



The Dramatist and His Praxis: A Comparative Study of the Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria.

Ogonna Anaagudo-Agu

Department of Theater Arts, University of Calabar, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

There seems to be a comparable personal circumstance between the Attic dramatist, Euripides, and the Nigerian dramatist, Wole Soyinka on one hand, and between Soyinka and the popular dramatist, Hubert Ogunde on the other. They all appeared to be actively involved in the politics of their time and society. However, Ogunde's role seem to have been underplayed, perhaps, because he was, like Shakespeare of the Elizabethan era, looked down upon on account of his little learning by the university wits of Cambridge and Oxford, notably Robert Green. Emerging at the time he did and a contemporary of the university trained Soyinka, this paper asks, Was Hubert Ogunde an upstart Crow? It takes a look at the political involvements of Soyinka and Ogunde and makes the point that Ogunde developed a more appropriate style for reaching his audiences.

INTRODUCTION

In an essay titled "Soyinka, Euripides and the Anxiety of the Empire"(1999), Okpewho has suggested that Soyinka represented a class of intellectual dramatists comparable to classical Greek playwrights, notably Euripides (34). These dramatists are known for what they, or their works represented in society. With Euripides, the comparable index is certainly there, and as Okpewho has rightly pointed out, has to do with the "personal circumstances of the two playwrights." To summarize it, Okpewho has put the comparison between the two playwrights thus:

Throughout his career, Euripides pursued a creative agenda that is bifocal. On the one hand, like the older Attic playwrights (Aeschylus, Sophocles, etc). He showed considerable loyalty to the traditions of the land by exploiting its mythological Storehouse in addressing the fortunes of various divine and heroic Figures. On the other hand, as a child of the intellectual-or, shall we say, furiously analytical-world of the fifth-century Athens, he was somewhat more inclined than the older playwrights were to

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

question the social, political and other choices made by his people. Unfortunately, this propensity caused him to be identified as a rebel and thus put in the company of some radical and unpopular figures of the time-men like the thinker Protagoras (with whom Euripides was actually friendly) and the intemperate statesman Alcibiades whose life style Euripides could hardly have endorsed (34).

The above, more or less, endorses Soyinka's own motivation as a dramatist: the playwright's bias for the culture and mythology of his people much as Euripides did, his literary and intellectual plays and "public actions" thought to be cavalier (120), and his somewhat rebellious involvements in politics. Therefore, if Athens sought for a scapegoat to assuage the feeling of defeat in the Peloponnesian war and found his scapegoat in Euripides, during the civil war in Nigeria it was found in Soyinka but we shall come to this later. As a consequence, while "Euripides was forced into exile in the court of the (albeit, benevolent) tyrant Archelaus (34)," Soyinka was forced too into exile to Britain. In all this, to Okpewho, Soyinka is of the view that Soyinka is a freethinker and radical just as his idol, Euripides (34).

Politics and the State:

This correspondence of purpose between Soyinka and Euripides is by no means unique, as it is the destiny of all freethinking artists to be involved in the politics of the day. For Euripides as a dramatist, as it is certainly for Soyinka too, politics seem to be central to their dramaturgy. With regard to their points of views and perceptions -just as was the case for emergent African artists and writers in the years preceding the independence of most African states, it is dramaturgy that had to do with ethos of freedom from repressive regimes of the colonial era. In Nigeria, 1946-1970 represented this period in two dominant situations prevalent at the time, the era of the struggle for independence itself and the aftermath. In some parts of Africa politics concerned armed struggle to win independence; in Nigeria however, it was through a peaceful process of transition of power from the colonial power, notably Britain, and through the power of the pen. In the political arena writers wrote through the newspapers, poetry, the novel as well as drama. In parts of East and South Africa freedom fighters were up at arms with the colonial powers. Ngugi, in identifying the writers, aptly referred to them as "writers in politics," being in itself the title of the book. According to Ngugi, there were those actually involved in politics, and there were the birds of passage too. In this regard, Soyinka was unlike Christopher Okigbo in their involvements. Certainly Okigbo's involvement was like that of Achebe, Gabriel Okara and Ekwensi not "during the hot political struggles of the day" as Ngugi would say but during the "Biafran politics"(73). We will come to this later. Others writers who had use their works in political struggles include the political juggernauts themselves, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, who wrote

