatre in 2007.

it, is to entertain his audience and not to teach them any moral that will make it change. In that respect, one can contend that Norris was right to present the play in such a way that it would not become a stark reminder of the inglorious colonial past which could have led to Soyinka's thematic concern being relegated to the background. Michael Billington, in his review of the production published in *The Guardian* of April 9, 2009, seems to be in agreement with this contention, when he notes that it was Norris's Fanonian casting, which he appropriately describes as "a stroke of radical daring", that made it possible for a materialist British audience "to look beyond our rational distrust of ceremonial suicide". In Billington's words,

> Norris makes it easier by presenting the play with an all-black cast that "whites" up to play colonialists. This is a classic piece of Brechtian alienation that forces us to examine the issues at stake. It also yields moments of startling comedy.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown however does not see the funny side of Norris's black face white mask casting. "Many may ask why we should tolerate this kind of racial caricature when even our royalty does not get away with 'blacking up' for entertainment", she writes in her review entitled 'A Whiter shade of beyond the pale' in the *Standard* of April 9, 2009. "Black actors chalking up to represent ignorant white rulers is unacceptable negative stereotyping" she adds. Tim Walker of the *Sunday Telegraph* did not see the comic side of black actors playing white characters either. In his view, such casting is no less racist than white actors blackening up to play black people. As far as Walker is concerned Soyinka's play is an indulgence in gratuitous Brit-bashing, hence the headline of his one-star review: 'Save us from this woeful Wole', published in the *Sunday Telegraph* of April 19, 2009. In my view, it was Charles Spencer's review in *The Daily Telegraph* of April 10, 2009, which summed up the collective view of the right wing pundits in his review, 'Drums, dancing – and second-rate drama'. "I found the patronising mockery of the British colonial rules offensive," Spencer writes, "and imagined the fuss there would have been if white actors had adopted blackface to play the Nigerian characters", he adds. In Spencer's view, "There are double standards operating here, with the National indulging in a guilt laden cultural cringe". John Nathan in his review, 'Civilization is taught a lesson' in the *Jewish Chronicle* of the 24th of April 2009 disagrees with Spencer. Although Nathan feels that Norris's casting, in the context of another scene in *Horseman* in which young African girls parody the etiquette-obsessed colonisers, distracts from Soyinka's argument that his play is not about 'clash of cultures', he cannot comprehend the fuss over black actors whitening up. In Nathan's seemingly direct response to Spencer,

> Norris's production has caused a stir by casting the white British characters with whited-up black actors. The suggestion that this is offensive as the reviled practice of white actors blacking up is nonsensical – like saying the French have a much right to be offended at being called "Frog" as Jews when they are called "Yid". No they don't. What is being depicted here is not so much ethnicity but as story being told by the people on whom a foreign culture has been imposed.

In her letter entitled 'Whitening up has its place' published in the *Evening Standard* of 14 April 2009, Paulette Randall echoes Nathan's sentiments. "'Blacking up' and 'whitening up' must always be considered in context", writes Randall. "Norris's decision to 'white up' the black cast members of the National's Death and the Kings Horseman", in Randall's view, "reinvigorated the play so it didn't just feel like old message about oppressed natives we have heard hundred times". Nonso Anozie, the actor who played the part of Elesin Oba reiterated this point in his interview with Siobhan Murphy in the *Metro* edition of the 7th of April 2009. "It's hard not to look at the drama as big old Britain imposing itself on Nigeria", Anozie explained to Murphy, "but really what makes the play interesting is could Elesin have done it if he wasn't stopped? Was his willpower strong enough?" Anozie agreed with Murphy that it was in an effort to highlight the real message of Soyinka's play that Norris had adopted the black face white mask casting. "If it felt like it was being done just as a gimmick, I would have a problem with that", Anozie remarked. "But I think it's going to help the audience see the story in a different way". Benedict Nightingale in her review entitled, 'Cultural outrage is spelt out in black and white' in *The Times* of April 9, 2009, definitely saw the issue in a different way. Nightingale felt Soyinka's play is a long winded piece in which the rich and rewarding dialogue of the African characters is contrasted nicely with the blunt, bland speech of the colonialists. "Indeed," in Nightingale's view, "Norris takes Soyinka's attack on alien occupation further by asking members of his all-black cast to white up when they're playing the British".

But out of all the reactions that the issue of Norris casting decision generated, one that stood out for me was a piece entitled 'Why Black Folks Can Play 'White'" penned by Dotun Adebayo for his column 'Rate him or hate him – you can't ignore him' in *The Voice* edition of 20 April 2009. I must clarify that I could tell, from his name, that Adebayo is not only a Nigerian, but also a Yoruba man. But the reason that I am drawn to Adebayo's piece more than any other reactions that I have come across in the course of this study is simply because the way he introduces his piece is an inversion of one of Frantz Fanon's compelling assertions (which I have already cited in chapter one). While Fanon argues that: "For the black man, there is only one destiny. And that is white" (Fanon 1967, 12), to open his piece, Adebayo

wrote, "I don't know why, but white folks seem to like nothing better than being 'black'". The premise of Adebayo's argument is that it is pointless to compare the era of the minstrelsy to the National theatre production of *Horseman* in which black actors were 'whitened up' to play white characters. "I can't remember an instance where a black actor whites up to take the mickey out of the white race", argued Adebayo. "Whereas when white guys put on the black they seem unable to do so without becoming a caricature of what black folks are like". Below is how Adebayo eloquently drove his point home:

> The black actors whitening up goes deep into our psyche. You won't understand the play if you can't see the irony. But then again, the play's message is that white folks don't understand where Africans are coming from, so it's double irony that the white critics don't get it.

Obviously, Lizzie Loveridge is not one of the white critics whom Adebayo had in mind when he concluded his column thus. From the tone of her online review for *CurtainUp.Com*, it is clear that while Loveridge considers it unusual on the British stage for black actors to be whitened up to play white folks, in her view, Lucian Msamati and Jenny Jules, on whose black shoulders laid the responsibilities to respectively portray the white colonial administrator and his wife couple, did not disappoint. "Black actors playing white roles is not unusual in Nobel laureate's Soyinka's native Nigeria," observed Loveridge,

> but what is unusual is the white make up the black actors wear, a negative image of the reviled black make up by white male singers in the manner of Al Johnson or in the 1960s for BBC television's *The Black and White Minstrel Show*. Lucian Msamati (I always think the Zinbabwean [sic] actor sounds like a very fast car),...makes an excellent sympathetic job of the British colonial administrator and District Officer Simon Pilkings. Jenny Jules, almost unrecognizable in a dark blonde wig with white face takes on his wife Jane.

Aleks Sierz is in agreement with Loveridge in his review for the *Tribune* of 24 April 2009 headlined (as previously mentioned), 'Hit and Myth clash of cultures in colonial showdown'. "Norris does his best to liven things up by using all black cast, some of whom white up to play colonial characters" Sierz's review reads. Despite a lot of hot air about this being racist, Sierz remarked,

> it works well on stage and effectively mocks the colonials from the point of view of the descendants of the oppressed. Lucian Msamati and Jenny Jules are very funny as the Pilkings and this Bretchian device is

enjoyable.

It is worth pointing out here that Sierz is not the first critic that I have cited in the present analysis, who regards Norris's casting decision as a Bretchian device; Michael Billington, in his four-star review, headlined 'Dazzling recasting of the final act as triumphant entrance', has also drawn the same inference. But it is not only through his black and white casting that Norris was Brechtian. The performance began with a prologue scene that is set in a typical African village. It was in this prologue scene that Msamati who played the part of the Colonial Officer was transformed into a white man by a make-up artist who helped him apply his white mask right in front of the audience. And when his make-up was done, Masamati joined all the other fellow actors in a procession dance which culminated in the first scene. This opening was essentially Brechtian and it was to foreground Norris's idea of presenting the drama from the point of view of the colonised rather the coloniser. But if we recall Soyinka's assertion in his interview with Lewis Nkosi in 1962 (as already quoted in chapter 6) that he does not believe that he has "the obligation to enlighten, to instruct, to teach"; that he does not "possess that sense of didacticism – very much unlike Brecht for instance", it would appear ironic that Norris had to revert to a Brechtian devise to foreground Soyinka's supposedly non-political message in *Horseman*. Bertolt Brecht is the German theorist and theatre, who having being inspired by the Chinese theatre, as already discussed in chapter two, came up with the concept of alienation technique through which actors can remain distanced from the parts they are portraying on stage and theatre audiences can remain objective rather than being emotive when they are watching a theatre presentation. In this sense, Brecht's theatre is a rejection of both Stanislavski's famous method acting technique as well as Aristotelian concept of tragedy which stipulates that for tragedy to work it must arouse the cathartic feeling of pity and fear in its audience. Brecht's theatre is, therefore, unapologetically political and his goal is to employ the medium of theatre to sensitise the masses. So, if Soyinka has declared that "what I like in Brecht is his sort of theatre, its liveliness and freedom, not so much his purpose or intentions" what are the commonalities between Brecht and Soyinka's theatres. As I have argued previously (in chapter 2), Soyinka is a deeply political and astute man and his theatre is unequivocally, but very guardedly, geared towards political ends. However, having lived and experienced racism in Britain, Soyinka is well aware of the way the western hegemony operates. He knows fully well that the reality of our existence is that any black person who wants to be afforded an opportunity in the western world must learn how to say what the Occident wants to hear rather than what the Occident needs to hear. In other words, if Soyinka had been vocal when he was a budding dramatist and had said his obligation as a

theatre artist was to enlighten and not to entertain his audiences, it is very doubtful that he would have been the subject of this thesis. So the idea that Soyinka's theatre is for entertainment, I would reiterate, is a post-colonial strategy. And it is perhaps because Norris's father was once a colonial officer that he was better placed as a theatre director to discern the politics of post-coloniality inherent in Soyinka's aesthetics generally and specifically in *Horseman* and hence his decision to 'alienate' the audience by presenting the play using a storytelling format and whitening up black actors. In my view, this is a perfect inversion of 'Orientalism' bearing in mind Robert Stam's insightful observation:

> Rather than the direct reflection of the real, or even a refraction of the real, artistic discourse constitutes a refraction of a refraction, that is, a mediated version of an already textualized and discursivized socio-ideological world (Stam 1991, 252).

This, I would argue, was exactly what Norris had achieved with his all-black cast presentation of *Horseman* and in the process he had managed to amplify the post-coloniality of the play and at the same time made its inherent complexity palatably accessible for an upper-middle class British audience. "The audience of the National Theatre are very sophisticated when it comes to storytelling, and the themes and layers will be resonant if they are not distracted", as Norris has pointed out,

> People either have an awareness of their historical responsibility or they are in denial of it. If they are already aware telling them again in a blunt way is preaching to the converted (Appendix 2B).

Lucian Msamati, who played the part of Simon Pilkings is clearly familiar with the Brecthian device of ensuring that the audience is not allowed to be overcome with emotion at the cost of not getting the message of the play. He had already pointed it out on the phone when I first contacted him that he would have been disappointed had the white parts in the play been given to white actors.[229] And when I asked him if he had any problem with been 'whitened' up, his response was that as an actor he had played many parts in the past, including the cowardly lion in the *Wizard of Oz* and a Cuban as well.[230]

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[229] I interviewed Lucian Msamati, who played the part of Simon Pilkings, in his office located in the Africa Centre building in Covent Garden in London in September 2012. See Appendix 2E.

[230] Msamati was born in London but he moved to Tanzania at an earlier age where he went to school and worked extensively as a theatre practitioner before returning to London in 2003, to broaden his professional horizons. Aside from acting, Msamati is the Artistic Director of the African Theatre company Tiata Fahodzi that has its offices



Fig. 21 Jenny Jules as Jane Pilkings



Fig. 22 Lucian Msamati as Simon Pilkings (standing by a 'human lamp shade').

When I put it to Msamati that people might see the idea of a black man being 'whitened' up as an inversion of the minstrelsy era, his response was:

> Yes, I completely understand why that is. But my inverse reaction to that will be surely it was the challenge that attracted me as a performer. To not only do it credibly but to also give it humanity and if we got it right, there will be a point where whatever artifice we used to represent a, b, c will melt away. What will remain is the essence of the person and that is the story that people latch on to (Appendix 2E).

One is inclined to agree with Msamati here in the sense that the main reason that Norris decided to cast black people for the white parts is to foreground the main theme of the play which is the sense of responsibility. Norris is essentially in agreement with Soyinka that the play is not about a clash of cultures. While Soyinka's "anger with the colonialists is very much there, so the conflict of cultures is very present" in the words of Norris,

> The crisis of leadership that the play centres on, and is the keynote in Soyinka's work generally, is the driving theme. I also think it is a much stronger theme as it transcends everything and is as prescient today as it was then. Responsibility. That's what I think it is about (Appendix 2B).

Msamati has convincingly reinforced Norris's thoughts as expressed above when he asserted that:

in the Africa Centre in Covent Garden.

> In our particular interpretation, where I think Rufus and the team were very cunning was to go okay: here is a story that is set in a particular time and in a particular system that is "familiar" if we take the traditional route, no matter how brilliantly or eloquently we produce it, it could very easily turn into a white bashing because of all the bashing in the play. That is dull, that is boring, that is being done. However if we take away the racial element what we are left with is the argument fundamentally about responsibility. Because when it comes down to it Elesin forsakes his responsibility. And that is the tragedy (Appendix 2E).

Norris, in my view, had conducted an in-depth research on Soyinka and as a consequence he was in a position to ascertain precisely the message that Soyinka would rather have foregrounded in the stage interpretation of his most important Yoruba tragedy. "When he [Norris] told me about his vision and his translation", in the words of Soyinka, "he struck me as a sensitive individual who has given deep thought to the play. I did not have any qualms at all. I was impressed by him" (*Africa Today* 2009, 11-12). Tim Walker is wrong, therefore, when he remarks, in his one-star review of the production, that "Rufus Norris directs with commendable grace under pressure, but one never feels that he has much of a handle himself on what the play is trying to say" (Walker 2009). Ironically, Walker does not deem it necessary to enlighten his readers what he thinks the play is trying to say. Instead he goes on to pick on fellow critics who have reviewed Norris's production favourably by describing them as "the more grimly nihilistic critics" (ibid.). Bearing in mind that Kate Basset of the *Sunday Independent* of 12 April 2009 concludes her review with: "But, all in all, Norris's inspired and superbly fluid production makes you wonder if he'll run the NT one day", one wonders if she is one of the critics Walker had in mind. Another critic who readily comes to mind here is the reviewer who wrote in the *South London Press* edition of 17 April 2009 as follows:

> If for nothing else *Death and the King's Horseman* should be hailed a triumph for the fact it managed to pull in one of the most ethnically mixed audiences I've even seen at the National. But this commendable cultural achievement aside, the most stunning aspect of the show is, of course, the much-talked about "whiting up" of black actors.

While it would be hard to assert with any certainty which of the critics Walker has in mind, in my view, there cannot be any ambiguity about the fact that Norris had a handle on what *Horseman* "is trying to say". While it is clear as day to Norris that the issue of colonialism has a place in the play, "responsibility

of leadership is the deeper message", as he explained to Jo Caird who interviewed him for an article that appeared in *Culture Global* of May 7, 2009. "Responsibility is about doing the right thing when it's very difficult", Norris added, "If doing the right thing were easy, we'd all be doing it all the time, whether that's not taking 700,000 pounds pension or remaining faithful to your partner". And as Jo Caird has rightly pointed out in his article, "Responsibility can also be understood in terms of a playwright's responsibility to his subject". Soyinka is not only a playwright, but also a director. And having written and directed *Horseman* himself he could not have been wrong to state that Norris's production "appeared to have worked well with the audience" (*Africa Today*, June 2009, 12-13). In other words, Norris's decision to present the Yoruba tragedy with black faces "whitened" up to avoid reducing it to a 'clash of cultures' had paid off.

7.9 On the Subject of Interculturalism

But in terms of interculturality of the presentation of *Horseman* at the National, I would argue that rather than Patrice Pavis' hourglass theoretical model, the theoretical model as proposed by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert in 'Towards a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis', is more applicable here. This is not merely because Lo and Gilbert's model is more up to date but, more importantly, because the National Theatre's presentation of *Horseman* as directed by Rufus Norris, in my own view, exemplifies the kind of intercultural exchange that Lo and Gilbert have termed 'collaborative' as against the other kind which they identify as 'imperialistic'. Collaborative intercultural exchange, according to Lo and Gilbert, "tends to emphasize the process and politics of exchange rather than theatrical product per se" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 39). To shed more light on the so-called 'collaborative interculturalism', they posit further:

> This form of theatre-making places great importance on cultural negotiations at all levels from the highly personal and individualistic to the "superstructural" and institutional. Collaborative interculturalism is often community-generated rather than market and/or state driven. There is less focus on maintaining the "purity" of the various cultures for exotic display. The exchange process is often marked by tension and incommensurability. While there is a general desire to maintain equitable power relations between partners, the aim is not to produce a harmonious experience of theatre making but rather to explore the fullness of cultural exchange in all its contradictions and convergences for all parties (ibid.).

We will return to Lo and Gilbert, but it is important to pause for a moment to apply all of the above to the present analysis and clarify some points. Clearly all the elements of Collaborative Interculturalism as

identified by Lo and Gilbert in their attempt to propose a more universal theorisation of interculturalism as quoted above is evident in the presentation of *Horseman* at the National. While one can argue that being at the Royal National Theatre the production could hardly be regarded as community-generated, I would argue that the fact that it was presented by a community of London-based black performers made it so. "It made for the most wonderful company feeling. 30 black actors and drummers taking over the National Theatre", as Norris has pointed out, "There are many Nigerians who work there, mostly on security, or in the canteen", Norris adds, "and they were thrilled to finally be so represented" (Appendix 2B). But it must be stressed that the process was not without its tension, which incidentally is another characteristic of the so-called Collaborative interculturalism going by Lo and Gilbert's analysis. In fact, I recall clearly that the main concern Badejo expressed as regards Norris was that he did not listen to him the way Lloyd did. Below was how Badejo explained Norris's role and how they interacted with each other during rehearsals:

> BADEJO: (...) Being the national theatre it was quite different....the process was quite different.
>
> ADIGUN: In what way sir?
>
> BADEJO: In the sense that the departments were well established. The costumiers were working on designs, theatre production was going on, we have rooms for different rehearsals. It was a luxury, but Norris was the overall ...he was directing the top actors' rehearsals. I was there and when things were a bit not what my understanding is, I was telling him.
>
> ADIGUN: Can you remember a particular episode sir?
>
> BADEJO: Some he dismissed, some he said he would look into it. Which one now in particular stands out? Even our actor.... Our lead actor, I was trying to explain to our lead actor that there are certain nuances that is not just Nigerian, it is typically Yoruba and it is embedded in the writing of that play....(Appendix 2C)

Just to reiterate, the lead actor, Nonso Anozie to whom Peter was referring is an Igbo actor who was born in the UK. And while Anozie was aware of Soyinka's work, the fact that his parents are Igbo meant "he had to do a lot of research into the Yoruba culture Soyinka writes about", as Siobhan Murphy has pointed out in her article 'The Big Interview Nonso Anozie' in the *Metro* of April 7, 2009. On the basis of

his Igbo background, it is highly unlikely that Anozie will be cast for the part of Elesin for a Nigerian presentation of *Horseman*. This could perhaps explain the source of Badejo's trepidation because iin a way, Anozie, an Igbo man playing Elesin is analogous to an Irish actor playing the part of Macbeth. So, one can argue that there was no difference between a black actor being 'whitened up' to play the colonial offices in *Horseman* and Anozie being 'dressed up' in Yoruba tie and dye to play a quintessemtial Yoruba part. Without belabouring this issue I want to argue further that as a matter of fact the bllack actors especially Lucian Msamati and Jenny Jules who were whitened up to play Simon Pilkings andl his wife respectively are much closer to the part they played than Anozie, despite the fact that there was no need to 'black up' Anozie . Jenny Jules, for instance, was born in North London and it is worth noiting that rather than a black actor, she is seen as an English actor. As I have already mentioned, Anozie gave a compelling performance as Elesin. He is a "door frame-filling, solidly muscled 6ft 7in", as Siobhan Murphy has rightly remarked in her article in *Metro* and "the 30 year-old exudes calm, gravitas and benign control." However in terms of his dancing, it was very clear that Anozie is not a Yoruba man. "Actors simultaneously reveal the culture of the community where they have trained and where they live", according to Patrice Pavis,

> and the bodily technique they have acquired be this rigorously formalised by an established tradition (as in the Peking opera, for example) or camouflagued by an ideology of the 'natural' as with the western naturalistic actors (Pavis 1992, 3).

