...[Y]ou can’t write about Nigeria truthfully without a sense of violence. To be serene is to lie. Relations in Nigeria are violent relations. It’s the way it is, for historical and all sorts of other reasons. (Okri. Interview. London, 1986)

We live in an extraordinarily debauched, interesting, savage world, where things really don’t come out even. The purpose of true drama is to help remind us of that (Mamet, 18, 2007).

I. Nigerian theatre history:

Theatre is both a cultural and traditional product—a conglomeration of humankind’s imitative and creative instincts interacting with his language, art, religion and culture. Nigeria has a long theatrical tradition in that the contemporary Nigerian theatre is seen as basically the by-product of two theatrical developments that originated in the communities of the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria. The theatre in Yoruba language is the ‘folk’ theatre that originated from the society of masqueraders around the middle of the sixteenth century. This form of theatre, however, succumbed to the offshoots of Islam and Christianity during the nineteenth century. The Yoruba folk theatre (or
“Yoruba folk opera” under the enervating influence of the *Alarinjo* theatre), in its dying stage however, marked the rise and opulence of a new theatrical form, the Yoruba Operatic Theatre that came into existence by taking cue from the ‘native dramas’ and ‘cantatas’ which enlivened the operations of the Separatist Church Movement (the African churches and later the ‘Aladura’ or Apostolic Churches) in Lagos during the first decade of the twentieth century. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Yoruba Operatic Theatre underwent a wave of transition as it developed into the popular theatre of Nigeria—being mostly performed in school halls, town halls and in many parts of the country on improvised stages. Rooted in African performative ambience of orality (verbal resources through poetry, chants and folktales), music, dance, spectacle and improvisatory nuances, “this theatre galvanizes keen audience participation and fine sense of attachment to its cultural roots” (Ododo, 150).

The other theatrical development is of recent origin due to its characteristic features of the European counterpart. This is the theatre of the English language, variously referred to as the ‘formal’, ‘literary’, or ‘intellectual’ theatre. It is the product of western educational movement in Nigeria and developed mostly from the ‘school plays’. The eminence of this form of theatre lies in the fact that by the late 1950s, many university-educated Nigerians began writing plays in English with a two-fold motive—not only for the sake of school curriculum and amateur productions but also for the newly emerging readership. These plays undoubtedly bear the marks and traits of European and American theatrical traditions.

One of the most conspicuous and significant characteristic features of contemporary Nigerian drama is that of adaptability and improvisation. There is a fine fusion of traditional play-acting through oral performance with modern techniques and the utilisation
of western concepts of stagecraft. In this context, mention may be made of the dramatists of the two types of theatre sharing a common ancestral origin of the Yoruba: Hubert Ogunde and Duro Ladipo as representatives of the Yoruba ‘folk’ theatre based on oral traditions and those of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi as representatives of the theatre in English. It is however intriguing that each of these dramatists has consciously (or unconsciously, if not intended or voiced) turned to Yoruba oral tradition either through the process of initiation or research.

Words form the nerve centre of any oral tradition. The use of oral tradition by the artist of contemporary Nigerian theatre is interesting as it intensifies the factor of social conditioning of the artists. The tradition of the entrance-song in the Yoruba theatre (as evident in the song of the women in the market-place in Wole Soyinka’s play DKHM is significantly a theatrical device of social conditioning. Ladipo becomes more significant among all other contemporary Nigerian playwrights because his play is a source of Soyinka’s modernised version of *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Ladipo not only explored the wealth of Yoruba myths, legends and history but also the rich and prolific poetry, music and dance. On the other hand, Soyinka has his own axe to grind. Soyinka makes use of the basic elements of oral tradition by calling forth the experience, beliefs, fantasies and emotions of his audience couched in an experimental style of presentation that seems to cut loose from the restrictions of the western theatrical form. In his use of oral tradition, “Soyinka behaves like the expressionist dramatist who discards conventional theatrical techniques, suppresses details of actuality and develops his own style of writing and production”. (Adedeji, 137) As such, Soyinka’s use of oral tradition is quite personal and therefore in no way, be considered as providing raw materials necessary for
investigating the Yoruba past with an anthropological exactitude. Kwame Anthony Appiah, the author of the path breaking work, In My Father’s House (1992), questions the ‘Yorubanness’ in Soyinka’s writings by observing that Soyinka not only personalises Yoruba traditions to his own end while using them but also deconstructs it (Roy, 17, emphasis mine).

In an attempt to explore the chronological titbits of African history, the pre-colonial history of the Yoruba attracts considerable attention. Although the academic historiography of Yorubaland or of sub-Saharan Africa does not antedate the 1950s, it was preceded by a tradition of historical writing by local amateur historians since the nineteenth century. Therefore, in ‘conjuring’ a history of Africa, the question of ‘authenticity’ seems to loom large in the production of a unique African history due to the dual nature of African historiography—firstly, due to the heavy reliance on oral traditions as sources for producing history and, secondly, the accuracy and authenticity of the fabricated versions of history that emerge from such contestable sources. The principal problem which seems to deter the production and thereby the validity of African/Yoruba history lies in the possible misrepresentation and distortion of the oral traditions. Jan Vansina, in his classic study of oral traditions, has not made any vocal assertion regarding the pitfalls of using oral traditions, reported second hand in most cases, in writing local histories. Nevertheless, in an implicit manner, he does warn of historians who “... derive his information from a number of different sources in order to get to know the history of his society...” and in the process “creates a personal version of this history in which all the contradictions of the sources he has used are obliterated, and to which he has added his own interpretations” (Vansina, 191).
Vansina’s argument is quite valid in times where narrativization of history is a well-accepted dogma.\textsuperscript{5}

\section*{II. Oral History and African Historiography:}

In so far as remapping the history of Africa or for that matter African historiography is concerned, two pioneering landmarks were Samuel Johnson’s \textit{History of the Yorubas} (1921) and Carl Christian Reindorf’s \textit{History of the Gold Coast and Asante} (1895). These books combined ethnographic observations, traditions of origin, and detailed historical narratives constructed from a combination of personal experience and oral research. Instances such as these compel modern African historians to not only acknowledge the significance of written sources but also to ponder upon the prejudiced European term ‘oral’ and its significance in revamping African History.

The pioneering generation of African historians did not completely negate the central significance of written sources. But if the size of the continent is taken into account, such sources appear too trivial to be taken for granted. In a situation like this, historians often imagined the kind of history that will emerge if it was based on the documentary record laid down in most parts by Europeans and the Islamic conquerors. They therefore began to suggest that the idea of evidence need not solely be synonymous with the written texts.
Their own experiences in pursuing their research led them to the conclusion that ‘oral tradition’ might be taken seriously.

Oral tradition, however, must not be confused with ‘oral history’. Oral history implies the recording of an individual’s own memories while oral tradition can be defined as the passing down from generation to generation of events that extended into the deep past. As a matter of fact, if Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Norse *Sagas*, and *Beowulf* can be the typical oral narratives of Western culture, why then, the African can’t have any of those? Is it that just because they are black their oral tradition is bound to be some queer babbling in the dark? Or is it that their oral tradition has no historical impetus for their ‘being’ African? These questions therefore invite serious critical considerations. Oral traditions had been recorded by Johnson, Reindorf and other pioneering African scholars in their own respective research. Arguments were forwarded that these traditions could be read in the same sort of ways as historians read written documents, a claim extended by Jan Vansina in *Oral Tradition* (1965). This was a bold claim and a brave one which seemed to subvert the conventional historical practice. This kind of attitude in fact facilitated the historian’s task of recapturing ‘history from below’. However, it must be noted that oral traditions are far from being straightforward and are rarely reliable vehicles of factual information. Nevertheless, these accounts undoubtedly serve useful in getting as composite picture of Africa as a continent which does have a history.

In 1993, the Program of African Studies Seminar at North-western University in the United States announced that its theme would be Material Inscription in African Cultures. The choice of the theme reminded that for the majority of people in Africa, writing has never been the principal means of expression or communication, and that many other forms of
cultural inscription such as ritual, dance, communal performance, sculpture, and weaving would take precedence over writing in any comprehensive historical description of African culture. This truth makes it even more significant that in the contemporary representation of Africa, a concern with written inscription has been so dominant. Although almost all accounts of African cultures insist on the importance of oral culture, there is little doubt that for all practical purposes the oral has been displaced by the written in the majority of texts concerned with African cultures written in the last twenty years. This, despite the fact that for the vast majority of the people of Africa literacy is still an unachieved ideal and that for most African people, the oral world of speech and non-written cultural exchange is the world they inhabit on a daily basis.

The idea of the written text represented a fundamental sign of superior cultural value and identity. The Arab cultures of East Africa and of the sub-Saharan Sudanese kingdoms stressed the importance of the text in identifying the Muslims from the indigenous people in ways significantly like later European practice. The Arabs saw themselves as part of a unique group, the people of the book (ahl al kitab), and so the idea of stability of the sacred material inscription of writing became central to their conception of culture. It is writing which seems to be the common ground as the scholarly accounts validates the spread of Islam and Arabic culture and those of the later European colonizers. For this reason, the patronage of writing has been a powerful and recurring weapon in African history from the earliest times. At a later date, when Europeans first encountered Africans in large numbers with the proliferation of the West African slave trade in the eighteenth century, it is significant that the implicit test of the absence of civilization was the lack of an effective writing system.
Without this sign of inscriptive permanence the complex and subtle oral cultures of the region were rapidly discounted and overlooked in favour of the cultural values carried along as baggage by inscriptive forms of the invasive cultures. It was the absence of writing which, for both major invasive influences on indigenous cultures served to justify the development of theories of racial and cultural superiority. (Msiska, 145, 1997)

Although oral tradition has been utilized in the study of many fields of history, in recent years it has been associated especially with the history of sub-Saharan Africa, and more especially of sub-Saharan Africa during the pre-colonial period. When the serious study of African history at universities in Africa, Europe and America began in the early 1950s, from the outset, great emphasis was placed on the use of oral tradition. This reflected the conviction that there was for Africa a relative dearth of contemporary written sources. There is an element of exaggeration in this view since sub-Saharan Africa was not by any means wholly non-literate. Written sources survived for many African societies—most obviously, Islamic societies with written sources in Arabic. However, it remains true that this sort of written documentation is limited.

Oral tradition therefore remains the only source for the history of some African societies, and the only form of internal source for many. It is however intriguing that the use of oral tradition as a significant source had, in fact, been a normal feature of historical research, back to the days of the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century BC; and was also characteristic of both Christian and Islamic historical scholarship in medieval times. The analogy between oral traditions and written manuscripts breaks down because in the case of oral traditions it is highly misleading to think in terms of an ‘original’ text which, more or
less, cannot be accurately reproduced in the chain of transmission. In oral performance, however, there is no ‘text’ to be copied as the text exists in the act of performance.