Ogonna Anaagudo-Agu

mainly through the newspapers, of which the West African Pilot was one, and Dennis Osadebe, to mention a few, Nnoli writes:

Writers from South Africa, Like Denis Brutus and Peter Abrahams used Poetry and novels to highlight the horrors of Apartheid. And writers like Achebe (*A man of the People*) and Armah (*The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*) use their novels to highlight and admonish their readers on the politics of corruption and the dangers inherent in the politics of self aggrandizement in post independence Africa (90).

For writers like Ngugi the battle ground is centred around the strangulating influence and hold of western multinationals on the cultures of the people. That is not all, at various fora this novelist turned dramatist has decried the marginalization of creative literature as a tool for arresting this reality. Ngugi writes:

Often the writer and the politician have been the same person. In The very process of articulating a people's collective consciousness, The writer is led into active political struggles. Leopold Sedar Senghor is a case in point. Or the politician steeped in active political struggle takes up the pen as a necessary and a most important adjunct to his involvement up the pen as a necessary and a most important adjunct of to his involvement. Agostinho Neto is an outstanding poet and politician. For him the gun, the pen, and the platform have served the same ends: the total liberation of Angola (73).

In the spirit of colonialism that saw the rise of those writers involved in the struggle for independence a number of writings began showing up. The first was within the era of the struggle itself in Nigeria, and the second, within the newly constituted "states". In spite of the ambiguity in those newly constituted "states," the debate continued, touching on a variety of issues.

Conor Cruise O'Brien, in his book titled *Writers and Politics*, had raised the issue of liberalism in relation to Africa which he sees as a non-issue (11). It was not even a slogan as Communism and Socialism. The real problem that confronted the new nations at independence was the fear of conflict among the factious entities that made them up. For instance, there was the fear, and quite well articulated by James Ene Henshaw in his very popular play, *This is Our Chance*, of what the federating states were out to achieve, peace and prosperity in the spirit of tolerance, or war. Henshaw carried this question further in the rather sad undertones of another play titled *Enough is Enough*. this notion of intolerance and loss of faith among the federating units being the essence of this drama. These questions, we have to admit, were fundamental, bearing in mind that the federating units had just emerged from a state of anonymity and from an era of cultural barbarity at the time. The other major question arose from Soyinka's *Dance of the Forests*, intent on knowing what the future would hold for the new state, peace and prosperity or barbarism as Africa had recorded in the annals of history.

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

Background to Soyinka and Ogunde

It will not be difficult to appreciate the background of the two playwrights under consideration. To start with, Soyinka was a product of Leeds University where he read English, not drama. With Hubert Ogunde, the situation was more ambiguous to say the least, and no less remarkable. Ogunde had no University training at all, and had no training in drama too. However, like Soyinka, they both imbibed the art of dramaturgy and play production ad-hoc, Soyinka as play-reader at Royal court Theatre at Sloan's square, London. In contrast, Ogunde claims no university background of the sort accorded Soyinka, for as he says, "if I had attended a college or university I would have been cut away from my roots."⁽¹⁰⁾ However, with barely a literate background, he began as organist and composer of sacred songs for a breakaway church from the parent Aladura Movement at that time in Lagos when there grew a simmering of theatrical activities at the Mission schools and churches in Lagos. This came to spotlight the burgeoning dramatist as theatre manager, actor and producer. At that time, Ogunde was said to be remembered for freeing church services from the monotony of rhythms from the hymns by introducing a sprinkling of Yoruba music and dance songs. This new trend began asserting itself, becoming known as the Yoruba Opera. This opened up for Ogunde a totally new way of life when he inaugurated Hubert Ogunde Concert party, the first of its kind as a professional outfit in popular theatre practice ever in Nigeria.

