NEW HISTORICISM AND CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN* AND OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN*

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation entitled NEW HISTORICISM AND CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN* AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN* has been carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this dissertation was previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other Institution.

_____	_____	_____
Anaza, O. Herbert Otohinoyi	Signature	Date

Certification

This dissertation entitled NEW HISTORICISM AND CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN* AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN* by Herbert O. Otohinoyi ANAZA meets the regulations governing the award of Masters in English Literature of the Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Prof. Tanimu Abubakar Chairman, Supervisory Committee	_____ Signature	_____ Date
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: Mr. & Mrs. E. J. Akande, my siblings and loved ones for their support, love, and presence despite the distance.

To the memory of Late Shaibu Ohuha Ismaila who saw me leave but did not see me come back, as well as my fallen colleague and friend Ohiorhenuan Ohimai Ebenezer, R.I.P.

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Abstract

This work explores New Historicists aesthetics in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun* and brings to the fore not only concepts specific for the field of literature seen from a New Historicist perspective, but also aspects that circle around reconstructive quality encountered in the selected dramatic texts, thus proving that the approach of New Historicism can indeed make itself distinguishable in the contemporary Nigerian literary sphere.The act of reconstruction in literature has always been an important subject among literary scholars. Reconstruction is a huge interest for New Historicism, one of the modern approaches in the field of literary criticism. In New Historicist analysis, not only history affects literature, but also literature could be effective in understanding history and thus the relationship between history and literature is reciprocal. Thus, the dramatic texts have been analysed in relation to the social and cultural contexts from which they emanated. The study is a content-based analysis set in line with the qualitative research method of the humanities to explore historical reconstructions in the selected dramatic texts of Soyinka and Osofisan. The research finds: That the selected play-texts show the place of African historiography in contemporary Nigerian drama. That New Historicist theory has become a popular area of study in the literary field and has grown through rigorous research works. That works of New Historicist orientation are strongly in their challenge of social and cultural reconstructions. That the New Historicists are interested in writing new history. That the relation between historical events and contemporary literature needs to be analyzed further to prepare a landing ground for the future. The dissertation concludes that the dramatic texts revisit the past with the intention influencing the present as well the future.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.0.Background to the Study

Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan are renowned writers who have chosen the drama as a platform to recount human experiences. The works of Soyinka and Osofisan are important in contemporary Nigerian drama because they have contributed to the development of literature in Nigeria in the context of Africa. According to Afrrev Ijah (2013: 70) "Nigerian drama has gained prominent and permanent position on the world literary map especially with the winning of the Nobel Prize by Wole Soyinka". For Osofisan, Muyiwa Awodiya (1993: 224, 225) states that "What is considered Osofisan's greatest contribution to Nigerian theatre is his extraordinary fertility of forms". He uses language that is accessible and simple, Awodiya (1993: 216) notes, makes his style not only to be 'tortuous or convoluted'. Osofisan tries as much as possible to make actions and situations in his dramatic works realistic and simple.

Consequently, scholars and critics have, over the years, explored their works from different perspectives, with each approach expressing the attitude of the Nigerian critic toward the thematic preoccupations and/or ideologies dominating these texts. The first wave of interpretation that greeted the works of these writers centers on the 'writing back' spirit which dominates the expressive and interpretative lens of postcolonial writers and critics alike. Consequent upon this, Awam Amkpa (2003:29) asserts that Wole Soyinka's genius in using the tragic myths of Yoruba culture to forge a compelling language of resistance and change has drawn many admirers and a few detractors. This was informed by the need to explore the African colonial experience, within the postcolonial discourses that simultaneously characterised the emergence of Nigerian literature.

Another interpretative and critical dimension on the works of Soyinka and Osofisan centers on the examination of the social function to which drama and indeed literature as a whole is used especially as a revolutionary tool for the transformation of the African society. Based on this perspective, Stephanie Newell (2006:161) points that Soyinka's literary works continue to be seen by critics on the left as both apolitical and inaccessible, irrelevant to the majority of ordinary West Africans. However, she describes his works as having:

> *Recognized the capacity of drama to stir up political opposition amongst the masses: this is demonstrated by his political satires, bravely performed by the Guerilla Theatre Unit outside government offices during the volatile months of the late 1970s after the assassination of Murtala Muhammed, when General Olusegun Obasanjo headed an increasingly corrupt and violent regime.*

This does not only reveal the Marxist tendencies in the works of Soyinka but also that of Osofisan. One of the worst comments that have been made about the works of Soyinka is best captured by Geoffrey Hunt (1985) who states that 'the writings of Soyinka contain a particularly sophisticated ideological elaboration of the class position of the neo-colonial agent class'. Realising the frustrations expressed by Soyinka's critics, Osofisan believes that the focus of contemporary playwrights should be on the state of society,' thus 'unmasking the class forces at play within it, revealing the material sources of exploitation and injustice, demonstrating how the masses could liberate themselves' (Osofisan 1996: 16). Hence, most plays written after Nigeria Civil War deal with these issues. Suffice this to say that, Nigerian post-Civil War playwrights and writers are expected to show commitment by focusing on the aforementioned issues.

In the light of the above position, many contemporary Nigerian writers were studied via the Marxist lens with the ultimate intention of viewing their plays as instrument of social change.

From the aforementioned, this seems to be the case more with the works of Osofisan than Soyinka whose works have been described by Gugelberger (1985: 12) as:

> …inflexible in their representation of indigenous culture: the Yoruba beliefs and practices he portrays in his plays and essays are seen to occupy a fixed framework with little to offer audiences in terms of political resistance or revolution. His works have also been judged by critics to promote individualism and apathy above collective action and optimism for the future.

Soyinka's works by contrast exhibit an overarching fatalism, presenting tragedy as an inevitable fact of life rather than a consequence of the social and economic inequalities brought about by neocolonialism (Hunt, 1985).

Beyond the aforementioned interpretative dimensions that Nigerian drama has experienced, Soyinka and Osofisan can be seen to be expressing certain ideological stance especially as it relates to certain historical events. "The Nigerian Literary environment seems to sustain a proliferation of ideological standpoints which tend to subsume aesthetic leanings and to determine the kind of literature that comes out of society" (Hunt, 45), the ideological stance comes where "Soyinka has relied on his mythopoesy, to remold and re-interpret the Nigerian literary experience in line with universal mythic experiences, Osofisan believes and upholds a demystifying experience which fosters a communal theatrical paradigm for the interpretation of life" (Hunt, 45). Edde M. Iji (1991:95) asserts that Soyinka's early plays are reflections of his youthful exuberance; the later so-called major plays are rather more forthright… Soyinka's artistic assertiveness and aggressiveness toward individual freedom and amelioration of individual status quo apparently reek of what purists may call Marxist or Communistic, he seems to fit more snugly into what one may call "a free thinker". However, Olaniyi Abdulwaheed (2006:219-22) points out that

> Wole Soyinka's drama/theatre vision is influenced by a combination of factors which directly or indirectly sharpened Soyinka's dramatic and theatrical vision. They are; the Yoruba god of iron (Ògún), early contact with Western and Christian education; communal rites, rituals and festivals; romance and fraternity with the Yoruba travelling theatre troupes; individual disposition to life; societal's socio-political, religious, moral and economic problems and Western theatrical modes.)

Furthermore, Soyinka in Musa's (2006:22) view is also a highly opinionated and 'fiercely individualistic' person and this he demonstrated by creating larger than life characters and heroes in most of his plays: Baroka, Lakunle, Olunde, Elesin-Oba, … among others who wear the toga of hero and anti-hero in his plays, showing clearly that "the hero's life is his people's life".

On the other hand, Awodiya (1988:224) points out that "the major objective of Osofisan as a playwright, it seems, is to the evolution of collective consciousness among all black people in an effort to liberate themselves from economic and socio-political oppression inherited from the colonial experience.

It is in the light of this that a New Historicists study is necessary in order to explore the pre-textual circumstances surrounding the production of the works of these playwrights – Soyinka and Osofisan. History at this point becomes a necessary element in understanding how these writers perceive or what attachments they share in their attempt to recount history. Beyond the writing back and the Marxist view, it is pertinent to explore these writers' attempt to textualise history and understand the possibilities that will emerge from the examination of their texts from a historical point of view by revealing each writer's perspective or account of history. Also of interest to this study, is to explore the nature of prejudices expressed by these writers in their attempt to reconstruct history and the resultant effect these biases might have on their readers' perception of history.

Literature has always shared a common ground with history; the very idea of imitation in itself connotes a recount of human experience. New Historicism as a theory is not just interested in the imitative capacity of literary works but also seeks to understand and investigate the circumstances surrounding the imitation and how such imitations are perceived as or translates into history. In this regard, the New Historicists try to negotiate between these extreme positions in order to see if a common ground could be created for their mutual transaction. It is on the basis of this, that this study seeks to examine how the works reveal the writers' and the readers' bias in their textualisation and perception of history respectively.

1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

This study uses the literary works of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan to evaluate the link between New Historicism and Nigerian Drama. This is because Nigerian playwrights tap from history in an attempt to preserve and where necessary 'reconstruct' it. History is important because it defines how we identify and understand ourselves, as individuals and as nations, in the present and also in the future. In this sense, how these 'memories' are constructed and reconstructed is crucial to whom we are. Thus, this dissertation considers the relationship between history and drama, explores the extent to which historic plays were used to either reclaim or challenge the official memories and identities created by those in power in the post-colonial Nigerian context. Therefore, this dissertation particularly chose to consider how new historicism has been explored in literature, particularly in Nigerian drama, to challenge the official memories and identities created by those in power.

Furthermore, the point of commencement of Nigerian Drama in its written form roughly coincides with the period known as the postmodern era. The implication therefore is that, the history of Nigerian drama is difficult to ascertain due to the difference in the traditional forms of

performances which of course qualifies as drama and the western sense of it from which the written form partly emerges, thus giving rise to a number of problematics. It is with these postulations in mind that this study attempts an assessment of the Nigerian literary and dramatic landscape with a view to explicating the place of New Historicism in contemporary Nigerian drama. This dissertation is therefore anchored on the following propositions:

i. The historical experience of the Nigerian people gave uniqueness to the discourse of contemporary Nigerian drama.
ii. Nigerian drama participates in national discourse because contemporary playwrights are concerned with the issues of tradition and custom, politics, gender issues, and national integration.
iii. The gap between artistic projection and the actual phenomenon creates the possibility of authorial distance in the textualisation of history or historicisation of a text.
iv. New Historicism is a viable tool for the analysis of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun*.

1.2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

Literature and history are inseparable; the interpolation of both aspects is central to the focus of New Historicism. This study therefore aims at exploring the historical context of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun*. The New Historicist study of these texts will help project the past especially as it relates to how much of this past is projected and how the facts are blurred by the ideological and/or bias of the writers. The dissertation further undertakes a New Historicist re-reading of *Death and the King's Horseman* and

Morountodun, drawing attention to devices, incidents and instances which form the basis of their perception of history. The objectives of the study, therefore, are to:

i. Illustrate that a New Historicist re-reading of Wole Soyinka's and Femi Osofisan's plays reveal the blend of form, devices and incidents with ideology as the basis for their historicisation and textualization of Nigerian experience.

ii. Uncover the silent biases expressed by Soyinka and Osofisan in their contemporary attempt at recounting contemporary Nigerian history.

iii. Illustrate the possible influence that Soyinka's and Osofisan's perspectives or biases have on their readers in relation to contemporary issues projected in their works.

iv. Show that New Historicism is a viable tool to study Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun.*

1.3. Justification of the Study

This study undertakes a New Historicist appraisal of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun*. As such, the study is anchored on New Historicist criticism which takes into consideration historical incidents with ideology as the basis for the historicisation of the Nigerian experience that have been left unexplored. The choice of the dramatic texts is premised on the fact that drama is one of the genres of literature that is instrumental in recounting and reconstructing history. These dramatic texts are valid for this research because they are drawn from and shaped by real and actual events. . The study is an addition to the already existing scholarly established opinion that New Historicism as a literary form has gone a long way not only to reconstruct history, but also to point out the biases and sentiments of the writers on the texts.

The dissertation thus contributes to knowledge and understanding by providing a basis for the New Historicist interpretation of the texts on the contemporary Nigerian drama. This is more so for the fact that New Historicism has sparked interest in the process of studying the text and history as equal entities within which literary interpretation can equally operate. This study is also relevant because it tends to deviate from the popular norm of studying the works of these playwrights using interpretative tools like Marxism, Feminism, Postcolonialism, and hosts of other theories.

Apart from sustaining interest in, and continuing the debate on the application of New Historicism to the texts under review, this research enriches contemporary Nigerian drama with its analytical representation of the discourse of New Historicism and by this fact widens the understanding of this form of historical and cultural production in this part of the world.

1.4. Scope of Study

The recent greening in African literary studies cut across all genres of literature. However, this study restricts itself to the drama genre and the works (plays) of Soyinka and Osofisan respectively. The works of these playwrights can be studied using different theories but the scope of this research is interested in linking New Historicism to contemporary Nigerian drama. Soyinka and Osofisan have a lot of literary works to their credit but for the sake of the scope for this study, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Morountodun* are adopted. These texts derive their materials from history, even though they are not historical documents but relevant as they have elements or trace of the interest of New Historicism on them.

1.5. Methodology

This study is a content-based analysis set in line with the qualitative research method of the humanities to explore historical reconstructions in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun*. Because of this, textual analysis was applied in order to explore this phenomenon. With this, the literary texts selected represent the primary sources while critical works, historical and other literary materials such as dissertations, journals, articles and books were used as secondary sources for gathering and collating information. In addition to these, Web sources relevant to the study was used in the course of the study as secondary materials. The study applies New Historicism as theoretical tool for analysing the selected dramatic texts in order to foreground the study.

1.6. Nigerian Drama and Social Discourse

To understand Nigerian drama and social discourse, it is necessary to explore the nature of drama in the African context. Like in the Greek sense, the history of African Drama entertains certain complexities; complexities born especially out of the African contact with the West. Ndesanjo Macha in his essay titled "Africa: What is African Drama?" (2009) raises the following questions about the meaning of African drama: "is it any kind of drama, as long as the cast is African? A play written by an African? A play written by anyone, as long as it is about African issues? Or is it a play performed in a venue with an African name like Bomas of Kenya?" A deeper look at these questions can help one to come to terms with what African (Nigerian) drama entails because a comprehensive definition of this phrase must always find a way of embracing these questions. The one question that fails to make the list is the one on oral tradition or the indigenous African drama because whatever we have as written today was inspired by this tradition. No wonder James Booth (1981; 87) boldly claims that "One way in which the African may seek an identity is by returning imaginatively to the pre-colonial past". The imperativeness

of oral tradition on the written cannot be underestimated; Minike Schipper (1980:57) stresses the importance of the oral tradition to the written, thus:

> …, in the case of drama, it would be absolutely incorrect to treat traditional drama-forms as one thing and the so-called modern drama as another thing. The oral tradition continues partly in written drama in our time. In more than one play the narrator functions in a similar manner as he did traditionally. The same holds for a number of other devices in African contemporary drama.