The practice of oral history has been a foundational component of the discipline of African history. During the early 1960s, historians and newly independent African nation-states alike became concerned with recovering a usable past—a history that would demonstrate African agency and establish an autonomous sense of identity apart from the preceding period of European colonial rule. Depicting Africa’s pre-colonial past consequently became a central goal, although written evidence proved to be scarce. Collecting oral history therefore, became a necessity, and indeed, the richness and ubiquity of African oral traditions that had developed over centuries in place of written records aided in this effort of reconstructing African history. Jan Vansina’s *Oral Tradition* is a crucial methodological intervention in this regard. In contrast to the prevailing perspectives of the time that emphasize the objectivity and fundamental importance of written records, Vansina argues for the equal value of oral sources as history. Moreover, for Africa, such evidence offer new perspectives that challenge the distortions of Euro-centrism which has been a characteristic feature of colonial documents.

Luise White and David William Cohen in their recent edition of *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* argue for a re-evaluation of contemporary oral history. One of their central contentions is that the categorical distinction between written and oral evidence is at times ‘overly schematic’. (White, 12, 2001). Their qualitative similarities—particularly as narrative forms—have suggested a common methodological ground, and the mutual interaction between the two needs to be examined. By articulating a separate distinction between words and voices, White and Cohen aim to cut through these
traditional differences. ‘Words’ refers to the raw material of historical research and the predicaments it can pose. ‘Voices’ symbolizes the African perspectives and opinions sought within the raw material of words, thus underlining the fundamental goal of retrieving forms of testimony for reconstructing Africa’s past. One can therefore, easily point out the multiple ways in which words can be collected and the variety of means by which such evidence can be interpreted.

Furthermore, commenting on the psychodynamics of orality, Walter J. Ong discusses how oral verbalization, in pure preliterate form or in residual form within written cultures, structures both thought processes and expression. The importance of orality in the absence of writing is further stressed by Ong when he talks of ‘primary orality’. He defines primary orality as,

…the pristine orality of mankind untouched by writing or print which remains still more or less operative in areas sheltered to a greater or lesser degree from the full impact of literacy and which is vestigial to some degree in us all. The noetic (sic) processes of primary orality, as we have seen, are formulaic and rhapsodic rather than analytic. As in Homeric epic and to a great extent in classical oratory, particularly of the more orotund variety, this orality operates with the sort of commonplace, formulary expressions, and clichés ordinarily despised by fully literate folk, for, without writing, an oral culture must maintain its knowledge by repeating it. Writing, and even more effectively, print store what is known outside the mind and downgrade repetitive styles. (Ong, 5, 1979)

The aforesaid remark speaks volume of the repetitive nature of oral culture, and it must not be forgotten that it is this repetitive nature that has still kept oral culture on the move. Ong
therefore maintains that once the psychodynamics of the oral mind is known, primary orality, although in its residual form, still serves as a potent agent in recovering history.

The use of oral tradition in the reconstruction of Yoruba history was a matter of great controversy among the educated Yoruba, most of who believed that traditional evidence would be doubtful. Ajisafe, for instance, lamented

...[The] absence of written history and the unreliableness of what is orally handed down to us, especially by a people fond of tribal glory, and therefore not faithful to the facts.⁶ (History of Abeokuta, 1964)

It should however be pointed out that the Yoruba local historians were not entirely dependent upon oral evidence in their anxiousness to know about the past of their ‘original home’, and in their reconstruction of a pre-colonial history. There was a considerable body of written documentation made available in the nineteenth century in the writings of European explorers and missionaries, and the Lagos newspaper from the 1860s. It is the existence of these supplementary literary sources which again complicates the use of ‘oral tradition’ as sources of local histories.

The use of language as a medium of theatrical expression is an ever intriguing element in contemporary Nigerian theatre. Some critics⁷ argue that the use of the resources of oral tradition for dramatic effects can best be done in the traditional language; that translation or transliteration ‘commits the playwright to some kind of compromise’.⁸ Notwithstanding the viability of this argument, Ola Rotimi asserts that the principal problem confronting contemporary Nigerian theatre in English is language itself. Being an alien tongue, it is true that English fails to convey local sensibility. Rotimi therefore makes a deliberate attempt to
employ Yoruba English—that which is not sophisticated—as a vehicle for his thoughts, meant to be commonly identified with the literate Nigerian rather than the intellectual.

The use of oral tradition in contemporary Nigerian theatre not only guarantees the principle of continuity but also serves as a centrifugal force in bringing about the process of integration between the two different theatrical traditions. It prepares the ground for the prospective emergence of a new brand of theatre, one that is more popular, more traditionally rooted yet highly sophisticated to cater to the taste of a global audience—a new "Theatre of Drums"—exemplified by an artistic finesse with the use of Yoruba myths, legends, folklore, dance and music, and Yoruba aesthetics along with the calibration of a hermeneutic understanding of the theatrical process. This study will try to explore this novel idea in the later chapters in its search for the true ‘African Theatre’. However, the term “African” does not refer to African Theatre in general (given the broad and extensive corpus and scope of such a term) but will have possible limitations in terms of theatrical register meant exclusively for Nigerian Theatre.

III. Mapping Nigeria:

Africa is a huge continent and is broadly divided in terms of sub continental regionalisation as North Africa, West Africa, sub-Saharan Africa (or Africa south of the Sahara), East Africa and tropical Africa. Africa is also a land of great rivers. The longest river system in the world, the Nile, drains most of the northeast quadrant of the continent. In fact, the Nile and five other great rivers—Zambeji, Limpopo, Orange, Congo and Niger—water and drain more than half of the continent’s surface. The broad Saharan barrier divides Africa
into two unequal parts. Mediterranean Africa, the smaller of the two, has played a crucial role in the germination and sustenance of great civilisations. On the other hand, sub-Saharan Africa, due to its isolation and inaccessibility has long been known by the sobriquet of the “Dark Continent”. Moreover, the sub-Saharan interior remained virtually unexplored until the nineteenth century.

Identification of the main stock of African people is complicated by internal migrations, the mixing of racial stocks, and the infusion of foreign populations, both European and Asiatic. For the sake of generalisation, the people of Africa may be divided into eight broad groupings, namely, Bantu Negroes, Guinea and Sudanese Negroes, Aboriginal Negroes, including Hottentots, Bushmen and Pygmies, Mixed Negro-Hamitic, Malayo Polynesian Malagasy, Hamitic and Semitic, Europeans and Asiatic Indians (Robert D. Hodgson, 12).

The attainment of independent statehood appeared to be the panacea of all the ills of the non-self-governing entities. The emergence of tribal societies into distinct nationalistic states has produced an uncongenial atmosphere for the evolution of proper democracies in the western sense of the term. Colonialism failed to create a trained manpower class in Africa due to which normal administrative and technical services are in a great mess. The lack of unanimity in terms of a national leadership is again a major problem that thwarts all projects of restoring order in Africa. Many of the African leaders were denied full political rights under the colonial hegemony and when the issue of self-governance and sovereignty arose, the leadership appeared to be too close to authoritarian dictatorship.

The intense colonial rivalries of the European powers in Africa were climaxed by the partition of most of the continent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The important
factors in the European Scramble for African colonies (better known as Scramble for Africa or simply Race for Africa) were the search for new market avenues, additional sources of raw materials, and supplementary food supplies. By 1875, territorial holdings in Africa by non-African states were monopolised by the United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Spain and Turkey. Britain dominated the largest amount of territory among the European states. Preliminary to the partitioning of Africa, an unofficial conference was held at Brussels in September, 1876. It was a three-day conference, called by King Leopold II of Belgium to discuss means of opening up the interior of Africa. The ‘national representatives’ included presidents of geographical societies, explorers, and other interested persons, but no official delegates from governments. As a result of these deliberations, an International Association for the Exploration and Civilisation of Central Africa was established. This co-operation proved unworkable which led to the inauguration of the Berlin Conference (1884-85). The Conference, proposed by Portugal, intended to clarify the status of the Congo drainage area. The states represented at the Conference included Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherland, Norway, Spain, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the nation most involved in determining the destinies of Africa.

On the eve of the First World War, seven European powers—Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Britain—controlled the fate of almost the entire continent. Only three African states were independent—Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa. By 1919, the greatest territorial gains, however, were registered by Britain which almost went to the extent of the dreamed ideal of establishing a trans-continental empire stretching from Cape to Cairo. However, the Second World War marked the beginning of the end of the colonial
era in Africa. The defeat of Italy, the fall of France, the economic difficulties of Britain, the appearance of Soviet Russia in the world arena, and the emergence of the more powerful United Nations in place of the League of Nations—all combined to set the scene for the almost unbelievable growth of nationalism and independence. Africa’s movement towards independence took on more of a scramble than a smooth progression as it was the most colonial of all continents. The movement appeared to gain momentum all of its own. The pattern of independence began in the north with the relatively sophisticated Arab-Moslem states. These nations were considered the best prepared for self-rule due to their possession of a long tradition of local autonomy before coming under European influence. Many other states (like Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda), unprepared for the burden of self-rule, had ended up in the likes of dictatorial and authoritarian regimes.

IV. Political Developments:

It is significant to assess the patterns of political developments of both the French and the British—both being the two most powerful and influential of imperial powers to have had near to equal share of colonies. The French pattern of political development of their colonies was based upon the assumption that a unique race of the ‘French Africans’ could be created. The basic concept was of “assimilation” of the population, or the elite at least, into the social, cultural, ethical, religious and economic framework of France. On this basis, a superbly educated and cultural group of intellectual and political leaders emerged in each of the French colonies which came to be known as ‘overseas territory’ later. In Senegal, and to a lesser degree in the Ivory Coast, the development reached its zenith. As the
educated class evolved, powers were transferred to the African leaders. It was this unique francophone experience of “assimilation” that came to be critiqued later by the emerging group of intellectuals with the likes of Aime Cesaire and the Senegalese poet-President Leopold Senghor in their theorizing of a unique African brotherhood—‘Negritude’.

In contrast, the development in the British territories aimed at progressive steps towards independence in West Africa. The British policy had long been predicted on eventual ‘self-rule’ for the colonies unlike the French who adopted the policy of ‘assimilation’. Britain had chosen early to divide most of her overseas holdings into small ‘colonies’ under the direction of London, and larger ‘protectorates’ ruled indirectly through local chieftains. As the transfer of power to local colonial authorities took place, the chiefs in the protectorates saw it as a potential threat to their traditional powers. Their eventual vocal reactions and violence led to the establishment of elaborate checks and balances within the new constitution in order to curtail central authority. In the Gold Coast (Ghana), the Ashanti were the principal defenders of the tribal system. Finally on April 6, 1957, the first new and independent Negro state in Africa, Ghana, came into existence. Ghana electrified sub-Saharan Africa, and under the direction of its dynamic autocratic leaders, the new state became the nerve centre of African nationalism.

Likewise, the Federation of Nigeria, the continent’s most populous state, attained independence on October 1, 1960. In addition, on June 1, 1961, the Northern British Cameroons trust territory became a province of Nigeria as a result of a United Nation’s plebiscite. Nigeria made giant strides during the first two years of her independence towards the solution of the greatest problem—tribal and religious antagonism. The rise of semi-autonomous regions—the north, east and west—based on the three principal tribal
units, namely, Hausa, Ibo (or Igbo), and Yoruba, along with many other ethnic groups like the Fulani, Kanuri, and Ijaw further complicated the political and cultural scenario.