Coming to Soyinka, having cut his teeth on a London stage with his elegant but sleazy play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka was destined for far more honours as soon as he was back in Nigeria at the eve of Nigeria's independence. However, the distinguishing mark, or feature, in Soyinka's dramaturgy, the poetic elegance and clarity of vision in *The Lion...* we think, seem to have deserted him when he wrote *Dance of the Forests*. Steeped in Yoruba mythology, Soyinka's dramaturgy seemed to face the dark moment of history when it was commissioned for the Nigeria's independence anniversary.

Literary Versus Popular Dramatists:

This two dramatists, Henshaw and Soyinka, asked the same question but in different ways, using different approaches. One was through a bright and sunny, raucous voice and dramatics in *This Is our Chance*, and the other through a dark, shadowy voice in *A Dance of the Forests*, respectively.

Within this same period there came a third voice, and a dramatist of note, more or less non-literary in his approach to dramaturgy, Hubert Ogunde. The involvement of this dramatist in politics stood, like all the others, astride the two mainstreams of colonial and post colonial era. If Soyinka's drama, like Henshaw's, represented the literary tradition, Ogunde's involvement

represented, in fact, the opposition between literary drama of Soyinka and his own form of drama popularly known as the Yoruba opera drama..

In this paper we are out to point out that Ogunde, as dramatist, perhaps less well known internationally and outside of this class of intellectual writers, his non-literary and un-analytical style of dramaturgy is no less comparable in his involvements in politics, to the Attic playwright hitherto referred to, Euripides. Ogunde comes to mind as the popular dramatist who set up the first professional theatre company in Nigeria and with well documented profiles of involvement in the home politics of the fatherland in the colonial days and after. Because any direct comparison with the Attic playwright, Euripides, might appear intimidating, we have chosen to offer an alternative menu, and compare the careers of Ogunde and Soyinka as it concerns their involvement in politics on the Nigerian stage. We believe that such a comparison is still an indirect comparison with Euripides, in spite of the latter's dominance in dramatic criticisms. In other words, it is with regard to the rather incontestable parallels and distinctions in their circumstances and involvements in politics in Nigeria during those early days of nationalism before and after independence that this study is of relevance.

We have suggested that the two dramatists, Ogunde and Soyinka, began writing during the colonial era, by which we mean that in their dramatic career they were contemporaries. We would add, perhaps, that their careers were sparked off by the demand for independence.

In the aftermath of independence politics had assumed a somewhat new turn and outlook, being seen as how leaders governed their states and arrived at decisions formulated as policies. Most often these policies triggered off a series of social and academic responses.

Politics is also concerned with how power is brokered. The first to come to mind is the politics of imperialism, in which we find dramatists like Ogunde at war with the colonial government through his operatic displays. How this theatre was represented became the question. Theatre critics like Loren Kruger sees this in the context of protest and revolt in West Africa. Closely tied to this is Erik Livingstone's approach in applying it to the task of decolonizing the theatre (208)

Basically for Ogunde, however, this was seen within the nexus of theatrical performances as a site for the representation of action. This action, inevitably, was in the form of resistance to imperialism. For Soyinka this was both literary and performative, oftentimes unproductive of the desired change. The question to ask, however, is if drama is capable of producing the desired change. Livingstone has afforded us a metaphor for colonial writer's revolt, which is that of *Eshu*, the Yoruba trickster god, embodied as an agent of disruption. We shall later be connecting this metaphor to Ogunde's own revolt in his dramatizations, as an agent of disruption too not witnessed in Soyinka.

In 1960, the Federal government commissioned Soyinka to produce a play for the independence celebrations. The outcome of that offer was *Dance of the Forests*. However, according to the critic, Gerald Moore, the play was

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

unable to achieve its desired aim with the audience, as people had missed the play's argument, purpose and intention for that year. Moore adds: "it is likely that there should have been an outcry against the author's sober expectations of his countrymen as well as its obscurity (29). What Moore was saying in effect is that the establishment against whom it was directed, remained confused of what the play was all about or was out to achieve.

