

**Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's
A Dance of the Forests and The Road**

By 

Dr.Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

**Department of English,
Faculty of Arts,
Assiut University**

- Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

- (*A Dance of the Forests and The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

Abstract

Identity is an important topic that concerns many writers and critics. It is highly connected with the writings in the previous European colonized countries. The Postcolonial works mainly seek to address the social, political, and cultural issues facing societies that were colonized. Writers like Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka created influential dramatic works to highlight the plight of colonized societies and their attempts to alleviate the negative influences. This paper aims to provide the reader with the future vision of Soyinka's depiction of the Nigerian postcolonial identity. This end is achieved by examining the postcolonial element in the two plays of *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and *The Road* (1965). The plays reveal Soyinka's intellectual and political concerns as well as his attempt to rescue Africans from the colonial and neocolonial cultural denigration in a manner that acknowledges the global contexts of Africa's colonial formation. Soyinka, also, mentioned the crisis emanating from the colonial era and persisting in the postcolonial age as well as conceptualizing the responsibilities of the people in the colonized societies. He believes that through history and rituals, the country's future can be controlled, and the colonial memories can be exorcised.

Keywords: postcolonialism, cultural subjugation, hybridity, colonial past, identity.

1. Introduction

Postcolonialism in English drama addresses the influence of colonization on societies and cultures. The works of such revered dramatists like Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott reveal a cultural subjugation that has been of major influence on their dramas. They sought to revitalize their traditions while producing literature that

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

helps in reconstituting the mixed identity of colonized individuals in order to reach a utopian future for their peoples. The mixed identity is an important concept in postcolonialism as it refers to the integration of cultural practices and signs from both colonizing and colonized cultures. In all his works, Soyinka's cultural authenticity language embraces hybridity in which the author recovers tradition and inserts it in the postcolonial modernity to cater for the transformation of political and moral justice. Marzieh Shamsi and others (2015) state:

He [Soyinka] believed that through the ritual drama African societies can establish social and moral standards and find harmony in their land. Soyinka expertly employs meta-theatre on setting. As a responsible dramatist and artist, Soyinka uses meta-theatrical devices like music, dance, costumes, song, color, ritualistic masks to catch his goals. In fact, Meta-theatre as specific aspect of drama is used for resisting in postcolonial discourse. Soyinka tries to apply mythology and ritual to make new world on stage; therefore, audiences are shown to a concrete reality in their own environment (p.1936).

Catherine Lynnette Innes (2007) thinks that reading texts written by African authors is a means of restoring dignity and self-respect to people who had suffered from hundreds of years of contemptuous dismissal, exploitation and enslavement by Europeans (p. 4). Therefore, readers come closer to understand the African culture which was neglected for centuries. Thus, it becomes very clear that literature, for Soyinka, not only has a political function but also a social one as well.

This paper aims to provide the reader with the future vision of Soyinka's depiction of the Nigerian postcolonial identity. This end

- Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

- (*A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

is actually achieved through examining the postcolonial element in both of *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and *The Road* (1965).

2. Soyinka's Postcolonial Drama

By examining the assessment of various scholars on Soyinka's dramatic works, such plays as *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* appear to be instrumental in bringing out the postcolonial culture, identity, frustrations and hopes of a nation. *A Dance of the Forests* is a metaphorical commentary of the postcolonial social and political situation in Nigeria. In a review, James Gibbs (1990) states that "Nigeria up to and during 1960 (is) the immediate context of the play" (p.155). In this drama, Soyinka traces the country's past in an attempt to forecast its dystopian future. The Nigeria's future is mainly predicted through studying its history and rituals. The country had a good past before the colonialists, and their departure left African leaders with their colonial mentality. Solomon Omatsola Azumurana (2014) says that *A Dance of the Forests* is Soyinka's depiction of postcolonial disillusionment in which a fruitless present is used in projecting a bleak future (p. 71).

