CONCLUSION

With the works of Wole Soyinka, Nigerian drama of socio-political concern has become a force to be reckoned with. The role which Soyinka envisions for the intellectual is that of a dynamic force. He believes that society has an inherent mechanism which changes it, but it is the intellectual who expedites this change and gives it proper direction. So he sees:

Society as being in continual need for salvation from itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act; it comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save. They frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision. (Jones 11-12).

Soyinka’s commitment does not end with an analysis of the problems facing the society. The analysis of these problems is aimed at giving his heroes the much-needed perspective for revolutionizing life and transforming society. Soyinka’s real commitment is to the creation of a new and just social order.

Soyinka’s democratically and politically oriented ideology takes the form of protest, which started as a mild satire in his early plays developing into scathing attacks against the rulers of his country. He is a relentless campaigner for human rights and a strong opponent of all types of dictatorship. His critique is committed to a rigorous but strategic interrogation of all of ideology. The motivating force is universal: to express an obsessive concern for an upholding of human dignity and an inherent abhorrence to a suppression of dissent and an acute consciousness regarding the destructive power and the authority of Satanic individuals.

What sets Soyinka apart from other political playwrights is that his drama incorporates and fuses diverse elements from quite different traditions of thought and methods of presentation. He is one of those artists who do not subordinate artistic values to political considerations even when he is committed to a political and social cause. He is very conscious of the important role he can play as an artist in shaping the destiny of his society. He made it his mission to examine the traditional structures
of his society with the intention of gleaning whatever is relevant and useful from the African past which he makes use of, in suggesting a future course of action for his society. The product of this fusion is often striking and novel and effectively reaches out to the masses. But what gives life to his plays is the kinship the audience feels with the content of the plays. He has produced drama which has its roots in the Nigerian tradition and speaks to Nigeria and the world through that tradition.

The writer's task becomes all the more difficult if he is to depict the complex African reality. A mechanical portrayal of this reality may render a work of art journalistic. So Soyinka calls into play all his creative abilities to maintain a poise between realism and art. A thorough analysis of his major plays in the foregoing chapters inevitably leads to this conclusion.

The significance of my research lies in studying how Soyinka exploits the resources of drama to awaken people to the widespread inhuman exploitation of the masses. I have traced the different paradigms of his political involvement in my study and the effectiveness of his 'drama of protest'. Soyinka's drama has had a vibrant existence in Nigeria and played many useful as well as controversial roles. His involvement with drama began in 1957. His earlier plays were more socially oriented, but by 1960, the collapse of his native country into political tyranny and social chaos spurred him into drama that was strongly political. He says:

I come alive best in theatre...Perhaps it's because I come from a society which is very rich in theatrical traditions, and I saw from my childhood the traditional forms of theatre, and it becomes for me a logical means of expressing some of my most profoundly felt intuitions, if you like, and felt material experiences of my environment. (Interview, Berkeley)

In the early plays Soyinka, on the one hand, lashes at the life-stifling rituals propagated by priests like Kadiye in The Swamp Dwellers, on the other, negates the raw essence of modernism propagated by the characters like Lakunle as shown in The Lion and The Jewel. It is heroes like Igwezu in The Swamp Dwellers who possess the courage to confront the tyranny of tradition. Igwezu's open condemnation of the 'Serpent Cult' makes him the prototype of the Soyinkan hero, who is not ready to
accept the age-old customs, thereby, endeavouring to awake the people from the somnambulistic state of encapsulation within the confines of life-stifling rituals.

At the celebration of Nigeria’s independence in 1960, in *A Dance of the Forests*, he evokes a violent and inglorious past in order to demonstrate its continuity into present. In this play, he has juxtaposed the present and the past lives of the principal personages to drive home the idea that hypocrisy and brutality of human beings has persisted since generations. The only glimmer of hope in such circumstances, in the writer’s opinion, is an artist like Demoke, who represents the fusion of African tradition and modern vision.

Soyinka’s premonition about a dark future in *A Dance of the Forests* proved true in mid sixties when the atrocities of military rulers plunged the country into an abyss of despair. In *Kongi’s Harvest*, Soyinka has made use of the ritual of Yam festival to comment upon the rulers’ perennial lust for power. By presenting a ray of hope through the characters of Daodu and Segi, the writer expresses his faith in the heroic power of the individual to resist tyranny and repression.