Now we come to Ogunde's own production of *Yoruba Ronu*, similarly commissioned by the Egbe Omo Olofin, performed to an audience comprising "Chief Akintola and other eminent political figures." the irony being that those who commissioned the drama, states Egun Clark, "did not know what they had led themselves in for" (315) the play got across to its audience and it was banned in the Old Western Region of Nigeria at the time. The point here, therefore, is that plays are capable of influencing government decisions and the powers that be irrespective of the apparatus of power at the disposal of the Establishment organs, but provided that the play is accessible to the public as to its meaning and intention.. there were playwrights, in other words, who, (like Ogunde, Soyinka and Euripedes,) not satisfied with government policies and the order of the day, write and produce plays to attack those policies. In 1737 in theatre history in England, an instance of this was witnessed when Henry Fielding "produced a play at the Little theatre in which he attacked the Prime Minister Robert Walpole," and the government immediately rushed a licensing Act through the parliament to strengthen the law forbidding dramatic performances at any London theatres except the two patented at Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

That attests to the power of plays in influencing political order of the day. Earlier on, during the Elizabethan era, a similar event took place when the Earl of Essex, the Queen's favourite courtier, attempted the overthrow of the monarch. Already acting as the monarch himself, and persuaded by a friend to hold the rebellion against the aging queen, Essex commissioned a private performance of Shakespeare's King Richard the II in which the playwright depicted the successful overthrow of a reigning sovereign by the rebellious Bolingbroke. Of course the queen's council intervened, fearing that this might spark off the actual rebellion, by moving quickly to stall the plot (51).

By that observation, we are pointing to the aesthetic distance between the two Nigerian playwrights in styles and values, one popular, the other intellectual; what in critical circles is seen as the discrepancy between popular and literary drama. To be sure, each of these two styles of approach to theatre represents the form of praxis to be employed by a playwright in making statements while reaching out to his audience. It was Jeyifo who pointed out this gap, implying a disparity in popularity ratings between the two playwrights. As a popular dramatist, Ogunde's own profile seem to have placed the dramatist, ironically, at a far greater advantage than Soyinka. This has to do with "the two broad and divergent streams" of popular and literary traditions. As Jeyifo would say, though "the popular tradition is more ephemeral and evanescent, it is often robust, vital and professionally

disciplined,” Thus, popular theatre’s advantage over literary tradition in appealing to a vast majority of the populace, in spite of the literary tradition being one of texts, intellectually prestigious and “more assured of the gratitude of posterity”. No one has attempted this contrastive distinction as well as Jeyifo has done and we think it is necessary to enable us appreciate the nature and extent of the involvements of this two dramatists in Nigeria. In other words, while Ogunde’s operas may be considered ephemeral and evanescent, Soyinka’s more tragic plays are deep in meaning and symbolism, and texture. In one study, we have attempted to take a look at some of these plays even from the context of mysticism, arguing that this component persists in these plays.

We have suggested that Soyinka’s dramaturgy appeared involved, “while at the same time his diversity makes him difficult to pin down to a consistent political position” as James Booth would argue. (114). Booth further goes on to state that Soyinka’s-: life and work gives the impression of a passionately committed man. But to exactly what Soyinka is committed is sometimes obscure, even to him, which is not to say that it is illusory or valueless. (114). All this is only to the extent that Soyinka’s plays are known for their “celebrated obscurity” arising “from the confusions caused by muddle and over ambition on the part of the author.”(117).

Ogubiyi asks a fundamental question, “whether any of Nigeria’s literary playwrights can be said to be genuinely popular”(37). In conceding that Femi Ososfisan is eminently so, the question then arises whether the Nigerian playwright can, “based in a university setting, writing in standard English be effective and popular in a society where the mass audience (some seventy percent of the entire population) is not literate in English.”(37). Based on this, it is arguable whether Soyinka’s plays had that reach, Furthermore, this theatre critic asks “will such a playwright ever strike a responsive chord in a mass audience, when such an audience comes from his immediate community. Will he be understood and his message comprehended. Do our literary playwrights reach out to mass audiences?” (37).