The Northern Region contains over fifty percent of the nation’s population. The people are Muslim in religion, conservative in politics, and feudal in social pattern. They are mostly poor and socially backward having been isolated from the developments that took place in the coastal areas. Due to their traditions and fear of the South, the emirs of the North were hesitant about independence and briefly considered remaining out of the Federation. On the other hand, the South, mostly comprised of the people of the Eastern and Western regions, is basically Christian. On the whole, the national fabric of Nigeria has been torn by inter-regional conflicts and by the federal-regional strife. A collapse of normal governmental function in mid-1962 in the Western Region led to federal intervention. The regional parliament got suspended in an effort of the federation to restore ‘peace, order and good government’.

Again, internal fractionalising of the nation is another significant factor that thwarts the very idea of solidarity in working out an effective and cohesive national identity. The civil war and the Biafran cause are other notable factors that have restricted Nigeria to emerge as a state proper. Nigeria still suffers the pangs of military dictatorship and authoritarianism which can be best ascribed as the hangover of the colonial experience. The divisive forces resulting from tribal, religious, and linguistic differences are manifested in regionalism and tribalism much to the detriment of national cohesion.

V. Historical Estimate of Military Rule in Africa:
Military rule in Africa is often defined as the ‘ideal instrument’ of post-colonial governance in the sense that “it was supposedly a ‘modern’ institution which transcended ethnicity and which possessed skills which might assist the task of economic modernisation” (Nugent, 205). Such justification sounds good and grand but only in theoretical terms. In putting such a theory into practice, this justification as it appears now in the context of post-colonial African condition serves to be a paradox of political ideologies as it has been the functional pretext of all coup d’état that has besotted African politics since independence. General Mobutu’s vain-glorious pretention that “the men in khaki had the capacity to set themselves up as the arbiters of the fate of squabbling politicians” now appears as a hoax (Nugent, 204).

Paul Nugent’s extensive categorisation of the diverse nature of military regimes in Africa in his book *Africa Since Independence* adds insult to injury in laying bare the essential truth behind such vocal pronouncements. The vulnerability or helplessness of the native politicians in culling the tide of regional conflicts arising out of party commitments and their subsequent resorting to the military by dragging it into partisan politics in an effort to maintain order can be considered as a major cause for the rise of military dictatorship in Africa. Again, the recruitment of officers in the military is often biased and region centric—the rank and file comes primarily from the north while the officer corps from the south. This further accentuates the ethnic tension which gives the military kingpins ample scope to wrest power from the civilian politicians in a frenzied display of restoring order by coercion. By extension, ethnic tensions even propel and persuade the civilians to support military coups as it appear to be the only medium to satiate their psychological complexes, prejudices and grudges in a nation fragmented by regional conflicts and ethnic violence.
The result was that coups broke out precisely because of an absence of institutional coherence. Ethnic divisions were amongst the most pronounced and represent yet another of the pernicious legacies of colonialism. In very many countries, the rank-and-file of the army was recruited from particular ethnic groups and regions (Nugent, 208).

The caretaker regimes were mostly apolitical in character with the avowed conviction that the military should not succumb to any political appropriation. Such regimes performed with the obligation to remove civilian politicians who might appear to disturb a nation’s social equilibrium by misusing power. The reformers or corrective regimes were quite distinct as it performed with a pre-conceived notion of political correctness. Such regimes had no specific timeline and worked tirelessly to put the country back on track by ensuring peace and order. The reformist agenda was enforced when a coup tend to dismantle the political set up by threatening national unity. The radical regimes functioned with the idea of handing power back to the civilians once peace and order was restored. Most of the military juntas exhibited this character as they believed or took for granted the notion that the onus of post-war reconstruction was levied upon them. Specifically, in Nigeria, the regimes of General Gowon, Brigadier Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo and General Sani Abacha—all typical radical regimes—tried to enlist public support by deceit and whenever any opposition arose, enforced extreme means of violence. Soyinka’s take on the credo of African politics—‘actualize power, then fictionalize the people’—as a consistent policy adopted by the military regimes after the phase of colonialism is an instance in point (Of Africa, 52).
This has been the nature of state-enforced violence in most of the African nations where military regimes, forming political parties, enjoy the privilege of declaring themselves as political demagogues. Nevertheless, escalating grievances, strikes and demonstrations account for their vulnerability. Civil wars and other coup d’états delimits their prolongation in both time and space. One would therefore do well if Nigeria as a nation is carefully examined charting out a chronological estimate of the military regimes which has turned the nation into the worst case scenario of authoritarian rule.

VI. Wole Soyinka: the ‘man’ and the ‘artist’:

Wole (Akinwade Oluwole) Soyinka, born on July 13, 1934 in Abeokuta, Nigeria, is a colossal figure among the African world of letters who has rightly earned the accolade of the “African Lion” for his charismatic personality and versatility in presenting African literature to a global readership. In one among his many felicitation speeches, Niyi Osundare tries to capture Soyinka’s enigmatic presence and contribution to African literature in English in a succinct way as,

No Nigerian writer’s works capture more sensitively, more audaciously, the vicissitudes of Nigerian, nay, African existence. Soyinka’s is the excoriative, the admonitory, regenerative vision. (Osundare, 2000: 150)

Soyinka’s near legendary status with titanic dimensions accounts not only for his writings and political activism but also for his persistent struggle against injustice on humanity, almost in a quixotic fashion, during and after the era of colonialism. Unlike Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, J.P. Clarke, Femi Osofisan, Amma Ata Aidoo, Buchi
Emecheta, Ben Okri and many other contemporary Nigerian writers, Soyinka’s ‘voice’ is unique in that it is almost impossible to extricate Soyinka, the literary artist from Soyinka, the man. James Gibbs examines Soyinka from five different perspectives: as a man, as a Yoruba, as an academic, as a political activist and as a writer. In his book, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism* (2004), Biodun Jeyifo concentrates heavily on the charismatic personality of Soyinka as the base while examining his literary corpus. In other words, Jeyifo believes that Soyinka’s personality colours his literary art. The contention that Soyinka the writer cannot be separated from Soyinka the man is equally shared by Jeyifo as the expression of the ideas, views and convictions of Soyinka the writer cannot be properly understood without taking stock of Soyinka the conspicuous public figure, always eager to intervene in political affairs even at the cost of his own life. Jeyifo’s assessment of Soyinka’s double role is exemplified by Soyinka himself in one of his interviews with Henry Louis Gates Jr.,

I cannot conceive of my existence without political involvement. (Roy, 15)

Soyinka has had a very hectic political life and is better known in Nigeria as a ‘one –man riot squad’ (Ndaeyo Uko’s, “Crossing Soyinka’s Path”, 32). He was arrested in October 1965, for allegedly storming the Western Region radio station to a political broadcast disputing the public results of the elections to make an announcement and was accused of planning a military coup. He was arrested again in 1967, accused of supporting the Biafra rebels, and was detained for twenty seven months until 1969, a year before the war ended. Soyinka’s cat and mouse relationship with Nigerian Generals, including Olusegun Obasanjo is a significant characteristic of his political activism. He also strained his relations with other military generals like General Gowon, General Buhari, General
Babangida and the infamous General Sani Abacha facing exile, arrest and even death penalty in the case of Abacha in 1997. Soyinka makes a sarcastic self-reference on his exile condition while travelling back to Ibadan after the death of the Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha:

Surely it is not the same white-haired monster, that same ‘wanted’ man with a price on his head, hunted the world over, who is headed home, steadily lubricated by the aircraft’s generous bar (YMSFD, 5).

Soyinka, who has learnt the art of survival in a country where arguments are often settled with bullets and sentence, once commented regarding the effectiveness of earning a Nobel Prize reputation in the case of political involvement as,

Some people think the Nobel Prize makes you bullet-proof. I never had that illusion (Ndaeyo Uko, 35).

His ability to articulate the most complex of ideas and emotions in a language undiminished by the sheer force of eloquence and grandiloquence has earned him the reputation of being one of the finest living writers in English. Yet, despite the clarity of his political beliefs, the convoluted nature of his writings along with the linguistic and stylistic complexity accounts for his obscurity. More specifically, the bolekaja critics, which include Soyinka’s former students and admirers, are highly critical of his writings with the firm conviction that his writings are un-African and are not meant for general consumption but for an exclusive elite class of readership. One reason, among others, against the critical view of treating Soyinka as a Brotherly Other15 (phrase and italics mine) might be his own sophisticated western education earned in English universities of great repute.
Apart from his ‘complexity’ and ‘obscurity’, Soyinka’s world view (which also includes his political views) poses an impasse to the Indian readers in their appreciation of his artistic credentials. A “profoundly rooted cosmopolitan”, to quote Steven Arnold, Soyinka’s world view is best exemplified in his strong emphasis on being “rooted in specific African traditions along with the imperative need for contact with world civilisation” (Roy, 16). In short, Soyinka’s world view is designed by a unique cosmopolitan outlook more functionally governed by the realisation of an ‘undifferentiated space’—a ‘space’ capable of granting all black Africans equal share and footing in the global arena sharing the likes of humanity at large.

VII. Postcolonial Writings and the appropriation of Wole Soyinka:

One of the central features of postcolonial writings is the construction of a discourse of Otherness (emphasis mine). This condition of ‘Other-ness’ is to be characterised by the discourse of the “post-postcolonial”—a condition that shall be duly discussed and highlighted in the forthcoming chapters. As a matter of fact, it can be argued that Soyinka’s recourse to Yoruba ontology and epistemology with the sole objective of deriving a linguistic mode that would free the African writer (or the African subject) from the shackles of intellectual confinement and discursive servitude of the West can be regarded as an attempt to construct a black African discourse as a counterblast to the western concept of totalizing narratives of nation.16 However, the historical specificity of the experience of colonialism and racism in Africa becomes an interesting area of research. While analysing the ‘post-postcolonial’ condition and the ‘constructed-ness’ of a discourse of Otherness, it must be noted that there cannot (emphasis mine) be a unique African discursive response...
primarily due to the different colonial experience of the Anglophone and the Francophone. For instance, the francophone discourse of otherness, illuminated by Aime Cesaire’s epochal work in the genre, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), and his theoretical postulations of ‘Negritude’ can be seen in terms of “sameness with difference” when applied to the Anglophone discourse. This “sameness with difference” model of the discourse is further bolstered by Soyinka’s denigration of the entire concept of negritude with his aphoristic one-liner— “A tiger does not shout its tigritude; it acts.” (Soyinka’s *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 1992, 127). According to Soyinka, this romanticised rhetoric of negritude did not bother to free the black race from the burden of its acceptance.

It accepted one of the most commonplace blasphemies of racism, that the black man has nothing between his ears, and proceeded to subvert the power of poetry to glorify this fabricated justification of European cultural domination. (*MLAW*. 129)

Again, Aime Cesaire’s unique Martiniquian-Francophone experience of ‘assimilation’—of creating a class of French African—is not the same experience in the Anglophone group. Frantz Fanon too, a product of francophone colonial experience, is a voice that cannot be subdued. Yet, his majestic psychopathological study of the pitfalls and consequences of colonialism in his celebrated work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), is a discourse which is more or less coloured by his ancestral affiliation to French-Algiers. Therefore, to apply and adopt Fanon’s anti-racial parameters blindly in theorizing a black African discourse becomes more complicated provided the colonial experience in question is Francophonic in nature. This also accounts for the different administrative policies adopted by France and
Britain in their respective colonies (as discussed earlier in this chapter)—‘assimilation’ by the former and ‘self-rule’ by the latter.