The place of oral tradition (folkloric: theatre at village level that comprises traditional songs, music, dance, spectacle, and storytelling) in the discussion of African drama cannot be underestimated because it serves as the root of literary or text-based drama. African literature is known to have experienced both the oral and the written form. For the sake of this study, major attention is given to text-based or written drama in Africa (Nigeria) since the study is dealing with contemporary Nigerian drama.

It will be difficult to point to a particular place in Africa where drama starts especially the text-based or written type. Apart from the fact that Africa is a very complex continent, there is "diversity in performances as a result of massive spread of cultures and traditions in each country. A lot of these cultures have rich oral and ritual traditions, aspect of which survived into contemporary society" Olaniyi Abdulwaheed (2013: 11). The colonial contact with the continent help in shaping the history of written drama in Africa (Nigeria) though one cannot submit that the history of drama during this period marks out the origin of African drama. Colonisation led to the suppression and outlawing of many indigenous art forms such as dancing, singing and drumming, even beliefs in the ancestral worship as Western missionaries sought to instill Christianity through biblical dramas pageant. This is exactly the point where the African

playwrights start the culture of adapting European dramatic forms for their own satirical or political purposes.

Literary drama in Africa (Nigeria) started when the West came to the continent to have their affairs of life imposed on the people. History claims that they came with lots of "ideas; religion, education, business transaction, making Africa raw material place where their solid land was built up by it". From this moment, the ways of life of the African people changed to the lure of Western lifestyle.

Thus, the origin of African drama based on traditional, historical and contemporary dramatic forms in the continent range from sacred or ritual performances to dramatized storytelling, literary drama, or modern fusion of scripted theatre with traditional performance techniques. "In both its oral and written forms it has a long history rooted in the continent's famous storytelling and performance traditions, and its classical civilizations are as old as that of any other geographic region of the world" (Gikandi 2003: xi).

African (Nigerian) drama like that of Greek can be traced to rituals (festivals and religious), masquerades, myth, legends, history, and many great traditional dances, within the African (Nigerian) background. It becomes difficult to distinguish drama from ritual because if the context of the performance is to be taken into cognizance, "a ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency" (Julius-Adeoye 2013: 21). Much of Africa's indigenous drama evolved out of an oral tradition, long before many African societies had developed written alphabet. Therefore, few indigenous African dramas were recorded in writing; instead they were passed down to generations by word of mouth. Designated individuals or groups were often responsible for the recollection of these

words; they can be eldest individuals in the society or the religious sects. In the words of Schipper (1980:55-56):

> The ancient literature has been transmitted orally from one generation to generation. The story-telling performance itself is the essential part of oral literature. In narrating the old stories the main point is the sung or spoken performance: music, singing, dancing, mimicry, masks and costumes may complete the oral 'text'. The narrator improvises or familiar themes, while the performance proceeds within a fixed frame of traditional ritual actions, formulas and refrains. A clear separation between oral literature and drama cannot be made. In fact, oral literature is always at the same time drama in a way, because the performance is such an essential aspect of this literature, just as in modern written drama. Sentiments, mimicry, gestures, intonation, rhythm and pause, variation of words and reacting upon the moods of the public, this is all part of the oral character of the African non-written literature and it is also inherent drama.

Ritual-drama is functional in traditional society because rites are efforts "to change the undesirable, or to maintain the desirable" (Schipper 1980: 56). This kind of performance is considered impeccable as they must be performed without fault because where there is any flaw or imperfection, meaning and effects were lost and there is always the need to attempt the performance again. Often in indigenous African drama the identity of the performers is always secret. Attempts are made to conceal the identity of these performers and sometimes these identities are measured as utilization of ornate and awkward masks. The African have had her own styled drama that predated colonialism and in defense of this, Julius-Adeoye (2013:21) submits that:

> Theatre or drama, whichever term we choose to call it, has always existed in one form or another in African societies. They both have their foundations in "festivals and religious rituals". There is no doubt regarding the existence of a robust theatrical tradition in many African societies. Performance of this theatrical tradition, predating colonialism is often executed by actors who regale in masquerade costumes.

This brings the debate of whether in pre-colonial Africa; drama as we know it today has existed because the Europeans were always hesitant to deny the existence of African drama before the coming of colonialism. The African oral literature, to a very large extent, has elements of drama, i.e. the story telling performance is a theater in many ways, this is because the narrator is often a musician, a poet and an actor. A narrator is a musician because he sings the complete text or a part of the text and accompanies it with his own instrument. He is a poet because he re-creates in his own form - improvising way, the indigenous 'texts'. He does that on account of his knowledge, mastership and command of traditional literature. He is an actor because he interprets different roles with voice and mimicry.

For instance, the African plays that portray the history of the continent's drama and their influences on the contemporary works which reflect the issues going on in the society are works like *The Fate of a Cockroach* by Tawfeek Al-Hakeem, *Death and the King Horse Man* by Wole Soyinka, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* by Ama Ata Aidoo, *Son and Daughter* by Joe De Graft, *Esu and Vagabond Minstrel* by Femi Osofisan, *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* by Athol Fugard, *I Will Marry when I Want* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirri, *Marriage of Anansewa* by Efua Sutherland, *Collision of Altars* by Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, *Intelligent Power* by Athib Yesin and Kate Dyacine, etc. These plays if one takes a close look into their salient elements can help those who really desire to explore all that the early African drama entail.

There is no denying the existence of indigenous artistic forms (oral traditions) in Nigeria before the advent of colonialism. This is because, a great deal of what we have today as literature got developed from the folkloric activities of Nigeria's pre-colonial past. The oral literature is a form of transmission which uses words in speech in a highly stylized, artistic way. This was purely practiced in indigenous languages and a path away from the written literature. "The non-literate

societies of pre-colonial Nigeria operated an oral literary culture (orature or oral literature) that consisted of poetry, folk songs, myths, legends, folktales, proverbs and other forms of dramatic and theatrical productions" (Akporobaro 2001). Joel Adedeji (1981:134) defines oral tradition as:

> …that complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of peoples. It is acquired through a process of learning or imitation and its purpose is to condition social action and foster social interaction.

Adedeji's definition is a vivid expression of the meaning of oral tradition. It seems a lot more detailed as it captures in clear terms the essence of the form. These art forms at some point in every society provided a frame work upon which these societies thrived, in terms of myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, songs, etc. They form an essential part of the African reality. The people in traditional societies served as repositories of these forms and as custodians of it, they were saddled with the task of passing it on from one generation to another. This culture was of great importance to pre-colonial Nigeria.

A shift was made from this indigenous literature in the midst of the contact with the outside world especially the Arabs and the Europeans. With the introduction of literacy in Arabic and English and the advent of colonial rule, the artistic space widened. While the knowledge of the Arabic and English language dominated the Nigerian scene, the oral traditional practices were subsumed and relegated to the background. Thus when writings in these foreign languages began to emerge, there arose the question of whether they can be called Nigerian literature. Critics like Emenyonu (1988) are of the opinion that Nigerian literature is that which is written in the indigenous language. He argues that to call a work Nigerian literature, it must be rich in not just proverbs, myths, legends and so on but should be expressed in indigenous languages. He further

stresses this sentiment by revealing his disappointment on those that write in European languages and completely shunned the indigenous languages. Emenyonu (1988) reveals that:

> It is important for any reader of fiction in Nigeria to realise that no matter how much the author denies or disguises it, every Nigerian who writes fiction in English today has his foundation in the oral heritage of his ethnic group…. An authentic study of Nigerian literature must, therefore, begin by examining and appreciating the origins and development of literatures in Nigerian indigenous languages.

James Booth (1981: 27) in response to this position states that:

> There are compelling reasons why the languages of the former colonial powers, English, French and Portuguese, continue to be used in independent African states. With the present political and economic growth of France and of the English-speaking nations, the retention of their languages for diplomacy and commerce is clearly a great advantage to a newly independent state. While in literature the use of such widespread languages give access to the widest audiences. Internal factors may be equally important. The ethnic and linguistic diversity within many African states makes use of the colonial language in education and in public life a simple political necessity.

If there is one obstacle that has made the definition of Nigerian literature hard to come by, it is the issue of 'language'. Ngugi wa Thiong'o believes that what can be termed as African literature can only be written in African languages (Gikuyu, Afrikaan, Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, etc.), a sentiment that Achebe does not really appreciate but accept that the "…use of an indigenous language allows full expression of the writer's Africanness, but reduces his audience, sometimes drastically" (Booth 1981). Works have been written in all these indigenous languages but quite at the outside due to the diversity in Nigerian languages, for instance, it is rare for a Hausa man to take the pain of studying or reading works written in Yoruba or Igbo, the same can be said of an Igbo or Yoruba person . This is exactly the genesis of the failure of the struggle to have an indigenous language as a national or an official language.

Modern Nigerian literature in English took off with the popular Onitsha market literature in 1940s, though a popular literature largely on romance as preoccupations for decades and generating more than 200 titles that covered "themes as varied as love, politics, biography and fiction" Darah (1988). There is Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter* published in 1947, all products of Onitsha Market literary school and then come the internationally recognised *Palmwine Drinkard* (1952) by Amos Tutuola. Palmwine Drinkard was written in an English language that "his fellow Nigerians are often embarrassed by his 'bad' English" Booth (1981). He writes other works such as *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1952), *Simbi and the Satyr of Dark Jungle* (1955) and *The Brave African Huntress* (1958). In 1958. Nigerian literature become internationally applauded when Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was published, a novel that have won many local and international awards. This novel *Things Fall Apart* and others like *Arrow of God,* Ekwensi's *People of the City, Jagua Nana*, Aluko's *One Man One Wife, One Man One Matchet,* and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* to mention a few are some of the works written in English by Nigerian novelists during the colonial rule.

The early Nigerian post-colonial literature produces works such as Achebe's *No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People*, Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters, Season of Anomy* and his plays *A Dance of the Forest, Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialist,* his collection of poems; *A Shuttle in the Crypt,* J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat and The Raft, Casualties* (poems), Christopher Okigbo's *Path of Thunder.* These earlier writings opened the literary door to other writers to emerge, these writers include Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Festus Iyayi, Zulu Sofola, and host of others.

1.7. New Historicism as Analytical Framework

This research adopts the New Historicist theory as framework in relation to contemporary Nigerian drama. "New Historicism dates back to Stephen Greenblatt's use of the term in 1982 in an introduction to an issue of the journal *Genre* devoted to the Renaissance" M. A. R, Habib (2005). Besides Stephen Greenblatt, other major new historicists are Jonathan Goldberg, Jonathan Dollimore, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jean Howard, Edward Pechter, Catherine Gallagher, Louis Montrose and D.A. Miller. Developed in America, New Historicism according to Peter Barry (1995) "is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period". Literary and non-literary texts are given equal importance and allowed to work as sources of information or interrogation with each other. This way, the non-literary text becomes not a con-text, but a co-text, along with the literary work. The literary text is placed within the framework of the non-literary text which is closely read.

New Historicism in Greenblatt's *The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the English Renaissance* where he contrasted the approaches expanded with the hitherto dominant procedures in American critical practice: "traditional literary history" and New Criticism. To him, historical and literary texts are autonomous entities that study the relationship between texts and socio-historical contexts. Greenblatt understands that texts are not only documents of social forces that inform and constitute history and society, but they fashion individual identity and socio-historical situation. By means of an economic metaphor, Greenblatt explains how texts and other symbolic goods, by circulating in a society through channels of negotiation and exchange, contribute to the distribution of social energy, by which he means the intensities of experience that give value and meaning to life and that are also indispensable to the construction of self-awareness and identity.

Stephen Greenblatt who prefers to call New Historicism 'Poetics of Culture' sees historical and literary texts as autonomous entities, studies the relationship between texts and socio-historical contexts. He points out that texts are not only the document of social forces that inform and constitute history and society, but that fashion individual identity and socio-historical situation. Greenblatt (1990) in his essay 'Resonance and Wonder' reveals the imperativeness of New Historicism when he states that:

> The new historicism obviously has distinct affinities with resonance; that is, its concern with literary texts has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own. New Historicist critics have tried to understand the intersecting circumstances not as a stable, prefabricated background against which the literary texts can be placed, but as dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces. The idea is not to find outside the work of art some rock onto which literary interpretation can be securely chained but rather to situate the work in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment in both in history and our own.

The focus of New Historicism therefore is to juxtapose the text and history as equal entities within which literary interpretation can equally operate. This is evident in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) where factual events that took place in 1946 in ancient city of Oyo were textualised. Also, in Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1982), past events were brought into the present to bear on the subject matter in the play. "History, therefore, is not regarded as isolated from the literary text in the scene of a 'historical background' but rather as a textual phenomenon" Mario Klarer (1999: 13). Of importance here is the interpretative enterprise where the text and the historical background blend to shape its existence, Hans Bertens (2002:176) stresses this when he states that:

> …the new historicism and cultural materialism reject both the autonomy and individual genius of the author and the autonomy of the literary work and see literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical context. The role of the author is not completely negated, but it is a role that the author is at best only partially in command of. The author's role is to a large extent determined by historical circumstances

The main issues in the contemporary literary criticism like New Historicism are the place of 'author' and his 'work'. Although new historicism centers on history as the subject of research, it differs from the old historicism in its understanding of history. While (old) traditional historicism regards history as universal, new historicism considers it to be cultural. New historicism takes a more subject approach; our understanding of the past is always conducted by our present consciousness, more conscious of history as interpretation on everyone's part: author or historicist. Traditional historicism holds that the proper aim of literary criticism is to attempt to reconstruct the past objectively.

Old Historicism is similar to New Historicism in that the idea is to investigate the historical, social and cultural world of the author and that these elements are always interconnected with the literature of their time or period. Both old and new historicists believe that texts cannot be separated from their historical context. New Historicism renders a political reading of the text by giving a venue to the culturally and psychologically oppressed and marginalized women in the society.

Politically, New Historicism is different from the Marxist sense of emancipation which is centered on the working class, even though it is liberal and accepts all forms of differences and deviances. There are many critiques affected by New Historicism which detects the oppressed and the marginalized voices in the text, and makes a political reading of it. This can best be seen from the point of the marginalised in the society, women's history against men's for instance.

New Historicism, in spite of some basic differences, is closely linked to Cultural Materialism. It was initially claimed to be the British counterpart of the American New Historicism. Both are by no means unified theories which owe allegiance to any single theorist, but are practices which incorporate several theories and positions. Both cannot be clearly separated from each other. Many examples of contemporary critical practices draw upon both Cultural Materialism and New Historicism. New Historicism is indebted to Marxism and Post structuralism in general and Foucault in particular. Cultural Materialism is largely indebted to Marxism of Raymond Williams. Raymond Williams coined the term Cultural Materialism in 1977 in his book *Marxism and Literature.*

The New Historicism serves as new pattern in studying history and bringing back narratives into the evaluating processes. Both *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Morountudon* have often been referred to as historical texts that treat the questions of cultural identity and political revolution respectively. To the New Historicists, the world has to be seen in complex instead of teleological development in processes of uncertainty, possibility and discontinuity, history as experience, man with different cultures, altering different historical pathways, and seeks answers for cultural differences and globalisation. New historicists tend to represent "a sustained negotiation of those complex cultural, textual and political forces which intervene between past and present, then and now" Knellwolf and Norris (2008: 92).