We will move quickly to answer these questions with respect to Soyinka as a writer of importance. It cannot be doubted that, in intellectual probing, Soyinka is, in political drama, complex. However, it can be doubted if, in popularity rating, the playwright is comparable to Ogunde.

We are referring to Soyinka’s serious plays, among them *A Dance of the Forest* and *Madmen and Specialists*, both of which are faced with serious communication problems in the projection of ideas. The objective ground for this assessment is there: Badejo has shown us how the playwright has been engaged in *A Dance of the Forest* and two other plays, *Opera Woyonsi* and *A Play of Giants* in unmasking the gods who, in fact are otherwise the political demagogues of his time. The subject which this critic prefigures in this study, though somewhat opaque, in essence suggests the political reality behind the smokescreen where failed dictators are what the essay is out to expose. The central theme, therefore, is that in this drama “both the elements of traditional African culture and the structures of Africa’s political power are variables

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

that exist hand in hand, so that in Soyinka's vision masks function to maintain the power of the demagogues of Continental community." Badejo goes on to suggest that three demagogues parade as divine figures whose masks represent and maintain hierarchical positions and the sovereign right to power," extending the mask idiom even to the "elite power position of earthly gods, so that what the playwright is all out to achieve is to unmask "these earthly gods and demagogues" in order to expose their real faces of corruption and the expressions that lurk behind the mask. This central motif of masking and unmasking, this critic states is found in the three plays given earlier on. According to the critic: In *A Dance...* the context for masking/unmasking is the traditional Yoruba festivals and Nigerian national history. Here the dramatic act of unmasking Yoruba gods is revealed as the faces of the oligarchs who employ charitable and business institutions for their own gains. In *giants*, the context is the international community of power brokers represented by scholars, diplomats, the press and international agencies (204).

The point to note from the above interpretation, therefore, is that Soyinka's style of dramaturgy, with its too much leaning on symbolic action, marks him out as a difficult writer, being the point of the befuddlement which Jeyifo had lamented (414). Hence, if highly charged, symbolic dramas that are intellectually tasking constitute attacks on the establishment, the point of the drama is lost to the audience as was the case with *A Dance of the Forests* on that eve of independence celebrations in Lagos. It is this very important meaning that is lost in a mesh of symbolism and mysticism. We have referred to the befuddlement in *A Dance of the Forests*. The same could be said of *The Road*, *Madmen and Specialists* and to some extent, *Kongi's Harvest* and *Death and the King's Horseman*.

An alternative option for Soyinka would have been propaganda as a tool for making that very important statement at independence.

In the days of the period now referred to as the holocaust, an American Jew and journalist by name Ben Hecht, employed outright propaganda in his play, *We Will Never Die*, with overt political implications while making a statement during World War II. This had to do with the mass massacre of Jews in Germany in that war (283, 284).

At 1960, the Nobel Laureate, Soyinka, wrote and produced *A Dance of the Forests* also with political undertones. While Hecht's play indicted the Germans for Genocide against the Jews, Soyinka's play was self-indicting of the horrors of the African past attendant on the present. The semblances and divergences between the two plays are obviously there, and this principally on the point that, in terms of purpose and objective, *We Will Never Die* represents everything that *A Dance of the Forest* is not as a propaganda tool for fighting a war of the mind.

Open propaganda, in fact, constitutes an attack on the Establishment, and which Hecht had ably demonstrated in the play titled *We Will Never Die*.

Ogonna Anaagudo-Agu

Perhaps, it would have been easier if Soyinka employed propaganda as a tool; but then, Soyinka is not such kind of writer. As Nnolim has rightly pointed out, propaganda per se, is inimical to art, and Soyinka is concerned with art, hence Nnolim's assertion that propaganda has to be subtle and the aesthetic content uppermost (90). Bearing this in mind, we find that *Dance of the Forests* is different in its aesthetic preferences in not being leftist as most agitprop theatres are (they are played mostly to the workers or preliterate). However, *Dance of the Foerst* holds mostly traditional theatrical values no matter how the playwright had tried to modify it.