Anozie was not only born in England, he received his training as an actor in England. Furthermore, his experience in acting before he took the role of Elesin included, according to the programme note, playing the part of King Leah professionally at the age of 23, the part of Othello in a world touring Cheek by Jowl production of *Othello*, featuring in David Mamet's *Edmond, World Music* at Sheffield Crucible. He has also been seen on the big screen in *Cass*, *Rock 'n' Rolla* and his first film lead role was as black British football hooligan. So going by Pavis' assertion, Anozie is non-Yoruba culturally and, therefore, his portrayal of Elesin corporeally is more British than Yoruba.

But Anozie is not only the non-Yoruba in the cast. Claire Benedict who played the part of Iyaloja is from Trinidad, Kobna Holdbrook who played the part of Olunde is a British-born actor but originally from Ghana and the parents of British-born Giles Terera, who played the part of the Praise Singer are from Zimbabwe and the Caribbean. In fact a close examination of the names of the cast as listed in the

programme note reveals that no Yoruba person was cast to play any of the Yoruba principal roles in the play. Thus Norris must have made a conscious decision to work with black actors, regardless of their countries of origin, with good résumés rather than actors from the culture on which the play is based. In my view as a Yoruba man, I would argue that this was a good strategy on Norris's part simply because Yoruba people are very proud of their culture and they have no problem expressing their views when it comes to preserving the culture. So, one can only imagine Rufus Norris, a white man, trying to direct an ensemble of thirty Yoruba actors in a play inspired by Yoruba culture. It would be akin to putting a cat among the pigeons. So it would be accurate to describe Norris's cast as a multiracial all-black cast and it was the better for it, because all the actors in the play are mostly British born.



Fig. 23 Nonso Anozie as Elesin and the cast of Horseman at the National.

Therefore, it would be counter-productive to expect all the actors to adhere to all the Yoruba cultural specificities, which, in any event, would be lost on its British audience. In other words, the misrepresentation of Yoruba cultural nuances and mispronunciation of Yoruba words and names which appeared conspicuous to Badejo, being a Yoruba man, would appear incongruously uniform to a British audience, which was the way it should be. "Intercultural performances", lest we forget, "grow and flourish in the interstices where foreign and familiar meet" (Brandon 1990, 91). In fact trying to ensure that the non-Yoruba actors get the Yoruba specificities in the play at the cost of clarity was not consistent with Collaborative interculturalism and this, in my view, was why Norris decided to employ a non-Yoruba, in the person of Venezeluan-born dancer/choreographer Javier De Frutos, to choreograph all the dance movements, which can best be described as a postmodern choreography of Yoruba traditional dance steps, for the performance. Likewise the issue of proper pronunciation of words and

names that apparently concerned Badejo deeply did not bother Norris. Furthermore, the mispronunciation of the Yoruba words in the performance was more representative of the audience in the sense that the actors on stage were intoning Yoruba words the way the British would. Norris echoed the same sentiments when he pointed out that "on the simplest level, allowing an audience to see black actors mimicking white colonialists with absolute accuracy helps us to look at ourselves and admire our multi-cultural society at the same time" (Appendix 2B).

Though some might argue that Norris's thought is rather clichéd and essentially British, in my view, presenting the most important work of Soyinka, the Yoruba tragedian on the British national stage with an all-black cast, more so, when some of the actors were 'whitened' up to play the white parts in the play, was not only empowering, but essentially counter-hegemonic. "The one is only the other differed, the one differing from the other", as Derrida posits. "The one is the other in differance, the one is the differance from the other. Every apparently rigorous and irreducible opposition", Derrida concludes, "is thus said to be, at one time or another, a 'theoretical fiction'" Derrida (2004, 291). It is in this poststructuralist sense that the casting of black actors to play white characters on the Royal National stage must be seen. In my view, the historical and representational gap that existed between Us/Them, Black/White, Subject/Object, Coloniser/Colonised was bridged by this postmodern presentation of *Horseman* at the National.



Fig. 24 Praise Singer (Giles Terera) and cast of Horseman in action.

What this illustrates for us is that "in the age of globalisation, theatre can operate as a performative tool" and indeed "as a political or social agent of intervention" (Singleton 2007, 25), if I may borrow

Brian Singleton's words. But this is the real potential of interculturalism bearing in mind that "the goal of intercultural and intracultural performance", as Brandon has reminded us "is to produce for spectators, opportunities for perceiving new relationships between other and self, between foreign and familiar" (Brandon 1990, 96). To reinforce this point it would be necessary to return to Lo and Gilbert for whom Collaborative interculturalism, "can be potentially counter-hegemonic; it allows minor cultures to act on dominant ones rather than merely submit, to cultural loss in the transaction" (Lo and Gilbert 2002, 39). This is what I believe *Horseman* at the National had achieved. The opportunity to present a culture, in the final analysis, can only lead to a greater possibility of understanding such a culture. By experiencing the alien Yoruba culture as mediated by one of their own in an intercultural collaboration with an 'Other', the presentation of *Horseman* at the National has provided us with an insight into the capability of western interculturalism to foster cross-cultural understanding while being counter-hegemonic at the same time in a true postmodernist sense.

7.10 Killing Two Birds with one Stone

To conclude this chapter I propose to demonstrate very briefly how the newly proposed talking drum and keyboard model can be applied to the two British productions of *Horseman*. But first it needs to be borne in mind that if the poem 'Piano and Drums' has inspired the name of the new model, *Horseman* is indeed its dramatic progenitor in the sense that the play, more than any in Soyinka's corpus, epitomises the idea of the cross-culturality that is embedded in Soyinka's dramaturgy. And while Soyinka has repeatedly insisted that the play is not a 'clash of cultures' one cannot help but notice that the play is a celebration of the Talking drum and Keyboard cultures ontologically and epistemologically. The play is a skilful exhibition of various elements of African and western cultures, including costumes, dance, use of space, manner of speaking and last but not the least the use of music that is respectively represented by the talking drum and the horn gramophone which are featured in the play. Clearly, both Phyllida Lloyd and Rufus Norris are unquestionably adept at the keyboard culture but rather than learning the talking drum culture, they delegated Peter Badejo to provide the essentials of the talking drum culture. In my view, it was Badejo who ensured that the play retained its Yoruba identity on the British stage but bearing in mind that both of these productions were presented in Britain and geared towards predominantly white middle class British audiences, it was important to credit Lloyd and Norris as their directors. But it cannot be overstated that if Peter Badejo had been afforded the opportunity to direct these productions culturally while the British directors had handled the choreography of actors on stage (or what is known as blocking in theatre parlance), the two productions would have represented the

ideal 'extended mise-en-scene' and not the sort of artistic projects that Daphne Lei terms 'HIT' – hegemonic intercultural theatre. In other words, the two British productions of *Horseman* were ideal for British audiences, but in intercultural terms there is a lot of room for improvement, as I argue in my concluding chapter, because in Soyinka's dramatic universe, the spoken word, albeit written in English, is not superior to the drum beat or the dance step, or the gestures. All these components need to be harmonised in order get into the central 'concinnity' zone.

CONCLUSION

Mind the Gap Please!!! [231]

> ***Africa Today***: *Are you afraid of death? What would you love engraved on your headstone?*
>
> ***Wole Soyinka***: *No, I am not afraid of death. I have very much reconciled myself so many times. I am prepared.....One that takes risks should not fear death. There was a time I thought the words of poet/philosopher called Omar Khayyam would be my ideal inscription on my gravestone but I keep changing.....What I would like goes like this: "For some, we loved the loveliest and the best. That from his vintage, rolling times has pressed. Have sipped their cup a round or two before. And one by one slipped silent to rest."* (Soyinka in *Africa Today;* June 2009, 15).

8.1 To perform, or not to perform: that should be the question

In his essay 'The Contingency of Performance: The Gap as a Venue', Tejumola Olaniyan provides a compelling argument in an attempt to answer the question: why do we perform? We must dwell on Olaniyan's essay for a while, because, in my view, his analysis encapsulates not only the rationale behind this study, but also all the arguments advanced in it thus far. The premise of Olaniyan's thesis is that nearly all human activities are predicated on performance. He delineates performance as "both presentation and re-presentation and as encompassing both art and life in all aspects – social, political, economics, cultural, religious, bureaucratic, technological" (Olaniyan 2009b, 23-24). The implication of this is that whatever we do as humans is a performance. In fact based on Olaniyan's analysis, one can surmise that being is performing. To cite a few examples pertinent to this work: when Soyinka sat down to write all the plays that we have discussed in this study, he was performing; the directors who directed the British productions analysed in this work were performing; the artists who participated in all the productions were performing; the audiences who sat down in the dark theatre auditoria to see the

[231] This is a pre-recorded announcement that one hears in a number of underground tube stations in London. The message which is obviously on a loop repeats: 'Mind the gap please' to warn commuters to be careful of the gap between the tube and the platform. I think it is appropriate as the title of the Conclusion to this thesis because a big gap has been covered since the Introduction to this work began several thousand words ago, but more importantly because the issue of gap is predominant in this concluding chapter.

presentations were performing; the theatre critics who reviewed the presentations in the press were performers; conducting and writing up the present research was a performance; and finally, you are performing as you are reading this thesis this very moment. So, we are all performers and the world, to paraphrase Shakespeare, is our stage. But the fundamental question remains: why do we perform? "The question is a broad and foundational one", Olaniyan argues,

> So, I will respond with an appropriate mix of specificity and speculative metaphoric generalizations. We perform because of our irresistible urge to motion. We want to move from A to B in space and time; A being what we know and where we are and B being where we think we could or ought to be (Olaniyan, 2009b, 24)

There is more from Olaniyan and it would be important to quote him further and perhaps this gifted Yoruba scholar will come to the attention of the ethnocentric western interculturalists who still consider Africa as the continent where the sun does not shine. Below is how Olaniyan sheds more light on why we perform:

> Between needs and their reconciliation is a space, a gulf, or in more popular parlance, a gap. Without the gap, there is no performance, and without performance the gap cannot be reconciled. It is the gap so commonly invoked and yet rarely considered in academic discourse generally, much less in academic discourse on performance – it is the gap that I am regarding as the primal contingent time-space of performance (ibid., 25).

In my view, nearly all the postulations of the often quoted western poststructuralist theorists – Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida, and Heidegger – are encapsulated eloquently by Olaniyan in this one single essay. What Olaniyan is positing is that in all spheres of human life there is always a gap between where we are and where we want to be, what we know and what we are ignorant of, what we have and what we want, and the list goes on. It is in an attempt to fill these ever-existing gaps that we perform. "The gap is the spectre that haunts performance", contends Olaniyan,

> The gap is a generative force that determines the genres and languages of performance. In theory and in practice, all our exertions in performance, all our performances, are ways of bridging the gap, whether we are conscious of this general fact or of particular gaps or not (ibid.,25).

In this respect, all the foregoing examples as well as all the theoretical paradigms prefixed with 'post-' and suffixed with 'ism', such as post-colonialism, post-structuralism, post-modernism and dare I say post-interculturalism, are all propounded in our concerted effort to bridge one gap or the other. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that it is towards the bridging of the intercultural gap between the west and Africa that I have embarked upon this study in which I have propounded a new intercultural theoretical model purely from an African perspective. Interestingly, to return to Soyinka, it is in an effort to bridge this same gap that Soyinka has written all his tragic plays, and more so *Death and the Kings Horseman* in which western and African cultures unavoidably come into direct conflict. "There is a tragic gap of understanding between all the cultures of the world", Soyinka stated in his interview with *Africa Today,*

> There's nothing wrong with gap of understanding; it is when it takes on the attitude of what I call violent superiority that is when the world runs aground. But the understanding that there can be a gap of understanding is the beginning of wisdom (*Africa Today* June 2009, 13-14).

But for Soyinka, the gap is "not just between the West and Africa", as he explained further, "but also between Africa and Africa, and Africa and Asia, and Africa and the Arab world, even though the Arab world also exists in the African continent" (ibid., 13). Soyinka's argument is not only valid, considering how diverse and complicated the world is, it is also very fundamentally illuminating. And it is in light of acutely nuanced observations such as this that I have come to the conclusion that there is more to Soyinka than meets the eye; and this needs to be probed further. So, having reconfigured Soyinka in the first part of this thesis, I propose to deconstruct him in this concluding chapter before I finally draw curtain on this scholarly 'performance' with a recommendation of the ideal director of his Yoruba tragedy going forward.

8.2 Soyinka: The Yoruba Nietzsche in Shakespeare's Clothing

In a study such as this, a number of inferences – objective and subjective – are bound to be vying for one's attention. But having conducted this research, there is one important conclusion that I have reached which I cannot ignore. "Judgements must always be in some sense provisional", according to Arthur Marwick in *Culture in Britain Since 1945*, "but provided one shows what they are founded on, they should be made" (Marwick 1991, 5). It is with Marwick's assertion in mind that I have come to the conclusion that Soyinka is a philosopher rather than a playwright and that explains the complexity inherent in his dramaturgy. At the launch of his memoir, *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* in Cubberley

Theatre in Palo Alto California in 2006 (which I have referred to earlier in a previous chapter), Chike Nwoffiah asked Soyinka if he had any preference for a particular medium of writing. Surprisingly, Soyinka responded without any hesitation that he was most at ease in writing essays. An essay is a dialectical argument based on facts, a debate for or against a particular topic, a philosophical thought, a polemic or a critical analysis. An essay is for the edification of its readers or (to use the appropriate academic parlance) to further advance knowledge. Drama (or a novel or a poem), on the other hand, is a creative writing, usually, based on fiction (or an expression of a thought, a feeling or an angst or a fictionalisation of facts) geared towards the aesthetic aim of pleasuring its audience (or readers). Soyinka, as we have seen in the course of this study, is a poet and a playwright (as well as an accidental novelist). Furthermore, he has worked all his adult life in that capacity as well as a theatre artist since 1958 when his first play *The Swamp Dwellers* was presented in London. So, how could he say in 2006 that he felt most comfortable as an essayist? The answer, I want to surmise, lies in the fact that Soyinka is more of a philosopher than a playwright. In other words our own WS is a Nietzsche in the guise of a Shakespeare. Below, for instance, is how Soyinka described the role of an artist when he was asked, during the interview Ulli Beier recorded with him in 1997, to summarise his theory of Yoruba tragedy contained in 'The Fourth Stage':

> I think what I was referring to was the mystery of creativity itself, which is almost like a dare, a challenge of nature secrecies. One goes out almost in the same way in which Ogun cleared the jungle because he had forged the metallic instrument. He is very much the explorer. The artist in many ways is similar; each time, he discovers a proto world in gestation; it's almost like discovering another world in the galaxy. The artist's view of reality creates an entirely new world. Into that world he leads a raid; he rifles its resources and returns to normal existence. The tragic dimension of that is one of disintegration of the self in a world which is being reborn always, and from which the artist can recover his being by an exercise of sheer will power. He disintegrates in the passage into that world. He loses himself and only the power of the will can bring him back. And when he returns from the experience, he is imbued with new wisdoms, new perspectives, a new way of looking at phenomena (Beier 1997, 6).

On the basis of the foregoing alone, one would not be far from the mark to suggest that had Soyinka been an Occident from a western country, such as Greece, Italy, France, Germany – where philosophical thoughts are accorded the respect they rightly deserve – it is extremely doubtful if he would have bothered being a playwright at all. In other words, Soyinka would have been able to earn a living and world recognition working as a philosopher. As we have seen in the first part of this thesis, the Yoruba

people have one of the most sophisticated cultures in the world and their epistemology is predicated on oral tradition – proverbs, chants, incantations, poetry, songs, riddles, folklores – as well as their sophisticated performative sign systems, namely dance, mime, masquerade, costumes, masks. It is in this light that Esiaba Irobi argues that Soyinka's "literary work was an early window to the appreciation and beauty of Yoruba culture, history, mythology, spirituality" (Irobi 2005, 7). The implication of Irobi's observation is that the Yoruba people are philosophically poetic and theatrically performative. That is all on a cultural level however. How does philosophy pan out on a socio-political level? Or to put it baldly, what is the place of philosophy in a post-independent nation state such as Nigeria with its myriads of problems – ethnic jingoism, poverty, crime, lack of leadership, lack of adequate social infrastructure, just to mention but a few – that have been plaguing the country since it gained its independence fifty-one years ago?

Tejumola Olaniyan has succinctly encapsulated the appalling condition in which millions of Nigerians live when he argues that the situation can no longer be described as 'unmet expectations' but, what he calls, 'reverse expectations. "In reverse expectations", Olaniyan explains,

> the hope is not how much better things will be down the road but how much worse they will be. What you can realistically expect is a worsened version of where you had already been; in the future you can expect a much impoverished version of what you had once seen and lived (Olaniyan 2009b, 26).

Is this not the antithesis of the American dream? But the irony of Nigeria's situation is that the country is abundantly blessed with rich natural resources, the like of which America and many other western countries can only dream. So, how does one explain in words such a retrogressive human existence of extreme poverty in the midst of unimaginable abundance? In other words, "What can be said about something that can't be defined, if one wants to avoid philosophical abstractions?" since "no one can be helped in life by abstractions" (Brook 1987, 164). This, in my view, is why Soyinka the poet/philosopher turned author/theatre director bearing in mind what Peter Brook claims is the responsibility of the theatre:

> What a book cannot convey, what no philosopher can truly explain, can be brought to our understanding through the theatre. Translating the untranslatable it its role (Brook 1987, 164)

As previously discussed, Soyinka is very political and his abiding religion is human liberty; and lest we forget, the Yoruba "people's philosophy of life, with regards to sacrifice", as Awolalu has pointed out, "held that it was better to sacrifice one life for the good of the community than for all to perish" (Awolalu 1979, 168). It is on the basis of this Yoruba phenomenology of mortality that the concept of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy is predicated and it is this ontology that Soyinka expounds in his essay, 'The Fourth Stage' which he wrote at the age of thirty three. 'The Fourth Stage', therefore, can be likened to the theory of what Greek tragedy must be and not be in Aristotle's *Poetics* or how the Greek tragedy came to be in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Hence, Jeyifo's claim that "'The Fourth Stage' is probably the finest document of modern African idealist philosophy" (Jeyifo 1987, xviii).

However, Soyinka is a very perceptive Yoruba man. Therefore, he is aware of the Yoruba proverb that can be loosely translated here as: "I am hungry, the soap-seller is hawking his wares. What is the point in washing my outside when my inside is empty?" In other words, Soyinka knows that if he employs his philosophical *langue* (to borrow Derrida's term)[232] such as 'chthonic realm', 'tigritude' 'numinous abyss' in Nigeria, the question would be asked of him: "Na big grammar we go chop?".[233] My point is: there is no place for philosophy in a society such as Nigeria, because while philosophers can interpret the world what Nigeria needs, to paraphrase Karl Marx, is change – a root and branch radical alteration. It is towards this aim, I would contend, that Soyinka had been left with no choice than to employ the available medium in an effort to obtain the desirable outcome. Soyinka, as previously discussed, is a visionary, who is gifted with the ability to see the future, which, by all accounts, as Olaniyan has forecast, can only get worse. The onus is on Soyinka to effectively and efficiently communicate what the future holds, no matter how terrifying it is, to the world. It is against this backdrop that Soyinka has placed reliance on the medium of theatre, more than any other medium. After all, "The object of theatre is not discovery and reinterpretation of meaning", Ossie Enekwe argues, "Theatre is first and foremost an experience" (Enekwe 1981, 155). Thus, Soyinka is first and foremost a philosopher, but he "finds himself compelled to flesh out the dialectic he perceives through actors who can transform themselves, transform their acting space and so transform the audience" (Etherton 1987 35). In other words, Soyinka recognises that while reading philosophy could be enlightening, it remains an individual

[232] See Derrida 2004, p. 304.