1.8. The Poetics of New Historicism

1. New Historicists argue that all levels of society share in the circulation of power through the production and distribution of the most elementary cultural and social "texts".

2. Whereas Marx-inspired Cultural Materialists tend to examine sites of subversion in literature, New Historicists (inspired by Michael Foucault) tend to concern themselves with forces of containment and the ways hegemonic forces consolidate the status quo.
3. Like Culture Materialists, New Historicists reject the New Critical precept that texts are autonomous units that should be examined without bringing in what New Critics termed the "intentional fallacy" (i.e. biographical criticism) or the "historical fallacy." New Historicists, by contrast, argue that texts are always intimately connected to their historical and social contexts, especially when texts attempt to repress that context.
4. According to New Historicism, all texts may be examined for their historicity, just as any historical phenomenon, no matter how apparently trivial or unimportant (e.g. Mariah Carey videos or Renaissance miniature portraiture), can be analyzed much as one would analyse literary text.
5. New Historicists reject the western tendency to write history from the top down (e.g. political history) or in grand narrative strokes.

To this end, New Historicism provides a novel perspective of literary criticism, and opens up new dimensions for the readers not to restrict themselves to the verbal construct of work only, but to unravel the historical and cultural consciousness of the writer also. The approach is a compendium of diverse procedures, and its employment in critical enquiry is bound to enlighten the readership, and thereby enrich the process of defining, classifying, and evaluating works of literature. Therefore, there is a scope for spatial and temporal analysis of literary text. The past is revived for the utility of the present.

CHAP TER TWO:

2.0.REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This research deals essentially with two playwrights: Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan and as such, the literature review of the work centers on how different approaches have been applied to the study and evaluation of the texts under review. The literatures reviewed in this chapter include journals, books, essays, internet materials and other unpublished documents, the reviews draw attention to peculiar aspects that are relevant to this research.

The New Historicists study a work through an analysis of its historical context and also to make sense of its cultural and intellectual history through a parallel reading of both literary and non-literary texts. The interaction of history and literature has always been an important subject among literary scholars. E. H. Carr (1961: 6) defines history as a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his fact as an unending dialogue between the past and the present. An aspect of history which forms the body of this study is history as an organized

critical study of such past activities of human beings that have produced significant effects on subsequent cause of events. This explains why history cannot be restricted to the records of past events only but as a continuous process. The relationship between past, present and future constitutes a dominant discourse in some of Soyinka's works as the playwright tries to imagine "a blending of old and new that would be better than a total rejection of one in favour of the other", (Dasenbrock 1985: 327). Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman* uses history to present idealized portraits of the Nigerian past. In his essay, "The Writer in a Modern African State", Soyinka declares that the "African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past … the past exists now, this moment, it is coexistent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future, but it is not a fleshpot for escapist indulgence," (19). The word 'progress' is key here. Caroline Neale (1985:7) refers to the British historian E.H. Carr as having said that:

> History properly so-called can be written only by those who find and accept a sense of direction in history itself. The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere. A society which has lost belief in its capacity to progress in the future will quickly cease to concern itself with progress in the past.

The European assumption here is that progression needs to be linear, forward-moving toward something. This 'something' according to Neale, tends to be defined in terms of city-states or empires. In the same vein, Yvette Hutchison (1999: 110) points that the tendency in histories and literatures has been to focus on State or Empire, on the dominant group instead of the majority in a country and the material circumstances that define these groups and their respective histories. The shift towards the majority and peripheralised was important because one can change the circumstances of a people more easily than one can change cultural identity.

2.1. CONCEPTUALIZING THE TERM CONTEMPORARY

It is important to first of all look at how the word contemporary has been to define most literary terms. Tammie Bob (2015) points out that “Contemporary literature is difficult to characterize because it reflects contemporary life and culture, which is rapidly changing and full of contradictions”. However, she expresses the fact that “there are certain trends which stand out. (These are generalizations, remember; there are exceptions.)”. They include the fact that:

i. Contemporary literature is no longer "innocent," but ironic. It reflects our political, social, and personal disillusionment, and no longer dares to believe it can create anything new. It can only cast the old in new forms.

ii. Contemporary literature is a new cynicism about he (sic) role of art and literature itself. For previous generations, literature and other arts were meant by their creators to be "anti-Establishment"--that is, to repudiate and subvert established values and traditions.

iii. Contemporary literature accepts as given the idea, handed down from the early 20th century, that everything we know is dependent on our perspective. I see things one way, and you see them another. Thus, since there is no truly objective observer, there is no such thing as "Truth." There is only my truth and your truth, and those can change at any moment with the addition of more facts.

The complexity of Contemporary literature is further replicated in the ambiguity that characterized the notion of Nigerian drama because the multivalent nature of the term contemporary constitutes a problematic as far as periodization is concerned. In *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage,* the word ‘contemporary’

> …inevitably has two main senses: (a) living or occurring at the same time (writers contemporary with the events they write of); similarly with

> the corresponding noun (the comic poet Alexis, a younger contemporary of Plato), (b) modern, of or characteristic of the present day, up-to-date.

In his explanation of the phrase 'contemporary writers', Dominic Davies (2015) argues that:

> Any author writing from a country in its post-independence era can, if we take the title in its literal sense, be termed post-colonial. If we combine this with understandings of the term contemporary, which tend to be attributed to any 'author that wrote post-1945, some problems arise. Because of the shockingly recent history of colonialism – many African countries especially only attained independence in the 1960s, with South Africa's 'internal colonialism', apartheid, only ending in 1994 – these two definitions apparently overlap so that any author writing from post-colonial world should fit under this subcategory.

Based on Davies' arguments, the likes of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo, Maggie Gee, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, V. S. Naipul, Nayantara, etc. who wrote within the post-colonial period can be referred to as contemporary writers. This invariably means that it will not be out of place to call African literature 'contemporary'.

From the characteristics above it is obvious that what qualifies a literature as contemporary hinges on the social and political disillusionment, the reformative tendencies and the subjectivity that characterizes the post-modernist period especially in relationship with drama. While Davies' definition agrees with this position, it also introduces us to another dimension of what makes a work contemporary. If it is more productive as Davies claims to define "'a contemporary playwright' as 'an author that is still alive', or even 'a twenty-first-century author'", then the contemporary status of the likes of Chinua Achebe, Festus Iyayi, Abubakar Gimba and more recently Elechi Amadi becomes threatened because they have been referred to overtime as contemporary writers. It is on this basis that this dissertation reviews contemporary as works within the period of post-colonialism and even present day. Davies further stresses the complexity of this term thus:

> Some critics have argued that postcolonialism (sic) is no longer a suitable label to administer to a writer in our immediately contemporary world – that contemporary literature is now post-colonial. With the spread of revolutionary activity across what is known as the 'Arab and China as potentially new economic superpowers, the relationship of colonial/postcolonial that takes European imperialism as its defining phenomenon is perhaps no longer relevant. The binaries that succeeded this history (First and Third Worlds, Developing and Developed Countries) are now adequate descriptive terms for the world we live in – and that statement is itself compromised by its assumption that they ever were.

Having examined the complexities that abound in defining what is contemporary in Nigerian drama, this dissertation aligns with Bob's and an aspect of Davies' argument that borders on periodization especially from 1945 to date. Nigerian drama owes its emergence to numerous oral traditions and rich indigenous artistic heritage of the Nigerian people. History, rituals, myth, legend, traditional values, belief systems, and post-colonial disillusionment characterized the subject matter of what we have as contemporary Nigerian drama. The body of critical works that emerged within this period examine major foremost playwrights on the basis of the need to assert the African identity. Thus, critics examine these playwrights and their works via the postcolonial lens.

Foremost Nigerian playwrights like Soyinka, J.P Clark, Ola Rotimi, and Zulu Sofola used indigenous artistic elements with classical forms in their early plays. According to Obafemi (1988), most "…of them treat the issue of "Man's search for peace and harmony via the cosmic realm … the playwrights … are generally existentialist in their search for formal excellence, sometimes to the detriment of content".

With the established background on the issue of 'contemporary', one can lay claim to the fact that Nigeria have two out of the four different generations of playwrights that belong to the category of contemporary playwrights. Obafemi (1988) categorizes this two as "dominant and

emergent", while the likes of Soyinka, Rotimi, and Sofola belong to the dominant group, the emergent group comprises of names like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kola Omotosho, Esiaba Irobi, Tess Onwueme, Onyeka Onyekuba, Emmy Idegu, Ahmed Yerima and many others.

2.2. CRITICAL WORKS ON SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*

The emergent plays, according to Obafemi, treat contemporary issues especially social ills, proffer solutions in form of a restructuring of the society for equitable distribution of national wealth and the entrenchment of social justice. In most cases, there is a recommendation for a revolutionary change from the capitalist to socialist society. Most plays written after Nigeria Civil War are in this group. The second generation writers, of which Femi Osofisan is a potent and indispensable part, write on subjects that deal with social phenomenon that ranges from class struggle, corruption, military dictatorship, students' riot, feminism and others. In achieving this, they employ the revolutionary potential of the theatrical medium to make firm political statements and their successes reflect in creating art that is not just propaganda-oriented but one that is "politically correct and artistically powerful." Obafemi (168).

This emergent group has been greatly influenced by the works of the dominant playwrights, most especially Wole Soyinka, but they have moved further than Soyinka's line of artistic expression. This is particularly true when Femi Osofisan who once remarked on the sixtieth birthday of Wole Soyinka that:

> Drawing from my unique intimacy with the man and his works, my aim will be to narrate as clearly as possible the fiction of an epoch and a relationship, to deal with a dimension of Soyinka that has not been much discussed, that is, his influence on us, the younger generation after his; to expound on what he has meant to us as a model artist and political activist, and explain why, and how we have had to deconstruct this idol in the end, in order to clear the way to our own maturity, Osofisan (27).

Critics of Soyinka's work tend to ascribe his use of the Yoruba pantheon to the cultural influences of his upbringing and the fidelity he maintains to the Yoruba people. James Gibbs draws on autobiographical data to this end:

> On one of his holiday visits to Isara, the young Soyinka went through a rite designed to strengthen and protect him... The pattern of the festival, the concern with communal purification and the eclecticism of the celebration were important for the growing playwright and they provide an example of the kind of inspiration Soyinka found in his African background.

However, in refuting Gibbs' claim, Eldred Durosimi Jones offers his readers a sociology-based contextualization to Soyinka's work which, unfortunately fares little better in its attempt to address the complexity to which Soyinka's naming of the gods refers:

> Traditional Yoruba life is dominated by religion. The Yoruba are surrounded by gods and spirits with whom the lives of mortals interact. In what is more an idiomatic expression for the idea of multiplicity than actual count, the Yoruba ascribe to themselves four hundred and one gods.

In most of his plays, Soyinka bring to bear the place of Yoruba traditional religion, he artistically fuse in the Yoruba gods into some of these plays as a pioneering determination to set up post-colonial perspective through the nationalist struggle against hegemonic culture in the field of Nigerian literary dome. In his article, Olaniyi Abdulwaheed asserts that Wole Soyinka's drama/theatre vision is influenced by a combination of factors which directly or indirectly sharpened Soyinka's dramatic and theatrical vision. They are; the Yoruba god of iron (Ògún), early contact with Western and Christian education; communal rites, rituals and festivals;

romance and fraternity with the Yoruba travelling theatre troupes; individual disposition to life; societal's socio-political, religious, moral and economic problems and Western theatrical modes. …Sudha (2004) on the other hand stresses that Soyinka is "one of the most well equipped writers who has effectively used rituals in his play to resist the obvious and the subtle forms of Western influence on African mind. Soyinka can be considered a victim of colonialism, as he witnessed Europeans trying to change his Yoruba culture to fit their own, thus, he acknowledged the dangers and evils of colonialism concerning every person that has been hurt from colonialism. Behzad Pourgharib noted in his postcolonial study *of Death and the King's Horseman* that:

> The same as other plays by this postcolonial playwright, Wole Soyinka, "Death and the King's Horseman" also suggests the colonized's desire to remain on their own interests. Here, again the difference between two sets of discourse brings about serious clashes. In this play, Elesin is typical of the people who persist in their beliefs and also a good example of being a discourse carrier. At the same time, he is opposed by Simon Pilkings, the district officer, who is endowed with specific discourses and follows them naturally. Elesin was successful in passing on the discourses to his eldest son Olunde. Despite the fact that he has been away from his homeland for a few years to study medicine in a European community, he bears the discourses well. In other words, Elesin's and Olunde's behaviors in "Death and the King's Horseman" prove the present discourse they carry over ages. They are prohibited by the colonizer's agents nevertheless.

Even though, the opening page of *Death and the King's Horseman* warned that readers should distance themselves from seeing the text as discourse of cultural clash between the west and Africa, critics have actually explored its postcolonial richness to study the text. Cultural clash can only be viewed in this research as having link to new historicism.

Brian Crow (1987) expresses the significance of Soyinka as African playwright in his article "Empowering the People: African Theatre and Neo- colonialism": "Soyinka combines elements of Western drama with Yoruba ritual and locates ritual more prominently in a contemporary world. The resulting hybridity and contamination can provide a constructive way of locating ritual in a post-imperial world" (75). Notwithstanding, however, a juxtapositioning of the actual colonial experience and the text reveals how history is shaped by ideology of the playwright. Tunde Adeniran (1994) notes that Soyinka's plays have attempted a direct and meaningful imitation of reality. One is therefore struck by the recurrence of features like myth and religion in his plays. The most endearing aspects of his plays to the public are the vibrancy and attempts to examine the dark recesses of the human psyche through satire. Underneath this humour is the political element of rebellion and change or the need for them in societies. In his discussion of *Death and the King's Horseman*, Adeniran believes that the play has so much to do with clash of will or the subversion of culture, treachery and worldly desires. On the contrary, this does not mean that it has any less to do with an attempt to recount history from the perspective of the playwright. The implication of attempting a direct and meaning imitation of reality appeals to our understanding of the textualisation of history and the historicization of texts.

Death and the King's Horseman according to Wole Ogundele (1994), "is of course about the acting out of a peoples collective religious emotions and desires at a crucial moment in its politico-cultural history". This artistic impact places its emphasis on the use of the human body through dance, music, songs and chants, a reported sexual act and two deaths to complement dialogue that expresses those feelings values and beliefs. The play subject is also textured by aesthetic rituals.