Propaganda, with its harmful effects and satiric caricature (23), derives from the agitprop theatre which came into being specifically for that purpose, like the primitive town crier with nothing artistic and dramatic to recommend it; though it was not until music was added, according to Innes, that it began to exhibit dramatic features. It is noteworthy that Hecht's experiment was in itself propaganda of the agitprop type, being Hecht's own response to that war and "his own personal crusade" on behalf of thousands of Jews murdered during World War II. As such, the play represented Hecht's rage against the Germans for their role in that war, in itself a political involvement and very clearly dramatized to a wide range of audiences.

Soyinka, however, is involved in politics in many other ways than that suggested through the scripted drama, and this in significant ways. On two occasions, Soyinka got so involved that it led, in the first instance to his trial in court, and in detention in the second. The first was during the political impasse in the old Western Region of Nigeria between Chief Awolowo and his erstwhile deputy in the Action Group, Chief Akintola, leading to the split in the party; and secondly, during the Nigerian civil war in 1967 respectively. Let us quickly take a look at those situations. First, the role played by Soyinka in those years of feverish political tussles.

The political tussle between Chief Awolowo is well known in the annals of Nigeria's history. Soyinka's own role is well known within the compass of that event leading to his interrogation in the 1964 election in the old Western Region. Egun Clark has captured it graphically when the theatre critic wrote about the rift between Awolowo and Akintola during that election; and which caused untold economic and political catastrophes in the old region. According to this writer, The Yoruba who formerly had the political organization to refer to and draw patronage from now had two, while their opposite numbers in other regions enjoyed their old tribal solidarity (314).

Under such prevailing circumstance as stated above, election into the Western Region came, and AG called on her supporters to boycott elections. Akintola's party, the NDP, then won, causing widespread unrest in the region. As report had it, elections came to a close and Soyinka held up the radio house, preventing the result of the election from being broadcast.

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

That must have been cheers for the playwright but not for subtle, elegant art. Soyinka's involvement in politic *physically* debilitated the elegance of art in speaking for itself. This raises one pertinent question: to what extent is a writer willing to give of himself, or his writing, in fighting a cause? Put differently, where does art, or theatre, end and activism begin? With Soyinka, there does not seem to be any borderline between the two.

Another incidence worth mentioning is Soyinka's involvement in the Nigerian civil war in the years between 1966-1970. At the end of that war, in 1970, Soyinka got released from detention following his attempt to create obstacles on the way of the federal government executing the war, just to force the federal government on its knees with regard to that war. However, the nature of it, though quite different from the former, basically had to do with activism. On the face of it, Soyinka claims that what caused his detention was the result of his "denunciation of the war in the Nigerian papers, and his visit to the East," which smacks of that same involvement physically in Nigerian politics. There was also his attempt to recruit the country's intellectuals within and without as a pressure group in terminating the war, working for a total ban on the supply of arms and ammunitions to the warring factions and thereby creating a third force which would then use the existing stalemate and confusion, perhaps, to repudiate and end both the secession of Biafra and the genocide of consolidated dictatorship of the army which made both the secession and war inevitable.

The above, in broad, outlines the cause of Soyinka's detention in prison, not any play that attempted to comment and strategize on stage any action for ending the war, even comment. In fact, Booth maintains that "Soyinka's various involvements in the practical politics of Nigeria had to do with the founding of "The Pirates;" and "his forced way into the Ibadan Radio Station (some say at gunpoint) during the crisis in the Western Region in November 1965, in order to substitute a tape announcing an Action Group election victory in place of the official tape announcing the actual. Flagrantly rigged NNDP victory (119)." For this he was interrogated; and for his involvements during the Nigerian civil war Soyinka turned out to be a civil detainee, again not on grounds of any play he had written and dramatized but for his personal involvement in that war.