Robert Young, in a very candid manner, once stated that postcolonialism should not be ‘exclusively discursive’ but politically and practically engaged.\textsuperscript{17} If this credo is to be taken into consideration, then none else but Soyinka appears to be the undisputed, the incontestable, and the true-blue African postcolonial intellect. The ‘constructedness’ of history as far as postcolonialism is concerned is an issue that has gained much prominence since the emergence of postcolonial narratives, mostly written by those cosily placed in the Western academies. The unbridgeable gap between theory and practice as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would have uttered taking hint of the difference between ‘being in the library and being on the street’ (Spivak, 1994, 1) comes full circle in the historical narratives of postcolonial literature, more so in the case of Soyinka. It can therefore be seen, from all set standards, that Soyinka is \textit{the} most practical of all writers. He is both at the same time—the ‘library-man’ in postulating theories regarding the postcolonial plight, and also the ‘street-man’—being politically involved in Nigerian affairs on countless occasions.

The misrepresentation and falsification of history which is again an intrinsic feature of the ‘constructedness’ of imperial narratives of hegemony and power structure assumes credibility when Fanon himself asserts the manner in which ‘history’ (always a constructed genre) can “give battle to colonial lies” (Fanon’s \textit{Wretched of the Earth}, 1967, 170). The ‘postcolonial lived experience’ in terms of ‘writing’ as a resistance strategy accounts for the distinct fracture between theory and practice.
VIII. Soyinka’s versatility and his Resistance-Writings:

Soyinka’s literary career can be broadly divided into three distinctive phases. First, the sardonic but light-hearted satire of the early works written during the period of Nigeria’s independence; secondly, the dark humour and disillusionment of the writings after his incarceration during the Biafran war; and lastly, the down-to-earth Soyinka whose works at last tried to break away from the elitist charge of “complicity with a bourgeoisie comprador class”. (A.G.Roy, 18) Unlike his fellow Nigerian writers, Achebe and Clarke who have excelled in particular genres of fiction and drama respectively, Soyinka’s uncanny ability to strike the right chord in his audience is illustrated by his consummate mastery over almost every literary genres—fiction, poetry, non-fiction, plays and even film adaptation.18 Soyinka’s theatre groups such as The Masks (1960), Orisun Theatre (1964) and The Guerrilla Theatre Unit of the then University of Ife (1978)—all of which aimed at performing satirical reviews to condemn and criticise the nefarious activities of the government—demonstrates his personal commitment and dedication to theatre practice. Such versatility is even acknowledged by Biodun Jeyifo, a stern critic of Soyinka, who sees the impossibility of compartmentalising Soyinka’s different forms of writings due to their strong overlapping tendencies. Soyinka’s writings undoubtedly try to recuperate a cyclical view of history with alternating periods of tyranny and oppression along with those of glory and achievements. In short, Soyinka is equally critical of the indigenous African evils in the post-independence era—an assessment highlighted in the staging of the play, *A Dance of the Forests*, performed as a part of Independence Day celebration—when he shifts his attention to the prevailing corruption of the authorities in independent Nigeria, ushering forth a new reign of terror only to replace the colonial regime.
Postcolonialism is fundamentally seen as a political strategy primarily governed by the urgent need not only to challenge and dispute (emphasis mine) the colonial presence but also to dismantle all forms of colonial knowledge which, in spite of official independence, proliferates in the ex-colonies through cultural, economic and political exchanges. The general view that postcolonial literature is a ‘literature of resistance’ is affirmed by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin who defines postcolonialism as,

Writing...from countries or regions which were formerly colonies of Europe...or as a set of discursive practices, prominent among which is resistance to colonialism, colonialist ideologies and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory (sic) legacies. (1991, xii)

The paradoxical nature of postcolonialism lies in its struggle against colonial insinuations even after the formal black out of colonisation. The emerging repressive local regimes exemplified by the rise of dictatorship in various countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa are instances of this incongruity.

In so far as postcolonial resistance theory is concerned, Wole Soyinka’s contribution to the field of postcolonial literature in working out an alternative modernity19 (which will be discussed at length and elaborated in the course of this study) freed from the imperial clutches of the prejudiced view of the African subject comes full circle in his attempt to investigate the conditions of “post-postcolonial” in the evolution of an African subjectivity. Furthermore, his manipulation of the formal character of the English language that oscillates between the dual poles of obscurity and solipsism can be seen as a resistance strategy on his part in forging an African subjectivity by appropriating Western standards. In Soyinka, theory and practice becomes one—a neat mating of the intellectual and the
revolutionary. The incommensurable gap between theory and lived experience is more effectively bridged in Soyinka because his personal involvement in the politically charged atmosphere of Africa is a more direct approach than any resistance theory. In his prison memoir, Soyinka states,

Let actions alone be the manifestations of the authentic being in defence of its authentic visions (*The Man Died*, 1976, 87/88).

His practical and theoretical commitment to the defence of the underprivileged in the face of repressive regimes of military generals like that of Ladoke Akintola, Tafawa Balewa, Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammad, Olusegun Obasanjo, Mohammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, and Sani Abacha is a glaring vindication of his resistance that is more neatly pulled out in his writings.

Although Soyinka uses the ‘stage’ as a powerful political weapon to launch his tirades against the vogue of military dictatorship and autocracy, it is his own experience as a Nigerian citizen that adequately showcases the range and extent of his political activism. His voice of resistance did not remain strictly confined within Nigeria but had reached out even to Uganda flaunting all geographical limitations—a place fashioning violent repression of opposition, ethnic cleansing and genocides under the reign of the infamous dictator, Idi Amin. During the Civil War (1967-71), Soyinka’s attempt to strike a negotiation between the Biafran secessionists and the Nigerian government resulted in his incarceration on trumped up charges. His prison memoir, *The Man Died*, registers Soyinka’s experience of solitary confinement for nearly twenty seven months without trial. This recorded experience of his prison life (originally written on toilet papers during his confinement) which accounts for the fate of innocent civilians pitted against the atrocities
of Nigerian government has left an indelible stamp on contemporary writings after the war. Soyinka’s writings from this period become replete with the expression of a deep-seated anguish and despair that substitutes the satiric and ironic overtones of his earlier works. His personal sufferings elevated him as “a cult figure in Nigerian academic and artistic circles” (A.G.Roy, 21), granting him the authorial license to address the condition of the post-independence Nigerian society in terms of justice, liberty and equality.

Soyinka’s whole-hearted connection with the South African cause is bolstered by his conviction that Nelson Mandela was ‘discovering freedom’ on a global scale. In order to highlight the insanities of the apartheid system, to terminate the racial insult that denigrated the very being of the black folks, and in a bid to ascertain his personal vendetta against such an oppressive system, Soyinka staged his very first play *The Invention* (1959)20 in London under the aegis of the Royal Court Theatre to inform the western audience of their callousness and injustice in South Africa under the guise of colonialism. Moreover, the naming of his anthology *Mandela’s Earth and Other Poems* (1988) as a humble gesture of his indebtedness to Mandela along with the dedication of the Nobel Prize speech in 1986 before a Stockholm audience goes on to enlist the influence of the South African cause on Soyinka. Lauding Mandela for taking the cudgels against racism, Soyinka in his memoir *You Must Set Forth At Dawn* acknowledges the Mandelian legacy of a struggle for freedom which he personally seems to carry on in Nigeria against military dictatorship and capitalist agendas. Thus, it becomes quite imperative to analyse the South African brand of nationalism, identity politics and the resultant violence while appreciating the dramaturgy of Soyinka complimented by his life-long struggle against autocracy and military dictatorship. Therefore, I have taken the liberty to read some randomly selected South
African plays in order to bring forth a collective picture of violence in the African continent. However, such juxtaposition will ensure the listing of the commonalities and differences between Soyinka and his South African brethrens which will open the path for the evolution of a new type of theatre flexible enough to adapt and accommodate a variety of plays emerging from the continent, not necessarily only those written by Nigerians. Hence, commenting on the difficulties and challenges that pops up while considering the prospects of a true-blue African theatre that decries all setbacks posed by the multicultural, multiracial and multilingual nature of African nations, Femi Euba in his essay “Report from London: The African Actor” optimistically states;

In time, there would evolve a style of acting peculiar to the group, yet flexible enough to adapt to a variety of plays, not necessarily only those written by Africans. Such a professional company (and by extension theatre) would allow the African writers, old and new, to have their work performed, competing successfully with other established theatres (parenthesis mine, 1969, 63-64).

IX. Soyinka’s views on Violence: Influence of Frantz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi:

Soyinka’s views on “violence” become a significant feature of his resistance strategy which is again a central concern of this study. His attitude towards violence is almost Gandhian in outlook but is again quite ambiguous due to the political stance adopted. His is an ambiguous stance because at times, he appears to follow neither Fanon nor Gandhi. It is therefore, significant to throw a flood of light on the ideas of violence prescribed by both Fanon and Gandhi before plunging headlong into the deeper recesses of Soyinka’s personal
views on violence. But the Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy still prevails in an effort of ideological comparison between Fanon and Soyinka.

Violence is generally used to refer to the use of force; an aggressive tendency to act. History is replete with the kind of physical violence (often in the manner of torture) meted out to people on the basis of sex, creed, caste, and colour. If the grand narrative of the Western colonial project is examined, one easily finds the kind of bias pitted against the colonized. Even the Western Enlightenment project of bringing light to the darker races seems to be couched in the form of a racist discourse which intensifies the notion of ‘violence’ pitted against those races whose humanity was questioned on the basis of their skin colour. With the advent of postcolonialism, these attitudes are not only questioned but have come under serious scrutiny.

In philosophy, however, violence has been variously appellated. According to Marvin E. Wolfgang, “Violence is a generic term that may include many forms of overt and often noxious, expressions, ranging from internal psychological changes in the organism to external behaviour that directly impinges upon the safety and security of other organisms...”(Wolfgang, 2, 1996). Discussing Newton Graver’s definition of violence, Joseph Betz says: “If violence is violating a person or a person’s rights, then every social wrong is a violent one….If violence is whatever violates a person and his rights of body, dignity or autonomy, then lying to or another about, embezzling, locking one out of his house, insulting, and gossiping are all violent acts” (Betz, 341, 1997). Violence has been considered at the conceptual level since the time of Plato, where we find a kind of idealization of violence, where it is rational, and has an object and end in view. This is reiterated in Marquis de Sade who points to the concealment of violence under the idealism
of sex while Hegel talks about violence in its relation to being, and defines violence as the destruction of the social realm by social beings (Siebers, 1-7, 1995). Violence has been categorized into overt or visible violence which seems to designate something visible, a happening in the physical world, which can be seen and recognized; and covert violence that is invisible, less spectacular, but perhaps more dangerous—having deep psychological and emotional impact.