Death and the King's Horseman has often been seen as a play dominated with metaphysics of sacrifice, Brian W argues that Olunde's sacrifice can only be understood in metaphysical terms; 'the problem arises as to whether an educated intellectual at the time would behave like this, but the argument fades into the background on the consideration of the world of the play. It has a metaphysical design, not a realistic one. It may be that this did not happen in fact, but it happened psychologically, spiritually and subconsciously'. However, James Booth (1988) in Barbalisingh approvingly concludes that in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka at last presents the story in which the efficacy of self-sacrifice is convincingly demonstrated. Olunde's death by ritual suicide is interpreted as a powerful metaphor for all sacrifice of self though the word 'efficacy' strikes a strangely practical note in this metaphysical context. Beyond the conclusion that *Death and the King's Horseman* is just a story, it is possible to see this text as an account of the religious and historical experience of a people.

In his materialist criticism of *Death and the King's Horseman*, Jeyifo (ibid), finds the play guilty of misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the real identity of the indigenous society. Jeyifo argues that *Death and the King's Horseman* did not attempt to highlight the real objective difference between the conflicting groups and classes in this society. However, he was positive in his essay on Soyinka's *The Road*, he offers kind words to Soyinka for the presentation of some dialectical awareness of history, but, that awareness, he feels, is subverted by Soyinka's mythopoeic imagination which leads to mystification of the road.

In attempting to communicate the nature of theatrical experience in its opposition to what Theodor Adorno calls "the line of least resistance", Soyinka makes clear his detestation of audience participation as a means of proving the physical reality of the encounter. He goes to great lengths to debunk the myth that African theatre may be distinguished from its Western

counterpart by virtue of the uninhibited participation of its audience members. He berates what he perceives to be the Western romanticization of this form of 'experience' and hotly denies its claims to revolutionary effect:

> When I go to the theatre it is not to suffer drooling morons translate audience participation into a license to maul me with their bodies simply because they are incapable of reaching me with their minds. This is the debasement of the principle of ritualistic communion at its most nauseating, the triteness which comes sooner or later to any culture whose rationale is based not on irreducible truths of universal experiences but on a cultural emptiness which can only feed on novelties, extremisms and personal fantasies.

Soyinka is very specific about the role of the audience in a live theatre performance: the members of the audience are part of the space of the performance and therefore metaphysically part of the conflict taking place. The audience participate in this much deeper metaphysical sense throughout the 'ritual'– which is the word Soyinka uses for the drama in performance – because they are an integral part of the space in which the performance of the conflict takes place; and he refers to the audience as a 'chorus' who give the protagonist strength in "the symbolic struggle with the chthonic presences' (MLAW, 38)

2.3. CRITICAL WORKS ON OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN*

According to Eben (2014: 24), Critics of Osofisan's drama have remarked on the range of influences in his works which include Soyinka, Brecht, Beckett, Feydau, Chekov and the indigenous traditions of Yoruba sacred and secular performances and festivals. It is the conglomeration of all these influences that is responsible for Osofisan's didacticism with considerable formal innovations and lyrical ebullience in his drama. In a statement credited to Brecht:

> It is not enough to demand only cognition from the theatre, instructive images of reality. Our theatre must arouse pleasure in cognition and organize the joy of changing reality. Our audiences must not only hear of Promethus freed from his bonds but they must school themselves in the enjoyment of freeing him. Our theatre must instill all the enjoyment and pleasure of the inventor and the discoverer, the liberator's feelings of triumph.

In his response to the assertion above, Osofisan (2001) states that:

> Literature can entertain, in fact must entertain, but it is only the dim-witted or brain-washed artist who is content merely to entertain, to play the clown. The primary value of literature seems to lie in his subversion potential, that explosive change which lies hidden behind the façade of entertainment and which must be controlled and made to (explode) for the use of our people, or mankind. Literature must be used to play its role in the advancement of our society, in the urgent struggle against neo-colonialism and the insidious spread of fascism. (85)

Brecht believed the purpose of the theatre was instructive, therefore he considered his plays to be lessons or parables to teach the audience how to survive. Osofisan just as Brecht, aims at reality, this he achieved by removing obscurity in the text as well as on the stage. Characters are allowed at each stage of acting to show themselves as actors in the play rather than individuals in the real life.

Like Soyinka, Osofisan relies heavily on the use of indigenous Yoruba traditions. Firstly, he makes use of the fusion of music, mime, dance and dialogue – elements of total theatre, which are features of Yoruba festivals. The impact of such theatrical experience on the audience cannot be underestimated as it penetrates the audience and involves them vigorously in the theatrical process just like Brecht theatrical ingenuity. This makes the audience to be genuinely involved and this is referred to as audience participation. He makes use of the Yoruba gods and mythical ancestors like Esu, Orunmila, Yeye Osun, Obaluaye, Olokun, Elusu, Yemoja, Oranmiyan and

Moremi in his plays. His view of them is that we do not need any religious or extra human explanation for our predicament nor do we need to go and seek people on any occasion to help us pray to some divine power. This bring us to the concern of postcolonial criticism where issues like cultural domination, subversion, colonialism are treated. While many critics have applied this literary tool to study the works of Femi Osofisan, this research chooses New Historicist approach to study *Morountodun*.

Osofsan has often been referred to as radical writer, his plays are about the first body of literary drama that devotes their themes and stylistic pattern to the plight of the peasants and working class. Awan Akpa (1993: 15), commented on Osofisan's theatricality saying that "No Nigerian dramatist…has so skillfully represented and interpreted Nigeria's history and social reality. His characters emerge as icons and images of social strife and struggle". The Marxist undertone is common in most of Osofisan plays, Marxist critics whose aesthetic standpoints demonstrate the alienation between the haves and the have-nots, fight for the place of peasants and working class in the society. As much as *Morountodun* can be studied via this channel, it is possible to have New Historicist study of the same text.

Charles Uji (2014: 6) in his article points out this Marxist tendency in *Morountodun* where he documents that:

> This revolutionary theme also finds itself at home in Osofisan's *Morountodun*. Here the revolutionary belligerency is staged by the farmers against the coercive State apparatus. The State in this play too is exposed as being corrupt, exploitative and dehumanising. The entire dramatic conflict is epitomised by Bogunde, a revolutionary combatant in the play, in the following excerpt when he states that the wanton brutality meted to them by the State is "All because we refuse to pay money we haven't got. Because we refuse to let men with two balls like us march upon our heads.

Omeh Obasi Ngwoke (2010: 5) in his article titled "Myth and the African Playwright: Osofisan's Craft in *Morountodun*" contends that:

> Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* is one of the well-known African plays that are rooted in mythic sources. And many a scholar, including the author of the play himself, has commented on the handling of the myth in the play, but their comments affirm the same idea of a subversive use of the myth.

Ngwoke stresses this point further when he states that:

> *Morountodun* an award winning play by Femi Osofisan, is one of such modern African works which relies heavily on material from the African oral literature for its making. Generally acknowledged as a revolutionary play, *Morountodun*'s fame rests undoubtedly on its author's artistry, especially in his manipulation of mythic and historical materials, spicing them up with rudiments of the Marxist ideology to evolve a contemporary play of a classic stature.

According to Uji, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels pointed this out very early enough in their prolific writings when they posited that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle." They went further to expatiate that this struggle is between the "oppressor and oppressed" and that this struggle either leads to "revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes." Radical drama aptly realises that to resolve this conflict for the benefit of the larger part of society, the majority in society has to fight it out in the form of a revolution since the oppressor hates and resists the idea of relinquishing his privileged position.

Though Osofisan is not the only writer in the race for peasant liberation, study on his plays are mostly directed towards sourcing and unearthing the problems of the society by educating as well as creating awareness amidst the masses to rise and revolt. His plays are radical as they aggressively approach societal issues and at the same time, point the direction that will lead to

liberation. His plays are revolutionary as they aim at instilling a revolutionary spirit in the masses to take-up arms and mend the "leaky" state of the society. Awodiya (1993) stresses this point further when he states that "… by expropriating the common arts of the people and their traditional materials, Osofisan has created a popular theatre that is very close to the people".

Some critics believe Osofisan has a lot in common with Wole Soyinka, as a playwright, the ideologies of Osofisan are often compared with Soyinka's dramatic ideologies – a first generation writer, writing before the Civil War. Osofisan addressed this in an interview with Jide Oshikomanya (1979: 54), where he called Soyinka a "reactionary playwright" who "Sees all the evils in the history of the society such as poverty, institutional corruption, injustice, brutality, etc. Talks about them, exposes them, but thinks that these evils are tragic moral patterns of human history." In other words, Soyinka regards societal evils as elements of unchanging pattern in humanity. However, Osofisan in contrast to Soyinka is a "revolutionary dramatist" who sees the same ills in the society as "created by man and can be changed by man." This change has to come radically or aggressively. Perhaps there is no doubt that, Femi Osofisan could be classified as a Marxist writer who demands social change in favour of the oppressed and or downtrodden masses in the society as the theme of his plays expresses. The major objective of Osofisan as a playwright, it seems, is to catalyze the evolution of collective consciousness among all black people in an effort to liberate themselves from economic and socio-political oppression inherited from the colonial experience. (Awodiya 224). We can say that Awodiya's submission reflects a part of Femi Osofisan's dramatic thrust, ideology and dramatic postulations. Marxist criticism has always been a common tool used by scholars or critics to study Osofisan's plays.

Studies on gender is an aspect in Nigerian literature that critics have explored and the works of Osofisan have been approached through this channel as well. In most contemporary male

authored texts, women are poorly represented. The overriding focal thrust of male playwrights has always been to foreground the physical, prurient negative nature of women. There are a few male playwrights however who portray women in their plays as talented and capable of achieving great things. According to John Ebimobowei Yeseibo (2013: 19) these playwrights are termed gynocritics and they include among others, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Iyorwuese Hagher and Bode Sowande. Women's portrayal as sex objects and mostly as docile mothers and wives forecloses their other capabilities. There should be a fundamental change in gender relations so as to recognize the role of women as complementary partners in the process of development, this is what Osofisan did in *Morountodun* and his other plays. Women in Osofisan's *Morountodun* played prominent roles in the society portrayed in the play. A study that focuses on Osofisan's women maintains that "…a most outstanding feat attained by Osofisan in his treatment of women in his plays is the revolutionary roles assigned to them" (Adedina, N. O, 2013). Osofisan's women in *Morountodun* are fearless, according to him women are indispensable and always nestle men folk throughout their lifetime. Eldred Ibibiem Green (1994: 22) points out that:

> In Osofisan's Altine's Wrath, Altine, a supposedly mute female character regains her power of speech and thus her freedom through her individual ability to affirm herself. A point that is immediately noticeable about Osofisan's female characters in *Morountodun* and Other Plays is their ability to hold strong views and be committed to the cause the views represent.

In *Morountodun*, Osofisan portrays Titubi as a social reformer in the mould of Moremi. She is bold and daring. She obstructs the staging of a play she perceived to be critical of her privileged class. She risked her life by living in the midst of the rebels with the intention of knowing the leader of the rebels and handing him over to the police. In the end, she gets sympathetically attached to the masses as the mass of their oppression is laid bare before her eyes. She therefore

does everything within her power to effect reconciliation between the warring forces through the window of dialogue. Awodiya (1993: 226) also provides a clear picture of Titubi thus:

> Titubi already belongs to the rich, privileged class. She is bold, courageous and undaunted. In fact she is the most daring and forceful of all the heroines in Osofisan's plays. This heroine of extraordinary qualities abandons her riches and opulent lifestyle to infiltrate the peasants' ranks… Titubi becomes the rallying point and a source of inspiration for the peasants in the play, thus she becomes the symbol of Osofisan's social justice who is fully conscious of her social status and the sordid condition which must be fought and challenged.

However, Victor Ukaegbu's view of the roles of women in *Morountodun* can be summarized as follows:

> *Morountodun* is not revolutionary for eulogizing women's contribution to society, it is dramaturgically significant as in it, Osofisan avoids character simpleness and tokenistic presentation of women, creating instead, strong complex women who command similar ideological and intellectual statures as men. They fight beside men as equals and resist marginalization from decision-making on gender grounds (2006).

According to Yeseibo, Osofisan is a gynacritic, he portrays women in his plays as talented and capable of achieving great things. He does not sexually objectify his female characters as was common in the plays of early dramatists. A number of critical works have studied Osofisan or *Morountodun* through this channel, these studies come mostly in form of feminist inspired essays. Gender issues in contemporary Nigerian drama is well exploited by playwrights that seek to liberate and emancipate the women folks who have been dominated in virtually all aspects of life by their male counterparts.

To this end, historical context in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Morountodun* is what this dissertation is out to explore. History is the base-rock upon which the literary text is built. From the Anglo-Saxon period till date, the literary texts have always chronicled the history of the

people. The centrality of history to the Nigerian drama cannot be undermined. Soyinka and Osofisan tried in these plays to reconstruct certain historical incidents they considered very important to their people.

CHAPTER THREE:

3.0. HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE NOTION OF TRAGEDY IN SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*

Reconstructing a historical experience is by no means an easy task. Reconstructing the past to fulfill certain mimetic demands is an endeavour that involves a significant effort from the playwright who is faced with the task of exercising his artistic power with precision in the space that lies between reality and his expectation of it. However, no act of reconstruction approximates the actual experience being reconstructed. This lack of exactitude is largely what accounts for the New Historicists' argument of the inevitable presence of subjectivity in every reconstructive attempt. Reconstruction of experience defines literary practice across epochs and from the time of independence to date playwrights have continued to explore actual experiences in their reconstructive attempts. Literature for New Historicism is a social and cultural creation constructed by more than one consciousness. Thus, it cannot be reduced to a product of a single mind. It is in relation to this assumption that this chapter, with emphasis on Soyinka's *Death and*

the King's Horseman, investigates the extent to which playwrights tamper with history in the course of reconstructing the past.

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is a reconstructive attempt at exploring the impact of colonialism on the Nigerian social and religious consciousness. It was written in 1975 and was first performed in 1978. Soyinka in his "Author's Note" acknowledges that *Death and the King's Horseman* is based on an incident that took place in Nigeria in 1946 but that for purposes of dramaturgy he has taken a number of liberties, among them, changing the date of the action to the early 1940s, during World War II. This enables both the wartime visit of the British prince to the colony-escalating the stakes for Pilkings and comparisons in Act IV between a British ship captain's self-sacrifice in wartime and ritual suicide among the Yorubas. The actual event that the dramatic text reconstructs took place in 1946 in Oyo; an ancient Yoruba city where a District Officer interrupted a sacred rite which was an essential transitional right for their dead king and the spiritual wellbeing of the people. Interrupting the process was a tragic move that had serious cosmological implications for the Chief, Elesin and the people.