[233] I can loosely translate what I have here as "Are we going to eat all these big words?" This is Nigerian pidgin English, which is widely spoken by teeming population of Nigerians especially those without (or with low level of) formal education.

and cerebral act unlike theatre spectating (more so in Africa), that is unarguably participatory, visceral, experiential, communal and, therefore, much more affecting in a culture such as Nigeria where there is a dire need to galvanise a collective sensibility. So, in my view, it is because Soyinka is more of a philosopher than a playwright that his plays appear esoteric, inaccessible, obscure or complex. In other words, Soyinka's dramaturgy is not mere storytelling but a philosophical argument. Summer Perez makes the same inference when he argues that Soyinka sets the scene of *Horseman* to two years before the actual incident to make it coincide with the period of World War II (as discussed in the previous chapter), not "for minor reasons of dramaturgy", as Soyinka has claimed, but for the purpose of a polemic. In Perez words,

> Soyinka uses the context of the war in a useful way that allows for a comparison of British ritualistic activities with those of Yoruba, and ultimately presenting an argument for cultural relativity (Perez 2005, 41).[234]

If we recall, Soyinka insists in the 'Author's Note', as included in the published version of the play, that the "Colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely". Is it really a catalyst merely?

But if I may problematise the complexity of Soyinka's aesthetics even further, I want to surmise that rather than consciously creating his dramaturgy or dramatising his thematic preoccupations, it is actually Soyinka who should be regarded as the product of his dramaturgy. In other words, Soyinka's thematic preoccupations in his so-called mature plays are consistent with what I would call: the 'postcolonial condition', if I may paraphrase Jean-Francois Lyotard's famous terminology the 'postmodern condition'.[235] If there are only two ways of thinking how literature is produced as Niall Lucy has suggested in his book, *Postmodern Literary Theory*, "One way might be to think that literature is produced by writers of genius, the other that writers themselves are produced (to varying degrees) by forces beyond their control" (Lucy 1997, 1). So, while we may regard Soyinka as a genius, in my view, the

[234] My source for this quote is *Soyinka Journal* No 1 (August 2005) but I must add, as I have already mentioned, that the pagination of the whole journal is inconsistent but this essay is worse.

[235] Lyotard in his 1998 essay, 'The Postmodern Condition', describes the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies as *postmodern*. See Lyotard, 2004, p. 355. In a postmodernist sense, I am inverting Lyotard's term to describe appalling condition of abject poverty that most Africans live in most of the countries awash with natural and mineral resources as 'Postcolonial Condition'.

Yoruba tragedian is merely a receptive conduit through which most of his plays were written against the backdrop of the prevailing socio-political and economic situations in a post-independent nation state of Nigeria. It is worth noting, for instance, that Soyinka wrote *Horseman* over a weekend. "This play was one of those plays which sat in my mind and one weekend suddenly it just poured out" (*Africa Today* June 2009, 13), Soyinka recalled in his interview with *Africa Today.* Further, an email correspondence that Tunde Awosanmi, a theatre lecturer at the University of Ibadan sent me further to a telephone conversation we both had in regards to Soyinka's aesthetics and *A Dance of the Forests* in particular readily comes to mind here. "That no doubt was a memorable discussion over the phone", Awosanmi's email begins,

> The other person I could recall I've had such [a] recall [with], on a few occasions, has been Kongi [Soyinka] himself. Bisi, there is no serious writer who can know the absolute implication – aesthetic and philosophical – of what he/she has written! That's my experience with WS. He expresses surprise at times about some insights brought to bear on some of his works. You know he doesn't like to discuss his works.[236]

If Soyinka indeed expresses surprise in relation to the meaning critics and scholars infer from his work, one can safely conclude that he is more of the messenger rather than the creator of the message and in this sense he is a postmodernist par excellence. Lest we forget, Soyinka does not only effortlessly mix the 'familiar' with the 'foreign' to create a new aesthetics – theoretically and theatrically – he is also gifted with the extraordinary power to look at present situations through the prism of the past, to foretell the calamities of the future. Motsa notes in her thesis,[237] for instance, that the year in which

[236] Just to reiterate, Awosanmi was a course mate during my undergraduate years in Ife. In 2003 he obtained his Ph.D from the University of Ibadan focussing on the works Soyinka and Yeats. Awosanmi has since worked as a lecturer at the Theatre Department of University of Ibadan and in the process has become one of Soyinka's close confidants. When I was in Nigeria in 2010 to direct my play *Home, Sweet Home* at the MUSON festival in Lagos, Soyinka and Awosanmi were auditioning actors for a proposed production of Soyinka's play *The Beatification of the Area Boys* but to the best of my knowledge the project was postponed. It is also worth noting that Soyinka is also known as Kongi in Nigeria, an alias he was given since he played the part of Kongi in his play *Kongi's Harvest*. I have attached my email correspondence with Awosanmi to this thesis and marked it Appendix 1B.

[237] Motsa for instance notes in her Ph.D Thesis, 'A Tiger in The Court' that Soyinka sets *The Invention* (1959) in South Africa in the future, specifically 1976 and it turned out that it was the year that the country experienced black students riot that changed the cause of the country's history. See Motsa 'A Tiger in Court', p. 283. Similarly

Soyinka sets *The Invention* is 1976 and it turned out to be prophetic. Similarly it is my view that when Soyinka was writing the line: "I will insist on being difficult. Then the Warders will punish me with solitary confinement" (210) for the character of Professor in *The Road* in 1965, hardly did he know that he was foretelling his own future. "Less than a month after *The Road* took first prize in London's 1965 Commonwealth Festival", as Henry Louis Gates Jr. points out, "Soyinka was imprisoned"(Gates, 1981, 65). In this respect, Soyinka is more of a medium[238] cum post-colonial writer, but as we have seen in this thesis, he has not only relied on theatre to further his post-colonial agenda, Soyinka would lay down his life and carry gun if need be to ensure that Nigeria becomes truly independent. "The Colonised man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and on a basis for hope" (Fanon 1965, 187), writes Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. "But to ensure that hope and to give it form," Fanon stresses, "he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul to the national struggle" (ibid.). It is against this complex philosophy-defying socio-political background that Soyinka cannot afford to be an arm-chair philosopher, and hence the complexity inherent in his dramaturgy.

If we recall, when Soyinka was asked to elucidate on why his work is complex in the interview John Agetua recorded with him in 1974, his remark was: "complex subjects sometimes elicit from the writer complex treatments" (Agetua 1974, 35). As we have discussed in this work, Soyinka wrote and directed *The Invention* in 1959 to criticise the then apartheid regime in South Africa. In 1959 he began to write *A Dance of the Forests* to remind fellow citizens of the soon-to-be-independent Nigerian nation state of history's tendency to repeat itself. In 1965 he wrote *The Road* to abate the incessant carnage and needless deaths on Nigerian motor roads. In 1973, he was commissioned by the Royal National to adapt *The Bacchae of Euripides* in which he focuses and ridicules the authoritarian regime of Nigeria and many other African countries. In 1974 he wrote his masterpiece *Death and the King's Horseman* in three days

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many critics have suggested that *A Dance of the Forests* is prophetic of the Nigerian Civil war that broke out in 1967.

[238] I cannot help seeing Soyinka as someone who is possessed or in state of hypnosis when he sits down to write. In the interview with Nwoffiah in California in 2006 Soyinka recalled that when he lost the manuscript of *The Strong Breed* (1964), he went back in and wrote the play all over again from the beginning to the end. He also said that he is not a disciplined writer like the monks of the trade, that if he does not feel like writing he will do something better with his time. He said he wrote *Horseman* in three days rolling in and out of the couch until it was finished. In my view, as a playwright, there are very few writers in the world such as Soyinka.

in an attempt to challenge the smugness of the colonialists. But if my conclusion is that Soyinka is more of a Nietzsche than a Shakespeare, how does this impact on his corpus of Yoruba tragedy?

8.3 How (Not) To Direct Soyinka

It is due to the fact that Soyinka is first and foremost a philosopher rather than a playwright that he has been able to successfully postulate his own theory of Yoruba tragedy, which is essentially an inversion of the time-tested Aristotelian tragedy. It is worth noting, however, that it is in an attempt to take this inversion to a dialogical (or dramaturgical) conclusion that Soyinka has patterned his so-called Yoruba tragic plays that I have discussed in this thesis along the line of the Yoruba philosophy which he has successfully theorised in his essay 'The Fourth Stage'. But philosophy as it is written is impossible to dramatise. The important thing, therefore, for anyone who wants to interpret Soyinka's work is to, in the first instance, endeavour to deconstruct the philosophy inherent in Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy before any attempt of staging it as a performance is made. It is when directors treat Soyinka's work as they would a Greek tragedy or a Shakespeare's play that they fall short as the director of a Yoruba tragedy. "The architectonics of Soyinka's theatre usually creates a problem for those who cannot penetrate its opaque façade with imagination and perception" (Adedeji 2005, 114-115), as Joel Adedeji has noted. It is in this sense that Adedeji has likened Soyinka's theatre to the *Ifa* oracle. "*Owe ni Ifa n pa*," Adedeji reiterates, "*omoran ni i mo*" (Ifa speaks in parables; it is the knowledgeable who comprehends it). In this sense, Soyinka's theatre is not designed to arouse the cathartic feelings of pity and fear in its audience but to enable the audience to experience the kinetic energy of African theatre viscerally in all its physical and metaphysical dimensions. It is by experiencing theatre in its stimulating ritual form where, not only the spoken words, but music, songs, trance, incantations, dance, and mime play vital roles that the true meaning of Soyinka's aesthetics, as Etherton has remarked, "is transferred to the audience who are energised by the very process by which meaning is established" (Etherton 1987, 35). The fact that most directors have failed to properly get the process of transferring Soyinka's philosophical plays from page to stage or from its source culture to a target culture should not diminish their potency. As Etherton has put it,

> That the process is not always successful does not negate its wider intention of diminishing the gap between the revolutionary poet – dramatist and his potential revolutionary audience. Often the process cannot work because it is contradicted by a director who would seek to put the playwright on a pedestal and fail to wrest the meaning out of the text (Etherton 1987, 35).

The inference that I will draw from Etherton's remark is that the best way to direct Soyinka is to try and find gaps in his argument and create meaning out of it. In my view Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy is essentially postmodern and it requires a postmodern director to do it justice. So, anyone who wants to direct Yoruba tragedy must first of all respectfully find the gaps in Soyinka's tightly written text and then imaginatively fill the gaps.

Whereas Esiaba Irobi criticises Yvonne Brewster's stylistic Jamaican approach to directing her 1992 Talawa presentation of *The Road* in his essay, 'The Six Blindfolded Men and the Elephants', I would argue that it is precisely the postmodern advice which Irobi, in the same essay, proffers to any non-Yoruba director, who would like to direct a Yoruba tragedy that Brewster heeded in her production. Irobi's words are: "If we are going to take on Soyinka's tragedy, we need to do our research into the culture that the rituals sculpted into them come from and approximate, not necessarily replicate them in our international productions" (Irobi 2005, 58). That was what Yvonne Brewster did when she directed *The Road* for Talawa by using Jamaican performative sign systems with which she was familiar to signify to her audience the Yoruba sign systems that were foreign to her and most members of her multicultural audience. That was what Rufus Norris did when he and his team travelled to Nigeria (the source culture) to source and buy every stage props that were used for the production of the *Horseman* at the National in 2009. That was what Phyllida Lloyd should have done but she went to Soviet Union instead. However, she engaged Peter Badejo as her cultural advisor. The only director of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedies that we have analysed in this work who did not heed Irobi's words was Roland Joffe. Joffe took it upon himself to further adapt Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* that was presented at the National in 1973 and as a consequence, he demonstrated the soul-destroying capability of western interculturalism at the hands of the wrong director. So, what this means in the final analysis is that, Soyinka might be a Yoruba philosopher, he is also a playwright whose plays can enthral if they are handled by the right pair of hands and directed by postmodern, intercultural and innovative directors. But in Soyinka's view the most important thing in any inter- or cross-cultural undertaking or collaboration is to have respect for whatever culture(s) is involved. He has already dramatised this view-point powerfully in *Horseman*, but he put it very succinctly in his interview with Appiah in 1987 thus:

> You see when you go into any culture. I don't care what culture it is, you have to go with some humility. You have to understand the language and by that I do not mean what we speak; you've got to understand

> the *language*, the interior language of the people. You've got to be able to study their philosophy, their world view. You've got to speak both the spoken language and the metalanguage of the people (Appiah 1987, 135-137; emphasis is original).

The above advice would certainly stand anyone, including a Yoruba person, who wants to interpret Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy, in good stead. In my view, many Nigerian (and Yoruba to be specific) directors are unable to direct Soyinka's work because they are in awe of 'Kongi himself' and are unsure of how to go about pruning down the Yoruba sign systems that are intricately woven into his dramaturgy. British directors, on the other hand, do not have any problem clipping Soyinka's work since they are not familiar with most of the sign systems any way. The irony of the situation, however, is that western directors who are not afraid to cut Soyinka's plays would always require the assistance of the so-called Nigerian cultural advisors to decode all the Yoruba sign systems in the plays. That is the reason that I have embarked on this research. And the only conclusion that remains to be drawn from my research is that while Brewster and Norris have done their best to transfer Soyinka's play from page to stage and from its source culture to the target culture in Britain, by all accounts, there is room for improvement.

When *Africa Today* asked Soyinka to comment on the outcry: "why are we having a white man directing a Nigerian play, and not just any play – one of Wole's most excellent play", heard from some quarters during the run of *Horseman* at the National, his response was characteristically pointed:

> I don't see why not. I have directed white plays, Russian play and American play. I have directed a West Indian play, so what is the farce about white man and black play [?] I don't see why a white man [or woman] cannot direct a Nigerian play and vice versa. We have all been to school where we played and directed Bernard Shaw, Moliere and so forth. Theatre should be cross-cultural (Soyinka in *Africa Today*, 13)

While I share Soyinka's sentiments that theatre should be cross-cultural, in my view, the best of the presentations of his Yoruba tragedy, either in Nigeria or in the UK, is yet to come. Such a production would be handled by an artist (of mixed race parentage preferably)[239] who has a deep understanding of

[239] Being a parent of a mixed race daughter, I am obviously biased towards people of mixed race parentage. But the fact remains that every day children are born to parents who are not from the same culture and I believe such children personify interculturalism by virtue of the fact that, all things being equal, they are brought up in an

western culture and a respect for and appreciation of Yoruba culture and cosmology in the sense that "When a child is born, it is there and validly so, and does not need any explanation to justify the logic of existence" (Nwoko 1981, 473), as Demas Nwoko has pointed out. "If it is an African child, it will be black and if it is European, an African dress will not make it black" (ibid.). In other words, Soyinka's plays, though written in English, are essentially Yoruba tragedies and one can only imagine what kind of resonance a presentation of a Soyinka play on a main London stage directed by a postmodernist theatre director who is Yoruba at heart but thinks like an Occident would have. When I raised the issue of a Nigerian director directing a Nigerian play for a British audience with Brewster, her view was:

> I think that a Nigerian play directed by a Nigerian, somebody like Peter – I use Peter as an example, because I find what he does very, very affecting and wonderful – would be an experience that I would love to partake of and so would a lot of other people in the British audience (Appendix 2A).

For the time being, a production of a *Horseman*, directed by someone such as Badejo with Phyllida Lloyd as his co-director, featuring Yvonne Brewster as Iyaloja (the matriarch who is the leader of the market women in *Horseman*) will remain a mere figment of one's imagination. It is true, as Badejo has stated, that "one cannot predict the habit of an unborn baby", but such a production would be cross-cultural theatre at its best, and would also exemplify an 'extended *mise-en-scene*' (to use Rohmer's term) in the sense that all imaginable semiological, linguistic and dramaturgical barriers would not be an issue. But the real question is: would the western hegemony give a black director such as Badejo the kind of opportunities that are available to western directors such as Phyllida Lloyd, Rufus Norris and Roland Joffe? No. In the world of interculturalism, writes Bharucha,

> one would be compelled to ask whether non-western directors share the same intercultural opportunities that have been made to western directors like Schechner..., who has recently worked on a Chinese opera adaptation of the *Oresteia* in Taiwan (.....). Would the decision makers ever consider the possibility of an Indian director doing Goethe or Brecht in German without knowing German (Bharucha 2000, 41)?

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environment in which they have the opportunity to understand and perhaps have equal respect for the respective cultures from which their parents hail. For more of my view, see Adigun, Bisi 'Why + How = Wow', in *The Irish Times* Weekend Magazine; November 1, 2008.

The question that Bharucha has posed can easily be applied to Soyinka's tragic plays, because while they are all written in English they are quintessentially Yoruba and without ignoring the value of interculturalism they will be better interpreted by a Yoruba director because one needs to understand the language and what Soyinka calls metalanguage of the Yoruba people before one can deconstruct Soyinka's plays. So, to suggest the ideal director of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy going forward, it would be instructive to duly acknowledge Demas Nwoko's recommendations for the kind of director that should handle what he terms the new African theatre. "In the new African theatre", Nwoko writes,

> my chosen director would be a good dancer and choreographer, and along with these accomplishments he should have developed an ear for good music. He should have become so conversant with shape and use of space that he can decide on the most practical use of costumes and props (Nwoko 1984, 476).

In my view these are all the qualities that Badejo possesses. However, it is Badejo's view that he will be too 'Yorubacentric' (to use his term) if he were to be considered to direct a major British presentation of a Nigerian play, such as Soyinka's. But in reality the contribution that Badejo had made to all the British theatre productions for which he had worked as a cultural advisor and as an all-round African performing artist in his own right is invaluable in intercultural terms. But Badejo in Britain is a topic for another thesis. To conclude this thesis, I want to stress that the ideal director of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy going forward must be a talented, postmodern, and globalised co-ordinator who possesses all the qualities that Nwoko recommends in his essay. But above all, such a director would be an artist who is fearless, gifted and innovative just like Soyinka. But while the search for an ideal director continues, in all likelihood it is white directors that will be afforded any foreseeable future opportunity to direct a major presentation of Soyinka's work on the British stage. It is in anticipation of such a presentation and the critical and intercultural analyses which it would engender that I have proposed an Africanist intercultural theoretical model that I feel would be appropriate to conduct the kind of analysis carried out in this study.

8.4 And finally....getting into the Zone

The newly proposed Talking Drum and Keyboard model presupposes the notion that Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy is an English composition of Yoruba ritual song that is being played on the keyboard. However a talking drummer is there to intermittently and rhythmically accentuate the melody that is being played on the keyboard to remind the listeners that this is indeed an African song being played on the keyboard

and hence Yoruba words such as *panla*, *eba* and the Yoruba songs that are inserted here and there dramaturgically in say, for instance, *The Road*, which I have analysed in chapter six. It is important not to forget, however, that it is from my vantage position as a Yoruba man who is resident in Europe that I have conducted the analysis of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy in this work. When English theatre critic Benedict Nightingale, who is clearly unfamiliar with Yoruba culture, saw the 1992 Talawa production of *The Road*, his comment was: "Seldom have I seen a piece that took for granted so much that was so alien." To emphasise his point, Nightingale goes on to quote a part of Salubi's line from the play: "Do you know any self-respecting driver who will eat *eba* without *panla*". And to conclude, Nightingale asked the 'intercultural' question: "When even the recipes prove elusive, what chance of cracking a play's cultural codes" (Nightingale, 1992). I would argue that the reason Soyinka adds the explanatory line: "Stockfish? You mean this Panla?" to the play is for non-Yoruba speaking reviewers such as Nightingale, but it is very apparent that despite Soyinka's effort, Nightingale still missed Soyinka's point. It was Patrice Pavis who pointed out that one of the uses of interculturalism in the development of performance theory is that it certainly: "forces the analyst to reconsider his own cultural parameters and his viewing habits, to accept elements he does not fully understand" (Pavis 1992, 5). Definitely, Nightingale, in his criticism of the cultural specificity of the Yoruba 'recipes' to which Soyinka refers in *The Road* has demonstrated to us that he is no such analyst. It is my hope that the theoretical model we have proposed here will prevent such a myopic review of an African play written in English and staged in Britain or any part of the western world, for that matter. In other words, I hope the new theoretical model would be a gateway for directors, performers, critics, and scholars or, indeed, anyone outside Soyinka's world who wants to get into the zone of Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy. "I'm irritated when people from outside my world say they find it difficult to enter my world," Soyinka confided in Anthony Appiah in the interview he granted him in 1987,

> It's laziness, it's intellectual laziness...especially today when communication is a matter of course. There are economic relations between all the nations of the world. I see in Nigeria millionaires, multinational corporations, a constant exchange of films, video tapes, radio, music...I find no difficulty at all in entering into Chinese literature, Japanese literature, Russian literature, and this has always been so. I think the barrier is self-induced. "This is a world of the exotic, we cannot enter it." The barrier is self-created. By now it has to be a two-way traffic. There can be no concession at all; the effort simply has to be made (Appiah 2001, 131).