Given the postcolonial nature of this study along with the need to maintain my subject position, Gandhi’s views on violence become an interesting area of study. Gandhi’s remark that it is better to be violent if violence is in the heart rather than to put on the cloak of non-violence in order to cover impotence, and that victory attained by violence is tantamount to defeat for its being momentary, neatly fits into the political underpinnings of this study. Gandhi strongly condemned an armed resistance to British rule which would Europeanize India as his aim was exactly the opposite. He called this mode of resistance satyagraha. He believed that “life should be governed by a communal morality where each member performed his duty” (Mukherjee, xiv, 1993). Gandhi’s idea of non-violence and ahimsa was highly influenced by the non-violent attitude adopted in Jain philosophy where injuring any living being or even thinking ill of others are regarded as instances of violence. “Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute” (Mukherjee, 99, 1993). However, although at times, Gandhi advocates violence (when it comes to a choice between cowardice and violence, and it is here that one can find Soyinka adhering to Gandhian prescriptions of non-violence, to a very limited extent however), yet he regards non-violence as infinitely superior to violence. According to Gandhi, Indian nationalism must be non-violent in outlook and hence should be the main instrument of resistance. This
attitude is not shared by Frantz Fanon when one comes to the African postcolonial context (especially Francophonic in the case of Fanon).

Fanon was vehemently striving for a more strong protest when it comes to reclaiming power through resistance. In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon prefers violence to get rid of the imperialist yoke. It should be borne in mind that colonization and racial violence challenged the humanity of the colonized and racially-dominated people. Therefore, the first logical response is to demonstrate that such people are as human as the people who have colonized them. What Fanon argues is that the criteria of nonviolence demanded by the colonizing forces require the absence of *de facto* transformation of power. In other words, there is an analytical presumption that justice for the colonized must mean injustice for the colonizers. It becomes quite apparent that Fanon strives towards a revolutionary socialism whereas Gandhi strives towards a non-violent, anti-capitalist, and peaceful world order. By reading Fanon, one immediately comes to know about the helplessness of the Africans, their impulsive violence as the expression of their ‘collective unconscious’ reacting in tandem with a deep-seated anger against the imperialistic exploitation down the ages. J.P. Sartre in his celebrated Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* states,

> Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm’s length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours (Fanon, 13, 1963).

Soyinka desperately tried to stop the violence that culminated in the Civil War in Nigeria (1967-71) by offering ‘moderate policies’, but was also favourably disposed to violence as
revealed by the infamous radio station incident of Nigerian Broadcasting Service in the guise of a “mystery gunman”²¹ (Chukwuma Okoye, 44). In his book, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*, Soyinka makes explicit his attitude towards violence as,

> I never join those who call for a violent revolution, in spite of the fact that I accept violence as a *something necessary component* of positive change [italics mine]. Yes, a sometimes necessary component, and one that I am always ready to endorse, instigate and even partake of, where circumstance leave one no option (Soyinka, 1994, 315).

In his plays (particularly in *King Babu*), Soyinka puts forward an “embodied resistance” of the common people in Nigeria in the face of the violence perpetrated both by the colonial masters prior to independence, and by the military dictators of late, more in terms of an existential challenge. In his book, *A Climate of Fear*, Soyinka talks about the ‘culture of competitive atrocities’ in unleashing a brand of terror in a scale unequalled in the history of self-governance. Soyinka’s voice becomes all the more significant due to his ‘ground reality’ which is coloured by his political beliefs in favour of the Nigerian populace. Soyinka’s eloquent voice of protest against Nigerian authoritarianism finds expression in his book *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. In this book, he describes Nigeria’s present political climate, condemns the country’s illegitimate leaders and muses about questions of nationalism and international interventions. Visualizing Nigeria as ‘a nation on the verge of extinction’ ever since independence, Soyinka argues that the ruthlessness of the military dictatorships have deprived her of nationhood. However, in its widely philosophical use of the term, ‘violence’ goes beyond
the overtly physical to cover psychological and institutional violence of which sexism, racism, economic exploitation, ethnic and religious persecutions are possible examples.

**X. Body/Performance, Body/Politics and Postcoloniality:**

As far as postcolonial theatre is concerned, body politics has been a major area of research. Paying attention to the body can be a highly useful strategy for reconstructing postcolonial subjectivity because imperialist discourse has been biased in the construction of the colonial subject as an inscribed body of knowledge. “The body is never simply a passive object upon which regimes of power are played out” (Gilbert and Tompkins, 204). The body is a site of *resistance* (emphasis mine) for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways. The colonial subject’s body contests its stereotyping and representation by others to insist on self-representation by its physical presence on the stage. It follows that postcolonial theatre finds in the ‘body’ more than mere ‘actor-function’. The body is an unstable signifier and therefore dialogic and ambivalent. The postcolonial stage, as exemplified by the stagecraft of Soyinka, provides ample opportunities to recuperate the colonized subject’s body.

Soyinka’s plays address the blind spots of settler history and literature on a number of levels, bringing the ‘black African body’ into acute visibility via individual characters and also through group interactions. Fanon’s assertion in *Black Skin, White Masks* that “the black man wants the objectifying confrontation with otherness” (Fanon, 72, 2008) and his final statement in the same book “O my body, always make me a man who questions!”
(Fanon, 206, 2008) comes full circle in Soyinka’s plays. The casting of the black body on the stage involves the complexity of theatrical representation: the body works in conjunction with language and costume. By foregrounding the possibilities of both parody and self-representation (Soyinka’s humour and parody will be discussed at length in the fourth chapter in a comparative analytic framework with reference to the plays of Edward Bond), Soyinka reinvests the black African body with a power and a presence—a ‘presence’ which has been hitherto treated as ‘absence’. The study which also takes an excursion to the *Tantra Shastras* while analysing Soyinka’s overt Indian reference to Goddess Kali as a repository of power in elucidating the Indian subject position is primarily methodological. It has been a humble attempt at transcending the geo-political and historical limitations of such a broad project.

The powerful presence of the theatricalised postcolonial body on the stage suggests active strategy for staging resistance to imperialism. “The personal site of the body—the body which has been violated, degraded, maimed or viewed with disgust—becomes a sign which must be actively reassigned to a more productive representation through embodiments on the postcolonial stage” (Gilbert and Tompkins, 221). To stage black subjectivity in an obvious state of fracture, Soyinka exposes the derogation of black Africans by parodying bodies which are visibly ‘broken’. The characters of the Mendicants—Aafaa, Blindman, Goyi and Cripple—in *Madmen and Specialists* are instances in point. As a powerful sign of brutality, the ‘maimed body’ operates as a part of a strategic critique of imperialism’s policies and practices. Again, *Death and the King’s Horseman* is a play resonant with violence. It is an effort on Soyinka’s part to suggest the colonizer’s attempt to rape the traditional belief-system of the Africans. In fact, the entire gamut of Soyinka’s work can be
seen in terms of a palimpsest where traces of colonial repression and violence are still visible.

The roles for the blacks in the wider field of western drama have been constituted within racist discourses with perhaps even more emphasis on their supposed violence and sexuality. Therefore, when black playwrights like Soyinka depict themselves (the Africans) on stage, the ‘body’ becomes one of the first theatrical elements to take on new iconic possibilities.

It was Veltrusky who succinctly stated that “All that is on the stage is a sign” (Elam, 6, 2002). Given the nature of the study, an attempt will be made to read ‘body’ from two different angles—the body as a signifier or stage-vehicle on the stage, and the performing body or the body of the actor thriving under the perpetual gaze of the audience. Theatre semiotics involves the ‘showing’ of objects and events (and performance at large) to the audience rather than describing them. It is this ostensive aspect of the stage which distinguishes it from narrative where persons, objects, and events are necessarily described and recounted. Again, the body is the vehicle of being-in-the-world. The ‘presence’ of the actor’s body on the stage (which is a phenomenological criterion) is affirmed by his/her role as both character and performer. Merleau-Ponty maintains, “I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 428, 2002). In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty goes on to discuss the phenomenological ‘presence’ of the body in terms of perception by claiming that the presence of the body is affirmed by its being-in-the-world. Hence, my study will try to theorize a new set of possibilities by bringing in phenomenology as a perspective—a way of looking into the very dynamics of the theatrical
process. The implicit link behind such a progression is the ‘postcolonial body’ which serves as a site of resistance. The objective behind working out such a broader linkage is to try and establish the dynamics of body politics from a postcolonial perspective, and to explore to what extent Soyinka’s plays address it.

Drama, always having a social perspective, represents its world by describing the events both visually and verbally. It is for this reason that concentrating on the written text only might appear quite lame and turgid. Each dramatic text or the theatrical performance acts as a direct visual sign of a functional reality existing in a society. A sign is anything that provides information to others. The entire process of theatre semiotics functions within a cultural, conventional, performative and rational context. It helps in understanding and interpreting the dramatic text as well as theatrical performance that represent social realities. Soyinka’s plays have used drama as a space to explore the problems generated by these issues. The aim will be to analyse selected play texts as well as their possible performance\(^2\) (and not the theatrical performance as such), and to locate how drama, having an immediacy of appeal, can be used as a medium of resistance as well as activism. Soyinka’s plays asserts that the repressive measures adopted and employed by the state as an institution (even in the post-independence period of Nigeria) is basically due to some kind of colonial hangover; and thus it is only through resistance that democracy can be attained. Soyinka becomes a fascinating area of research as he has combined influences from Western traditions and European avant-gardes with African myths, legends, oral traditions and folklore, and such techniques as singing and drumming which constitutes the life of the Africans.

**XI. Theatre of Drums: The Need for a ‘New’ Critical Terminology/ Frame of Reference:**
“Theatre”...“Drums”—these words obviously enhance the auditory participation of the audience engrossed in a spectacle. But when we consider African Theatre and the question is about African plays, then do these terms hold the same emotive reference or do they uphold the same meaning as before? Quite the contrary. This is because the audience (and by ‘audience’ it is intended to suggest the ordinary folks and not the intellectual scholar because theatre is always conceived as a means of popular entertainment) who is the “undisputed monarch” in terms of theatrical on-looking, is immediately reminded of a huge bonfire in a jungle or besides a great river back in some remote corners of Africa where a group of anonymous tribal people engages in performing a muscular orgy in the form of a dance-like act to the accompaniment of the resounding and deafening sounds of a huge drum. If such perceptions exist, the audience is not to be blamed. It is due to the general representation through the Western narratives of the Africans especially in the commercial films that always presents a denigrating picture of the African native as raw and savage. One can easily relate such projections to the Hollywood commercial Ace Ventura where the resistant idea of visualising the westerner in the guise of the “White Devil” gets illustrated along with the comic representation of the tribal customs.