Death and the King's Horseman offers a uniquely African context of tragedy by deviating from the Aristotelian notion of it. The drama text reconstructs history in a manner that appeals to the African sense of tragedy and particularly the Yoruba World view. One major argument the New Historicists present is the notion of "objectivity" in reconstructive process. In pursuit of the Yoruba world view, the play in its "fourth stage" takes us into Yoruba cosmology by describing a tripartite structure of the world: the worlds of the living (Elesin's bride), the unborn (the seed Elesin implanted into his bride's womb) and the dead (the dead Alaafin). The fourth world or fourth stage comes when this tripartite structure which are linked together and this Soyinka called the area of transition. The myth of Ogun, the Yoruba god, conqueror of the Fourth Space,

is an essential tragedy. In this regard, myth forms an essential part in the reconstructive process. Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju (2012: 34) is of the view that "the mythical medium enables the dramatist to plumb the depth of experience in a manner that 'banal' actualities cannot". He further emphasizes that for Soyinka:

> The African world-view is epitomized in the Yoruba metaphysical perception of the universe as a cyclical continuum. Here the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn are in a constant flux and are in constant interaction with the spiritual forces of the universe. Within this configuration, maintenance of harmony is the African grundnorm, manifesting in a deep sense of communality, solidarity and camaraderie (as against the Western ethos of individualism, for example). Western colonial narratives had derided African culture as either non-existent or as primitive; Wole Soyinka's position has been to defend African epistemological traditions, including its legacy of myths and archetypes. He also defended the reality of an African world marked out in relation to the West, notwithstanding the internal heterogeneity of Africa.

Sudha (2004: 20) expresses the same sentiment when he states that:

> The concept of tragedy arising out of the works of Soyinka, obviously differs from the well-known mode of tragedy formulated by Aristotle. The tragic hero according to Aristotle acutely generates the catastrophe due to a flaw in this nature. But in Soyinka's plays, hero is an individual endowed with a strong will and a desire to redeem the community. His end is not a fall but an act of conscious sacrifice for the well-being of the society. It is a spiritual deed. On the contrary, in the familiar European mode, the tragic hero transgresses and violates the accepted canons of social life. It is a defect in him or a shortcoming in his conduct that leads to disintegration. The tragic concept in the Yoruba culture is a glorification of the hero who is a social redeemer.

The implication of this therefore is that what binds a people together is a set of common beliefs which are justified by the myths handed down to them by their ancestors. These myths are primeval accounts of the natural demand and cosmic forces. Soyinka's approach to history explores the 'natural order' and 'superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding' that underscores the existence of the Yoruba people. An "understanding" that defies common sense

in the western eyes of Simon Pilkings and Jane. He tapped from actual event with the intention to drive home the African concept of tragedy. Through the use of myth therefore, the play-text reconstructs a Yoruba worldview that diametrically opposes the western worldview and notion of what constitutes a tragedy.

Furthermore, Soyinka's account presents the cosmic process as a natural process of transition. This approach helps to fashion out Yoruba tragedy by following the path mapped out by Nietzsche in his approach to Greek tragedy. The former tries to appropriate the method utilized by the latter in his interpretation of the Greek myth, and he applies it to the Yoruba mythology, establishing in the process his own theoretical enterprise of African tragedy. The tragedy in *Death and the King's Horseman* is a response to the dynamics of Africa's histories and cultures because in the play, tragedy is portrayed to simultaneously express grief over alienation and spur intense desires for change and perpetual becoming. This is parallel to the Aristotelian notion of tragedy where tragic art is seen as a vehicle to enable a cathartic process through which human flaws are purged to induce conformity to an established moral and political order. *Death and the King's Horseman*, by contrast, simultaneously reconstructs the Oyo kingdom's lamentation of turbulent change and its eventual desire, through defiance and resistance to internal and external tyrannies, to be the authors and subjects of such change rather than its objects. Soyinka's dramaturgy suggests that the kernel of agency is the constant ability to adapt to changing circumstances without losing focus of the transformative directions of such developments.

Reconstructing the Aristotelian tragedy to create the Yoruba's tragic characters in *Death and the King's Horseman* do not exist for themselves; rather they are community representations whose actions enable change and a communal sense of identity. They have huge resolve, pride and the desire to be patriotic sons or daughters of their communities. To the west, the impending ritual

suicide of Oba Elesin is a tragedy they must not allow to happen but *Death and the King's Horseman* in it reconstructive drive makes a twist of this western notion by redefining it to suit the African view. Pilkings' disruption of the ritual redefined the western notion of tragedy to what the Yorubas/Africans considered as tragedy. The disruption has dire consequence that may befall the entire kingdom and this is exactly where the communal in Yoruba/African tragedy comes in because in Yoruba society the community is more important than the individual.

In an attempt to reconstruct a workable theatrical tragedy, Soyinka makes Elesin commit suicide at the end, not within a ritual context but due to the unbearable grief of his son's alternate death. Here, the play not only creates a counter-memory, but also suggests ritual drama as a means of exploring the past and healing the nation, as it processes its history. There are more than one tragic characters in *Death and the King's Horseman,* Elesin and Olunde who are both tragic characters if they are considered as a continuum. While Elesin's symbolizes the indigenous need for rebirth, Olunde's localizes the global reach of such needs. For Aristotelian the death of the King, Alaafin or Elesin's impending death is tragedy, reconstructing this logic Soyinka considers a more communal setback as tragedy in the Yoruba/African context.

As a justification for bias, New Historicism pays close attention to who or what a work supports or condemns in its attempt to reconstruct history. Soyinka's account asserts and celebrates the depth of the Yoruba cosmic cycle. In Awam Amkpa's (2003:29) view:

> Wole Soyinka's genius in using the tragic myths of Yoruba culture to forge a compelling language of resistance and change has drawn many admirers and a few detractors. Few can deny his influence in shaping what the historian Nicholas Dirks describes as "the politics of thinking about power and resistance" as his dramaturgy uses social crisis and existential chaos as ingredients for social transformation.

This implies that Soyinka's *Death and the king's Horseman* expresses the 'superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding' that underscores the existence of the Yoruba people and the western attempt to subvert it through a sacrilegious interruption of a cosmic process. This attempt at looking into the community from which he emerges is geared toward explaining the philosophy and worldview behind the Yoruba thought to the modern world. The play explores the myth surrounding the world of the living, the dead and the unborn. From the opening of the play we encounter the Elesin whose destiny is tied to the one purpose of serving as a guide in ensuring the safe passage of the king to the world of the dead. The passage rites due the king must be honoured by the ritualistic death of the Elesin, the king's horse man. The Elesin, as does the entire community counts it a noble destiny, without questioning the Elesin is ready to perform this honourable and all important task that will ensure peace in his community.

Elesin: You all know
What I am.
Praise-singer: That rock which turns its open lodes
Into the path of lightning. A gay
Thoroughbred whose stride disdains
To falter though an adder reared suddenly in his path.
Elesin: My rein is loosened
I am master of my Fate.
When the hour comes
Watch me dance along the narrowing path
Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.
My sole is eager. I shall not turn aside.

The generational duty binding on the Elesin and his descendant justifies the belief system the people hold so dearly. The importance of the Elesin is informed by the spiritual function that society demands of him. His importance in some ways is similar to that of an Aristotelian tragic hero. However, the Aristotelian tragedy produces a cathartic purgation of transgressive behavior while that of the Yorubas stimulate communal consciousness of the Fourth Stage- the idea of

transgressing and limiting tyranny so as to create democratic spaces. The Yoruba tragedy originates from Ogun's agony that is why Elesin's predicament can be read as parallels to Ogun's passage.

3.1. CULTURE AS RECONSTRUCTED *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*

Death and the King's Horseman takes the minds of its readers back to the African formative past where the work addresses the colonial question fully and squarely. The play-text attempts a reconstruction of the colonial experience of Oyo Kingdom to assert the common sentiment that African past was not "one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe 1973: 4). The play-text revisits and criticizes the spirit behind colonialism, which is that white values were considered superior and faultless, while those of African people were seen as barbaric. The play-text questions the white man's famous 'superiority complex mentality' and this is made visible through the negative actions of the white characters. To puncture this superiority complex, in Pilkings' bungalow, there is "an old hand-cranked gramophone" (Ibid: 23). Later, in the Residency, the band plays "Rule Britannia" very badly. This is symbolic of the critical way in which the colonialists are depicted in *DKH*. They claim to be superior, but their words and actions suggest the opposite. "Like other writers in this tradition, Soyinka's literary career was defined by the tension between the desire to account for African worlds and experiences at the end of colonial rule, using the language and literature models borrowed from the departing colonizer" (Gikandi 2003: 78). This is why Ogunde (1991: 14) asserts that African literature is "the story of the black man's attempt to reassert his political rights, defend the integrity of his culture and reassess his relationship with Europe and its institutions".

The idea of 'sacrifice' has often been related to the tragic art since the beginning of its history. The reconstructed account projects the ritual suicide as practice in *Death and the King's Horseman* with a deep sense of communal essence which cannot be simply unlearned by experiencing western civilization. The character of Olunde was uniquely constructed to express contempt on the colonialists. Olunde stuns Jane in the argument about the desecration of the ancestral mask when Jane asks if he is shocked:

> **Olunde**: No I am not shocked Mrs. Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand. (Soyinka 1975: 50).

Olunde further stresses how much he had known the West when he tells Jane:

> ... I had plenty of time to study your people. I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgment on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all (Ibid: 54).

Olunde maintains striking similarity to the personalities of most Nigerians who acquired western education as at the time and still hold high regards for their culture. Olunde's character stand as one that is committed to his root even though he has acquired what the West called civilization. Hence, Olunde's years abroad did not rob him of his traditional sense of responsibility. On the same argument with Jane, he explains to Jane thus:

> Mrs Pilkings. Whatever we do, we never suggest that a thing is the opposite of what it really is. In your newsreels I heard defeats, thorough, murderous defeats described as strategic victories… I spoke to them, I spent long evenings by their bed side while they spoke terrible truths of the realities of that war. I know now how history is made… don't think it's just the war. Before that even started I had plenty time to study your people. I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgment on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all (54).

This opinion shows that Olunde's time abroad only gave him an opportunity to better appreciate his culture. Informed of the king's death, he has come home to bury his father and asks Pilkings not to interfere, but in vain. While he seems to hear distant drums announce his father's death and leaves to see his dead body, Elesin is brought in, alive and in handcuffs. The shock is deep on both sides. Elesin, humiliated and painfully ashamed, falls at his son's feet, but Olunde refuses to recognize him. At the end of the play Elesin, cursed with an identity drained of all communal significance, rids the world of his presence by strangling himself with his chains in his prison cell – a serious metaphor for colonial subjugation. This account justifies the bias that often characterizes the reconstruction of history. As an instance of New Historicism therefore, the text presents the propagandist nature of western history and questions their right to pass judgment on other cultures. The western's 'holier than thou' attitude is questioned at this point considering the implication of their action on other people.

Pilkings' lack of consideration for the people's culture is an ominous warning of how the issue with Elesin will be viewed. To Pilkings, it is a 'confounded nuisance'. This has become part of the history of colonialism that African writers did not ignore. There are a number of events and remarks that demonstrate the colonial arrogance and insensitivity. Pilkings learns about the prepared ritual suicide from his black sergeant Amusa while practicing, with his wife Jane, the tango for a ball at the English club. Amusa hands him his report on a piece of paper, for he refuses to speak to the couple wearing an African costume of a death cult, a costume that for him has the power of death. Pilkings orders him to arrest Elesin and the couple, after some hesitation, go to the ball. The premonition of the more serious clash of cultures to come is suggested by their insensitive wearing of the Yoruba egungun death cult costume to their fancy dress ball. The 'Native Administration' policeman Amusa, despite being a Moslem, is shocked to see them

parading in egungun costume and masks. Even when Amusa warned that the egungun "…belong to dead cult, not for human being", they adamantly wore the masks to the ball party where they jokingly mimic the dances and sounds of the egungun and the adaptations with press-button controls, which they have added to their costumes. This can be considered a mockery of a cavernous ritual and shows their lack of knowledge of the people. This act of insensitivity to the culture of the natives compounded with the way Pilkings consistently and arrogantly speaks in terms like 'they' and 'them' when he is referring to the people, shows that there is a complete lack of respect to the African values by the colonialists. To the Pilkings, the people's customs and beliefs are "mumbo-jumbo", "rubbish", "confounded nuisance", "some strange custom", and "superstitious nonsense". Pilkings calls the Elesin "the old pagan" and in an instance where Pilkings, while responding to Jane, uses the phrase "sly, devious bastards" in front of Joseph, not minding that he is one of these people he is slandering, further shows that the west consider their beliefs to be superior to the African's and so, deserve no respect.

In some of Soyinka's works, there is a brooding presence of history as a result of his attempt to reconstruct the Nigerian experience. The story in *Death and the King's Horseman* juxtaposes with an actual event during the colonial period. The way history is handled in this play can be surmised in the words of Hutcheon (1985: 27) when he states that "to write history – or historical fiction – is equally to narrate, to reconstruct by means of selection and interpretation. History is made by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves (Hutcheon 1985: 27). Several factual events in *Death and the King's Horseman* were selected and fictionalized to suit the reconstructive drive that inspires the creation of the play. In one of the interviews he granted in the 80s, Soyinka complains of a damaging and negative review of *Death and the King's Horseman* by a critic of the New York Times – Frank Rich. Soyinka expresses

dissatisfaction with Frank Rich for implying that *Death and the King's Horseman* "would have been a fuller play if there had not been the political aspect" (Soyinka 1988a: 332). Rich accuses him of giving "trite speeches to white characters" as well as of "stereo-typing the natives, the Africans". From the western point of view, Soyinka's account of the colonial experience contains, to some extent, elements of bias. Rich feels that Soyinka portrays the western imperialists as arrogant and hence considers him a cultural chauvinist in the way he presents all the whites in the play which to him is way too sentimental.

Death and the King's Horseman inspired by factual event and adapted to the stage is often expected to have an audience with a historical background and in most cases obsessed with the historical material of such plays as they already know how the story ends. The element of suspense is partially missing here and this places a burden on the dramatist to compensate for this lack of suspense. The play is expected to attract its readers to the hidden facets of past experience to stimulate a state of historical consciousness. The playwright's treatment of history and the way of integrating the past into the present reveals that he is a creative writer who enjoys plenty of experimental verve. His view of history intersects with the modernist interpretations and this is voiced not only in his plays but also in his critical essays. Aside history, *Death and the King's Horseman* is chiefly in line with creativity and hence making it a piece of literary art for an audience to consume. The work is therefore expected to say what could not have been said by the playwright plainly such as criticism of the governments. This projects Stephen Greenblatt's (1990: 30) view that a literary work is shaped by collective beliefs, social practices and cultural discourses; these leave textual traces in a work of literature and connect it to the extra-textual representational systems of the culture in which it is embedded.

In subverting the actual history depicted in *DKH*, the play reverses Olunde's role from that of last born to the first born son of Elesin and indicates that he had been away in England studying Medicine at the time of his father's death but in actual history the horseman's son was a trader in Ghana. The emendations in this play were intended because the playwright as Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju (2012: 7) puts it, wants to:

> …articulate a conceptual parallel between the ritual suicide by Elesin Oba and the suicide of an English naval Captain who, according to the news relayed by Mrs Pilkings, blew himself up with his ship, "to save lives." Both suicides occur on a similar ethical plane as a selfless service on behalf of the community, often the supreme price within turf of the tragic hero.