In both of Soyinka's dramas, the struggles of a country are clearly revealed. This country not only survived the disastrous exploitation of colonialism, but also dealt with the devastation of authoritarianism and civil war. Concisely, the anarchy of the Nigerian history, which is well documented in Soyinka's writings, is associated with the influence of Europeans in that African nation. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the half-child is a metaphor representing the unknown future compared with the social and political transition of the country. There is an analogy drawn between the past, present, and future of the Yoruba. With the play having been set during the slave trade period, Soyinka globalizes the corrupt power context in the Yoruba kingdom. Furthermore, McLeod (2007) adds that the

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah -

play shows the extent which colonialism reached in breeding dishonesty and power misuse in native politicians (p. 3). The main purpose of Soyinka's drama is to stir the consciousness of his readers who strongly take part in the plays' performance in a metaphysical sense. Soyinka is noted as the most unforgiving and stubborn critic who satirizes and classifies his society and its socio-political affairs. Such establishment of classes is noted as successful in creating misfortunes and causing the downfall of postcolonial societies. What the writer wants to do is to try to rediscover and rebuild the individuals' identity alongside rebuilding the nation.

In assessing the postcolonial identity, Msiska (2007) mentions that Soyinka has a political and intellectual concern within the wider framework of the cultural theory in the postcolonial era, and his dramatic work focuses on basic questions that concern global culture and formation of political identities after colonialism (p. 47). In this view, Soyinka's vision is deemed as essential to the modern efforts to understand the nature of his nation. His dramatic work endeavors to conceptualize identity in a manner that promotes and modifies the national perceptions of being African. This goal is achieved by his attempts to rescue Africans from both colonial and neocolonial cultural denigration in a way that acknowledges the global contexts of pre-colonial formation in Africa. Generally, what emerges from studying his plays is the assurance that even after colonialism, the affected countries still struggle with social and cultural issues that can be traced back to the period when they were being colonized.

The Road, on the other hand, is about a group of lorry drivers who experience a series of accidents. Soyinka actively protests against the real road conditions in Africa; he figuratively speculates about where Nigeria is headed on the road of independence, which

- Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

- (*A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

the country had gained from England just five years ago at that time. The crash of the Civil War (1967-70) which followed, proves that the author has been completely right when he has protested against the bad conditions of the road toward the country's welfare in a manner that reveals the lack of progress in the postcolonial era (Phillips, 1990, p.140).

2.1. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*

While the interpretation of *A Dance of the Forests* is of a play that reveals postcolonial disillusionment, it is also a play that has been designed to celebrate Nigeria's independence and one in which Soyinka attempts to forecast an ideal future for Nigeria. As a direct comment on it, Michael Etherton (1982) says:

A Dance of the Forests is Soyinka's first major play. Within the play the gathering of the tribes for a great feast, symbolic of Nigeria's independence celebrations requires the presence of industrious ancestors from the past. (p.257)

Msiska (2007) states that such creative postcolonial dramas, not only focus on the extent to which colonialism destroyed Africa but how the African leaders themselves terminated and ruined the great expectations and hopes of the indigenous rule (p. 24). Soyinka strongly opposes the new African leaders' attempt to follow the same steps of the colonialists. Within the play, the recurrent use of the phrase, 'great expectations and the mourning after' sums up the mood of the dissatisfaction experienced after independence. To mark Nigeria's independence, Soyinka, on the tongue of the Crier, who tries to welcome the dead, announces the ceremony of inviting only those of the dead who have completed a cycle as . He says:

May resume their body corporeal as are summoned when the under streams that whirl them endlessly complete a circle.

Only such may regain voice as summoned when their link

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

with the living has fully repeated its nature. (CP II, 1974, p.45)

Nasser Dasht Peyma (2009) says that while this play reveals how the Nigerian people have become disillusioned; it is also concerned with the configuration of things in the country during the year of independence celebration (p. 47). Soyinka uses the word 'circle' as a symbol showing that history repeats itself, and the Nigerian people should be aware of that when treating the social and political issues facing them in their contemporary postcolonial time in the hope of eliminating them.