Now the point that one seriously need to consider is what sort of an ethical mentality can uphold such a negative picture of Africans. Obviously the finger points out a racist sentiment verging on the extreme limits of sado-masochism. Therefore, in order to have a holistic view of Africa and African life, the audience needs to rise above such representations that not only denies the Africans honour and status but degrades them to the level of bestiality. Only then can s/he understand and appreciate African theatre and begin to truly participate in it.
The notion that drama and theatre are essentially two different modes of art expressing a singular artistic perception can nowhere be better illustrated than in the choice of such etymological incongruity in conveying a sense of ‘commonality’ between the two contesting binaries—Theatre and Drama. Although the two terms essentially uphold the same basic trajectory of mimesis, yet these words are to be chiefly understood in their essential ‘functionality’—that kind of applicability that touches the fine line between drafting a play and its final staging. The reason behind adopting a phrase like “Theatre of Drums” lies chiefly in the theoretical and philosophical methodologies which will be ultimately brought to bear upon the works of Wole Soyinka. The idea of a “Theatre of Drums” owes much to the numerous nomenclatorial innovations that modern dramatists have deliberately come up with in order to individuate their artistic oeuvre. Consider for instance the “Theatre of the Oppressed” by Augusto Boal, “Theatre of Cruelty” by Antonio Artaud, “Laboratory Theatre” by Jerzy Grotowski, “Theatre of Roots” by Suresh Awasthi, “Naya Theatre” by Habib Tanvir or “The Third Theatre” by Badal Sircar. All these writers were formulating their ideas under the surge of a conviction that theatre can not only bind people but also serve as an existential link to experience such a linkage across different cultures. Soyinka even affirms;

Culture and language differed with each nation as frequently and as profoundly as they found identities across the borders of such nation spaces; the arbitrariness and illogicality of their groupings hit any traveller in the face—and remained meaningless to a huge majority of those whom the borders enclose or separate (YMSFD, 47, 2006).
Given the nature of the postcolonial subject position of this study, it becomes imperative to adopt such a theoretical position that will try and negotiate with the generic and epistemic difference that have for long defined the Orient. However, in formulating such a critical terminology, it has never been the intention of this study to compete with the intellectual richness of such writers of repute. It is not the mission of the study to put forth a theoretical paradigm in the manner of the aforesaid theatrical practitioners, most of which are generally considered as Director’s Movement. Rather, it is an attempt to discern the possibilities of assessing Soyinka’s plays in the light of a new perspective.

The influence of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty is quite vibrant in the theorising of this new theatre basically due to the similarity that is perceptible when it comes to the addressing of the relationship between the ‘oriental’ and ‘occidental’ theatre. Like Artaud’s, the study also pits the metaphysical inclinations of Oriental theatre (Balinese theatre for instance) against the psychological tendencies of the Occidental theatre. However, “Theatre of Drums” only serves to function on the conceptual framework and never to bypass the strict paradigm of theory chiefly due to the limitation posed by the rigours of thought. In short, “Theatre of Drums”, conceived in the form of a metaphor, is an earnest attempt to bifurcate that composite of ideas which comes into critical consideration while assessing a play in terms of both its conception and stage rendering.

The Nigerian Theatre owes its origin to the Yoruba folk opera which later became the Yoruba Operatic Theatre. The term ‘folk’ here assumes tremendous significance due to the essential notion of theatre being a communal form of entertainment. Again, one must not neglect the African performative ambience of orality (verbal resources through poetry, chants and folk tales), music, dance, spectacle and improvisatory nuances that hooks the
audience with his/her cultural roots. The use of oral tradition in contemporary Nigerian theatre not only guarantees the principle of continuity but also serves as a centrifugal force in bringing about the process of integration between the two different theatrical traditions. It prepares the ground for the emergence of a new brand of theatre, one that is more popular, more traditionally rooted yet highly sophisticated to cater to the taste of a global audience—a new “Theatre of Drums”—exemplified by the use of Yoruba myths, legends, folklore, dance and music, and Yoruba aesthetics along with the calibration of a hermeneutic understanding of the theatrical process. “Theatre of Drums” is a neat meeting point, a conglomeration of the two theatrical influences—traditional or Oral (folk) and Western or modern—to establish and achieve a fusion of both these tendencies in its efforts to galvanise the essential identity of the African erstwhile Nigerian people. However, the term “African” does not refer to African Theatre in general (given the broad and extensive corpus and scope of such a term) but will have possible limitations in terms of theatrical register meant exclusively for Nigerian Theatre.

Intricately tailored to suit the exigencies of Nigerian national life (and a national life in Nigeria is quite doubtful given the present political atmosphere of the region), “Theatre of Drums” can be seen to voice an understanding that places the postcolonial in a better light.

The term “Drums” should not be misunderstood with the mere physical presence or application of the drum or drum-beats as a stage prop employed by Soyinka. On the contrary, Drums refers to that body of unrecognised voices which are perpetually threatened either through the form of violence or societal negligence. Although Soyinka’s plays are replete with instances of state-initiated violence, the sole purpose of this study is not just to pinpoint such an issue rather to impose on the reader the consciousness of
practically living with such an attitude or bent of mind. Drums are functional in most of Soyinka’s plays which are used as some sort of theatrical devices to herald some turning point in the action of the plays. Nevertheless, the context in which the proposed study uses the term has a much wider usage than the mere practical appropriation of the term on stage.

Due to these issues of identity, the biased discourse of the dominant and the lived experience of the natives of those terrible days, this study seeks to highlight a new area of research that would conjoin the empirical with the epistemological. The study will also serve to highlight how the ‘body’ can also serve as a potential site of the ‘drum’. The body, the study shall argue, discards its mere anatomical designation and serves as an agency of the discourse of violence. The phenomenological and semiotic yardsticks are seriously taken into consideration as in theatre one cannot do away with the idea of the signifier and the signified. The increasing interest in performance studies is another issue that cannot be taken casually when one is concerned with drama and performance. The idea of body politics that this study serves to highlight will be chiefly assessed in terms of an interpretive framework by a close reading of the texts as it becomes practically impossible to have immediate access to African theatre, African performance and African ambience from an Indian subject position.

XII. Methodology:

As the data is necessarily interdisciplinary, the study would have to adapt its research tools adequately to suit its material in so far as they provide relevant information for my reading of the chosen literary texts of modern African drama. To establish the
theoretical/conceptual base of the argument, the study shall use the tools made available by existing frameworks of reading violence and postcolonial subjectivity. Given the nature of the proposed subject, the study shall take frequent recourse to postcolonial perspective along with historical, sociological, cultural and anthropological research methods to aid its reading, while trying to situate the same within the African context. A deliberate attempt would be made to analyse Soyinka’s select plays with an Indian subject position. Arguments and assumptions will be generated via the works of African theorists and critics like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon whose ideas regarding violence and identity immediately distances the subject position while at the same time juxtaposes it with the Indian counterpart in the form of the celebrated Gandhian principles of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*. The resistance strategies that are at work will also be taken into consideration. Consequently, the study shall use Performance theory, Phenomenology and Semiotics, Hermeneutics, feminist thought and other literary theories (both Western and Non-Western) in the analysis of Soyinka’s plays.

XIII. Review of Literature:

The initial hiccups that normally afflict any researcher are generally the viability of the argument, the justification of the topic/object of study, the voluminous range of literary materials at his/her disposal, the need to maintain a review of literature and a working bibliography. Books like Susie J. Thoru’s *The Sense of Performance: Post-Artaud Theatre* completely changed preconceived views of stage performance. Michael Syrotinski’s

Sander’s book provided the necessary insight to engage in theory and how to put it into practice. It removed the initial misunderstanding of applying theory as something which is the prerogative of the great intellectuals. The library of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT, Guwahati), granted access to many research materials like Gail Ching-Liang Low’s White Skins, Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism, Richard J. Roid’s A History of Modern Africa: 1800 till the Present, Simon Gikandi’s edition of The Routledge Encyclopaedia of African Literature, Alice Cherki’s Frantz Fanon: A Portrait, Thomas L. Charlton’s edition of History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology, Patrick Colm Hogan’s Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crisis of Tradition in the Anglophone
Literatures of India, Africa and the Caribbean, Fredrick Cooper’s Africa Since 1940: The Past and the Present among many others were mostly helpful in providing a perspective on African history.

As far as review on this particular area is concerned, the study has included works produced by these various disciplines (history, anthropology, sociology, political science and women’s studies) along with other materials.

The African continent and its people occupy a ‘subaltern’ position in global politics where voices from the African continent remain on the peripheries of global governance. Since the Human Rights Council is envisaged to be a forum for dialogue on thematic issues on all human rights, Africans need to seize the opportunity to be heard, rather than remaining as a problem to be solved. Books such as Orality and Literacy by Walter J. Ong; Oral History: The Challenges of Dialogue, edited by Marta Kurkowska-Budzan and Krzysztof Zamorski; The Oral History Reader, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson; Generation on Fire: Voices of Protest From the 1960s, edited by Jeff Kisseloff—all raise the key issue of the African continent (as a continent without a history) and the African people being perceived as a problem to be solved rather than a voice to be heard within global politics. In an essay, entitled “African Talking Drums and Oral Noetics”, Walter J. Ong goes to the extent of associating the beats of the drums with the African languages. However, he states that the beats of the drums (which are so essential for the Africans) varies with places and tribes as different tribes have their own individual drum beats. Drums are indeed the essence of African existence.
In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka defends African democracy whole-heartedly and also upholds the view that the West should pay reparations for the crimes committed against the Africans. The book is also remarkable for the concept of ‘negritude’ of which Soyinka has been one of the most outspoken critics. This is reflected in his remark that a tiger does not shout its tigritude; it acts. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discusses the psychological impact of colonialism in the minds of the colonized. The theory of ‘lactification’ (the desire to mate with the white race to forge a new identity) that he postulates is in keeping with the postcolonial experience of the Africans. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty goes on to discuss the phenomenological ‘presence’ of the body in terms of perception by claiming that the *presence* of the body is affirmed by its very *being-in-the-world*. *Bodies and Voices*, edited by Merete Falck Borch, is a basic text that brings to the fore the underlying force-field of ‘representation’ in the postcolonial context and also focuses on the postcolonial aspect of ‘resistance’ which is imbibed and emulated by various modern writers of the Third World. It also throws light on the validity of contemporary debates on colonization of the body and the mind, representations of the Other, subaltern agency and debates about the colonized subject, along with enslavement of bodies and voices, discourses on race and racism, ‘voices’ of everything from colonial administration to post-colonial discourse and drama, performance and mime.

Fanon’s essay “Concerning Violence” that appears as a booklet which is originally a part of his larger treatise *The Wretched of the Earth* can be regarded as the summation of Fanon’s philosophy of violence. In this handbook, Fanon asserts his undying affiliation to the practical application of the brute force of violence which he believes can serve to be the
ultimate retribution for the colonizers. Fanon asserts that the only principle in the
decolonised world is the principle of violence. “The native who decides to put the
programme into practice, and to become its moving force, is ready for violence at all times.
From birth it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be
called in question by absolute violence” (4). Fanon goes on to examine the psyche of the
colonised people as demanded by his own professional expertise and maintains that there
seems to be a never ending envy and lust on the part of the colonised people to become like
the colonizers and not just merely substitute or replicate them. He envisions that the same
colonial world would be a much better place to live in if it adheres to the Manichaean ethics
deftly employed by the Westerners. “The native is an oppressed person whose permanent
dream is to become the persecutor” (21). The book becomes significant also due to the fact
that Fanon makes a complete behaviour study of the natives who constantly engages in
tribal conflicts and ethnic cleansing. “The colonized man find his freedom in and through
violence” (59). He reasons out the psychology behind the sectarian violence as a form of
vendetta against the colonial order; a kind of violent repression which makes itself visible
only through violence. From the psychoanalytic point of view, Fanon goes on to discuss the
performative tradition of the Africans, their belief in the occult and magic. According to
him, dance in the form of trance offers a relaxation of the muscles in which “the most acute
aggressivity (sic) and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed and conjured
away” (26). Fanon denigrated the naivety of the elites and the bourgeoisie class in their
adherence to non-violence and pacific settlement in that such a disposition does more harm
than good to the collective psyche. Fanon’s vehemence gets accentuated in his refusal to
comply with any compromises when it comes to the question of deciding the fate of the
natives. “The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity” (61).