On the playwright's alterations of factual events in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Moffat Moyo (2014: 12) observes that:

> The changing of the details makes this be more of a creative piece of work and not a mere recreation of historical events. Soyinka, in this play, creates a play that is 'merely based' on events that took place. He does not play the role of a historian whose purpose is not to embellish the narration but to narrate events as they took place. Soyinka's is to focus on the aesthetics of the work apart from recounting facts.

Considering the parallels between the playwright and the character Olunde in *Death and the King's Horseman*, the presence of the playwright was greatly intuited within the text. Olunde is the educated young man who had studied Medicine in a white man's land, his education is not just common education but one he gets from far England where modernity is the norm, yet upholds and respects his culture. Wole Soyinka's autobiography reads that he (Soyinka) is one of the privileged Nigerians to have studied abroad in the early days, the western education that could not discourage him from believing in the Yoruba gods. The portrayal of Olunde, a character that has something in common with the playwright is suggestive of the fact that even

though he is a meeting point for different cultural expectations, Soyinka stands for continuity regarding African culture. This character (Olunde) combines 'modernity' and 'traditionality' just like Soyinka who is well educated but a staunch believer of the Yoruba gods, he is an embodiment of 'overlapping culture' defining not only his local city but the whole country. Though he succeeded in combining these cultures, "we are thus shown that the transgression of cultural boundaries may not necessarily lead to the transformation of a subject's fundamental beliefs and that, if anything, it may in fact entrench them more deeply" (Mpalive Msiska 2007: 43). Even when he was not considered to sacrifice himself in place of his father, Olunde deliberately embrace his father's faith, fulfilling the role assigned to him as the Elesin's eldest son and giving a concrete example of sacrifice, he also stood as a theoretical defender generating counterarguments to the Pilkings.

Since New Historicists is concerned with the forces of containment and the ways hegemonic forces consolidate the status quo, Soyinka uses the characters of the British District Officer and his wife, to lucidly portray to his readers what life was under the Europeans in Nigeria in *DKH*. This note is essential because Greenblatt (1990: 32) sees New Historicism as a creation of an 'intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts. Greenblatt (32) further notes that in literary criticism; 'intention genre and historical situations all have to be taken into account as all are social and ideological and must be involved in any reading of the design.' In the play, the Oyo Kingdom breathes under the dominance of colonial administration. It is a searing inside account of the power of rulers over the ruled. In this society that *DKH* is depicting, the whites have the dominant discourse and natives have to accept the rules assigned by the dominant ideology. Thus, the *Death and the King's Horseman* may be a critique of the exploitation of the blacks by the whites.

Most African critics use New Historicism to reject the western tendency of writing history from top down (e.g. political history) or in grand narrative strokes. Thus, *Death and the King's Horseman* depicts the nature of sociopolitical, economic and religious life of the Oyo people as a result of their contact with the West. These textualised experiences were further used to challenge the European notion of Africans as people without history or culture. *DKH* shows that the colonial administration interrupted the African reality and history, just as Mr Pilkings interrupted the ritual process of transition. Herein lies the conflict of culture; the attempt of one to stop the other. Western colonial narratives had derided African (Nigerian) culture as either non-existent or barbaric, "they believe the claim that the Nigerians are a "people without a history", and insofar as "they have demonstrated that the meeting of the various Nigerian peoples was neither a colonial creation nor a recent event" (Oyewese 1988: 11). The play's position has been to defend African Epistemology including its legacy of myths, history and archetypes. *DKH* is a rewritten history of Oyo Kingdom under the colonial rule, new history and myths were created to tilt towards African civilizations. The play also defends the reality of an African world marked out in relation to the West, notwithstanding the internal heterogeneity of Africa. Thus what African playwrights do is to focus their writing on proving that they have progressive tradition and history. This is best summarized in the words of Fox (1986: 14) where he observes that:

> ...in the past the artist was a kind of priest, today's artist is something like an archaeologist of the soul, uncovering lost or hidden meanings. This is especially the case with the visionary artists of the New World, where indigenous history was unmade and the historical imperatives of the Old World were imposed by force and violence".

Ogude (1991) suggests that the mainstream African literature is 'historical' in the sense that it dramatizes actual historical events or social conditions, and that this history "has tended to be the

history of the Europeans in Africa". History has documented many accounts of cultural and political dominations in the pre-colonial and colonial African societies. It has observed the long tyranny and oppression of the ignorant and weak. Power has always been an important aspect for the elite and they were used to live in a colonial relationship. Evolution after evolution silently observed those conflicts between the maker and the made; the superior and the inferior; the rulers and the ruled. While stressing Soyinka's description of colonialism as "catalytic" in *Death and the King's Horseman,* Golnar Karimi (2015: 43) notes that:

> By describing the colonial presence in his play as a "catalytic incident," Soyinka reveals his position on the role Simon Pilkings plays in Elesin Oba's cosmic trajectory. For the author, Pilkings is not a modifying force in Elesin's individual progression, but his presence certainly complicates the nature of the plot.

According to Karimi, the controversy surrounding Soyinka's use of the word 'catalyst' incited a vast array of responses from readers who seek clarification on the role of the colonizer within the play. Hence, it becomes imperative to view Soyinka's characterization of Simon Pilkings as a catalyst. However, Soyinka's prefatory comments seem to deliberately distance British characters from Yoruba players in an attempt to contain the colonial intrusion on the development of the action. A group of people is enslaved to a few people's comfort.

In terms of forceful realities, the play contains suicide, police confrontations and verbal abuse. Most of these realities of life exist in the play with some tough confrontations instigated by the colonialists. Police officers have been given great powers by the Europeans in order to properly discharge their responsibilities. This power is made more evident by the uniform and the badge worn by police officers. These powers, like all forms of power, are subject to corruption and abuse particularly by individuals who misjudge the significance of power and underestimate the responsibilities that individuals have. The play however places a limit on the influence of this

power. For example, Amusa speaks honestly against his fear for that which is sacred far above that which is political.

> **Amusa**: it is a matter of death. How can man talk against death to person in uniform of death? It is like talking against government to person in uniform of police
>
> **Amusa**: Madam, I arrested the ringleaders who make trouble but me no touch egungun…I treat egungun with respect (25).

The confession of Amusa shows that he is conscious of the limits of his power. Thus, he can only exercise them within the limit of what the uniform he possesses signifies. In other words, despite the power given to them by the Europeans, they (the policemen) understand the fact that matters with transcendental significance supersede the police uniform and whatever powers it commands. The implication of this is that the Europeans are only as powerful as the culture and practice of the people permit. Every attempt to do otherwise amounts to conflict of culture.

Soyinka dramatizes mourning, death, suicide and pains of his people as parallel to faction, he creates an interior history to accommodate the voices of the lost people whose plight escapes the vigilant eyes of the historian. In the play, Soyinka has dealt with the dislocation, exploitation, oppression and nostalgia of the marginal groups. There is no doubt that *Death and the King's Horseman* brings alive the colonial history or experience of the Oyo Kingdom. The West in the process of preserving their supremacy over the natives wields their dominant power over the people by subverting their cultural practice and belief. From a New Historicist point of view, power should not be understood as physical power or violence of an individual towards another or group. Instead, it should be seen as the ability to make someone comply with the norms imposed on him/her without realizing that his/her decisions are not made independently, but from an array of impositions by centers of disseminating power. The main ground of New Historicists is to climax the subversive forces of marginalized native of the society like Elesin,

and the people's belief. They feel compelled to analyze residual, emergent, repressed and marginal elements of culture which are less dominant. It may be assumed that New Historicism shares the tenet of Marxism as it tries to find out the conflict between the suppressed and the dominant like that of Capitalist and Proletariat. However, Greenblatt holds historical forces and power politics responsible for continuation and consequent failure of social and political revolutions.

Death and the King's Horseman records a deep political and spiritual unrest regarding Elesin's plight. Although Elesin's master is death, his servitude does not end; he has to serve his master transitioning with him in the grave. The play evokes the fears of repression politicized in the Yoruba society that kills Elesin eventually. The refusal of the Elesin to die causes a tension that is beyond the physical. He must die through a religious ceremony as a sacred means of serving his master in the afterlife. The story of Elesin in *DKH* indicates his helplessness, which is destined, and therefore, slave's identity remains same even after his master's death. The text thus reconstructs history with emphasis on the spiritual implication politicizing matters of deep religious significance. Consequent upon this, the New Historicists believe that critical approach to history should stress on political reading of the text because any texts, whether literary or non-literary, is a cultural construct and reveals political, social, religious and economic circumstances of the given era. M.H Abrams (1999: 20) states that:

> Political readings of a literary text— [is the] reading in which they [New Historicists] stress quasi-Freudian mechanism such as 'suppression', 'displacement,' and 'substitution' by which, they assert, a writer's political ideology (in a process of which the writer remains largely or entirely unaware) inevitably disguises, or entirely elides into silence and 'absence,' the circumstances and contradiction of contemporary history. The primary aim of political reader is to undo these ideological disguises and suppression in order to uncover the historical and political conflicts

> and oppressions which are the text's true, although covert or unmentioned, subject matter.

The suicide in *Death and King's Horseman* is therefore, politically motivated and 'imposed' directly or indirectly on individual. This was the nature of political set up in the ancient Oyo Kingdom and Elesin happens to be the victim of this particular set up. As a form of political control, the Alaafin has the right to request any titleholder to commit suicide. This practice continued into the twentieth century despite the colonial presence, culminating in the internal struggle between the Alaafin and the Bashorun, which destabilized the empire in the second half of the century. Soyinka who hails from this part of the country projects the nature of politics within this region before the whites intercedes. According to Foucault (1979) and Althusser (2013), ideology is an essential factor necessary for reproduction of power relation. It provides the structure of thought that affects how various cities and sub-groups solidify their identities and plot their politics. The divine status kings enjoy is derived from the Yoruba's belief in the active existence of the deceased ancestors who act to aid man.

The play shows the social vision of the ancient Oyo Kingdom, where Elesin has no alternative to escape his duty to the dead king. In fact, the playwright is believed to have disagreed on the intervention of Pilkings to stop Elesin's ritual suicide that he is intended to perform; but at the same time, he is concerned with Elesin's 'enslavement' to the king because the colonial system calls this as being 'duty'. In Femi Osofisan (2001: 17) words:

> The confrontation in *Death and the King's Horseman* ... between Elesin and Pilkings, goes beyond a simple matching of good against evil, even beyond the contending logic of two cultural philosophies, and is meant to probe deeper into the metaphysical traumas of a society in transition, as well as the role of the committed individual in such rites of passage.

According to McPherson (1998: 56), Wole Soyinka is among contemporary Africa's greatest writers. He is also one of the continent's most imaginative advocates of native culture and of the humane social order it embodies. He sees Soyinka's work employing an approach that would lead to liberating black Africa from its crippling legacy of European imperialism. For McPherson (58) Soyinka will envisioned a "New Africa" that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present onto the stock of its own ancient traditions.

One wonders, then why in the 1970s Soyinka chose this event from 1946 to discuss a custom that seems to have been fading for almost a hundred years. Soyinka's preoccupation with history and the questioning of the past from a modernist perspective is of central importance to its use as a substance in his plays. In his drama, the authenticity of history is at stake. His intention was clearly defined in "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?" where he analyses the uses of history in creative writing; and the use of mythological figures for contemporary historical writing. He is concerned with subverting the traces left by colonialism in his society. He sought to defy this hegemony through questioning the stereotypical image of the native and criticizing the dictatorial regimes left as a legacy. He invests his spectacular drama with historical flashback scenes which help the audience visually relate the past to the present.

The play does not have a happy ending like most of Soyinka‘s political plays. Moreover there is death at the end of the play, which shows the danger colonial intervention poses to the custom and tradition of the people. So far, we have focused on history, power and subversion of culture in the play and try to reveal that the play shows the unwanted reality of a bigger force stopping and overpowering the native tradition. With some literary and non-literary texts we have had the chance to compare the play‘s location, and the relations with Nigeria and the Nigerian society. The play's revisiting of historical events like colonialism may be read as a symbolic and real

restoration of subaltern history and cultural memory. The play-text accords meaning, purpose, and integrity to a forgotten and/or erased past. Soyinka would have done little critical examination of other colonial experiences but he highlighted the importance of neglected, overlooked areas of Nigerian history. His deep and painstaking observation touching every literary and non-literary source is grand and significant. Though not intentionally, he satisfied the basic ideas of New Historicism. So, there is no doubt to bring Soyinka into the category of few writers who effectively used the principles of New Historicism in their texts.

One of the strongest motivations for African historians rewriting history in the post-colonial context was contesting the European assertion that Africa had had no history before colonization. *Death and the King's Horseman* directly addresses the issue of history as reconstructive process that more often embodies the ideologies or bias of the narrator. The privileged status of being a narrator often interferes with the objectivity of any reconstructive process. For the African, especially within the period the play was written, reconstructing history often means asserting the African identity. In this sense therefore, historical aspects questioned or misrepresented by western history are textually reconstructed through plays and other mediums of expression. Soyinka in reconstructing history through *Death and the King's Horseman,* shares in the sentiments of African historians of the 1960s and 1970s. They defined the artist's first task as being to contest the colonial myths and highlight the heroes of the African peoples, thus creating a new national consciousness and identity.

CHAPTER FOUR:

4.0. RECONSTRUCTION OF MYTH AND HISTORY IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN*

Literature is a viable means of propagating history, culture and politics. In this sense, literature projects history, culture and politics of the people thereby making it possible to know about the events that took place historically. Drama in Nigeria like all societies is deeply rooted in the historical and social experiences of its people. The drama in Nigeria has its origin in the cultural settings of the past and the vicissitudes of the present. Plays such as Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman, The Beatification of Area Boys*, Ngugi's *Grain of Wheat*, Ola Rotimi's *Kurumi*, J.P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* are all reflective of this assertion. While the first generation Nigerian dramatists such as Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, etc. largely pre-occupied themselves with the themes of cultural retrieval and nationalism in their early works, the second generation playwrights evince a revolutionary stand point of the oppressed masses or project the consciousness of the privileged class. Such radical drama in Nigeria is traceable to the plays of Osofisan, Sowande, Omotosho and Obafemi. The major target of contemporary Nigerian playwrights (writers) is to stand as social crusaders and Soyinka and Osofisan, among these writers, use their works to liberate the people. Femi Osofisan is the more radical of the contemporary playwrights in his approach to and use of history. He is a playwright with keen interest in the Yoruba myth, legend and history as evidenced in his works. He employs such elements as song, music, dance and riddles of the Yoruba people so much that his plays appeal to

all and sundry irrespective of academic background or social class. This chapter therefore examines the political influence of myth and history as embedded in *Morountodun*, a political play about corruption, exploitation, deprivation, oppression, and infrastructural decay.