It must be borne in mind that Soyinka made the above remark in 1987. We now live in a globalised world in which the concept of culture is rapidly changing. In this sense whether the Occident is prepared to make the effort or not the traffic is now multidimensional and multinational with the proliferation of Google, Facebook and YouTube occasioned by the internet. Perhaps this is the condition that Lyotard might refer to as the 'Post-Post Modern Condition' I would call it the Inter-Cross-Cultural Information Age and we can perhaps designate its study in the academy as 'Post-inter-cross-culturalism'. But no matter how globalised or uniform the cultures of the world appear, I would argue that drama such as Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy will remain a 'culture capsule'. And for it to transfer successfully from its source culture to any target culture, its cultural specificity must be acknowledged and respected in the same way that one would have to understand English language to present any Shakespeare play to a Nigerian audience. For it must always be borne in mind that "the work of a director principally involves responsibility towards the audience", if we may quote Soyinka one more time:

> [S/]He must always find idioms, whether in the field of music, poetry, or scenography, to interpret what might be abstruse elements. The director must bring out images in concrete terms which are merely in verbal terms within the book. When [s/]he moves a play from one area to another, seeks certain symbols, certain representational images in order to facilitate – because you're encapsulating a history of a people within a couple of hours. If you take Coriolanus to Africa, it's the responsibility of the director to try to transmit the metaphors within the particular language, the visual images, in terms which cannot be too remote. But then again, I believe that the audience must not be over-indulged, and once (as a director) I feel I have satisfied myself, that I've eased the transition, the rest is up to the audience. They can take it or leave it (Appiah 2001, 132).

But to appropriately and successfully transfer a Yoruba tragedy, which is the primary concern of this study, from page to stage and its source culture to a target culture, the advice Annemarie Heywood proffers in her essay, 'The Staging of Soyinka's Plays' becomes pertinently instructive, in my view. In Heywood's words,

> The easiest temptation in interpreting Soyinka's brilliant dramatizations of ideas for the stage is to develop their surface realism; for actors to lose themselves in the vividly differentiated parts; for audiences to relish the rich evocations of the familiar and the sparkling fun of it all. That way perplexity about 'meaning' is inevitable. The remedy lies in interpreting the texts] like a musical score (Heywood 2001, 50).

It is with Heywood's affirmation in mind that I conclude this thesis by reiterating that Soyinka's tragedy is a musical score, its director is what Rustom Bharucha calls a "magical conductor or a master of sacred ceremonies",[240] its actors are performers in a westernised ritual orchestra, and its audience and critics alike are active participants and not passive onlookers. That is the only way, to my mind, that whoever partakes in Soyinka's 'gestalt' (to borrow Adedeji's word once again), be they African or Occident, male or female can get into the zone where the complexity, post-coloniality, transculturality as well as musicality of his dramaturgy are transformed into an experience of beauty, profundity and concinnity.

[240] Ironically it is in the context of criticising Antonin Artaud's misreading of Indian sacred culture that Bharucha uses this term. Bharucha argues that Artaud is fascinated by the spirituality of Indian theatre practice. "In Artaud's mind's eyes", as Bharucha puts it "the director became 'kind of magical conductor, a master of sacred ceremonies'". I actually think these are the appropriate terms to describe the kind of director that Soyinka's Yoruba tragedy requires. See Bharucha, 1993, p. 16.

APPENDIX 1: EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

Appendix 1A
Adigun's email with Esiaba Irobi.

From :	Esiaba Irobi <irobi@ohio.edu>	Mon, 27 Nov, 2006 19:59
Subject :	RE: My dissertation	1 attachment
To :	'bisi adigun' <bisi@ireland.com>	

Excellent title and content.

Perhaps my essay, soon to be published in the Soyinka Journal, will help you.

The essays here in are copyrighted. The journal has not yet been published. So just use it for your dissertation and do not publish or send anything to anybody from the journal. My essay is titled: The Six Blindfolded Men and the Elephants.

Let me see your first draft once you are ready.

Esiaba

-----Original Message-----
From: bisi adigun [mailto:bisi@ireland.com]
Sent: Sunday, November 26, 2006 10:54 AM
To: Esiaba Irobi
Subject: Re: My dissertation

Dear Esi,

How body? I sincerely hope you are speedily regaining you health. I look forward to seeing you in January.

Thanks for asking about my dissertation. I have been thinking seriously what and how my work could contribute to the vast resources already available on Soyinka. Originally I was going to expand on my MA thesis by looking at the theory and plays of Soyinka from an intercultural perspective; hence the title: 'The Interculturality of Soyinka's Dramaturgy.' I have however been struggling to write twenty thousand words and I must admit that I am not very sure that I know exactly how to sustain the interest and write 70,000 words required of me , without parroting what everyone else had written or said.

So on Friday, I met with a drama lecturer who taught me during my days in UCD (he is now a a mentor and a good friend) to seek his advice. He opined that I should try and come up with something on Soyinka from my perspective, which I think someone else can not write about. Since the meeting I have been thinking and just yester-night an idea struck me.

As a theatre practitioner living in the west, I believe I am in a vantage position to examine how

Soyinka's plays have been produced, received and reviewed here in the west. From the perspective of a Yoruba and a theatre practitioner living in the West, I want to examine how, producers, audiences and reviewers who are non Yoruba and based in the west decode some of his works that are unarguably rooted in the cultural matrix of the Yoruba. So my new title is:

'Playing Away: A critical analysis of the production and reception of Soyinka's drama in Europe and North America.'

What do you think?

Regards,

Bisi Adigun

Appendix 1B

Adigun's e-mail correspondence with Tunde Awosanmi

----- Original Message -----
From: Tunde Gbenga
To: Bisi Adigun
Sent: Thu, 17 May 2012 06:02:12 +0200 (CEST)
Subject: Re: One more request

Bisi,

That, no doubt, was a memorable discussion over the phone. I must tell you that i don't usually get the opportunity of such quality discussion with my Ife colleagues, with the exception of Isola Balogun of course. It's the kind of reflection, spontaneous at times, that is prompted by a particular weight and direction of conversation.

The other person i could recall I've had such recall, on a few occasions, has been Kongi himself. Bisi, there is no serious writer who can know the absolute implication - aesthetic and philosophical - of what he/she has written! That's my experience with WS. He expresses surprise at times about some insights brought to bear on some of his works. You know he doesn't like to discuss his works. But I do not know why and how he has been allowing me that indulgence.

Having you to muse with on some of these things that are resident in one's sub-conscious understanding is quite great, man.

Well, I'm just too glad that you have only said that the play is 'too dense and difficult to comprehend' and not that it is outrightly incomprehensible as some of our teachers had misled us to believe in the past. That play, for me, is one of the simplest of Soyinka's plays. Of course, it is loaded with certain cultural/aesthetic tropes that have been 'privately refined' in Soyinka's imaginative crucible. This may be the reason for the seeming cloudiness. But I must assure you, it's as simple as the Jero Plays.

.
Elaborating on the idea in a mail would be okay, if that would be scholastically conventional enough. The only problem is that I'm a (lazy?) hesitant writer. But, who am I to refuse an order from my Ife senior! Could you give me a few days to collect my thoughts so I can put the idea together in, at least, a cognate manner? Maybe a page or so.

Bisi, finish what you're doing there quick and come home. There are many things to attend to here.

Greetings to your family.

'Tunde AWOSANMI, Ph.D.
Department of Theatre Arts,
University of Ibadan,
Nigeria.

From: Bisi Adigun <bisi@ireland.com>
To: Tunde Gbenga <atundah@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, 15 May 2012, 19:46
Subject: One more request

Hello Tunde,

Naturally I have been mulling over our very interesting telephone discussion of yesterday in respect of our generation and our relation with WS.

I must say that I do find your observation of Soyinka's A Dance of the Forest as his canonical work very interesting. In fact, I must admit that that was perhaps the first time I heard the word 'canonised' being used in that context.

As I said, I am presently writing on the play and I just read it again recently and I must admit that I find it too dense and difficult to comprehend, let alone enjoy.

Having said that I remember that when I got to the point when they are talking about the motor accident, it struck me that it must have been that segment that inspired The Road. Then it all made sense the way you articulated your observation that if Soyinka had not written Dance, he would not have been able to achieve what he

has been able to achieve with the other serious plays in his canon.

I would love to quote this insightful observation of yours. So if you have any material published or unpublished on the subject would you be kind to send it to me. So I can appropriately source the quote. Otherwise you can send me and email as regards what we discussed over the phone yesterday and I can cite it as a personal communication with you.

I must add that one conclusion that my thesis seems to be leading me towards is: Soyinka is more of a Nietzsche than a Shakespeare. I will understand if you have a different view on this. But I am happy to discuss it further with you some day.

I look forward to reading from you.

Take care of your self.

Regards,
Bisi Adigun

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWS

Appendix 2A

Olabisi Adigun's (OA) Interview with Yvonne Brewster (YB)
5 May 2012 The Tricycle Theatre Kilburn London.

OA: Can you first tell me a bit about Talawa?

YB: The thing about Talawa is, it's a Jamaican word, it means small, feisty and female. So she Ikkle, means she's small but she Talawa that is the saying she's small but she's strong don't mess with her. That's what it means and that is really what it was. Okay so Talawa. The thing about Talawa was to do black classics at first, black classics which they weren't ever done in this country or if they had done, it was time then to do it again and then afterwards to give the black actors the chance of doing not just maids and spiffs and murderers, to give them to play parts that in the wide spectrum of life. Okay you can murder as well but sometimes you can be a king so that was the whole thinking behind it. By the time I left we have made the point that black people are as just as multi faceted and just as multi-talented and just as multi-human as anybody else. I am not saying that we were more, I am just saying there is equanimity that was sometimes not obvious in the way in which we treat it. We started off with classics - Jamaican classics, Caribbean classics, African, African/American and then we got modern and doing things that were written by people who live in the country now and so it was alright. I had to put up with a lot of jealousy. ..... Should I tell you how I got into this Soyinka thing?

OA: That's my next question.

YB: Well... I was quite established at Talawa and we got this building as a theatre company at the Cochrane and the problem was what play to use to open the thing. I talked to a lot of people and people were giving me all sorts of ideas and none of them really thrilled me. And I was doing *Anthony and Cleopatra* at the time when I had to make this decision and Derek Walcott came to see my *Anthony and Cleopatra,* which he sort of like, because I was playing.....I was thinking of Cleopatra really as a very successful business woman instead of being ...because I saw a profile really on a coin and I kind of thought this is no *femme fatale;* this a real good business woman.....and that is what we did and Derek really liked that. And I have known him for a long time ....since the 70s and I say to him Derek ...I don't know what to do to open the theatre company because if I do a comedy, we've had it because they are going to say "oh this is just black people singing and dancing all the time" which is.....if I do a Caribbean play, they are going to say ...it's because ....If I do an English play.... I don't really want to. I just want to do a play that is a challenge to me. He said you want a challenge, I tell you something, I have seen some of your work.. You want a challenge? ..Do *The Road*, because I tried ..this is Derek Walcott saying to me. I tried to direct *The Road* and I failed miserably.. I could not understand what the hell it was all about. And Wole.....because they know each other... laughed. Let's see how good you are. I went: "I'm going to read it, I've never read it".

I read it and didn't know what the hell it was all about, but there was something which clicked into me, I

love the Professor because I could see people like the Professor out of my own existence in Jamaica in here in England here that Professor is such a wonderful, wonderful theatrical character. So I said okay, I would do it. Well my Board nearly killed me, they said it is not doable, nobody will come and it's going to be a disaster. I said well..... that's what I am doing if you don't want me to do it, you can sack me, but that's what I am doing. I had a friend called Kole Omotoso and I told him that I want to do *The Road* and he said: "Oh my God!". So he arranged a meeting ...Wole was having something.... being presented with something at the National and he arranged that he was over here and I was working at the National, because I was doing *Blood Wedding* at the time, at the national. And we met, and I was so terrified I was sitting there in the little part of one of those places in the National and I go: oh my God this is a very famous man. What am I doing? I don't understand this play... .he is going to ...and he is so clever.. he is going to push me under the table. Well this is how it went: there is Kole (doing Kole's voice) "May I present Professor Soyinka" (back to her own voice)...You know the right pronunciation "Sho- yin-ka" okay. (Back to doing Kole's voice): "May I present Yvonne Brewster. Now be very careful Yvonne, he has an anthology of wives" (Laughter, then back to her voice). And I just fell about...You know what he said: (doing Soyinka's voice) "Oh yes, and all the children are the little poems" (laughter again then back to her voice). That was my introduction to Wole Soyinka. He said you want to do *The Road*, he said you'll do it.

Well Kole helped me quite a lot and Peter Badejo.... because Peter understands a lot. Peter Badejo is a very important person in my life in terms of anything Nigerian because with *The Gods Are Not to Blame* without Peter, I don't know what I would have done. But *The Road* now it was decided that ...they thought that my approach to it was completely different from anything Nigerian. So they thought it is about time an approach which is a non-Nigerian approach was attempted for *The Road,* because the first time it was done in England, it was done very much along Nigerian line. This is what I was told anyway.

OA: Soyinka was part of the production. He came over from Nigeria.

YB: Yes...Well and I couldn't do this. So the Arts Council gave me a bursary and I was allowed to go to Nigeria for three weeks. And I stayed at the house of Ola Rotimi

OA: Where? Is it in Ife?

YB: Ife

OA: So it was in Ife?

YB: Oh yes, but I went with him to Port Harcourt as well. We drove.. we drove nearly the whole night.

OA: From Ife?

YB: Yes from Ife to Port Harcourt.. ohhhh and he showed me what a Professor was in Nigeria. And I will

always be grateful to Ola for that. Because.. you see.... you are a Nigerian, you don't understand how difficult it is to appreciate the Professor. So, he said we are going down to Port Harcourt . Now my piggot [Peugeot] car needs some help so we'll go into the Professor. He did it deliberately. And then we rode, we got a bumpy road and then we end up under this tree with this man in some white overalls. And he said: "Yvonne, this is the Professor of Peugeot". In Nigeria, if you are the top of the tree, you are the Professor. All of a sudden -

OA: The Professor in Soyinka's *The Road* made sense.

YB: You understand? Because you could read thousands of books about this and that and all the way people had done it and what you should do and what you shouldn't do. But that is more important to a theatrical director not somebody of cultural niceties that is going to reproduce culture on the stage. You see, there is a difference. You can put culture on the stage....Rufus... Rufus was always, you remember Rufus? I can't remember his last

OA: Rufus Orishayomi

YB: Oh yeah, yeah he was always putting culture on the stage. You see, I can't do that; it is not my culture. But I can take a play which is supposed to be a piece of theatrical work, which you know is dramatic and I can take it..... I can look at through my eyes, I don't have Nigerian eyes, I have Caribbean eyes. I can take it and see what I find in it through the humanity and that is what we did. And we had... Kole helped me a lot.

OA: How did help? In what.... as a dramaturge or ...?

YB: He helped me interpreting the role of the gods and..... the symbolism of the Professor in the junkyard. And the man who used to go...you know, it was almost like Derek Walcott' Bolom so that Derek was doing it in his own way a Nigerian thing whereas you have this strange creature, who is around, who is almost like Aerial who is almost like Caliban, there's Shakespearean overtones. There is all of that. That's where I am coming from.

OA: What's a Bolom?

YB: Well, Bolom is an unborn child. In Derek Walcott's Tgan

OA: One of the plays?

YB: Yes a play by Derek. So I just said in the Caribbean, we have this creatures in The Road, there is that strange creature that is around, who is like a dog, like a human like manifestation of something unborn....showing the problems of the society as it were. And I found it in Shakespeare as well .. so that you have the Aerial. I put a gourd around the earth. All things are so tied up, so that the internationalism of The Road was clear to me. So I felt more confident to be able to approach it without the Nigerian

....being a Nigerian. And we did it for the text. The church that cross, that thing that seems to me to the intervening, interfering nature of that religiosity. So when I speak into the designer, I needed to find a symbol of that church that was there. So we had this big prospect church with this cross almost overshadowing. So I found those things in it and everybody was going: "oh that's not in the play", I go it is. See it there. "But that's not how we do it. Well I am not you

OA: Who's saying that?

YB: Oh lots of Nigerians. Oh when I was doing *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, they were going, you can't, you have a stool for the king, nobody else can sit on it. I said but when it is the King's stool, it is the king's stool it is the one prop that we have. Sometimes it is the King's tool (end of tape)

YB: You were asking me if a director was better off....

OA: A director is more or less a privileged audience. What I mean by that is.. I direct as well...I don't know whether you know but I have learnt from working with you, I have learnt from working with Alby-

YB: Alby James ..Yes

OA: So what I am saying is that most of the time when I am working with people I learn a lot from them. So my directing is.. I am not a controller, I guide.

YB: You can't be a controller. Good directors are not Hitlers. Because all they get are just little Hitlers.

OA: What I am saying is .. remember what I am doing is Nigerian plays on the British stage.

YB: On the British stage.

OA: And for British audience.

YB: Yes, yes. So do I think, that a play, say for instance *The Road* directed by a Nigerian director on a British stage would be as important or as significant or as helpful or as energetic or as clear as it would be directed by a Nigerian. Well now, you put me in a funny plug, because ..I think it depends on the Nigerian director. Now you mustn't quote me you know, but I mean don't think that somebody who is going to stick to the complete letter of the law how this must be done. There's no way a play must be done. If anybody says "well this is the only way a play can be done", I don't want to even talk to them, I don't have any time of day for them because that means that they should not be in the business because they are lacking in (a) confidence and (b) imagination. So, I think for a British audience Nigerian directors, I mean I've worked with for instance Peter.. Peter doesn't say he is a director, but he is and I believe what Peter would bring to Nigerian play although I had the privilege, you see I have been extremely lucky woman, I have had privilege of working with Peter and I know the generosity of the man, but I also know the wide vision and landscape of the man. And I think that a Nigerian play directed

in England by Nigerian... somebody like Peter.. I use Peter as an example, because I find what he does very, very affecting and wonderful would be an experience that I would love to partake of and so would a lot of other people in the British audience on the British stage.

Howsoever, if you had a Nigerian director that was based, whose directing skills were based on repetition of past deliberations and past manifestations of this text, which was taken from the page to the stage exactly without any kind of transitionals. So if you take the text from the page to the stage without imbuing it with what that stage is and who that stage is speaking to, then I think that perhaps it would be a less interesting experience. How am I doing?

OA: I must say you are doing....I feel blessed...Besides the academic, you are inspiring me as a theatre artist. ... I was going to ask you that how did you go about decoding the Yorubaness but you've told me that having worked with Kole Omotoso. Did you have them with in rehearsals to call upon Omotoso and Peter Badejo or did you access to them?

YB: Peter wasn't there at all. Peter didn't help me with The Road.

OA: Was there any reason or..?

YB: Oh no, no, no, no. I don't know he probably wasn't around because, he helped me with the Gods are not To Blame and I did phone him up every now and again. You I always asking Peter's advice but not recently because I haven't seen him for a while. And Kole just came for a bit, but you know what? To tell the truth what I used to do was having listened to Kole because you are stupid if you don't listen carefully to when people who have something to say speak, because they never repeat themselves, hopefully, too much anyway. And if you listen carefully to Kole you stand a chance of succeeding and that is what I did and if I was in deep, deep trouble, because I think he was in South Africa at the time because he was writing New Dawn, I it was just coming out.

OA: *Just Before Dawn*.

YB: Yes *Just Before Dawn* yes and he was having problems. So I couldn't get hold of him. He wasn't here but you felt that any problem you would work it out. You would use his way of thinking about things and then use that mechanism to work out the problems. And I had Willie Jonah in the cast

OA: Willie Jonah is?