Towards the penultimate part of the essay, Fanon states that violence in the colonised people serves immensely beneficial in fostering a collective harmony and invests them with positive and creative qualities. This union, according to Fanon, has the potential not only to challenge the colonial order but also to retaliate with full vigour the wrongs pitted upon them since the beginning of imperialism. “...violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (65).

In An Image of Africa, Chinua Achebe tries to chart out the contemporary political life of Nigeria, the sectarian violence of the Igbo and the Yoruba which has rang the death knell of the country and has left her in the quagmire of military dictatorship. According to Achebe, the problem lies not with the country but with the people; not with the post-colonial situation but with the lack of efficient leadership; “the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility” (22). He comes down heavily upon the work ethics of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the two political giants of Nigeria who tried to guarantee solidarity on the principles of economic self-sufficiency. He enlists a series of striking examples where the question of nationalism is cut short by one’s tribal lineage. He painstakingly states that Nigeria is not a great country but one of the most disorderly nations of the world. Taking certain indigenous examples, he makes clear the “gargantuan disparity” (41) of privileges that has made the edges of nationalism even more brittle, that is, the disparity between the ordinary Nigerians and the corrupt bureaucrats. He then goes to enumerate the effects of a lack of cohesive nationhood and ascribes the root
problem to the Nigerian Civil War that has pitted Nigeria into an abyss. He concludes his essay by making a comparison with Mahatma Gandhi and Aminu Kano, people who can make positive contribution in the political field by maintaining the standards of humanity, never falling a prey to the ever seductive concept of manipulating Power.

George Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence* is one of the most controversial books of the twentieth-century. Developing the ideas of violence, myth and the general strike, Sorel celebrates the heroic action of the proletariat as a means of saving the modern world from decadence. It is quite a disturbing book because of Sorel’s conclusion that violence would save the world from barbarism. However, Sorel clearly marked a distinction between the violence of the revolutionary proletariat and the force deployed in the name of the state by politicians and intellectuals. In his book entitled *Violence*, Salvoj Zizek questions the permissiveness of violence in philanthropy; and in daring terms, reflects on the powerful image and determination of contemporary terrorists. As a philosopher and a cultural critic, Zizek constructs a fascinating framework to look at the forces of violence in our world. Using history, philosophy and Lacanian psychiatry, Zizek examines the ways we perceive and misperceive violence. According to him, violence takes three forms—subjective (crime, terror), objective (racism, hate-speech, discrimination), and systematic (the catastrophic effects of economic and political systems)—and often, one form of violence blunts our ability to see the other existing forms.

In his book, *African Discourse in Islam, Oral Traditions and Performance*, Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah focuses on the centrality of the religion to the oral literature and indeed the entire range of expressive culture among the people of the Yoruba society. This book not only analyses Soyinka’s contribution but also tries to develop an African indigenous discourse
paradigm for interpreting and understanding literary and cultural materials. Aime Cesaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* describes the brutal impact of capitalism and colonialism on both the colonizer and colonized, exposing the inherent contradictions and hypocrisy implicit in Western notions of ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’ in the process of encountering the “savage”, “uncultured” or “primitive”. Here, Cesaire reaffirms African values, identity and culture and their relevance in the contemporary world. Soyinka’s eloquent voice of protest against Nigerian authoritarianism finds expression in his book *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. In his book, he describes Nigeria’s present political climate, condemns the country’s illegitimate leaders and muses about questions of nationalism and international interventions. Visualizing Nigeria as ‘a nation on the verge of extinction’ ever since independence, Soyinka argues that the ruthlessness of the military dictatorships have deprived her of nationhood.

Again, Zlata Filipovic and Melanie Challenger (Eds.), *Stolen Voices: Young people’s war Diaries from World War I To Iraq* is a compilation of those suppressed and unheard voices that has been rendered inconsequential basically due to the format in which they appear. With the emergence of the twenty-first century, the field of research has undergone a paradigmatic shift in that it has not only become interdisciplinary but also a model project in unearthing hidden truths and facts. Zlata Filipovic in her introduction to this book harps upon the gargantuan importance of such first-hand war experience documentation as these sources are never censored for outright publication (nor even intended so) and can therefore project a composite, true and authentic picture of violence. One of the conspicuous elements of diary-entry is that it is never taunted with the tricks of memory in the narrative framework. Although private, it conveys the nature of conflict in a real and immediate
manner. The book introduces the reader to such voices which crave for being heard, souls who crave for redemption. The Holocaust violence (1939-1945) is captured by the entries of Clara Schwarz and Yithzak Rudashevski, the Vietnam War (1964-73) by Ed Blanco, the Balkans War (1991-95) by Zlata Filipovic herself, Intifadda (1987) by S. Zelikovich and Mary Hazboun and the Iraq War (2003-04) by Hoda Tanvir Jehovah.

In terms of doctoral work in the area, a preliminary research reveals the following material on the area. Michael Staudigl’s *Towards a Phenomenological theory of Violence: Reflections Following Merleau-Ponty and Schutz* prepares the groundwork for developing a thorough-going phenomenological description of different phenomena of violence such as physical, psychic and structural violence. Drawing primarily on the phenomenological accounts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alfred Schutz, the paper tries to work out a phenomenologically grounded theory of violence. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s *Giving Africa Voice within Global governance: Oral History, Human Rights and the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council* calls for the African continent to transcend its current ‘subaltern position’ in international relations and make its voice heard within global governance. The paper also tries to make a case for the use of oral history as an ideal medium to bring the voices of the subaltern to the notice of the Human Rights Council and as a key methodology in the current endeavour to understand different situations of human rights and violations. *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, edited by Biodun Jeyifo is basically a collection of essays by various acclaimed authors and critics like Wilson Harris, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Kwame Anthony Appiah, Femi Osofisan and others. The essays that range from analytical tradition of philosophy to Marxism and from feminism to phenomenology showcase Soyinka’s postcolonial politics and his literary
aestheticism. In Mpalive-Hangson Msiska’s *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka*, Soyinka’s representation of postcolonial African identity is re-examined in the light of his major plays, novels and poetry to show how his idiom of cultural authenticity both embraces hybridity and defines itself as specific and particular. Soyinka’s works conceptualize identity in ways that promote and modify national perceptions of *Africanness*, rescuing them from the colonial and neo-colonial logic of cultural denigration in a manner that fully acknowledges the cosmopolitan and global contexts of African postcolonial formation. This book also tries to locate Soyinka’s intellectual and political concerns within the broader field of postcolonial cultural theory.

Notably, there is no evidence of work on this area at the doctoral level in the said discipline—i.e. the dramatic literature of contemporary Africa, despite the fact that a few African playwrights like Ngugi wa Thiong’g and Ngugi wa Miri have chosen to focus on this issue. There has been no research work till date on dramatic theory concerning Soyinka’s plays that tries to evolve a new brand of theatre or even use such a critical terminology like this study.

**XIV. Chapter Summary:**

In Chapter 1 titled *Introduction*, an attempt has been made to chart out the theatrical roots of Nigeria by briefly reflecting on the historicity of the performance tradition. This chapter locates present day Nigerian theatre which evolved from the Yoruba folk opera and the Alarinjo theatre as a cultural space powerful enough to stand as a counterblast to the Western form. The study attempts to show how Nigerian dramatists like Wole Soyinka,
Femi Osofisan and Duro Ladipo have tried to configure a distinctive form of theatre while at the same time duly acknowledging the Western model. The chapter proceeds to map out Nigeria from the African topography and analyse the present geo-political space with its multifaceted cultural, social and linguistic interexchange. Language is an issue that has baffled almost every African writer. As such, the chapter tries to bring out the potential contradictions in the form of a linguistic impasse that has seriously threatened the African cause. The politics of the English language as an academic discipline forced into the curriculum by the dictating norms of Western imperialism (as reflected by Chinua Achebe in his book *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, London and New York: Penguin Books, 2009) has been discussed as one find ample instances of cultural/ideological resentment behind such coercive acts. Ngugi wa Thiongo’s favouring Gikayú and Soyinka’s advocacy in favour of Kiswahili as possible alternative for the unification of Africa under a confraternity are other instances in point. Furthermore, this chapter locates Soyinka in the postcolonial space of Nigeria and contests the idea of how the resistance strategies of his writings voice out his own understanding of violence as a possible solution for the post-colony. The idea of violence then gets elaborated by referring to the philosophies of Fanon and Gandhi, and attempts are made to recuperate Soyinka’s political ideology which accommodates violence as a necessary tool to contest the alarming notion of a pan-African identity explicated by Marxist aficionados like Aimé Césaire and Senghor Segun. This chapter also tries to make a suggestive link of how the politics of the body and the idea of body politic are simultaneously used by Soyinka to dwarf the ideological base of the Western imperial project. In addition, an explanation of the proposal undertaken for evolving out a new “Theatre of Drums” in analysing Soyinka’s plays has been listed. The
Chapter 2 titled Violence and Identity: Reading the Postcolonial African Subject, will focus on the politics of identity in the postcolonial African situation and try to assess how Soyinka’s plays address the forging of a black African identity which challenges the ‘Other’. This chapter has been published in English Forum (March issue, 2013) with an extensive title “Negotiating Identities: Forging of Black African Identity and Its Challenges to the ‘Other’—Wole Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman”. Soyinka’s own hybrid/diasporic identity which he himself acknowledges with pain the ground reality of ‘exile as a mimic death’ (Soyinka, 2007, 23) in his memoir You Must Set Forth at Dawn explicitly suggests the rupture that has defined an African identity in the first place. The heterogeneous tribal formations in Africa are seen to be a major hindrance in working out a cohesive national identity. The concept of ‘weusi’ (African term for blackness) is an issue that gives the much needed thrust to this chapter’s argument. Attempts will be made to expose the reductionist view of essentializing a pan-African identity which Soyinka for a majority of reasons is critical about. The ‘dis-connectedness’ of the Nigerians or the Africans in general with their own roots, their negligence of a cultural responsibility, their craze for a superficial adoption of Western modernity (Westphilia), the clash between tradition and modernity and the need for an alternative modernity are issues that will be discussed with reference to his plays. However, the identity question will not just be analysed from the linguistic point of view but also from that of the political representation of the black body which inevitably challenges identity politics. The need to look for an
alternative modernity on Soyinka’s part will be analysed in connection to his plays which guarantee the black African body a different empirical knowledge about its identity. This will be done with due recourse to some select South African plays which again seems crucial to be necessary rejoinders in the evolution of a black African identity. The colonial philosophy of social and cultural denigration, Soyinka’s challenging the fabricated concept of ‘Negritude’ as a means of ‘universalizing’ the African subject within the restrictive paradigm of a pan-African identity as reflected in his *Myth, Literature and the African World*, his anti-Cartesian ideological position and his simultaneous voicing in favour of western/classical adaptation are issues that will be discussed to justify the theoretical supposition behind the “Theatre of Drums”.