A crucial segment of Nigerian drama which emerged in the early twenty-first century engages with subjects derived from myth and history. This choice is a pragmatic one partly because narratives from the past provide the pattern of common beliefs, yet it is also a conscious attempt to saturate the country with cultural vitality and to promote the national spirit. The mythical past is expected to portray models of endurance, self-sacrifice, courage and undaunted resistance in the contemporary characters as seen in Titubi, Marshal, Baba and others to inspire the writers' compatriot's effort to fight against exploitation and oppression. The return to the past was inevitably characterized by the famous "revivalistic romanticism" to counter the bourgeois' images of the common and the proletariats. In his article titled "Some Notes on Development and Culture" Osofisan (2000: 8) states that:

> Literature and History are potent weapons in the hands of artists. Such tools help the artists to project to the society certain mentality of decency, enlightenment and ethical conduct and all other virtues and values which translate into refinement and insight and without which no society can claim to have a touch of civilization. Such values are also needed in order for the society to experience cultural liberty.

The use of myth and history in contemporary writings is not just an attempt to preserve the Nigerian past but also to develop ideas where necessary. That is why Osofisan, by using the past to clarify and comment on the present, recreates Yoruba myth of Moremi, a legendary figure in the history of Ile Ife, a town in western Nigeria and the history of Agbekoya uprising.

Holman (1960:298) in "A Handbook to Literature", gives two meaningful dimensions of the concept of myth. He defines the traditional sense of myth as "...anonymous stories having their

roots in the primitive folk beliefs of races or nations and presenting supernatural episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view". He goes on to say that "...in the modernist redefinition of the word, myth is seen as containing vestiges of primordial ritual and ceremony, or the repository of racial memories, or a structure of unconsciously held value systems, or an expression of the general beliefs of a race, social class or nation or a unique embodiment of a cosmic view." The concepts of myth and history in Nigerian literature have overtime provided the Nigerian writers the chance to look back at their backgrounds and heritages. They have implored myth and history as tools to reconstruct the experiences of a people in a particular society. Femi Osofisan therefore uses the mythical and legendary status of Moremi in *Morountodun* to reconstruct a certain past in the Yoruba dynasty which gives us an insight to the life and the background of first, the Nigerian character and then the Nigerian experience in general. In C. O Ajidahun's (2014:1) word:

> The adaptation and reconstruction of myth and history to suit the imperatives of the contemporary social realities is a 20th century phenomenon. This is copiously utilized by modern playwrights to depict, in a symbolic way, the dilemma and the predicament of the modern man. Both the classical and Elizabethan drama, which emphasizes the concept of tragic hero and tragic flaw are regarded by the modern playwrights as the theatre of the oppressor, whereas the modern drama is referred to as the theatre of the oppressed.

There are many experiences preserved in books and archives that recount the horror and trauma of life after colonialism in Nigeria. These documented experiences have become useful sources of historical facts regarding the post-colonial Nigeria. Books are read for their facts; similarly archives provide humans with memories that give a glimpse at history. Archives also have a bearing on recollections of events in the past and facilitate people's understanding of history. *Morountodun* is one of such contemporary plays which rely heavily on materials from the

Nigerian past. Though greatly influenced by Marxist ideology, the play which was first performed at the University of Ife Theatre, Ile-Ife also has a large level of manipulation of mythical and historical materials, spicing them up with rudiments of the Marxist philosophy to evolve a contemporary play of a classic height. The mythical and legendary material is the ancient Ile-Ife story of Moremi, while the historical material is the Agbekoya Farmers' Revolt of 1965 which took place in the post-colonial Oyo State. Osofisan, through flashback, brought historical events into the present to bear on the subject matter which is the place of the women folk in nation building and peace keeping.

Pointedly, *Morountodun* is a symbolic projection of the historic conflict between the Yorubas and Igbos where Moremi stands out as the major heroic figure. According to Samuel Johnson, (1973: 147-148), Moremi was the wife of one of the ancient heroes of Ile-Ife, probably Oranmiyan. The legend tells how for years Ife was subjected to the constant raids of the Igbos who appeared as gods or demi-gods in their battle costume. The raiders stole goods, women and children from the people of Ife. After their supplication to the gods met with no response, Moremi took it upon herself to free her people from this calamity. She resolved to find out who the Igbos really were and the secret of their power so that they could defeat the Igbos. At the river Esinmirin she vowed to the deity thereof that if she were successful in her plans, she would offer to the god the most costly sacrifice she could afford. She undertook to be captured at the next raid, and, owing to her great beauty, was given to the King as part of the booty. Slowly, she gained both the king and the people's trust and confidence and learned the secret of their power. Samuel Johnson (1973) explains this feat in terms of the Ekan grass and bamboo fibre, with which they covered themselves from head to foot, making them appear superhuman. Her husband the king also tells her that the secret of attack lies in rushing in among the Igbo warriors

with lighted torches. Having discovered the source of their strength, Moremi escapes back to the Yoruba people and hastens them to prepare themselves for the impending attack. They do as she says, and defeat the Igbos. Moremi then goes to the river, prepared to sacrifice lambs, rams, goats, a bull, but none are acceptable, the deity demands her only son, Olurogbo. After supplication, she agrees to the sacrifice and the people bewail her loss for their salvation. Legend tells though, that Olurogbo, when supposed dead, was only half dead and climbed a rope ladder to heaven where the Ifes believe he resides until one day he shall descend again to the earth to receive full reward for his good deeds.

Osofisan in *Morountodun* through the style of play within a play reconstructs the influence of the mythic Moremi especially on the character of Titubi in the famous Agbekoya uprising. The play started with the production of stage performance but in the development of the performance, Titubi and her group representing the upper class boycotted the show which unfolds the rest of the action. *Morountodun* is arranged in a way that event of the past shuffle into the present to create a fantastic whole. As Titubi and her group came to boycott the stage performance which is a way they feel is best to stop the revolters because they consider it risky to allow these revolters sell their intentions to the masses who, after watching the performances, will support their cause. Titubi discovers another way of achieving this after her interaction with the Deputy Superintendent who is fishing out their leader. To achieve this, Titubi volunteers to disguise herself as a prisoner so that when Marshal's men storm the cell she will be rescued as one of the prisoners. The overall aim of this is to find her way to the camp of the revolters so as to know their secret and consequently weaken them just like Moremi did to the Igbos. Unfortunately, when Titubi made her way to the camp of the peasants in disguised of a prisoner, she discovered that the prisoners are fighting a just cause. Though she succeeds in capturing their leader

(Marshal), she requests for negotiation between the two parties to the surprise of the Deputy Superintendent and Alhaja Rabirat, her mother. Having stayed with the peasants, she witnesses their suffering and identified with their quest for fair play. For her, Moremi, her role model fought a just cause but in her own case she finds out that the state is not always right like the case of the exploitation of the poor farmers who pay more than they earn.

Most times, a historical play tells one more about the time in which it was written as it does about the history upon which it is based. Every literary work is the product of an artist living in a particular place and time. Social forces inescapably shape the work of art. The Nigerian environment forms the ambience of Osofisan's development. His drama, therefore, is shaped by the appalling conditions of deprivation, mismanagement, corruption and greed that reign in Nigeria. Nowhere in the world have forces of oppression been known to willingly set the oppressed free at any point in history. *Morountodun* is about Nigeria and Nigerian dictatorial regimes because it reflects the nature of the Nigerian lives in post-colonial period. When the date of the play, the subject matter it reflects and the background of the author are taken into account, military coups, the suppression of the powerful over the powerless, civilian, and civilized people, and the abuse of power have gained great importance. There is justification in seeing *Morountodun* as a play about the Nigerian post-colonial experiences. As Muhammed Attai Yakubu (2015:81) points out:

> In *Morountodun*, Osofisan expresses his concern over social, economic, and political situations in Nigeria. The play reveals Osofisan's anger over the level of corruption, deprivation, exploitation, poverty, and so on in the contemporary Nigerian society. The play enacts the popular events in the defunct Western State of Nigeria: the Agbekoya uprising of 1969, and Moremi myth. Osafisan draws inspiration from history and Yoruba myth. These provide the raw materials for his dramatic works.

Morountodun was first performed in a slightly different version at the Arts Theatre, Ibadan in 1979, that is years after the Nigerian independence. According to Hutchison (1999: 136), the struggle for power escalated and in 1964 an unpopular premier, a friend of the federal prime minister, was imposed in the west. In 1965 there were federal elections during which violence, murder, and the destruction of property was the order of the day. The election dissolved into chaos as the AG-NCNC coalition and NNDP disagreed about results; and there was a consequent general breakdown of law and order. 15 January 1966 saw the first military coup which at first was welcomed as an end to the chaos and violence, but soon fears grew that the Igbos were taking advantage of the fact that one of their own, especially among the northerners. Major J.T. Agunyi-Ironsi, was at this time the head of government. Some people feared that he would abuse his position at the expense of the rest of the Federation. Riots flared up and the Major was assassinated on 29th July 1966. The tension between North and South escalated and the Eastern Region refused to acknowledge Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon as the new Head of State. On 29th May Lt. Colonel Ojukwu announced the secession of the eastern area which, with its oil reserves, could sustain an independent Biafra as he called his proposed country. Thus, in July 1967, the Biafran War broke out and would rage until Ojukwu fled Nigeria and left his army commander to announce the end of succession on 12 January 1970. *Morountodun* presents the Nigerian society after independence as seen through the eyes of the rebelling farmers. It is the disillusionment of post-independence Nigeria that is reflected in the play. The play reconstructs the post-colonial experience of a nation violently ruled by corrupt elites, business interests and army misusing authority and governmental powers to enrich themselves and exploit the already poor peasants at all cost.

The play's use of history highlights the early Yoruba history for the audience; it also challenges corrupt rule, and calls for the personal integrity of rulers at various levels of the society. In *Morountodun,* Osofisan presents a dictatorial regime that consists of civilians supported by the military to ensure the perpetuation of the ruling class (the cartel) in power. The fight between the individual (represented by Marshal and co) and the ruling class is a very serious one because the oppressed resort to violence/resistance. Therefore, the event recorded in the play is a replica of the goings-on in Nigeria. Since independence, there have been power conflicts, instability of government and crisis. The play explores political life in contemporary Africa and the manner in which African dictators governed their subjects. *Morountodun* is a comment on political life in Nigeria in the context of modern Africa. Unlike previous historical criticism limiting itself to simply demonstrating how a work is reflective of its time, New Historicism evaluates how the work is influenced by and influential to the time in which it was produced. *Morountodun* re-visits a significant experience of the Yoruba people in post-colonial Nigeria. The play becomes a spot where people can learn and remember what transpired within the region and re-think about the past, the present and the future. In the play, the stories of recollection recast the violent uprising, unrest and terror experienced by these people in post-colonial Nigeria. This play attempts to link the past, the present and the future through reconstruction since what transpired in the historical past informs the present and the future existence of a nation. In the play, history of the hostile military encounter shapes the notions of individuality and group identity of the characters as they come to terms with the traumatic experiences, hence making the play capture the complex historical and emotional nuances of the lives of the common under a capitalist rule.

Morountodun's focus on the poor farmers brings into full view the need for understanding the correct relationship between the peasantry and the working class in the African revolutionary

process. Very little has been written about the politics of the Nigerian poor as a social group. The reconstruction or recreation of the Agbekoya Uprising in *Morountodun* is targeted at hearing from the side of these farmers that have been exploited. History is believed to be one-sided and most times designed in favour of the upper class. It is on this note that *Morountodun* retells the hi/story of the uprising and allowing Titubi into the camp of the poor farmers where she intends to capture their leader.

> **Titubi:** I can bring him to you.
>
> **Superintendent:** You? (laughs) Corple!
>
> **Titubi:** Don't laugh, Salami.
>
> **Superintendent:** (Looks at her, stops laughing.) My word, I do believe you are serious.
>
> **Titubi:** Two weeks. Give me only two weeks.
>
> **Superintendent:** This is a dream? (Rubbing his eyes.)
>
> **Titubi:** Two weeks. And I'll bring him here, on his knees.
>
> **Superintendent:** What the entire Police Force failed to - .
>
> **Titubi:** Is that why you're afraid? That I might succeed?
>
> **Superintendent:** (after a pause) What do you want?
>
> **Titubi:** Can you arrange for me to be captured?

In reconstructing a bolder version of Moremi, Titubi was first mock-captured by the Police to be recaptured by Marshal and his soldiers. This capture of Titubi by the farmers makes it possible for readers to actually get to know about the peasant's grievances. "The Director refers to history and Titubi refers to Moremi's story. History is interpreted by showing how Titubi wins the hearts of the peasants and is subsequently renamed "Morountodun"; after being married by Marshall.

Moremi's story is reconstructed to show its relevance to and possible utility in a modern revolutionary situation" Akinwumi Olutola Olafisayo (2015: 42-43).

Morountodun revolves around Titubi, the only daughter of a well-to-do merchant Alhaja Kabirat who has markets all over the town. Representing the upper class Titubi embarks on infiltrating the ranks of rebel peasants. Her role is made clear even before the proposed play as she wears the `Moremi necklace' conspicuously. Through some exchange of words between Deputy Superintendent and Titubi, Osofisan introduces to his readers the modern Moremi in Titubi who brags: "Now, when I wear this necklace, I feel a passion deeper than any passing vogue/It is as if I have become history itself' (*Morountodun*, 20). Here Titubi understands her role in standing for her class as parallel to that of Moremi saving her society from the everyday assault of the Igbos. Though Moremi, who is of the royalty, did not want to lose her prestige and is therefore willing to do anything to maintain the status quo, even while depriving the public their rights but Titubi gave up the luxury of her life to pursue the cause she believed in. In reconstructing this reality, Osofisan creates Titubi to be conscious of the implication of depriving the public of their rights. It is in the light of this that she declares: "I am not Moremi! Moremi served the State, was the State, was the spirit of the ruling class. But it is not true that the State is always right" (70). Judging by this statement, Osofisan's *Morountodun* questions the one sidedness of history by creating the character of Titubi as one bold enough to challenge even the story of the legendary Moremi. History in most cases is written from the top down, that is, it is written in such a way that it favours one side over the other. The Moremi story never really brings to bear the aspect of the other side (Igbos).

The sharp twist in this reconstruction has to do with giving the women folks more responsibility in the African society. Osofisan's position in this play is that women, like their male counterparts,

are capable of playing key role in the development of the society. This is different from the opinion held by many other writers and critics alike who give their female characters impeding roles. The myth of Moremi provides the background and catalyst to the character of Titubi, the heroine of contemporary reality. The playwright balances the past and the present to produce the future by combining Moremi the past and Titubi the present to produce Morountodun of the future"…a revolutionary reconstruction of the Yoruba myth of Moremi and the history of the 1969 Agbekoya farmers' revolt harnessed in a positive effort to influence contemporary life" Eldred Jones (1973; 3).

Osofisan's plays are powerful, challenging leadership and how leaders, both men and women, are perceived within a society. He advocates for the place of women in history and contemporary Nigerian society to be recognized. *Morountodun* challenges the existing status quo of male dominance in history that has repressed the female gender. It indicts the history that limits a female legend to mere myth. This is seen in this dialogue below:

> **Titubi:** (turning sharply) Tell me, Salami. You don't really believe it, do you? You don't believe she existed.
>
> **Superintendent:** Who?
>
> **Titubi:** Moremi.
>
> **Superintendent:** Oh!
>
> **Titubi:** But she did exist, didn't she?
>
> **Superintendent:** A myth. We're dealing with reality here. And reality is a far more cruel thing.
>
> **Titubi:** Yet it is the same reality that softens with time, isn't it that turns into myth (26-27).