YB: He was from Ghana, but he played the man in the car.

OA: I see.

YB: And I didn't hardly have any African in the piece.

OA: Any particular reason? In fact I was going to ask you about the casting... the casting process.

YB: Well I had ... You know what? I can't cast by nationality. I have to cast by do I spark ...do they spark me? And... Willie Jonah, I didn't even know him, I didn't even know where he came from. But Willie Jonah was such a ..interesting kind of quiet, deadly sort of person. I go yeah, he can do that. Then afterwards, I discovered where they are from. So I had some Nigerians, I had .. most people playing lots of Caribbean people. Umm the Professor was a black English ma.. it was all over. Because my casting is never by nationality. When I did Blood Wedding at the National, I had nine different nationalities. I didn't even realise it at the time. But I cast by feel. I cast by sense of does.. would that person interest me? Because if they interest me they will sure as hell interest the audience because I am hard to interest. So you need to have something of what I am looking for. And then I am willing to take the risk. ... I must say Wole Soyinka really loved it.

OA: Oh ..he saw it?

YB: Oh he... oh I haven't told you that, have I?

OA: No you haven't.

YB: Okay ..well now (gives a shriek-like laughter) Oh this is important because this is this is only....it's just me that will have this. Umm we got permission because Wole said yes. I mean Kole said yes, yes she can do this. After we met... which was fine...well I always bring my playwrights to London for the first night because you know... we black people have got to learn to pay due respect .. you know. He came.. first night. Before that we've been through some hills and some valleys because I think the thing is overwritten (gives a long shriek to suggest she should not have said that)

OA: It's okay.

YB: Well I did. Because in terms of a theatrical experience in this country, it's too long and is repeti...eh you see me now I'm burying myself...but its repetitive. And I am a very good editor. That's my skill with plays; I edit like a beast. Because I see the forward line and I see the full line and I see the characterisation and I edit it and it's so smooth... I am very good at Shakespeare too. And you don't even miss the things. Because I would not take out essentials; I would take out non-essentials. Because I follow my Barry Record, who is a Jamaican playwright who said if you write a sentence and you look at it and you can take out a word out of the sentence and it still has the same meaning that word is redundant and I don't like overwritten stuff. So, I said (laughs again) You know me I'm nobody you know .. and I am saying to this Nobel Prize Laureate...oh God... it's over written.

OA: What did he say?

YB: He went (starts doing Soyinka's voice): "Well what are you going to cut? " (In her voice) I said no I am not cutting anything without your permission, I would send you cut text. Everybody was going cos

they are all kind of tiptoeing and they went "Yvonne are you mad?" And Kole went wwwell. Oh my God. Anyway I sent him this thing and ... I was cheeky you know....I sort of said if well

OA: Did you send it to him?

YB: I sent him the cut text.

OA: Did you send it by email or by letter, that was 92?

YB: I can't remember. I can't remember. It must be email because it would take too long.

OA: 92? Was there email then?

YB: (In Jamaican accent)Yeah man! Oh....It must have been. Email was around then but oh yes....email was around but it wasn't so...I don't know. I can remember because I had a lot of help you know.. Talawa.. I mean my administrator probably did it off.. anyway it was sent.
OA: Ok.

YB: But we never knew where to find him you know because it's either he is Paris or is in Lagos or he is in Ile Ife ...you know

OA: California..

YB: Wherever and that time I think he was probably in Paris I can't remember. Anyway then I just said if I don't hear from you, I presume it's okay. Anyway, the thing was cut... everybody was tiptoeing because any minute we expect to say, permission has been revoked. Anyway he never said word. He turned up on the first night and he said to me: (in Soyinka's voice) "Am I sitting next to you?". (In her voice): "Yes sir". And Lord have mercy, it was the worst first night I've ever had. Every time there was a cut he went (makes a hissing sound)

OA: Every time there was what?

YB: Every time there was a cut, he went (makes the sound again repeatedly at intervals). And I am looking straight ahead. Now, my administrator is looking from the wings outside she's looking to see, she is looking at his face. Everybody back stage, the production manager, everybody hoping against hope that he is not... and they are looking and I am looking straight ahead. We come out for the interval, he doesn't say a word, we give him a drink and everybody crowds around, my administrator was a woman called Angela McSherry, an Irish woman. And she was going what is he what is he saying. I said I don't know not a word and he goes back in, not said a word to me you know. We go back in and I'm going oh my God every time there's a cut, he goes: shshshh. Then we go out. At the end now, people are applauding, because it went down well. And he stood, he applauded and then he said to me: (In Soyinka's voice) "It's better than what I did in Chicago". 'Cause I believe he had done it in Chicago "It's

better than what I did". That's the only thing he said me. ...But I am completely thrilled, there were lots of things wrong with the production and I wish I could do it again now you know.

OA: Such as..

YB: Well... I missed. I missed some of the nuances you know. You can get everything in a production. But I miss, you know, that guy that is always eating...I think he should have add(sic) more to him uumm I think some things I am quite pleased at because the set was fantastic... It was fourteen wrecked cars

OA: Fourteen

YB: Fourteen ..1-4...wrecked

OA: Fourteen wrecked cars

YB: And we used it to clamber over...it's amazing set

OA: Can I tell you the truth? I have read reviews no one mentioned-

YB: Oh, the reviews? Don't talk to me about reviews.. anything I do... I've never had a good review in my life, I don't think. I mean if I was to read these reviews ...they don't... . I have pictures of that set, it was the most incredible set..

OA: Fourteen wrecked cars .., I can see Nigeria straight away...

YB: Yes because that is what it was all about, wasn't it?

OA: Because somebody says in Nigeria, that is the only place you see more cars not moving.

YB: Well that's what I got...I got the set from when I was in Nigeria. And they say why are you doing this? I mean a lot of Nigerians said to me why you have this? I went because that is my impression of Nigeria. And if he is selling, he is in a car . I mean it's all about Ogun, is iron and wrecked cars are metal. And so therefore when you do those movement things you can use.. they clamber over them, you know. And the Professor was so Nigerian, but so colonial. And I thought it was important that I would cast somebody who know about the British colonial, you know, so that it can relate to people here. But it was quite, there was a lot written about this production you know. In various journals and things.....God knows. BJ has something on it. ....I am going to tell you a story about Soyinka (goes on to tell the story of when she saw Soyinka in Kingston in Jamaica where Soyinka was working on his play, The Beatification of the Area Boys). So I don't think he hated the production because he has never been and he can be quite specific and it is such a long time ago now I don't know. But it thought me a lot about taking the text from a culture that you do not know, having respect for that text, having respect for that culture

but taking it off that page and god damn slamming it on the stage you know.

OA: Wow!!. You know what I think they might be a good place ..

YB: to stop.

OA: to stop. May God bless you. Thank you very much

YB: You are welcome.

THE END

Appendix 2B

Adigun's Interview with Rufus Norris in respect of his 2009 production of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* at the National Theatre in London

ADIGUN: Can you recall how it came about that you were asked by the National Theatre to direct Soyinka's *Death and the Kings Horseman*?

NORRIS: The NT were very keen to produce a major African work and Soyinka was the obvious writer to look at. My own personal connection with Nigeria (I was there for several years as a child) and interest in a broad theatrical spectrum made it a very happy marriage, I hope. The actual subject of the play came up during a conversation with Tom Morris, then an Associate t the NT, who I was visiting. Whether the idea was his, or he was repeating an idea from the Literary department, I don't know. Either way, I was immediately taken by the idea, and Nick Hytner called me the next day to confirm that it was real.

ADIGUN: Before you were invited to direct Death, were you familiar with any of Soyinka's work? If yes which one(s)?

NORRIS: In truth I was not very familiar with his plays. I had read several articles by him, knew him of course by reputation, and had read a couple of plays – The Lion and the Jewel and the Swamp Dwellers – but was no expert.

ADIGUN: After you have agreed to direct Death, can you recall what your next course of action was in preparation for the challenges ahead given the fact that you are English and the play is set in colonial period in Nigeria?

NORRIS: Most crucial was to find the key person – someone who could be our touchstone and authority into this history and culture in an accurate and profound way. I found him in Peter Badejo, and Peter's contribution in every area was beyond what I could have hoped for. He is a fantastic man and a wonderful artist to work with. Beyond that, the job was to assemble the right team, particularly the designer and choreographer, and start our research. I did a certain amount of reading and we managed to track down several documentaries that were very informative; not only in historical and geographical terms, but more importantly in spirit/ There is a celebration, an ease about African performance that is very different to our literal and more formalised western traditions, and it was very important to try and tap into that. Also, we started immediatley thinking about casting. There are many wonderful actors in london, but not many that could play Elesin or Iyaloja with authority and accuracy.

ADIGUN: Further to reading Death with a keen eye of a director, what was your first impression of the play?

NORRIS: That there was an underlying theatrical world to discover, in order to honour the complexity that sits under the text. One of the challenges was to make what is perhaps a natural sensibility to a Nigerian audience accessible to a western audience.

ADIGUN: Would you agree with Soyinka as he has written in his Author's Note that Death is not about clash of cultures?

NORRIS: Yes I would, mostly, not least because it is not for a director to question a writer when he states explicitly what he is writing about!

ADIGUN: If you agree with Soyinka what in your own words would you say the Play about? And if you do not agree with him how you did go about presenting the clash of cultures in your production without amplifying it thus?

NORRIS: Of course his anger with the colonialists (which I think fuelled the writing in the first instance) is very much there so the cultures conflict is very present; however, the crisis of leadership that the play centres on, and is a keynote in Soyinka's work generally, is the driving theme. I also think it is a much stronger theme as it transcends everything and is as prescient today as it was then. Responsibility. That's what I think it is about.

There are areas of the production that we were bold with in terms of the culture clash, in order to keep that aspect in the correct balance in the piece, but thay are brought up by you later in this article.

ADIGUN: In the production's programme note, I see that you and a few members of the creative team who were involved in the production travelled to Nigeria to do a bit of research. And from our previous conversations, I understand that you used the opportunity to meet with Soyinka at his house in Abeokuta. Can you recall what you discussed with him particularly in respect of how you intended to go about interpreting his play for a predominantly white British audience?

NORRIS: I was nervous when I met Soyinka in his house, and as usual there were too many people there for us to have anything more than a formal discussion. Also, we had already had an exchange over email about some key issues. We discussed the question of black actors playing the white roles, and I asked his advice about pitfalls – where directors most go wrong with this play, and his worl. We also talked about his African art collection and his completely excellent palm wine.

ADIGUN: As a follow up on the above question, I recall also that you mentioned that you felt it was necessary to edit the play somewhat and for this purpose you had to seek Soyinka's permission. Can you recall how you put this request across to him and how he responded to your request?

NORRIS: To be honest I don't recall the details of that. It may have been the palm wine...Soyinka was very erudite and precise, and also generous – he is a man of the theatre, and understands that each production and time require different solutions, within reason. I think he trusted that I was not going to

radically alter or compromise his work in any way.

ADIGUN: As I have already mentioned to you, I personally found your casting idea of whitening black actors up to play all the white characters in *Death*, on the national stage of Britain in 2009, courageous, fascinating and inspiring. Can you recall how the idea came about and what the reaction of the National Theatre was when you mentioned your casting idea to them considering the fact that there was no shortage of white actors in Britain who would have loved to interpret those roles that are unarguably complex? Did any one, for instance, raise any objection or express any concern on a dramaturgical, cultural or political level?

NORRIS: The idea came from a conversation with Katrina Lindsay, the designer. We were searching for a theatrical solution to a double-headed challenge with the white parts in the play in the context of a production in London at the National Theatre.
Firstly, for a literal-minded white audience, the presence of white characters ruling it over an indigenous population would immediately reduce the play to the simplistic culture-clash interpretation that Soyinka was keen to avoid. Secondly, to be a little blunt, the white characters are not very complex to my mind. They are ignorant and unsympathetic, and while this may be accurate it would again make a white audience feel like they were being judged, thus negating the broader power of the play. By having black actors portraying those parts, a lyer of irony was added which was delightful. The parodying of white characters by black actors was also, for me, a very witty reversal of certain old traditions. It was also funny – the two actors principally involved are both very skilled and did not comment on what they were doing; the sometimes ludicrous racism in their attitudes was somehow amplified by being spoken by black actors.

On another level, it also made for the most wonderful company feeling. 30 black actors and drummers taking over the National Theatre. There are many Nigerians who work there, mostly on security, or in the canteen, and they were thrilled to finally be so represented!

As soon as I had mentioned the idea of black actors "whiting up" to Katrina (the designer) in that initial conversation she announced that she would no longer continue with the project unless we went through with the idea, she was so convinced it was right. The NT were immediately in agreement, and we held a workshop for three days with several actors to test the idea out in various ways. Obviously we knew there would be some backlash in the press etc so we had to be sure, and after the workshop everyone was happy that it was a strong way to go.

ADIGUN: Did you mention your casting idea to Soyinka when you met him? If yes what was his response?

NORRIS: He was supportive. As I said, he is a man who deeply understands theatre.

ADIGUN: Can you recall the reaction of the company when it was announced that black actors were going to play all the white parts in the play? Was there any discussion during the production?

NORRIS: I told every actor who came to audition for the play that we were going to do this. Occassionally someone didn't quite get it, but everyone knew and for the most part were delighted with the idea. Once we started rehearsal we all took it for granted.

ADIGUN: As I have already indicated I am a fan of your casting but for the purpose of my research I must ask you the following: by casting black actors to play all the white characters in *Death*, would you agree that the power of the play has been diluted somewhat to make it palatable for your audience? In fact it is the opinion of one of my interviewees that the white audience who saw your production had been let off the hook in circumstances where culturally specific roles and lines that were specifically written for white characters were given to black actors and therefore the dramatic moments between 'coloniser' and 'colonised' had been reduced to a mere dialogue between two black people, albeit one had been whitened up. A case in point is Jane's response: "So you've returned with a chip on your shoulder..."to Olunde's line: "You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand...". The night I saw the play, this particular line engendered laughter in the audience whereas, I would argue, if Jane had been a white actor, the audience would not have laughed at such a culturally-loaded line. Similarly, it could be argued that had the part of Simon Pilkins been played by a white man, the last image in the last scene when Elesin is on his knees in chains would have had a complete different complexion (forgive the pun) and perhaps would have had a more affecting resonance on a visceral level for your audience. What is your view on this?

NORRIS: I would argue for the opposite on two levels.

Firstly, I don't think people go to the theatre if they think they are going to be attacked, and if they are attacked, they become very defensive and that takes them out of the piece. There is a relationship between actor and audience that can be easily broken if the audience member is bored, distracted or personally affronted in an obvious way. I believe the way to affect an audience is to keep them open, then you can work them with the themes and politics of the story or piece.

It is important in this context to remember several things; the audience of the national theatre are very sophisticated when it comes to story-telling, and the themes and layers will be resonant if they are not distracted. The shared laughter you speak of in that moment for me is much better than an awkward division between the black and white members of the audience. They laughed together at the wit of what Soyinka has written about the ignorance of the age, and how ludicrous it now is in an age where the black actor saying the lines is as British as any white actor you might see on that stage. Another thing to remember is that people either have an awareness of their historical responsibility or they are in denial of it. If they are already aware, telling them again in a blunt way is preaching to the converted. If they are not, or deny it, or justify in this way or that, then they are practiced in the craft of denial. A direct attack on them will only result in a very defensive response rather than any opening of awareness, and nothing is achieved.

I will not quote him directly, but one right-wing and very prominent critic in a national newspaper took against the play and production quite personally, arguing that Nigeria should look to it's current problems of corruption before criticising an age when such problems didn't exist. In other words, Nigeria would be better served if it were still a colony. This fantastical level of ignorance and thinly-veiled racism were exposed in a knee-jerk response to criticism, to the extent that the critic identified exactly the principle theme that Soyinka is examining (ie crisis of leadership) without realising that is what the play is about. My point is that if we had made the criticism of the British more overt and unlayered, his response would have been more widespread. Even on the simplest level, allowing an audience to see black actors mimicking white colonialists with absolute accuracy, I think, helps us to look at ourselves and admire our multi-cultural society at the same time.

Secondly, I come back to your earlier point. Soyinka says the play is about leadership, not a clash of cultures. It is a director's responsibility to honour the intentions of the writer, and I believe by casting black actors across the board in a play about black leadership was the best way of keeping that theme dominant.

ADIGUN: I understand that Soyinka had come to see your production, what did he say to you?

NORRIS: I asked him what he thought. He said "I don't say good, I don't say bad. I never do." Then he spent 30 minutes being incredibly supportive and generous to the cast. I didn't mind, as I know he can be sharp and has plenty of reason to distrust when it comes to directors ruining his work. However, several weeks later I saw him at the box office when I thought he was in USA or Nigeria. He had come back for a second look whilst on a trip to Edinburgh, so he can't have disliked it too muc

Appendix 2C

Adigun's Interview with Peter Badejo at the latter's residence in Holborn, London on the 8th of July 2012

ADIGUN: You took part in the 1990 production of *Death and The King's Horseman* at the Royal Exchange in Manchester in 1990 as consultant and as a praise singer. Can you tell me how your involvement with the production came about?

BADEJO: Since my coming in to London, besides doing my own productions which is dance based, I am also involved in theatrical performances, like Esu's *Faust* by Gabriel Gbadamosi...these are just major ones I am naming...like *The Gods are Not To Blame* with Yvonne Brewster and people have kind of recognised my contribution to these productions not only as an actor, dancer choreographer, but as a consultant. I think that was led to Phyllida Lloyd who was the director of the first Death at the Royal Exchange to seek to find out who could really help her do this production because as much as Wole's writing is international, *Death and the King's Horseman*, the subject itself is not very familiar in this country, we know how the west, their understanding of death and the way they celebrate death, they celebrate death differently and when you say death and the Kings' Horseman, when you first read it's not in the realm. I don't think it is in the realm and concept of the white man's culture. So they needed someone to kind of may be assist them to understand and bring clarity into the culture where this production is surrounded. Phyllida Lloyd after her research sent for me and we had a talk. I just told her simply, I said,

ADIGUN: Did you meet?

BADEJO: Yes we met. I remember the first thing I told her was. I am not really into pacifying African theatre because we have struggled we are struggling and we will still continue to struggle to define our theatre because the term African theatre does not mean anything to me because it is like European Theatre in Africa which to me that is not what it should be. So I asked Lloyd what was her interest in this African play? I mean there are several plays you could pick from. I know she was an upcoming director then. I knew that she was a serious minded director. One she is female and two... I did a bit of finding out from people before I met her that she goes for what she believes in rather than pacifying an audience or pacifying a culture. So we had a discussion and she said no sincerely...

ADIGUN: Uncle Pete, this pacify I would like to kind of ...if you don't mind if you can elaborate on what you mean by pacifying.

BADEJO: What I mean by pacifying is in some cases people present African theatre in a culture where there is a presumption...people presume that ..you know ... a little bit of the raffia skirt culture but not really in what they see as the classical way of presenting theatrical work. So they want to be African not because they believe in it but because that is what sells or because that's the way people see African.

ADIGUN: So you are talking about the exotization ..Okay..... So the question you asked her was: you would like to know why she chose.

BADEJO: Why she chose...

ADIGUN: What did she say?

BADEJO: She said...well the writer and she read quite a number of plays.. African plays. She thought it was high time African theatre work is presented in the forms they are at the moment. She wanted to be inclusive rather than exclusive. And she chose Soyinka's work not because he is a laureate not because of his Nobel Laureate but because she thought that play kind of has to do with an understanding of where people are in this country in different colours especially black people in Britain. And she wanted to present it in such a way that people are able to see other cultures and appreciate it in relationship to them rather than evaluate it from a superior/inferior point of view.

ADIGUN: So that was how your involvement began?

BADEJO: That was how we started.

ADIGUN: So can you tell me how things then developed.