Soyinka’s non-dramatic works—novels, poems, critical essays, memoirs, autobiography and ‘factions’—are unfailing testimonies to his own political activism and are thus major sources of distilling his postcolonial angst. In most of his non-dramatic works, Soyinka manages to uphold his political and aesthetic principles which have hitherto served the cause of his writings. His memoirs are crucial from the political perspective because these are the *stamped document* of his turbulent life. The study plans on using Soyinka’s non-dramatic works (both prose and poetry) as necessary adjuncts to his plays as most of his plays espouse a political principle and an aesthetic standard which inevitably link them with his critical works. For instance, the resonance of the drum comes from his own reflection in *Ake: The Years of Childhood* where he acknowledges the charismatic appeal of the drum that led to his initiation into the *egungun* (masquerade) cult. Again, works like *The Open Sore of a Continent* and *A Climate of Fear* are glaring evidences that projects
Soyinka’s dilemma in the Nigerian ‘post-colony’, and thus evinces the need to put that experience in the dramatic form. To be precise, the study shall try to read and relate his non-dramatic works in the light of his plays just as it plans on reading/interpreting his plays in the light of his prose.

In Chapter 3 titled *Body/Performance, Body Politics and Postcoloniality: Reading ‘Body Politics’ in Wole Soyinka’s King Baabu and A Play of Giants*, body politics fuses alongside the performative angle to formulate an apparatus of understanding the representation of the black African body on the stage. This chapter has been published in *English Forum* (2015) with the title “Reading ‘Body Politics’ in Wole Soyinka’s *King Baabu*”. The term ‘body politics normally refers to the political connotations of the material bodies, bodies on which major socio-political issues are contested and played out in time and space, and the political body of the nation. Body politics, when looked at from theatrical standpoint connotes a multi-layered perspective as to the politics of the body on stage, the gendered subjectivity, the politics of representation, the body of the Other, the performing body, the actor/audience encounter, the body of the audience, the context-specific historical and cultural production and the politics of meaning, the real/post-real representation and so forth. The study seeks to arrive at a negotiation of this multi-layered ideological position as the corporeal participation of the body in the theatre and its very ‘presence’ on stage leaves the spectator to either labour hard in making meaning out of it as participatory engagement, or to assume that theatre itself in all its variegated manifestations cannot work without the agency of the body. In other words, the study seeks to arrive at the understanding that the acting body in the theatre not only invests meaning to the performance but also lends and
imparts credibility to the entire project of spectatorship. Therefore, the study uses body politics with a two-fold significance—firstly, the context specific ‘body politics’, that is, the postcolonial body working out itself to form a discourse of itself in terms of signification, and secondly, the ‘body’ on stage which is a much more contestable category in the meaning making process. The study will however focus more on this latter type of body politics which will then be analysed from two different angles—the ‘body’ as a signifier or sign-vehicle on stage, and the performing body or the body of the actor thriving under the perpetual gaze of the audience.

Chapter 4 titled *Theatre of Drums: Conceptualising a new Praxis*, tries to postulate a new critical terminology of “Theatre of Drums” as it has the potential to evolve and explicate the ideas pertaining to the post-postcolonial situation. This ambitious project of inventing a new terminology necessarily arises due to the lack or availability of a definite philosophical and theoretical language that elaborates an ‘alternative modernity’ in the context of African or more precisely Nigerian drama. Given the ever-burgeoning nature of such a project and also due to the limitations of scope befitting a doctoral thesis, the study intends to keep a tight leash and concentrate on Nigerian theatre, especially the plays of Wole Soyinka. This however does not mean that contemporary African plays proving unworthy to fit into such an enterprise will be completely brushed aside for which the study plans to make necessary connections through discussing and interpreting major African and South African playwrights (in a more random manner) to make a comparative assessment of their works.

It will be pertinent to state that the idea of a “Theatre of Drums” does not and should not be misinterpreted as a form of theatre which only seeks to enhance the auditory participation of the audience engrossed in a spectacle. Nor does it refer to the popular means of viewing
traditional African performances where a group of tribal people performs a muscular orgy beside a huge bonfire to the accompaniment of the resounding and deafening sounds of drums. On the contrary, the term ‘drum’ is conceived in the form of a metaphor which refers to that body of voices which are perpetually threatened either through the form of violence or societal negligence. This “Theatre of Drums” is primarily conceived to explore Soyinka’s plays in working out an alternative modernity. The notion of “alternative modernity” can be applied to Soyinka’s world view as it is based on the ontological assumption that clinging to the tradition or roots does not ensure an African essence; on the contrary, a true African ‘essence’ can be obtained by an opening up of the narrow, insular African existence, freed from all individual complexes of being ‘black’ when confronting the world at large. In other words, alternative modernity as the term implies, relies on a substitute—a substitute for the biased polemical western concept of modernity and epistemic world order (that is, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the ideals of Western Humanism, the Cartesian cogito to list a few) which never grants recognition to the African as ‘modern’ along set standards.

The objective is to see Drums through the lens of phenomenological validation as it crystallizes the conflict potential provoked by the characters in his plays. However, I cannot entirely neglect the importance attached to drums by most of the African playwrights. In fact, the idea of conceiving the postulate of a “Theatre of Drums” arises due to the overbearing and ubiquitous presence of drums in most of the plays that I had studied so far in the course of my research. Nevertheless, the study deviates from a mere
phenomenological approximation of the drum by trying to access and read the psychological impact thus engendered.

The phenomenological idea of ‘presence’ is a matter that is constantly toyed with in this study as the conception of ‘drums’ as a sounding, attention-seeking device is given sufficient credence. The idea of drums and drum beats upholds the threnodic essence of the African natives and imparts them a voice so unique that they can now question the authority of those who initially allowed them such a voice. The voice of the natives is the voice of the drum. The study will therefore reiterate the possibility of codifying a new theatre where violence in its most extreme and nefarious manifestations emanates through the agency of the body, and how, in turn the body, represents it while forging an African identity.

Chapter 5 will be the conclusion of the study. Although it is quite difficult to arrive at a particular conclusion to a five-year long research project, a tentative summation will be offered. This chapter will also raise and discuss certain areas that would require further research.
End Notes:

1 *DKHM* stands for Soyinka’s play “Death and the King’s Horseman” in *Wole Soyinka: Collected Plays 1*, Methuen Drama, 1998

2 Duro Ladipo also wrote a play based on the actual events which took place in Oyo, ancient Yoruba city in Nigeria, in 1946, where the dead king is assisted by his royal horseman in the afterlife. Soyinka took his cue from this play and worked wonders with the plot-structure and the theme. Ladipo’s play, however, was published much earlier than Soyinka’s.

4 See Jan Vansina’s *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, London: 1965, 191-192

5 See Hayden White’s theory of narrativization of history.


7 Especially the Bolekaja critics, which include Soyinka’s former students and admirers like Jemie Chinweizu and others.


9 The study aims to give relevance to a new critical terminology in the formulation of African theatre history. In the process, however, the study will try to throw light on the sub-text of violence and the politics of the Black African body.

10 It was Aime Cesaire who in March, 1935, published a passionate tract against the French colonial policy of assimilation, in which he first coined the term ‘negritude’. In short, the idea of negritude was really a resistance to the politics of assimilation. In an interview with Rene Depestre, Cesaire lays bare the conditions that moved him to proclaim an Antillean essence which, he believed, must be couched in the form of an African essence. For Cesaire personally believed that negritude would banish all fears of the ‘whiteness’ of French identity by striving towards an identification of being a “negro” irrespective of any geographical limits. Cesaire was frustrated by the unrestrained politics of assimilation which was much in vogue in his time in France. In his famous *Discourse* (1950), he
vociferously asserts that, “Europe despised everything about Africa, and in France people spoke of a civilized world and a barbarian world. The barbarian world was Africa, and the civilized world was Europe. Therefore the best thing one could do with an African was to assimilate him: the ideal was to turn him into a Frenchman with black skin” (Discourse, 88). This statement clearly pinpoints the politics of formulating worlds along binaries.


13 See A.G.Roy’s “Introduction: Essentially Soyinka”, 15

14 In 1967, Nigeria fought a Civil War (1967-71) to bring the breakaway Republic of Biafra back into the Federation. Soyinka’s nation group, the Yoruba, (Yoruba is the second largest ethnic and linguistic group in Nigeria) joined Nigeria in fighting Biafra (Easterners, mainly Ibos, Ibibios, Ogonis and other smaller eastern nation groups). Soyinka’s was a lone voice empathizing with the rebels.

15 By this term, conceived in a oxymoronic manner, I mean to emphasize quasi-Enlightenment ideal and Soyinka’s identity factor, first as an African brother in terms of facial appearance and secondly, as the Other—the formidable European all-knowing male, entrusted with the onus to bring light to the darker races.
16 For an in-depth research, see Aijaz Ahmed’s *In Theory*, where he denounces the biased and partial yardstick employed by Westerners (erstwhile, Fredrich Jameson) in judging non-western works of art.


18 Soyinka’s 1983 film, *Blues for a Prodigal*, called for the sacking of the Nigerian administration where he accused the administration of rigging the elections.

19 The notion of “alternative modernity” can be applied to Soyinka’s world view as it is based on the ontological assumption that clinging to the tradition or roots does not ensure an African essence proper; on the contrary, a true African essence can be obtained by an opening up of the narrow, insular African existence, freed from all individual complexes of being ‘black’ when confronting the world at large. In other words, alternative modernity as the term implies, relies on a ‘substitute’—a substitute of the biased polemical western concept of modernity which never grants recognition to the African as ‘modern’ along set standards.

20 *The Invention*, Soyinka’s first play which never got published, is about the South African apartheid system and in general a commentary on racism. Soyinka became a resident playwright for the Royal Court Theatre soon after completing his graduation at Leeds. The dramatic focus of the plot is basically centred upon a group of white South African scientists bent upon discovering a key for identifying racial origins in order to re-establish the apartheid system. It gives a concise picture of Soyinka’s early struggle with the problems besetting the African continent and his personal stance on the apartheid system. The play ends with an explosion that wipes out the entire group.
Soyinka was allegedly charged with an armed hold-up of the radio station of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service in the guise of a mystery gunman’ and is said to have forced the engineer on duty to substitute a pre-recorded tape he brought along with him for the copy of Akintola’s victorious speech which was to be transmitted at that time to the entire region. For more details, see Chukwuma Okoye’s “Soyinka: Text, Embodied Resistance and Postcolonial Resistance”, 43/44.

One of the major obstacles in carrying out research on an African project from India is the lack of immediate access of the researcher into his/her respective field of study. The situation becomes worse when someone chooses to study African drama and performance without having any firsthand experience of what an African stage performance might be like. Therefore, in so far as the ‘politics of the body’ is concerned, the study has taken recourse to an interpretive framework. Consequently, a semiotic reading of the play texts becomes imperative in order to counter the so-called ‘absence’ of the performance text or the theatrical performance as such.

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