The extent to which the lines of action enunciated by the playwright would go in ending the civil war, or influence government policy concerning that war, or in modifying the state of anarchy in the country is another ground for debate. However, the ability of the playwright to bring about the "revolutionary changes" all by himself, through personal involvements of the sorts we have referred to, and as he himself did maintain, calls to question the place of art in society. Here, arts fail our dramatist. Why, in this circumstance, art failed the playwright is a subject for a separate study. However, we think that the play, *A Dance of the Forests*, failed to get to the desired audience as a result of idiom closure occasioned by the playwrights too much dependence on private mystical symbols and arcane mythologies that are more or less private to the playwright, hence, the intellectual dimension of his literary

output. We have referred to Jeyifo's evaluation of this attitude, the befuddlement that it breeds, its crass incomprehension, and the difficulty in deciphering the written codes of communication within the play. Jeyifo is therefore of the view that a play should strive to achieve greater directness, greater clarity and to strive to be understood for it to achieve greater popularity among its teeming audiences anywhere, any time. Hence, Soyinka had not fully clarified the issue of his audience in his dramaturgy due to the language panegyrics of the playwright too.

Now we come to the story on the obverse side, about the dramatist who targeted his audiences through operatic drama, and here we are referring to Hubert Ogunde. But first, the nature of this drama needs expatiating. Ogunde's opera, for that is what the form is called, being non scripted, perhaps, is of the nature of masques in restoration England. To be sure, masques, according to Peter Lane, "consisted of song and dance scenes and which requires poets to write the special verses. Also, costume is an attractive part of this form of presentation which, with the scenery, are often lavish." And Because it involved a lot of singing and splendid costume and scenery, it is believed to be "the forerunner of the modern opera." (54).

Ogunde must have employed this way of presenting action in Yoruba *opera*. It is probable that these operas were often without dialogue at first, which later grew, with lean plots. A newspaper report informs us that it was with the second outing of *Black Forest* that the opera was re-arranged to include a dialogue" (306) Ogunde composed, directed and produced these operas at the same time managed his theatre company. With this kind of play, which is far removed in content and style from the intellectual drama of Soyinka, Ogunde virtually targeted colonial as well as home government establishments through his operas.

A look at some of Ogunde's operas would suggest this artist's commitment to political theatre. Clark lists Ogunde's operas to include his religious operas, among many others, as the Garden of Eden and the Throne of God, but it is the political *operas* that are of significance in this study. These include *Bread and Bullet*, *Strike and hunger*, *Darkness and Light*, *Tiger's Empire*, all of which were "an attack on colonial rule." But it was *Bread and Bullet* that brought him to a close brush with the colonial establishment. According to Clark, after its premier in October, 1950, "when he took the play to the Northern cities in 1951, he was banned from showing it in certain areas there," the Daily Service newspaper reporting on May 11, 1951 that "Ogunde's Play is said to be seditious." The report went on that Ogunde was not only served a ban notice, he was in addition charged to court and brought before the mafisatrate for "posting posters of the said play and for which he was fined six pounds. Ogunde was banned not only in Kano but also in Kaduna and Makurdi (305).

Ogunde's other play, *Yoruba Ronu*, became a political tool in the hands of the NNDP the ruling political party of the then premier of the former region. We have already referred to the schism between Akintola and

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

Awolowo leading to the political impasse in the state and for which it was banned.

Popularity Ratings of the Dramatists.

Earlier on in this paper we identified areas of similarities and divergences in the career and political involvements of Soyinka and Ogunde with regard to their way of reflection and action in Nigerian polity. While Soyinka played on charges personal to him as a way of bringing about revolutionary changes in society, Ogunde had relied on the power of his art for this purpose. With Ogunde the situation is even more poignant and daunting, but he is the popular dramatist with the greatest reach in the local setting but not with the international reputation of Soyinka. This is, for sure, due to the nature of popular drama where the message is accessible, being more liberal and democratized, than is the case with literary drama of Soyinka. It is true, to some extent, that while Soyinka enjoys much of the international recognition, as a local champion Ogunde is a much more a household name than Soyinka could be. In output, it is not possible to say, but the likelihood is that Ogunde wrote and produced more drama and adopted the appropriate praxis peculiar to his art as a political commentator than Soyinka did in his career.