BADEJO: And then we agreed on that she said she would get back to me and then when she got back to me, we then sat down and looked at the script. Actually I first thought she wanted me as consultant and choreographer which is my strength because that is what people know me for. But then she said I believe you are a good actor, I think she must have heard about my role in the Gods Are Not To Blame and as the Faust in Esu's *Faust* during her research. So she said won't you like to play the Praise Singer. (Peter's explanation of what a Praise Singer is). She said she thought the Praise Singer in this play is culturally underpinned, he must have some kind of understanding and she feels (1) with my ability to move, movement ability and (2) my understanding of praise singing from my own culture. She feels it's going to help getting the production to where it is. So I said okay... Then she did her casting and when she was doing her casting too, she was kind of talking to me

ADIGUN: So you were also consulting

BADEJO: Yes.....on the casting.

ADIGUN: Looking at who is good for what?

BADEJO: Exactly, exactly... So the casting was done...and we started rehearsals and I was also involved with the music because I wrote quite a number of the songs out, rewrote them in terms of delivery. Like the *ale le awo n rele.* Soyinka just wrote *alele awo n rele, awo ma mi lo.* And I turn the thing to a song

Muraino Oyelami was brought in in to come and help the music section because I couldn't do everything and I was able to work with him and tell his this is what.....I remember that song very well because it became very popular, the cast loved it so much. It is the lament song:

(Badejo Sings)

(Chorus) Ale le o awo mi lo o
Ale le o o awo mi lo
Ale le o awo mi rele

(Solo) Bina ba ku a feruboju, bogede ku, a fomo e ro po laye o

And it is harmonised that people just love it. So things like that you know. I was able to insert some of my understanding and it worked. We had almost twenty four reviews from different papers....serious reviews.

ADIGUN: Very good. Would you say the play gained something based on the fact that Phyllida Lloyd is not from the culture where the play is based?

BADEJO: Phyllida Lloyd is a trained director, so she brought in as far as I am concerned, all her directorial experience as a tool and then did a cultural extraction to embellish it.

ADIGUN: What does that mean?

BADEJO: Cultural extraction in the sense that, there are lots of things - where is Oyo? , What is Oyo kingdom? As she began to understand what does that kingdom mean, what is the kingship in Oyo? What is the political structure in Oyo that bred Elesin? It is not a western culture. There are similarities... but it is not the same. I am sure if you break down oligarchy or rulership in like kingship and queenship, what you find in Buckingham palace you'll find similarity in Yoruba dynasties but the application is different. So I think Phyllida Lloyd now used two things: her directorial ability and her open-mindedness to be able to say alright...the first approach of someone who is not open-minded towards that play is the condemnation of barbaric culture. Why should Elesin die because a kind dies.....you see that is very judgemental, without really looking at the checks and balances. He is a servant to the king but at the same time he is treated like a king but for every good thing, there is a payment for it and it is agreed it is within the structure. People think he has not got a choice.... He has a choice of not being an Elesin from the beginning.

ADIGUN: Question sir. What you have Phyllida Lloyd didn't have it that is the cultural understanding of the play, which she has, you perhaps didn't have it – that is the directorial training

BADEJO: Yeah...even if I had directorial training, the background is different.

ADIGUN: The background of

BADEJO: The directorial understanding.

ADIGUN: Would you say it is better for her to have directed it considering the fact that the audience is a British audience?
BADEJO: Well... this is a ten thousand dollar question, which we faced again many years later. But we will come back to that. But I think there are some western skills I still believe that Phyllida Lloyd brought into directing the play that maybe a director of her quality....of her calibre from the African point of view would have been so 'afrocentrically' consumed that he may not approach it that way

ADIGUN: Can you be specific sir?

BADEJO: Specific in the sense that Phyllida Lloyd can pick and choose what aspect of the culture she wants to bring into the show. She can pick and choose. First and foremost, she is a director from a western point of view. That's her training, that's what her training is. She's been trained to do that, she is going to direct the play whether you like it or not only from her background. You cannot see beyond your standing point. All you can do is extract from your immediate environment. You can't take from what you don't know. You take from what you can see around and what is available to you. So she can do that extraction. But she did not have a baggage of ...I think first and foremost Phyllida Lloyd's consideration is the audience ... 'I want to satisfy this audience with the message I feel this play is got'.

ADIGUN: Shouldn't that be what a director... where ever they come from, shouldn't that be every director's priority?

BADEJO: Yes priority to be able to communicate to the audience but at the same time one has to be very careful. If it were to be a Yoruba director there are lots of things [s]he would have taken for granted in the play

ADIGUN: That's true.

BADEJO: No matter how good you are as a director if you are doing a work from your own culture, you have a benefit some time of saying I understand it but you also have the problem of assuming for that culture that what you understand, part of it is understood by your audience. So there is a difference between conveying message clearly from a very neutral point of view and conveying a message with assumptions.

ADIGUN: What I think I understand from what you are saying now is that the fact that Lloyd had to work hard to understand the play would help the audience to understand it in the way she communicates it. Meanwhile a Nigerian director might take certain things for granted.

BADEJO: Which in turn might make it clearer for the audience she has there. Phyllida Lloyd's production may not have the same effect in Nigeria as it had here.

ADIGUN: That's a good one. When you say may not have the same effect ...

BADEJO: Because they are two different audiences.
ADIGUN: Which comes back to what we are saying, because what I am trying to do here is I am trying to understand where the interculturality lies, which brings me to my next question: if you were to direct the play?

BADEJO: If I was the director?

ADIGUN: What would you have done differently?

BADEJO: I would have...Let me tell you some of the things I would have done which Phyllida Lloyd adopted and I was surprised that oh she took my advice.

ADIGUN: That's interesting.

BADEJO: The scene where the alter transformation started with Elesin where the Praise Singer took on the vision of the other world for Elesin. When he was trying to hype Elesin to this alter state of consciousness. I told Lloyd, I said this is the Egungun communication in my culture. In African traditional performance, they have what they call the possession level and they have the trance level. The trance level is still a level where you communicate between the two worlds, you are not totally, you are the horse, you are not totally absorbed.

ADIGUN: Okay.

BADEJO: And to use that I said we should try the ancestral voice and straight to me she just said: 'fantastic' so that is why that scene I was doing it in Yoruba... "*Elesin Oba, so n gbohun mi*". And the drum was going, they were playing the drum of death and he was answering in English "*slowly, slowly*"

ADIGUN: You were doing it?

BADEJO: *Yoruba ni, Yoruba la se.*

ADIGUN: Did you translate it?

BADEJO: I translated it into Yoruba

ADIGUN: You're joking me?

BADEJO: Yes. I translated that English part into Yoruba. When this guy saw it, Martin Banham, he wrote a letter to Soyinka that I don't think I have seen any *Death and the King's Horseman*'s production that is as good as this. Because we got into the circle, *Won lu ilu yen, ilu dundun ye lo ... pele pele* (the drum is going) , we started with just straightforward movement. *Bi eegun gidi ni, gbogbo awon obinrin yen na jo* (it is exactly like the Egungun masquerade and the women are dancing). Elesin physically got into it "Elesin *Oba o..so n gbohun mi* Slowly, slowly my lord". We translated that scene, because she just accepted that scene. Yes she saw the vision, because you want this man to get into trance, how do you get him into trance?

ADIGUN: Juts like the Egungun?

BADEJO: Yes we got into a circle and harnessed the physical energy of everybody in the circle movement-wise, so for some time we built it, the audience were into it even though we were all backing the audience, Elesin was like this..

ADIGUN: Was he in the centre?

BADEJO: Yes, Praise Singer was here and the drum was going.

ADIGUN: I can feel it.

BADEJO: You can see it. So she bought the idea. That's one thing I must say. As a director she listened although she had her own strong conviction but she was able to extract what she thinks was culturally valuable for the production, which added more meaning. So in that scene, all the Praise Singer's lines were translated from English

ADIGUN: So you actually-

BADEJO: Literally

ADIGUN: So you went home and actually translate-

BADEJO: I translated it.

ADIGUN: And you bought the script to rehearsals?

BADEJO: And I gave it to Phyllida Lloyd. And I was saying it...Because I was the one who played the Praise Singer and that is why my Praise Singer was different from any other Praise Singer because I just thought about it, you want to commune with the ancestors.

ADIGUN: So the Praise Singer became the dead Oba.

BADEJO: The voice of the ancestor.

ADIGUN: So all those incantatory parts.

BADEJO: It was all done in Yoruba.

ADIGUN: But what about Elesin? Elesin Oba continues in his ...

BADEJO: In English.
ADIGUN: In English?

BADEJO: Well, the actor could not speak Yoruba anyway.

ADIGUN: So could that be the problem?

BADEJO: The problem?

ADIGUN: Would you have, if he was able to speak Yoruba.

BADEJO: If I was doing it in Nigeria, I would have made him answer in Yoruba

ADIGUN: The two?

BADEJO: I would have made him answer in Yoruba. Again that could have been the problem; it would have been my own Yoruba hangover now.

ADIGUN: You see what you are saying now...what you are doing now is you are thinking like a director you see?

BADEJO: I'm thinking like a director, but I am thinking like a Yoruba director

ADIGUN: Yes, but also.

BADEJO: Now you're beginning to understand what I mean by my baggage.

ADIGUN: Yes.

BADEJO: Of that director.

ADIGUN: Then. One thing you're also doing is: you have a benefit of the two audiences.

BADEJO: Yes, but again, you can not predict the habit of an unborn baby, because from what we have seen or heard to record, we can estimate the success of Phillyda Lloyd but because we have not tried this for this audience directed by a Nigerian director who may have this kind of hangover that I am talking about, we are not able to quantify it.

ADIGUN: But you know one thing, and this is where my interculturality idea comes from.

BADEJO: Yes

ADIGUN: Because what you have been able to do was whatever weaknesses she had, you were able to strengthen it with your own cultural background.

BADEJO: Yes, whatever weaknesses that background of hers has or the deficiency because I am Yorubacentric with the production. Even the songs... the songs affect me differently. For example, during the scenes when the Praise Singer we had in Manchester was a dancing Praise Singer, because (1) I am a dancer, (2) I know the culture. When the drums... whether the musician we had then, whether it was a full ensemble or less ensemble I was dancing to the full ensemble, which is in my head.

ADIGUN: Very good, very good. Excellent. In that sense, I just want to tease you...

BADEJO: Yeah.

ADIGUN: If you want to give that production percentage

BADEJO: I'll give ninety.

ADIGUN: You are joking me?

BADEJO: I'm telling you.

ADIGUN: That's fantastic.

BADEJO: In fact maybe I would have rated it lower if I had not been polluted with what happened in the last production. I am sorry.

ADIGUN: Maybe we should go into that now.

BADEJO: Okay.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE PRODUCTION 2009

ADIGUN: You were invited to the National's production of Death in 2009, can you tell me how that one came about sir?

BADEJO: This guy, Rufus Norris just called me from nowhere. I was going to Nigeria, so I said that we could meet when I return. He said he wanted to see me that he is doing a production at the National and he wanted to see if I am interested. So I told him okay when I come back. So when I came back I went to the National, we sat down for hours. I said yes, I have done this production before and I am interested but funny enough ...I don't know why I asked him that question: how come you are directing Death and the King's Horseman? Because (1) he is young, he looks young, what are your experiences, in other words, what are your qualifications?

ADIGUN (surprised): You asked him that?

BADEJO: Yes, yes.. Because you see the thing about it is I wasn't begging for a job and I wasn't... so he then said, I have gone around and he even told me that I have gone around, I have spoken to Phyllida Lloyd... oh I haven't seen Phyllida Lloyd for years. I have spoken to Phyllida Lloyd and everybody points to your direction that I should go and look for you, so I said, here I am. But are you able to do it? Are you able to project what the play is all about with its culture? He said oh yes. So I asked him what have you done? Apparently he is done some non-European plays. I said yes, that's very interesting. Non-European plays means they are cultural but culture is different from culture and plays, the depth of plays in different cultures is different, you understand. Some peripherally use a culture to project a play. Some go into in-depth for a better understanding of the people where the play is coming from so I said this one is deep and it would not be fair to the culture if it is handled and it is not projected. He said no no no, we want to look at it and approach it differently and it is going to be good... So we had a good time and we left and he told me that I have started auditioning but I will be auditioning, I would be glad if you can join me, if you are around.

ADIGUN: Uncle Pete, did he ask you if want to be a consultant as well?

BADEJO: Yes, no no. Actually he was specific. He wants me to be a consultant. Then I said who is going to be the choreographer? He said there's one guy that it is going to be this guy who is going to be the choreographer. I said hmmm, that's interesting but the play is culturally specific. Choreography, there are two styles of choreography. There is the English, the waltz but also there's the tradition which underpins the whole production he said yea yea yea, you are going to be the consultant so you will be consultant on music, consultant on movement. So it was a general consultancy which I in quote, I was a bit sceptical in the beginning because there is a difference between being a consultant and being a consultant/ performer or consultant/ choreographer.

ADIGUN: As you did with Phyllida Lloyd?

BADEJO: As I did.

ADIGUN: Would you have preferred to do Consultant/Performer or-?

BADEJO: I would have preferred to do Consultant/ Choreographer. I don't mind if I don't do, maybe they have a new idea about how they want ... because I think the Praise Singer in the first one was me.

ADIGUN: Was you?

BADEJO: Very me.

ADIGUN: Okay.

BADEJO: My big understanding heavily laced with my understanding of the culture. And he was struggling with who is going to play Elesin.

ADIGUN: Okay.

BEADEJO: Clare Benedict applied again.

ADIGUN: For the Iyaloja.

BADEJO: And then I was at her audition twice cos they had to do audition twice.

ADIGUN How do you mean audition twice?

BADEJO: Because she was auditioned then Norris and I auditioned other women and things and there was a this, this girl had played this thing twelve years ago or eleven years ago, she played it in Manchester but we then examined the strength of even the last ones we chose, Clare still had an upper hand in terms of understanding and her delivery of the role.

ADIGUN: Was she the one who played it?

BADEJO: Yes. Clare came back. She is the one.

ADIGUN: I didn't know that.

BADEJO: And the audition, I am telling you, people were auditioned twice

ADIGUN: Do you have a number for her? Because she played the two parts I would love to talk to her.

BADEJO: She did, she did both. And that's why she was livid when I didn't play...

ADIGUN: When she couldn't play against you.

BADEJO: Oh she was so happy that I was there because I had to go back into her training of the words, language, all these things....names. Because when I work in these productions, it is not just consulting and advice alone, I teach names, I teach songs, language.

ADIGUN: So you are more or less, like a cultural advisor?

BADEJO: Yes, on a daily basis. Daily basis and that is why it hurts when you see things are not...

ADIGUN: Properly credited?

BADEJO: No not only credited, but not going the way you taught it and then you call the attention of the director and you see that he did not... unlike Phyllida Lloyd, he did not take to it, he just said "oh yes we'll solve that" and you did not see it happening so you begin to feel there is a deliberate way of presenting it in a way that you are not.

ADIGUN: We'll get there sir. The question I would like to ask is ... you have told me how you were invited.

BADEJO: So I was invited, I agreed. We did auditions together of some of the artist not all the artists. And they introduced me to the guy who was going to do the choreography. And they introduced me to the guy who was going to do the music. And I see that the two of them haven't got an iota of the culture, no idea. And if you look at the production as .. let me not put that way as it was presented, I still taught them all the songs, I taught them the rhythm, I taught them everything I brought in the musicians, because the guy who came to do it, ain't got a clue about the music but he has the clue about setting the western music but he gets the credit.

ADIGUN: So to that extent, would you say they are favouring the western music over...

BADEJO: They took the Africanness of music in that play in this same one for granted.

ADIGUN: They didn't.... as far as they are concerned

BADEJO: Peter would just teach them because I got them and teach them the songs

ADIGUN: So what about the idea of the threnodic essence that Soyinka wants the play to evoke?

BADEJO: No no no, you see this play is different one because the National then sponsored myself the director, the designer, the costumer, the choreographer to go to Nigeria and meet Soyinka

ADIGUN: And what was that experience like sir?

BADEJO: It was a scary experience for Rufus.. You know Soyinka is larger than life if you don't know him. And Soyinka was nice, he allowed them to meet him in his house. He said meet me in Abeokuta. So we landed in Lagos. We are killing two birds with one stone. They had decided that everything, all things in the production – props costumes- will be bought from Nigeria....They have the budget.

ADIGUN: Is that good? That's good though?

BADEJO: That's very good....they can afford that's what I am saying. So our going to Nigeria was (1) to hunt for props and costumes and (2) to meet the writer. So we landed in Lagos. I remember that two days before we left, they brought someone from the British Council to come and talk to us about Nigeria. They were saying how scary it is all these things. I told the guy I said I am a Nigerian. I just got back from Nigeria two weeks ago. Any way when we landed, we had police escorts ..you know. I can understand the protocol.... When we got to Soyinka's place, he welcomed us in his sitting room and he was a good listener.. He listened and they introduced everybody. Rufus said he is the director, Soyinka said that's nice. And then Norris came up with his idea for the production because he wanted to use all black in the production. Soyinka said why? Soyinka said I am not going to stand in you way but you have to convince yourself enough on why you want to, because there is a reason for him as the writer to have made it in the white cast and black but you want to make it all black. So he said no that his reason was he wants it to be experiential thing so that the blacks will be able to experience what the position of the whites is

ADIGUN: That's the reason he gave?

BADEJO: That's one of the reasons he gave. Soyinka said go ahead. I am not going to stop you. Go ahead and do whatever you want. So we left Soyinka's place.

ADIGUN: Did he mention anything about lines, cutting lines? Did he mention, I am just interested in.

BADEJO: No, I don't maybe I think he mention that he was going to clip some lines or something and Soyinka said as long as it doesn't change the concept of the production.

ADIGUN: Okay.

BADEJO: Soyinka did not gag him at all. And then after that he said for experience....because Norris said he left Nigeria when he was, yes that is one of his qualifications too. His father was a colonial who took him. He said he had not been to Nigeria since he was three or four or five, so he wanted to walk in Soyinka's compound. So we walked around, we went to the river every little thing we saw, we picked.

Things we used as props. So we came back after all our bye bye. In fact Norris left a day before me. So we did the rest of our buyings and we came back. And then we started the rehearsals. Being the national theatre, it was quite different.. the process was quite different.

ADIGUN: In what way sir?

BADEJO: In the sense that the departments were well established. The costumians were working on design and theatre production was going on; we have rooms for different rehearsals. It was a luxury but Norris was the overall, he was directing the top lead actors, I was there and when things were a bit not what my understanding is I was telling him.

ADIGUN: Can you remember a particular episode sir?

BADEJO: Ummmm.... Some he dismissed, some he said he would look into it. Which one now is particular that stands out. Even our actor... our lead actor, I was trying to explain to our lead actor that there are certain nuances that is not just Nigerian, it is typically Yoruba and is embedded in the writing of that play and emmmm our leader who is a beautiful actor in the west.

ADIGUN: What's his name?

BADEJO: Ibo boy ni. His mother is Igbo so he was born and raised here.

ADIGUN: What about his dad?

BADEJO: His dad is Nigerian, Igbo.

ADIGUN: Both of them are Igbo.

BADEJO: Yeah but all his life he has lived here.

ADIGUN: I see, I see.

BADEJO: Oh yeah, ko gbo Ibo ko gbo nkan kan . But most Nigerian actors here especially Igbo actors, since they have seen *Things Fall Apart*, they think that is where Nigerian theatre begins and ends. (Pauses tape) What they know about text representation as an actor ni the kind of Igbo style acting to wa ni *Things Fall Apart*. So when this actor... started delivering lines, he is trying to make a Nigerian kinni, I called the director's attention because I feel it is my duty. I called his attention that in the first place, that's a very wrong accent and mosalaye fun, Things Fall Apart lo hun gan mo. Mosa laye fun pe, things fall apart is from the Eastern part of the country and even their pattern of speech which they bring into theatre is different from the Yoruba, you understand, so I would rather, what gave Clare the edge is because she is not pretending, she is not trying to do an African accent,

ADIGUN: She is just speaking clearly.

BADEJO: She gave a clear speech. And I think he should advise this actor to do that and he said yes and he took it up. But no matter ...if you rehearse for twenty five years, the day, the last day dress and tech that is your last control on actors, they go there, they do their thing, you can recall them for rehearsals which they did but between you and I , I think he slipped back into that Ibo thing trying to ibonise....

ADIGUN: Were you there when he was auditioned?

BADEJO: Yea.

ADIGUN: And what was your view?