The period of mid sixties was marked by mayhem, political turmoil and upheavals in Nigeria. This socio-political scenario gets reflected in the changing visage of Soyinkan hero, who has lost his moorings and is in pursuit of unbridled power like Bero in *Madmen and Specialists*. All these protagonists have completely deviated from traditional values and personify greed, selfishness and lust for power, thereby, echoing the post-independence military rulers of Nigeria. *Madmen and Specialists* conveys a demonic world in which man instead of drawing power and sustenance from community becomes a beastly individual who gains his strength by devouring his fellow men. The total collapse of human bonds is represented by Bero’s act committing parricide.

In *Opera Wonyosi*, Soyinka advocates that dictatorship may not be a desired alternative to democracy. In revolting images he depicts the manner in which dictatorship stifles popular activities and self-expression. In a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria, the free expression which democracy assures is a way of bringing out burning issues. Issues when expressed give rise to possible solutions; when stifled...
they boil within and explode, often into violence. And violence often leads to anarchy and national disintegration. The advocacy for a free, democratic society, then, is geared towards a formidable nation-building.

Though Soyinka’s drama sees criticism as one of its functions, its incisive criticism and portrayal of alarming scenarios in the socio-political setup are not intended to destroy the delicate fabric of the Nigerian society. Rather the plays are the writings of a genuinely patriotic dramatist, sad that such angst-ridden situations should arise and hoping that by using drama to portray the problems and issues such situations could be altered. His drama aims at achieving a healthy national integration and at healing a national malaise. In this sense, his ‘drama of protest’ is also a ‘drama of therapy’.

Soyinka as a maverick genius of African culture and literature becomes for every reader across the globe, whether black or white, a living personification of the confrontation between the humanist values of society and the reactionary, stagnant elements in society. Soyinka himself once proclaimed that he believes in the values of an egalitarian society and possesses no faith or belief in self-proclaimed and self-styled revolutionaries and reformists who under the garb of modernity and progression become totally impervious to the welfare of people at large.

My study demonstrates how his political activities, for which he has suffered imprisonment and exile, stem from a deep concern for the common man seen as mercilessly exploited by tyrants, bureaucrats and opportunists. His work shows a simultaneous commitment to continuity and desire for change. His commitment to continuity emerges out of his metaphysical analysis; while his deep-moving sensibility provokes a desire for change. Indeed, it is the holding tension of his metaphysics and his sensibility that generates his art and appeals to the masses.

We may conclude, that the future of political theatre akin to the ‘drama of protest’ of Wole Soyinka, seems great because of its capability. Four decades after independence, Nigeria seems in a position to boast of the most lively, forceful and critical socio-political drama in Africa. It is capable of insisting on an image of change and of perfection as its target. This is a radical perspective but it seems to me that the future of Nigeria’s theatre lies in it. As long as there is room for improvement
- and Nigeria is far from being a perfect nation - this type of theatre is bound to prosper. Ultimately, it may prove more useful for the survival of the country than non-political drama.

In a country that has experienced many coups as it seeks a better society and a workable socio-political platform, Soyinka’s theatre is of vital importance. In the issues it touches, such drama exhibits the qualities necessary to nation-building. Political leaders seem so aware of the presence of drama that even as some have attacked it for trying to dethrone them, as Chief S.L. Akintola did, others already dethroned have sought some consolation in its wisdom. The prime example is General Yakubu Gowon, head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, 1966-75, who, when he heard in Kampala, Uganda, where he was attending a summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity, that his government had been overthrown, resigned himself to fate, quoting Shakespeare’s words:

All the world’s a stage
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances. (Quoted in Daily Times of Nigeria 9)

The words were a tribute to drama and a soothing therapy for a soldier-politician in a moment of distress and of truth: a moment of distress, because he had lost his throne; and of truth, because he had become the Head of Government by ousting General Aguiyi-Ironsi in a coup and now the wheel comes full circle as another soldier tells him that his role is ended and he must make his final exit.

Many intellectuals, like Wole Soyinka, have openly come out against all types of corrupt institutions in recent times. The fact that these intellectuals have been able to influence public life is exemplified by the ouster of the notorious Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, against whom the intellectuals of Africa built a strong public opinion. The release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the establishment of the SWAPO Government under the leadership of Sam Niyoma in Namibia at the end of a long period of colonial rule while validating Soyinka’s belief in the viability of the leadership of the African intellectuals mark a significant triumph for them in both moral and actual terms.
The survival of this form of drama established firmly by Wole Soyinka seems assured by the emergence of young Nigerian playwrights like Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Ola Rotimi, O.O. Amali, Tunde Fatunde, Tess Onwueme, Akanji Nasiru, Sonny Oti, Zulu Sofola and Atiboroko Uyovkerhi.