In the new dispensation, Ogunde's traveling theatre had a wider appeal for its use of the vernacular and local idioms and forms to project his meaning. Soyinka was domiciled in the universities, powered with academic discourse. This is to say that Soyinka's drama is confined to the few elite circles within the university system, while for Ogunde a wider field of action is sought within the Nigerian polity and beyond. In short, Ogunde's profile as a popular dramatist places him at a far greater advantage in popularity rating than Soyinka.

CONCLUSION

Of Soyinka's involvements in politics through his newspaper commentaries, speeches and outright personal involvements no more needs to be said than that his individual self intruded in politics more than his plays did. As such, he is important as a social and political activist and critic than as a dramatist. It cannot be denied, however, that because his plays are tangible on account of which they are published plays, this alone has given him the reputation that he deserves. However, we cannot be sure that those plays are more far-reaching than Ogunde's plays. Ogunde traveled far and wide with his plays stirring audiences. Therefore, it is not difficult to say who is most widely rated of the two dramatists. And this brings us back to the issue of befuddlement in Soyinka's works which sometimes led to confusion and inaccessibility in his works. Booth talks of Soyinka's "celebrated obscurity" and "the confusions" caused "by muddle and over-ambition on the part of the author" (117) as the very factors that prevented Soyinka's works from getting to a larger audience. If therefore Soyinka is the Shakespeare of the Nigerian

stage, Ogunde is one of those brigand Irish playwrights who breathed life into the aged theatre of the Elizabethan drama impinging on the restoration period. What these playwrights did was to embark on a reworking of the Shakespearean plays to give them a more positive feeling of light and warmth now finding a new audience. Soyinka's less successful plays need this kind of reworking, and now.

WORKS CITED

- Badejo, diedre L. Unmasking the gods: Of Egungun and Demagogues in Three Works
by Wole Soyinka. *The Theatre Journal*, Vol. 39, No 2..Timothy Murry, Ed. . Baltimore: The John Hopkin's University Press, 1987, pp. 204-214.
- Booth, James. *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.
- Clark, Ebun. Ogunde theatre: "The Rise of Contemporary Professional Theatre in Nigeria 1946-72" *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source book*. Yemi Ogunbiyi, Ed. Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development and Culture, 1981, pp.295-320.
- Hecht, Ben. *We will Never Die*. *The Theatre Journal*, Vol. 39, No 2. Timothy Murray, Ed. Baltimore: The John Hopkin's University Press, 1987, p. 169.
- Henshaw, James Ene. *Enough is Enough*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation,1976.
- *This is Our Chance*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.
- Innes, C.D. *Erwin Piscato's Political Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1972.
- Jeyifo, Biodun: "Literary Drama and the Search for A Popular Theatre in Nigeria"
. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source book*. Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development and Culture, 1981, pp. 411-421.
- Lane, Peter. *The Theater*. London: B T Batsford Ltd., 1975
- Moore, Gerald. *Wole Soyinka*. London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1971.
- Ngugi, Wa Thiongo. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- Ogunbiyi, Yemi. "Nigerian Theatre and Drama." *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Profile*. Yemi Ogunbiyi, Ed. Lagos: Nigerian Magazine,
Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Social Development and Culture,1981, pp. 3-53.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *Soyinka, Euripedes, and the Anxiety of Empire*. *Research in African Literature*, Vol. 30, No 4. Indidana University Press, 1999, pp.32-40.

The Political Involvements of Ogunde and Soyinka in Nigeria

- O'Brien, Conor Cruise. *Writers and Politics: Essays and Criticism*. Middlesex: PenguinBooks, 1965.
- .Soyinka, Wole. *The Man Died*. London: Rex Collins, 1973.
- A Dance of the Forests. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
 - The Road. London: Oxford University Press, 1967
 - Kongi's Harvest. London: Oxford University Press, 1967
 - Madmen and Specialists. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Yitzhak, Ben Ami. *Years of Wrath, Years of Glory*. New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1982, pp. 283,284.