BADEJO: I think he auditioned second time. He was a good size. Physically standard and then he had good CV. So I thought he would be well managed in terms of directing but funny enough, there is some kind of sublime politics going on in this country where when you are part of the cast of a production and if the production has to do with black and then you have a white director, the director is always or the directors are always careful especially in a production like this that there was an all black cast. The director is a bit careful not to offend. You understand? When you are in a world of theatre, I think you are supposed to leave all baggage outside the theatre

ADIGUN: Outside the rehearsal room you mean?

BADEJO: Outside the rehearsal room. I can talk to you but you can tell when in a rehearsal room people are still playing this political right what do they call it?

ADIGUN: Political correctness.

BADEJO: Norris is a quiet person and he is always very distantly looking....visionary but you can tell that he is very careful. I don't want to offend this people. Because he knows that there is a possibility of people questioning even his understanding of the culture and then when you go and cast the lead as a Nigerian who is me that knows that this Nigerian that does not have the cultural background. You know.. he is a Nigerian that is the only cultural qualification

ADIGUN: By birth?

BADEJO: By birth. Nigerian ni, o ma n lo le and things he is into a lot of these new films. He is a popular actor.

ADIGUN: In Nigeria?

BADEJO: Here...he has been a popular actor here even before we did *Death and the King's Horseman*. Because they cast him for a US gangster movie while we were working on Death so immediately we finished, he went into that. So we had that problem where people are limited even in their own understanding of the differences of the Nigerian culture.

ADIGUN: People like Wale Ojo, did he audition?

BADEJO: Wale Ojo auditioned. I must tell you the truth, some auditions. Some people don't' audition well.

ADIGUN: I know.

BADEJO: And I am one of them.

ADIGUN: I don't as well.

BADEJO: I don't.... if I go to audition. If you put me in a play, you give me my part, I go sit down with it, I consume it I come back to deliver but if you judge me from reading script. Some people are perfect at that, but they may not be good. They may not be good. Some of our boys like Wale Ojo and things they didn't audition well. They did not because I was present in some of the auditions.

ADIGUN: What about people like Cyril Nri? Was he invited?

BADEJO: Ah this guy auditioned almost every body. He being in theatre he knows-

ADIGUN: All of them?

BADEJO: What plays were around and things. Again Cyril is one of your Mr Igbo

ADIGUN: Is he Igbo?

BADEJO: He is Igbo.

ADIGUN: I think he was born here.

BADEJO: Yes he was born here. But people there was a time there was identicentrism

ADIGUN: What do you mean?

BADEJO: When everyone wants to have identity. And that was obvious when we did *The Road*? So they have that problem that's why, that's my only understanding besides other things that may have been involved that I don't know why some of the Nigerian actors

ADIGUN: Cast for the play.

BADEJO: For example Olohun Iyo I don't think Norris was pleased with the Olohun Iyo but he had no choice. They didn't find anything better tori

ADIGUN: Giles.

BADEJO: Tori boy yii Uganda. He tried

ADIGUN: Actually I have a question sir. Do you have a view on the all-black cast notion of the play?

BADEJO: Yes. I really I was shocked when Prof didn't stand his ground but I can understand the freedom of the director as an artist. And Norris played the ball into Soyinka's chest

ADIGUN: How do you mean?

BADEJO: Well he went to Soyinka and said; well please sir I am asking your permission, I want to do this.

ADIGUN: So if he had not done that..

BADEJO: If he had not done that....then we would have known the real view of Soyinka vis a vis that. But to me, I think it is the wrong thing to do.

ADIGUN: Would it be because of your involvement with the first one?

BADEJO: No it's because... even if I wasn't involved....if I had sat in the audience and looked at it, you see when you.. the roles that were there were better played by a white man in the sense that it's amazing how our brain works with feelings. We feel what our brains dictate, you understand? Sometime if you see someone hurt, a knife cut or something, you can almost feel the pain with them because your visual. So the visual of seeing the difference between a black man and a white man on stage there for a white man commanding a black man on stage it gives you a different impetus on understanding of the production. So I think we lost that

ADIGUN: So the question then is, if we lost that, did we gain something?

BADEJO: I wish we had gained something. To me it neutralises the potency, the potency of the statement I think the author was trying to make that the coming of this people... yeah nearly can never kill a bird yes, we dressed the black people in a white (man's) dress it is like the minstrel era where you get people painting their faces to play... it is not the same. Like you see,, there is something there is something in the human chemistry that makes it, that goes beyond the technicality of delivering another colour

ADIGUN: For me this is the most interesting part of the production.

BADEJO: It is, it is

ADIGUN: So I would like to

BADEJO: Probe it, probe it and I am giving you my own personal opinion.

ADIGUN: I have spoken to two different actors in the play. One of said he would not have played the part if he was given the part. One of them said he thought that by the fact that a black person played a white person makes the play more powerful. What is your view?

BADEJO: No. I don't think so. No. I think to me it neutralised the weight, it lightened the weight of what happened.

ADIGUN: He lightened it?

BADEJO: Yes, it trivialised it.

ADIGUN: Isn't that what theatre does?

BADEJO: No no no theatre does not trivialise, theatre makes message more palatable.

ADIGUN: What I mean by that is...

BADEJO: It makes it more acceptable....

ADIGUN: Exactly..

BADEJO: Yes ... acceptability doesn't mean.. I can accept ... if you give me something as potent, I can take it, but you are not asking for my own reaction, you are not weighing the reaction differently. Action of my receiving message, but when you have neutralised, you have trivialised message before it comes to me so what am ...

ADIGUN: What I am trying to get at is this; we are taking about the National Theatre

BADEJO: Yeah

ADIGUN: And we are talking about a play that shows how the British, how their action impacted on the tradition of the indigenous people of Africa.

BADEJO: Yes, but the National theatre is not supposed to be ... a politicised industry in terms of presentation in fact it supposed to leave the concentric effort of the National supposed to be a theatre that uses this medium of truth, I see theatre as a medium of truth

ADIGUN: Medium of truth

BADEJO: Yes, if you bring a script, whether it is Chinese, Japanese, African British yes to be able to state it the truthful way whereby the audience will be able to perceive the historical and the psychological content of that production.

ADIGUN: So you think, Rufus Norris production did not do that?

BADEJO: No I think, it didn't fully do it for me.

ADIGUN: Why

BADEJO: Because to me, I did not feel the weight of the .. nearly cannot kill a bird. Those boys did their best. They were trying to play white.

ADIGUN: So you would say, the way they were trying to play white is the way the lead was trying to play Yoruba?

BADEJO: Yap. The way they were trying to play white for me didn't give me the weight. It didn't give me the, I didn't ... the weight...I don't know how to explain it. It didn't give me the weight of the situation. Whereas if I had seen... let me tell you 1968 no 1970, when we did Ovoramwen Nogbaisi by Ola Rotimi, the invasion of Benin, we took it to the stadium in Benin, some of played white soldiers white assistants.

ADIGUN: Black soldiers assisting white?

BADEJO: Exactly. But the guys who played the white they had to give them military protection in the stadium in Benin

ADIGUN: Because it was so convincing..

BADEJO: To them.. in fact because it was so powerful, it made the people of Benin say wait a minute, Jimmy Solanke, whom I know very well, you know very well. They said he looks like Ovonramwen that day they gave him an employment straight to the Arts Council of Benin and that day they collected over 200,000 naira those days in the stadium. The governor got up, Ogbemudia and asked for donation and people donated money to go and bring the remains of Ovomrawen wherever it may be back to Benin. If the soldiers were Nigerians trying to play white, they will play it till thy kingdom come but they feel, well white man wicked o, it would have lightened the situation but because of the potency of that.. look at

the Chikawas on stage and you see one telling their Oba, you know is a taboo in Benin for their Oba to remove his crown, we have to do five changes before the present Oba then accepted how Ovomrawen was going to surrender to the white man

ADIGUN: You're joking me.

BADEJO: Yes, they said ... throughout our rehersals in Ife they sent delegates to sit with us in Ife. The first one was remove the hat, remove the crown, Ovomramwen kneels down, they said where, where are you going to do that, impossible. Okay the white man took his crown, they said for where? Believe me...this is a serious, they will go back to the Benin palace and come back this was during rehearsals....the last one they finally accepted was for him to take is crown put it in his hand and drop his head. That is the surrender that was the surrender they would accept. To show you the power of theatre but what I am saying is if those Oyinbo part was played by black man, the Benin people will not, it wouldn't hit them that much but to them it became real, it was too real, it was reality.

ADIGUN: At the beginning, it is very interesting what you said at the beginning that what you like about drama, tries to explain something, I think you also mentioned that there is also drama of revolution, but you are not talking about. But could one argue that the reason why Norris chose that casting idea was to lighten, maybe that was the purpose. Can one argue that? What I am trying to say sir is you just said now the impact

BADEJO: It was not there for me.

ADIGUN: Was not there for me. Maybe that was the purpose because if it had been done as written, maybe it would have been too hot for them to handle. Can one argue that sir? Because don't forget this is the National Theatre of Britain

BADEJO: Which downplay the politicization of the theatre.

ADIGUN: But what I am saying is

BADEJO: Which they do..

ADIGUN: What I am trying..

BADEJO: I am coming

ADIGUN: Okay sir.

BADEJO: I am kind of following your trend now, because you can not devoid politics from the national theatre at the same time they want to be seen as the true art institution that gives equal opportunities to any theatrical... which is not true, we all know.. How many black plays have been done since then?

How many African plays? And you see the thing is we fall into this problem. I'll come back to your question. You see the word black and even the word African is too bogus, it's easier to even say British, it is an entity, whereas if you say black that is the whole of the continent of Africa plus all the diasporic blacks

ADIGUN: Including African Americans.

BADEJO: Everywhere And believe me sincerely there are developed African culture existing in these places which you cannot say is African and you cannot say is non-African because the foundation... it's well reflected in jazz music. Look at music today, something they say 'that's African music'. You go: where? If you search, if probe deep you will find the Africanness of it. So the same thing applies. But you would have thought a place like the National that is meant to be serving the community, at least the whole British, all the multicultural aspects of Britain is supposed to be served by the national theatre but if you look at it, how it distributes its output, you will see that there is unevenness. So that's what I see about that. I just think, I don't know if we can fully label it as the major reason why Norris chose all black, I am sure he would have other reasons that he would not even discuss with us. But did he get away with it? Did it reduce the success of the play? To me I think it reduced the impact. The person who says he thinks it makes it stronger....are we begging issues? Are we stating the facts or are we using the medium of theatre to beg issues, to pacify? Is that what theatre is supposed to be? I thought theatre is for enlightenment. Whatever theatre, even the comedy. It supposed to be for enlightenment and if historically you want to enlighten people on the relationship between the colonial masters and these... which has been clearly written in the play, I think it is just the duty of the director not to be afraid of what axe is gored. Otherwise, let's look at it the other way round, what were the reasons for not using the white people? What could have been the other reasons?

ADIGUN: Are you asking me sir or you're just..?

BADEJO: I am asking the question. This is the kind of question I would have asked Norris today tomorrow, the day after.

ADIGUN: The question you are asking.

BADEJO: Did you ask Norris?

ADIGUN: I sent him all of this he hasn't responded yet....But you have a very close relationship with Soyinka, what do you think was Soyinka's view about the production. Was he guarded about it? Or was he opened about it?

BADEJO: He was guarded. Soyinka is a very careful person, very careful observer. He had the opportunity to see the play, he was invited to see the play more than once. He came and it was interested because in reality it looks like the National theatre had planted specific observers around where he was sitting to observe his reaction.

ADIGUN: To observe him.

BADEJO: And Soyinka just, you know he is warrior, he made sure he just kept this blank face from the beginning of the production to the end. When the break time came we took him to where his seat was and had his wine. He didn't even discuss anything about the production. After he came back and went to the cubicle because all the audience would want to talk to him and when the audience left, he came back to the cast and said than you very much for the production. That was all his comment. So he did not express or show any satisfaction or dissatisfaction to the production.

ADIGUN: What about to you?

BADEJO: That is a different... that is a private matter.

ADIGUN: How private can you be?

BADEJO: I think it would be unfair, if Soyinka wanted to make statement, general statement, he would have done it. You understand what I am saying? But I think he has his own view.

ADIGUN: Would I be able to get this view.

BADEJO: He has view, he had his own view, which almost affected me. The view, for example, the pronunciation. Which is the same view I had too. If they are doing a Russian production, they will make the effort to make sure its.. when I worked with them after the opening I wasn't reinvited and actors acting is a problem in the sense that people tend to fall back to, they retrogress, you have to constantly oil the machinery of the actors as you do in movement especially if it is a play that is foreign to the actors. Names and things, and these things matter, because if you are sitting there as someone from their culture and you hear the mispronunciation of basic things like names and paraphernalia of the culture, you cringe and that distracts you understand what I am saying? I don't think the National understands or placed emphasis on the importance of the continuity of making certain things right and towards the end of the production that affected the production. Towards the end of the run

ADIGUN: So the cultural specificity kind of...

BADEJO: It lapsed ...names, the way songs were coming out...

ADIGUN: Just to round things up.. You gave Phyllida Lloyd 90%, if you were asked to give Norris production

BADEJO: Well I won't say Norris, I would say the national theatre production, I would give it 60%

ADIGUN: 60 Okay,

BADEJO: or less.

ADIGUN: I think you are quite generous.

BADEJO: Why I would give it sixty, I think they did wonderful work in terms of the theatrical setting. The costumes, the props and the stage setting incredible it is so simple and it is with the things I witnessed us buying or collecting and the way the designers and the builders built them.... I mean and used it technically, it became life moving that is what gave it the big plus.

ADIGUN: As a Nigerian impresario,a performer extraordinaire what would be your view, your suggestion or your advice to directors who are

BADEJO: Who are handling culture that is not theirs.

ADIGUN: What would be your ....

BADEJO: A sincerity and they have to be extraordinarily careful will have to be extraordinarily careful. You have to be sensitive, you have your directorial license technically but at the same time you have to be extraordinarily sensitive to other people's culture.

ADIGUN: Isn't that what Death is about?

BADEJO; That's what it's about but sometime being in that communication, you lose the essence of what you are trying to transfer, communicate to people. Because the play itself, teaches you a lesson but in transmitting it don't lose the lesson. And when you are dabbling into other people's culture, there are lots of culturally sensitive points.

ADIGUN: As you've said, like the names.

BADEJO: Yes, names are very important

ADIGUN: Because Olohun Iyo yato si Olohun Iyo.

BADEJO: Especially when you are dealing with a very sensitive tonal language like Yoruba where one word of the same spelling means twenty five different things. You have to be sensitive.

ADIGUN: So your advice is sensitivity

BADEJO: Sensitivity and sincerity.

ADIGUN: What about directors like us?

BADEJO: Well other intercultural directors must have the same approach. They have to be sincere and sensitive and to first examine self; am I carrying a baggage? Am I taking things for granted? In terms of communicating, because sometimes you even lose the essence of what you are trying to communicate if you throw it as a bundle to the audience who have no dissecting ability, they would not be able to dissect it.

ADIGUN: Is there anything you would like to add for me... comments, or anything at all?

BADEJO: Well, I just hope the outcome of your research and Ph.D comes out in a way that it helps people to practicalise what we are talking about. So it doesn't become a shelved information.

ADIGUN: Thanks very much Uncle Peter.

Appendix 2 D

Interview with Giles Terera at the National Theatre London on April 22, 2009.

ADIGUN: What I want to ask you is this: this is the National Theatre of Britain, whether we like it or not, the majority of their audience would be middle class white audience, now are you saying to me that it would be better for a Nigerian person to direct Death for their benefit, because what is the purpose of putting a play on in the first place?

TERERA: I think what struck me about this....if you are going to do this play, what struck me about this play, you aim to do it as truthfully and authentically and as respectfully to how it's written and the culture that it deals with as possible. And then you let the audience... you see, to me I thought well, there are things I don't completely understand, there is cultural thing that is not quite clear to me but I can learn but the audience don't have time to learn those things. So the best way for them to receive them is if it's done as clearly as possible. If you are going to....this beautiful way that he writes the Elesin, the Praise Singer and Iyaloja, the way they speak, the way they use riddles, stories, imagery, you have to invest that a hundred per cent and then even if, the audience don't know what an awusa nut is, if it's given a hundred per cent, they will understand it on a certain level. And I think the best way to do that is to have it as clearly and as authentic as possible and if that means having a Yoruba director do, then so be it.

ADIGUN: Very good.

TERERA: But certainly with this, I thought we need to, yes, our audience is going to be predominantly white middle class but we shouldn't dilute it because of that.

ADIGUN: Do you think you did?

TERERA: Yeah, I do.
ADIGUN: You did

TERERA: Yes I think so.

ADIGUN: And what is the effect of that for you as an actor?

TERERA: If I have been completely frank.

ADIGUN: And... believe me between you and me Giles, I would show you whatever I would be using, so you can just, okay.

TERERA: I think I find it very hard, because in rehearsals, it is predominantly a black audience, we were doing it, it was ourselves.

ADIGUN: In the rehearsal process?

TERERA: Yes, there is thirty of us. So the funny things, the jokes are landing, and the funny references are landing are going great, because in that experience, Death and the King's Horseman in that rehearsal room at that point for those two months, it was predominantly black audience essentially

ADIGUN: Interesting.

TERERA: Now when we came to perform, it is predominantly white audience massively. So it's almost in a different, the different reactions to things, the different weight to it. And I found that we have, I feel that we've been pulled towards the things which are landing here which happens in any play, I mean you must know that, once you get the audience laughing and there is funny things, you... actors kind of get pulled towards that a little bit and I find that there is what is happening here from my mind that's what is happening here. I don't know how....

ADIGUN: Who is responsible for that?

TERERA: I think it's partly to do....there's a responsibility on us as a company and as actors but essentially it is down to production and I think and your director and who is steering it, who is keeping eye on the production really. A lot of this stuff with say the Pilkings's characters, the white characters, the British characters goes over very well. You can feel that in those scenes between Olunde and Mrs Pilkings where you have or Pilkings himself and Elesin, there are these arguments going on and you can feel, the audience is very much sort of ...I don't if it's too much to say....on the side of Pilkings but you know you sit in audience, and you're listening to an argument, you work out which person you identify with I think here it is predominantly white audience and the character they understand is that British character., so it feels as if they are tilted in that direction. And I think it makes it very difficult for us to kind of do what Soyinka says which is I think, it is not about blaming one or the other, it's about...I mean he even says it...it's about understanding the other culture, its about understanding the other person and I feel we slightly...our director was in yesterday so maybe we will have notes re addressing that ...I don't know. But certainly what I do know is that there were a lot of the things which drove our decisions in rehearsals were coming from my director saying well I don't really understand that I understand that but I understand that.

ADIGUN: Like can you give me specifics?

TERERA: A lot of the Yoruba words, a lot of the Yoruba references....if you know...the character Jane Pilkings refers to the long-winded roundabout way the Yoruba people

ADIGUN: Have conversations.

TERERA: And I fought in rehearsals to keep a lot of them they were going to cut a lot of them. I said Soyinka has done this for a reason, he has put this here for a reason. This is a man who knows the value of words and if...there are lots of repetition, there are repeats and the director would say well you have said that before, you have said the before. And I go well Soyinka is not stupid if he has that word and it is a Yoruba word, you might not know what it means. The second time you hear it, you might be slightly clear and the third time you hear it, you will understand what the character is talking about. And that is..

ADIGUN: Did you say that during rehearsals?

TERERA: Yeah.. I said there are, I am sure there are reasons why this word is here and why this particular passage, you know, there was one line that I had that Iyaloja has just said before I am there so it couldn't be a case of I was picking up what she had said but I said these are things that are in these people. This is how they express themselves and that is why is there, if we take them out then you kind of as an actor, you have gaps. And that is what I found very, very hard.

ADIGUN: You have gaps?

TERERA: You have gaps, because as an actor you look at things and you say what is my lines through this, what's my journey through this and you look for your clues that is given you in the text and then if you start taking things out.... and what really frustrates me was if you take things out because it is just a repetition, for instance, that refers to something that someone had said in the first scene or third scene the message is followed through if you look at it. He's a writer, he is a man of words, he uses words and not only the meaning, but the sounds of words... I mean you know that as a writer. The sound of a word is as important as the meaning of it and so to me, this is a play where you cling to what the writer has given you, because he is not foolish. The man wrote it in three days and to me that is incredible as opposed to one pointed out that this looks like a play that has been written out in three days and I said that is not a bad thing, the fact that the man wrote it in three days is incredible.