Reconstructing that aspect of history or myth that has always been repressed. Through the character of Titubi, a legendary myth is recreated to bring home the belief that it is possible to actualise Moremi. However, an exceptional feat attained by Osofisan in his treatment of women in his plays is the revolutionary roles assigned to them. Osofisan's *Morountodun* borrows from an actual event in Yoruba's history to reconstruct the past as a tool for resistance. The character of Titubi draws the minds of readers back to the days of Moremi in pre-colonial Ife kingdom, the Aba Women Riot, the iconic Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Queen Amina, Madam Tinubu, and the Egba Women, certain past that influenced societal change in one form or the other. Looking at the reluctant attitude of women in politics these days, *Morountodun*'s Titubi is like a reminder of the role they are expected play in demanding good and just governance. That women were/are involved in these sorts of political undertakings is not called into question. Women need to reassert themselves politically whether openly or via 'hidden transcripts' throughout Africa's history. Obviously Titubi is challenging the patriarchal basis of power in the society, suggesting that women too can and must determine their own destinies, and even the destinies of their people, for themselves. So, in *Morountodun*, legend and myth become flexible, transformed and completely recreated to suit contemporary events. Through a dialectical twist, the play squeezes myth, legend and history to extract only the tangible aspects as can sauce the own vision of society. The play historicises Moremi into a woman (Titubi) of the people who prefers just and fair society for both the rich and the poor. What this means in a practical sense is made clear, it is simply a rewriting of history. The use of a myth in *Morountodun*, fictive world is of special interest insofar as it distances critical commentary from specific history or personalities, while remaining close enough for his audience to understand the referents.

In the independent African countries, where the powerful ruling military, political, or religious classes appear to have generated more poverty and social strife than existed during colonial times, the playwrights engage in historical or social reconstruction of the situation to arrive at an enlightened interpretation. It is obvious that the play reconstruct the Agbekoya uprising which was intensified by the exploitation of the ordinary farmers by the state as the locals stepped up their rebellion against the oppression of their members. In *Morountodun,* the farmers (who represent the oppressed class) and the ruling class (the oppressors) clashed because they (the peasants):

> ….tend the yams but dare not taste. They raise chicken, but must be content with wind in their stomach. And then, when they return weary from the market, the tax man is waiting with his bill (66).

The state, through one agent or the other like the marketing board, the sanitary inspectors and the tax men, threatens the existence of the farmers who ironically, are the producers of the nation's wealth. The peasants formed a strong group under the leadership of Baba and Marshal, to fight back to resist the excesses of the government. Osofisan has probably injected the issue of unrest in the play to draw the audience's attention to the devastating effects of military rule and the resistance it engendered that are often taken for granted. Following the resistance, the state forced the farmers to give up their homes and reside in the forest where they plan every attack. When the play opens, Director says:

> I'll try and give you a rapid summary of our play tonight. The play, as you will soon see, starts in the year 1969, the month of September. That year, if you remember, the civil war was raging in the east of our country, but this play has nothing to do with that. It deals with another war, the one that was later to be popularly known as the Agbekoya uprising, in which ordinary farmers, in the west of the country, rose up and confronted the state. May be you remember? Illiterate farmers, whom we had all along thought to be docile, peace-loving, if not even

> stupid, suddenly took to arms and began to fight against the government (5-6).

The reconstruction of Agbekoya uprising is intended as a reminder of the failure of the military government during the self-rule. The play ridicules the government that makes promises that are never fulfilled. They exploit and oppress the people but when they protest, they employ all sorts of punitive measures against them. The government uses the law enforcement agents to torture and coerce people into obedience. From this point, representations of power can be encountered in Osofisan's writings due to the fact that there are scenes which focus on the oppression and exploitation of societies and institutions over the weak which eventually was met with stiff resistance by the peasants. The atmosphere created in this play is expected to motivate the peasants to take over the productive forces and change their society and history positively. From a new historicist point of view, one could also think that resisting oppression and exploitation is a way of exercising power because it pave way for new history.

Considering the history of capitalist practice in Nigeria, *Morountodun* recreates a capitalist society that chooses to exploit and over-tax poor farmers of their small earnings. Capitalism has its basis on money making. In modern time, man has also become a commodity under capitalism. The ruling class section enslaves the people under them, and consumes money. The rise of capitalism has been promoted to some of the parts of Africa even though Africa has been liberated from the British colonization. Osofisan's *Morountodun* reflects these problems in a particular way, an attempt to reconstruct history and make the peasants fight for what belongs to them or take control of the productive forces, Osofisan leans heavily on Marxist philosophy. In the play itself, Marshal and others wanted to "imaginatively reconstruct [their] history, envisioning the world of the Agbekoya uprising in terms of the peasants' and workers' struggle. The essence of this reconstruction hinges on the failure of the capitalist system. This system

suppresses the interest of the poor over the rich and this was the case in *Morountodun* where the poor farmers have decided to resist the system. Titubi's role as a government agent on the daring task of defeating the masses' uprising, she becomes a scapegoat for the fears and guilt of the capitalist and ruling class in the society that is presented in the play. According to Umukoro (1994) Osofisan's play,

> Reflects the Nigerian society as a capitalist society and proposes that the Marxian model of socialism also called scientific or doctrinaire socialism is a more valid politico-economic system for the country… This is what generates the central ideas in the plays and informs the other dramatic elements (24).

The characters in *Morountodun* are based on two classes: The peasants (lower class) and the bourgeois class. The bourgeois comprises of the rich represented by Alhaja, sanitary inspectors, tax collectors etc. while the ruled are the exploited peasants, who are in the majority waiting to be led. Osofisan uses myth and history as hyperlink in order to advance his revolutionary goals. Thus he creatively and with complexity, uses history to comment on the role of tradition in the post-colonial context. He suggests a complex relationship between history and myth, suggesting that both the specific incident and the mythic, communal memory must combine to evaluate the past to face and transcend the limitations of the present for the future.

The reconstruction of the past in order to understand the present and define a visionary future is one of the most exciting contributions of contemporary Nigerian drama, especially the direct interplay between myth, history and literature. According to Oyelade and Okunoye, (2008; 247), radical dramatists such as Femi Osofisan have made their marks in the theatre and aesthetic of twentieth century. His paradigm may not necessarily constitute a breakaway in totality from the earlier canons, but he has successfully questioned old beliefs and attempted to transcend the inherited and dominant theatre practices. He rejected Soyinka's approach to myth and history

and, like Ngugi, insist on the importance of acknowledging individuals as agents of particular social forces that they can and must challenge. On the whole, the play *Morountodun*, is not reconstructed through a war or clash between sexes, classes, but through the need for humanity to come together as one indivisible unit that is bent on ensuring and sustaining a universe that is just and free for all

CHAPTER FIVE:

5.0. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* as examples of how contemporary Nigerian drama reconstructs history. The research pays close attention to how these playwrights have tapped from the past to redefine certain historical experiences. These plays have been discussed as historical dramas, analysed from the new historicist's point of view. Consequently, references have been made to historical accounts in order to buttress the views of the dramatists about their chosen materials. Using New Historicism as an analytical framework, the dissertation aim to reveal how history and myth have been used to comment on contemporary aspects of the Nigerian society by Soyinka and Osofisan. It has also determined the extent to which drama sets up a counter-memory to history, and to what extent it parallels the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial historians' aims to reclaim history and assert identity. Of course there can be no single answer to these questions, as they depend on each playwright and his particular context. It is fair to say that these playwrights

have both supported the reclamation of history, challenged and subverted these histories. One of the most important things discovered in the study of these plays is that historical drama certainly provides a pluralistic assessment of histories.

This research proceeds on the assumption that the concept of reconstruction is useful in retelling and recovering certain historical experiences that has been overlooked in contemporary Nigerian drama. The research portends that the concept of reconstruction is a critical means of redefining and preserving the Nigerian history. It argues that Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun* are saturated with concerns of forceful dominance and oppression against minority groups as factors that amount to revisiting history in contemporary Nigerian drama. These assumptions were pursued to show that beyond the retelling of history from the perspective of the oppressed groups, the concept of reconstruction in contemporary Nigerian drama is expressed in the limitation associated with the ability of human memory to reconstruct events with precision. Thus, the reconstructive process is often clouded by social, political and cultural bias. Furthermore, this research illustrates how a historical frame may be used to redefine a historical period and figure, this is expressed in Nigeria's contact with the west in *Death and the King's Horseman* and the Moremi figure in *Morountodun.* DKH questions the direct and forceful involvement of the west in the Nigerian affairs while *Morountodun* criticises the post-colonial government's failure to protect the poor farmers.

The study further demonstrates that the concept of reconstruction is necessary to reclaim, redefine and preserve certain historical experiences for generations yet unborn. However, it is the place of the Nigerian creative writer to reconstruct the past and the present in proper perspectives in order to predict the future. In addition, a new historicist reading of these plays allows us to throw more light on interrelation between history and literature in contemporary Nigerian drama.

These plays were published when African independence was well underway if not in full swing and they appear to be haunted by the historical theme of the struggle of the native for freedom or by problems arising in the postcolonial society. The study taps into the concept of tragedy by redefining it in the Yoruba/African perspective. It also draws attention to the experiences of the Nigerian people during and after colonialism. In all, exploring historical experiences in these plays justify the place of history as an important theme in contemporary Nigerian drama.

The research foregrounds its arguments by reviewing literatures that have used theories like Postcolonialism, Marxism, Deconstruction etc. to study *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Morountodun*. The dissertation therefore examined the new historicist dimensions in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun*. These include: history, politics, religion, and culture.

In view of the foregoing arguments, this dissertation has examined historical reconstruction in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Osofisan's *Morountodun* within the historical context of the limitations that accompanies the reconstructive process. This is to prove that the contemporary Nigerian drama has its roots in not just ritual but also in history. The study also shows that the theme of colonialism is still enjoys playwrights' attention in contemporary Nigerian discourse because the Nigerian playwrights/dramatists revisit this history to right the many wrongs that has infiltrated the Nigerian history especially as depicted by the Europeans. *Death and the King's Horseman*'s revisiting of historical events like colonialism and clash of cultures might be read as a symbolic and real restoration of subaltern history and cultural memory. The play accords meaning, purpose, and integrity to a forgotten and/or erased past. Although the (colonial) past cannot be changed, it is our duty to examine it and to interrogate our role in it; and this is exactly what this dissertation has done. Ultimately the play has taught us the

need to re-look colonial history in the contexts of the present. There are two major reconstructions of historical experience in *Death and the King's Horseman*: the notion of clash of culture (the conflict between European and African world views) and the notion of tragedy (the Aristotelian notion of tragedy versus the African perspective of tragedy). Soyinka insists that there are certain things integral to the African thought that may not be understood by the Europeans. In the reconstruction of this experience, Soyinka tries to restate the place and importance of African culture. His plays displays the beauty and unity of African culture, by treating the various aspects of the African culture, as an embodiment of morals and ethics of behaviour.

Death and the King's Horseman is a very powerful tragedy and it grows from both the tradition of Yoruba tragedy and from ancient drama and Aristotelian tragedy. Soyinka's tragedy culminates with the death of promising young medical student Olunde, as well as the demise of his father, the king's horseman Oba Elesin. What Soyinka has sought to do is to develop a contemporary African theatre that would not only be drama in the Western sense of the term but also ritual in the Yoruba sense of the tragedy. The actual event that inspired *Death and the King's Horseman* has offered Soyinka the opportunity to reconstruct the colonial experience and get to fashion and make case for African tragedy.

Morountodun on the other hand illustrates how an historical frame may be used to reclaim an historical figure and period. In this play, Osofisan has dealt with the dislocation, exploitation, oppression and nostalgia of the marginal groups. The central dilemma of the text lies in the conflict between upper class and the peasants. This dilemma which is revolutionary is reconstructed to encourage the downtrodden to rise and fight oppression and exploitation. "*Morountodun* … reconstructs the Moremi myth and legend of the past to suit his revolutionary

view on the political forces of oppression, injustice and corruption in contemporary Nigeria" Muyiwa Awodiya (1992: 106). The playwright uses this legendary figure both to recall and challenge the heroes of the past in general, and female heroines in particular. *Morountodun* can be view as advocating for the place of women in national history. In this play, Osofisan elevates the place of women by giving them roles and responsibilities that are mostly given to male characters in the works of his male counterparts. The reconstruction and subversion of the mythic Moremi is intended to make a call for action for women to be empowered with more responsibilities in the society.

The dissertation has established that good historical drama is that which is on the side of the people, one that will never repress the voice of the marginal group, a drama of commitment, that which without making mistakes, injustice, and weakness, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggles for total liberation from oppression, from bad unproductive and dehumanizing government. Soyinka and Osofisan were able to use the dramatic form to express both direct and empathic human experiences through literature, since literature relate to people and society. Sympathetic to the task of memory, contemporary Nigerian playwrights can contribute for the rewriting of a national history. At the same time, the decolonization of memory and of national history to gives rise to new debates, discourses, and even conflicts in contemporary society. The removal of monuments, the replacement of avenue, street, or square names, and the inauguration of new memorials, commemorative plates, and museums contribute to a better dialogue among all social or ethnic groups involved in reconstruction of history or rewriting of national history. Osofisan's reconstruction of the Agbekoya rebellion in Morountodun was geared towards teaching the present and future generations than simply reproducing a historical fact, hence the divergences in the play from historical truth.

In *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Morountodun*, through the retelling of individual characters and even groups, we see how their actions reconstruct the past to illuminate on the challenges facing the present and even future generations. In the play, facts and fiction are shaped through the process of reconstruction. The reconstructive process in these plays teach us about the past, the present, the future and the general human condition. Febres (2011: 18) asserts that "art restores meaning in bringing us, as responsible human beings, face to face with undeniable facts and circumstances. The plays use realistic strategies to stage traumatic memories experienced by people during and after colonial rule.

This dissertation therefore shows that even though there are more daring issues represented in contemporary Nigerian drama, the issues of mythical and historical reconstructions still pervade the thematic thrusts of contemporary Nigerian drama, particularly in relation to the colonial and post-colonial experiences of the Nigerian people – which lays emphasis on reconstruction as tool to recover and redefine the Nigerian past. This research finds that every writer functions at his own period. Nigerian playwrights have the responsibility to keep updating the world of who Nigerians are through the Nigerian plays. Most works even before being published have become history as one tends to wake up and find out that the Nigerian enemy now wears a new mask.

In essence, this study demonstrates that beyond the reclamation of the past and different aspects of the society, communal heritage can be remade into a powerful and challenging new form in contemporary Nigerian drama. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka engages critically with the legacies of colonialism and suggests how history may be used to understand the present, and how it should be used with a sense of its power for the future. Osofisan's history can be seen to be useful insofar as it may be subverted to challenge the past dialectically and so change the

present and future of a society. He shifts the power to make decisions for and change a community into the hands of the ordinary individual in society.

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