ADIGUN: It's burst of energy.

TERERA: It's incredible. The reaction that people have... and it's interesting you talk about reaction. When you speak to black people afterwards or you look at the curtain call, the black people who are incredibly moved by and profoundly affected by it even last night, on the front row, there was a woman she was just , she was moved...I mean she was moved and that I feel is the reaction I had when I read it. It's akin to that, it's nice piece and that's what we get from most of our audiences. Nice piece and that's some very funny moments but are you actually moved by it, that's why we are here, isn't it? Truly. So that's been really eye-opening for me and we're still in it, the more I notice that we perform I hope we are not bending too much towards our dominantly white audience at the detriment of what the play actually is and what the play is actually saying. We all felt incredibly proud during rehearsals that we were being proud of this and I don't know if you saw it, there was a lot of stuff in the papers about the black actors whiting up an there was potentially going to be a big kick of about it in the papers but that

was before we started performing and I think once we started performing people could see that it wasn't what they thought it was going to be. But we are proud to be part of this production and giving this opportunity to do this writer's work at this theatre at this point. I mean I spent the last two years watching America and watching that election every day just seeing how my man is doing just thinking up until so late thinking, I have to get up every day, thinking this is America we are talking about. This is not going to happen. This is not going t happen no matter how much you wish it. And it was not until late after he got that nomination that I thought, this people could actually go this way. And I think the fact that we're doing this play, when we are looking at two cultures two sets of people dealing with each other and understanding each other and how you move forward, I think it is timely that we are doing it now and I think we need to remember that, hold on to that. Because you can be seduced, of course, of course you can

ADIGUN: You can be...?

TERERA: Seduced by an audience. And there is funny thing they react to. They react a lot to any moment where it's evident that you get a black person on stage this is not going to happen, no matter sending up white people, that's what they love...they love that which is great but there is point, there is a line in the scene where in the play where Jane and she is talking to Olunde – he is come back – and he said I have sent four years with your people. Now I understand ...know

ADIGUN: Now I realise that you don't respect whatever you don't understand

TERERA: Yeah, which usually gets a big laugh. Then Jane says I see you have come back with a chip on your shoulder, which gets an even bigger laugh here. Now when I hear that I think if I hear a white actor saying that line it wouldn't be as funny? There's quite a shocking thing he is saying here. It's funny here because it's a black actor saying it to another black actor and I wonder how if we missed the point of that moment, it is a very strong specific moment and I wonder whether....okay there is fair enough but what is he story that we are trying to tell here. There is another pint where the guy calls Olunde nigger. "Stop nigger" he says and here it gets ohhhh, you can hear that the audience have not yet fully taken on what that moment is if it was a white actor saying that to a black actor, it would be a lot more dangerous loaded moment. The moment you get a white actor and a black actor doing the scenes, it is immediately loaded. You know when the Elesin is there is chained and Pilkings is standing, the moment you have that image of black guy chained and a white guy surrounding him before the scene is even started there is a tension there and there is a danger there which I hope we don't miss out on in our choice of having all black because, you want them they have to take that story seriously, you have to take those characters seriously Pilkings and Jane because if they don't the story.. Pilkings balances Elesin the story when they have that scene, they are... as characters equal to a certain extent and it's how they manoeuvre around each other,. So you have to take Pilkings seriously otherwise I feel the balance is out of the story because then we don't then take Elesin's story completely seriously. That's something which has been in my head just a couple of days of listening to it as we are performing.

ADIGUN: It is a very interesting observation...it is an amazing observation which is as a matter of fact the

most interesting part of this piece of work for me, for my work. When I spoke to him the first time – Rufus – that was what I said to him I said my concern, great concern the thing I was interested in is the choice of black people playing white actors. I was going to ask you that but you have sincerely and very well actually talked about it, but let's explore it a little bit more. For me I believe that in any piece of work you gain by not doing something, you lose by doing something. So either way you win or lose that's what I was asking you that what do you think would have happened if a Yoruba person had directed this play? Because certain things that would enhance the production values a Yoruba person might not bring it when he is being busy focussing on the authenticity of the play.

TERERA: Yeah, yeah.

ADIGUN: But what I would like us to talk about first is the whole idea of black actors playing white characters. Why do you... Was there any reason given by the director or the production team for that?

TERERA: No. I remember in my first audition when he said we are going to have an all-black cast and I said what does the writer think about that? And he said okay well we haven't quite discussed that yet but we haven't quite made that decision yet. I thought well I am not sure I would want to white up. I would have a problem with that as an actor.

ADIGUN: You would?

TERERA: In this situation, yes, because I would be worried that it would dilute or undermine where I taught I saw the story as. So if that was my character, I would have to relook at it if I wanted to do that kind of work but my character wasn't involved in that. And when we go into rehearsals ...there was never...I was waiting for it to be discussed but it never was not with me anyway perhaps that was because I wasn't involved in it. Maybe the characters that it affected, the actors it affected they had conversations. But we never...there was never conversation... this is why we are doing this.

ADIGUN: You said the scene between Olunde and Jane Pilkings, you think that because of the fact that people were whitened up that the audience might not get it, you said the scene when he was chained and Pilkings, when he is going around like the guy who is in charge of a zoo and this is the animal in the middle, you said people might not get it. So the question then is if people don't get those two, did they get the play?

TERERA: I think we are in danger of letting our audience of the hook to a certain extent and the reasons I said that is when we were in rehearsals a lot of our decisions were influenced by, as I said, the audience are not going to get that or that's not going to be... you can read that that is not going to be palatable to the audience which I think fair enough, you are beholden to your audience but why do the play? why do the play if you are not going to try and doing completely one hundred per cent truthfully for what's written there. The guy has written... I mean you can take Shakespeare of course and change it around but you do it in sense that you are trying to get to the heart of what the piece is what the characters are going through. I wonder whether we do dilute the power of this story by introducing.. by

having an all black cast do it. Because it is almost as if ...because it is a very strong thing, especially Iyaloja says at the end to the white man: this is what you brought about. There are some very strong statements, I know that some of those were taking out. And I think as Clare said as much as she points the finger at the white man she points it at Elesin as well. That's the point, that's what is what the writer said..

ADIGUN: So it's like a judge.

TERERA: Exactly. So I think you can then let your audience off the hook because not so because they are white, but because they are your audience, no matter what you are going to do if you are going to do something about holocaust the fact that the world let that happen, you don't dilute that down. Let the audience see it for what it is, because that is the whole point of drama that is the whole point of theatre. We go to the theatre we see ourselves, our own behaviour and then we take stock of that and we change. Whereas here I think, I wonder whether we've made it to pout I think.

ADIGUN: Would you prefer if the audience are having fun and coming in bucket loads or thinking this is too much for us and they are coming in dribs and drabs?

TERERA: You know he is written a very funny play anyway. I mean he knows, even Elesin has some funny things to say in the midst of all that, because we laughed, this is a celebration. This day, going into this day. Even that the perception of just the idea of the body coming in at the end, Olunde coming in and how as an audience would expect that moment to be. I mean that moment when he comes in, the audience don't know its Olunde, but essentially it is a dead body and it has a funeral element to it and working in rehearsals about what the audience would expect that to be well actually in the story this is a moment of celebration, the moment of transition, this is what we've been talking about gearing towards in the whole play and for the whole month. So just that aspect, to see things differently again I thought it is a cultural thing but as uncle Peter said that moment, that's coming in there this is celebratory moment. So we have to have those things. Within all that there is humour, he is written humour. The characters of the women in the market and Amusa, that's a funny scene, funny things are happening there. Well humour is always in there. I guess Soyinka ....you know power, when you've got this powerful, powerful moments and sentiments you have to have the balance of that and he knows that because he is a great writer but I haven't answered your question.

ADIGUN: Another thing that comes to mind as you are speaking is that one can argue that if you look at the cast, most of them are actually non-Yorubas, how do that affect the process of the actors? Because if we say the director is a non-Yoruba, what about the actors themselves.

TERERA: I found it particularly hard but at least within the women, there was enough or I would always just hang around the musicians and they keep telling me stuff and we kind of helped each other. Nonso is a Nigerian so he got less of a journey to make. And as Uncle Peter said, you know we might not all be Nigerian or we might not all be Yoruba but we are African and therefore.. The fantastic thing for me in

this is my dad was from Zimbabwe and my mum was from Barbados. And I didn't know my dad's side of the family but I grew up with my west Indian family.

ADIGUN: Okay.

TERERA: And what is being great in this process is seeing similarities, hearing things and seeing juts tiny little things that we see all the time but when you can make that direct comparison, its... I can't describe that really

ADIGUN: It's kind of a re-connection for you... amazing.

TERERA: And so the fact that we weren't all Yoruba I think we've got this kind of foundation there that when Uncle Peter says this... or if you listen if I listen long enough, I can start to hear phrasing and intonations and the musicality bit and I think we all have that capacity even if we don't all get there still but we have the foundation there, the capacity, to understand whereas maybe if you are a non-African you don't have that.

ADIGUN: Giles. Well thanks very much

Appendix 2E

Interview with Lucian held at the Africa Centre, Covent Garden London
on the September 11, 2012

OA: You were part of the production of the Death and the King's Horseman on the National stage in 2009. And you played Simon Pilkings , a white character. The first question I would like to ask you is number one can you remember how it came about, how were you told or how did you get to know about the production?

LM: Well through the normal channels and I just returned to the country I think there was a call from my agent saying there is this production of Death and the King's Horseman that the National is looking to stage, they are interested in talking to you about this particular character. I was familiar with the play, so and Soyinka was one of my inspiration, my heroes, so I jumped at the chance to go and meet Rufus Norris, whose work I had heard of I had heard of him but I had never met him until that point. I met with Rufus and Peter Badejo. We got talking and he Rufus basically explained the methodology that what he wanted to do was to remove the "traditional" as it were, from the play and concentrate instead on some level on something that touched a much deeper nerve and hence and the idea was that what do you feel about "whiting up" and without skipping a bit I said I have absolutely no problem with that because first and foremost I grew up where in a part of the world I was in the majority.

OA: Where is that?

LM: That's in Zimbabwe in southern Africa, so my family are from Tanzania. Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania southern South Africa, that's where I grew up.

OA: When you said you were in the majority, what does that mean in comparison to?

LM: Very good question actually...What it means is that I was not the Other. I was not the "visible foreigner". There's a whole other story about being the invisible foreigner or being the other within but when you walked down the street over there everybody is the same skin colour as you. Prejudice of a particular kind falls away and what you are left with is the content of the person's character. So everyone from pope to priest to president and the prostitute in between, when the all look like you suddenly that doesn't come into factor. So, on a much broader level, the only time the first time I ever heard the term black actor was when I moved to the UK.

OA: When did you move?

LM: That was in 2003. It was the very first time that I heard the term black actor, because up until that point, I have been an actor. Very quickly I learnt the unfortunate tyranny of definition or pigeonholing. But to come back to the question of my reaction to it, I said well, first of all as far as I am concerned I

have played all sorts of characters and creatures on stage.

OA: Can you give me two examples of ....

LM; Well for example, I played the cowardly lion in the Wizard of Oz and there was no picketing from the world wide life foundation and the RSPC didn't show up to complain that I was depicting lions. And I played a Cuban, a tobacco factory worker, no one from Castro's cabal arrived to hammer us, no. Obviously, yes, you can say in some instances, it is easy to take an obtuse route and go well, but there are Cubans who look like me, I walk down the streets in Havana or whatever until I open my mouth, it is easy to be one of the crowd.

OA: So in a nutshell, you didn't have a problem with whiting up.

LM: In a nutshell I had no problem.

OA: But what I would like to ask you though is just to kind of push the boat out a bit . Wouldn't people say it is a kind of an inversion of the black minstrelsy?

LM: Yes, I can completely understand why that is. But my inverse reaction t that will be surely then was what attracted me was the challenge as a performer. To not only do it credibly but to also give it a humanity and if I.. if we got it right, if I got it right, there will be a point where whatever artifice we used to represent a, b or c will melt away. What will remain is the essence of the person and that is the story that people latch on to.

OA: And do you think that was achieved?

LM: I would like to believe and I can say my anecdotal evidence and from fellow professionals that yes, it did work. And to tell you a very interesting story about Jenny Jules who played Mrs Pilkins. Actually two stories. On one night, a white friend of one of the members of the company, Giles Terera, who played Olohun Iyo. He didn't have the best sight but afterwards in the bar asked Giles why is that they got a white woman to play Jane Pilkins when everyone was black and Giles said no no she is black. And the gus said no no no she couldn't be I mean I could see and she sounded exactly like my mum. Now that is one story. Other story this is directly to me personally. My partner and I were getting ready for the birth of our second child and the midwife who was looking after my partner came to do the usual check ups and during talking and socialising, she asked what does your partner do, she said he is an actor and what has he been in so she mentioned Death and the King's Horseman. And she said oh I saw that and I really, really enjoyed it and I was with a friend of mine, we were sitting in the Olivier, right at the very top and at the end of the play, we were coming out and my friend said: it was a great play but why did they have the white couple in an entirely white company. And this woman said it took her more than ten minutes to explain that no they weren't white they were black. And so to my mind... and when you've got someone of the calibre of Rufus Norris saying and he said this in front of everybody during rehearsals but also certain talkback sessions with the audience that having grown up in the certain 'colonial' world

where those characters the Pilkins were very familiar to him. His father worked in

OA: In Nigeria.

LM: And he said it was like seeing my father on stage every night and for me there is no greater endorsement than that.

OA: In that case what I would like to ask you is would you then say to that extent that you felt it actually enriched the production by getting a black person or would you say we would never know?

LM: Well on one hand, it is an academic supposition because every production is unique In our particular interpretation, where I think Rufus and the team were very cunning was to go okay: here is a story that is set in a particular time and in a particular system that is "familiar" if we take the traditional route, no matter how brilliantly or eloquently we produce it, it could very easily turn into a white bashing because of all the bashing in the play. That is dull, that is boring, that is being done. However if we take away the racial element what we are left with is the argument fundamentally about responsibility. Because when it comes down to it Elesin forsakes his responsibility. And that is the tragedy.. in our recent times anyway .. this phrase was bandied about a lot of the time: The tragedy of African nations. It is that we laud our heroes, we give them the world, we give them everything, all they have to do it to perform their duty. As difficult, as painful, a terrifying as it is, we give them that, we endow them with that and when Elesin at the moment goes actually you know what life is too awesome suddenly the system is corrupted. When the highest person poisons it, it poisons us all and that is then requires the blood sacrifice on a spiritual level or if you want to get biblical about it, there has to be a balance restored, karmic, there has to be some kind of balance. That if our forebears do not do what they are supposed to do, it is those who come after who would suffer. We are not doing this for us we are doing it for those who are coming after as they will do it for those who come after them. And I think in that instance, we certainly touched quite deeply on that particular strand.

OA: That is well said. What I would like to ask you as a director yourself, would you say Rufus is a kind of a different kettle of fish entirely? Because I think he has his heart in the right place. The question that I would like to ask to follow upon that and you can answer them together is: do you think a black director would have done something like that?

LM: That again is two-fold because on the one hand every production is unique. On the other hand and this where it gets complex in my imagination because having now lived and worked in this country and having seen the challenges that not only artists face anyway but the challenges of a specific kind of work or represent an aspect of the society. Some time, the best intention get sacrificed for what I would like to call anthropological exercise. And I have to say I am sick and tired of going to productions where the moment the lights come up, you go here we go I know exactly what they are going to do. There is going to be this character and that character and what we are going to feed is that we are going to look at mannerisms, we are going to start speaking in sayings, we are going to start speaking in our vernacular, we are going to do all these things and the crowd is going to love it but it's not going to move anywhere.

There is no great art in this particular artifice. Now I qualify that by saying that none of those things, there is nothing wrong with that but what I am saying is that I am a man first, I am then an artist and then I am a pigment and all that comes wit it. And so therefore when I pick up a script, I am not picking it up because I want to change the world, even though I am sure somewhere.....I am picking it up because as an artist I go wow this is I want to do this one.. this sings to me, this is a song that I would like to sing, this is something that I would like to explore. It really is difficult to say, it is such a difficult one to say because you are also then stepping out of a particular cultural territory and stepping into what is the measure of someone as an artist and the question I suppose that I would ask is why are there not more artists of colour who are giving the same resources as Rufus Norris. That is a very, very multi-layered question. And I think there you begin to unravel and drill down into what the trues are about that. I am not going to and I don't know for certain, it is purely based on snippets but there had been a suggestion. Ben Okri said part of the reason is taking so long is cultural lazyness and that when Jane Pilkings Olunde says I have lived in your country long enough to know what thing that you have no respect for what you understand. And there is unmitigated, blaring blasting truth in that line.

OA: I would like to round up if you don't mind. You told me that it was a very good opportunity to be able to see things from the other side...from the other perspective. Can you please elaborate on that?

LM: You know the most challenging as an actor with any character however good or however bad is to give them some sprinkling or some level of ..... call integrity, call it pathos. Something that is going to make an audience, not so much sympathy or respect or love but at least invest in the journey that you are on. And so I found myself and this was the challenge right from the start, and that was why at some level why I was attracted to playing the role on a much deeper level because the moment you say black actors in white face, the folks would say they will be making a mockery, they are going to satirise. And Jenny and myself and Rufus explicitly and implicitly said no.. what we want what we are after is for us to get up on that stage and for all the Mr and Mrs Smiths watching to go, that's us. I am not watching...

OA: A caricature.

LM: A caricature, no. I know that's my neighbour, that's my uncle, that's my father, that's my wife, that's my mother, that's my sister. In doing that, the first thing that you will have to do is actually step into the shoes of that person and go okay, this is what they look like artificially from the outside, that's fine...but then when you drill down deeper, you have got to go... okay put aside the prejudice, put aside whatever negativity there is associated with the character and look at what this man's job is really is. He is the highest representative of his government in this particular nation. He is the one who is seen as the most.. he is the one who reports to then queen. It's him...if anything goes wrong, it's him. Why were you not in control?

OA: Ear to the ground.

LM: Exactly. But regardless of the implications and application of that power, it takes someone of great

responsibility and great self control and self master to be able to do it. What I found very admirable about this man, was that it's very clear the way Soyinka has written it to me at least, that this is not lily livered furbish guy walking around in linen standing behind the fence, no. I am in there, I am hands on I've got to this, this is my job. It's not about these are savage blacks no it's about I am going to do a job and this man is going to kill himself and I fundamentally disagree with that. The best way for me to show that, to demonstrate that to defend my principles with my own hands and with my own life, if need be. No matter which way you look at it, there is a great deal of honour in that. There is a great deal of respect whether you like the person or not in someone who does that. But also these were people who had to command respect. They had to... when they walked into a room, they had to listen to them. He is the kind of person that when he walks into here, you will GO.

OA: Somebody important.

LM: This is someone important. This is someone when they speak, I will listen. I may not agree with what he says but while he is saying it I am listening because they are in command. And it gets to him. What happens gets to him, he is not disconnected from the reality of what happens, you know. And I think certainly the way in which we played it. Actually physically trying to stop Elesin hanging himself... you know... that goes beyond .. that's somebody that's one human being saying no you will not leave this earth like this. That is not the way this is supposed to work. And so for me my own prejudices, for whatever they were had them to put aside and made this man flesh and blood. But what is interesting and here is a provocation: I would like to see one day, a white actor do the same for a black actor.

OA: Like a white actor playing..

LM: Like Elesin for instance, or any number of.

OA: Any number of, was it Sir Olivier Lawrence playing Othello

LM: Lawrence Olivier playing Othello.

OA: I don't know anything about that... I didn't see it

LM: Well me neither.

OA: Is that anything you would like to add?

LM: I don't know if this would be of any value but the passion invested from the performers in making this work quite something. There are certain jobs that transcend professional calling and speak to other things. And I do think when it comes down to it, the story resonated, there is a true story, there is truth there. People plugged in not only because they are familiar culturally but because there is something

deeper here. They are trying to understand that there is something much more fundamental than what is cosmetic.

OA: Lucian, thank you very much.

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