A Dance of the Forests is used by the playwright to compare the situation during colonialism and after attaining independence while telescoping the country's future. In other words, the play does not only focus on disillusionment that ensued after independence but on the general issues affecting the society as well. Further, the play not only criticizes the status-quo but also it is concerned with criticizing the colonial past, which has influenced major aspects of life in the contemporary society. Accordingly, Jeff Shantz (2012) says that the characters seem to be victims of both the current configuration and their past actions. As Soyinka (1976) puts it in his book, *Myth, Literature and the African World*:

The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same relation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies, and uncertainties, employing the same Masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition. (p. 10)

- Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

- (*A Dance of the Forests and The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

In the play, Soyinka deliberately attempts to suppress the country's inglorious past by considering the gains made in the present and forecasting a successful future (Gilbert, 2013, p. 179). *A Dance of the Forests* is set out as a creation and rebirth dance, but it soon develops into a death dance. The widespread deaths witnessed in the contemporary times, which are mostly carried out for no apparent reason, explain the spiritual death of the contemporary men as they pursue temporal power. From the play, Shantz (2010) argues that it is apparent that men have turned into predators and his job is to advocate morality in a society affected by colonialism negativity and struggling in the postcolonial era to regain its integration (p.91). Soyinka calls for the awareness of self-being through which one should take action in helping the society liberate itself from passivity brought about by colonialism and bad leadership. Soyinka (1976) declares that Ogun, the Yoruban god of iron, war and a symbol of creativity and destruction, is the embodiment of challenge which is constantly at the service of society for its full self-realization (p.30). In that, it is clear that Soyinka's aim is to seek to cause a positive communal change.

Soyinka uses the character of the Dead Man to represent his views about the shortcomings of the political awareness. This is a position in which Demoke, the protagonist, must transcend to be able to change anything in the future. The Dead Man has succeeded in serving his purpose by transcending a position that could not be transcended before. The Dead Man's personal examination, self-regeneration, and self-confession have enabled him to change several aspects about his life. Each individual is required to bring appropriate changes in society which is in continuous need of recovery. This kind of recovery springs from the dedication and

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah -

vision of individuals in pursuit of their vision to save their communities.

In *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka reflects upon the humanity condition whereby the Warrior informs the Physician that the unborn generations will become cannibals and will end up eating one another. The play also reveals the source of unhappiness and tragedy in the human life. Soyinka argues that it is men's habits of deadening the soul that bring them pain and anguish. Such bad habits have also been witnessed in the ancestors and hence, they will continue to be found with those people of the present as well as in the future generations if they do not attempt to be heroic enough to break this cycle of wrong deeds. Madam Tortoise, named Rola in her modern birth, characterizes the destructive principle by boasting that she will outlast all other individuals. After discovering Rola's identity as a prostitute, Adenebi, who is a council orator in Mata Kharibu's court, and her client, becomes very cautious that he will be implicated in the scandal. The following quote shows how much corruption the past had:

The whole horrible scandal. How did I ever get in your company? And more explicitly. Oh yea, and I found that the woman who was with us was that notorious lady they call Madame Tortoise. That was really why I left. Think, if I, a councilor, was discovered with her! (qtd. in Bhargavi, 2013, p.3)

Soyinka is making a statement on the future and predicts that the future will be very bloody if the people fail to stop their materialism and greed. Gilbert (2013) claims that Abiku, the half-child, is used by Soyinka to highlight the transition into the unborn

- Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

- (*A Dance of the Forests and The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

world, which is a future world where the earth's resources are wildly plundered by man (p. 51).

2.1.1. Soyinka's Vision in *A Dance of the Forests*

The structure of this play is a vital framework in which the writer confronts the problems that have occurred in the country's past because of colonialism as well as the atrocities that persist in the societies after independence. The structure also echoes the political confusion that dominated the Nigerian society at that time. Soyinka claims that before the entry of the Europeans into the country, the society functioned well and most social ills witnessed in the present can be traced back to the entry of the European imperialists. Soyinka rejects the glorification of the colonialists for introducing various changes in the society while idealizing the past of African nations before colonization. Based on a negative reconstruction of postcolonial leadership in Africa, Soyinka calls for more writers to reconstruct the past in the way that the living can recapture the ideal past in the future (McLeod, 2007, p.98).

In the play, Soyinka dramatizes his tendency to partly change his present by turning a blind eye to the ignorable past. Without real changes in the present society, Soyinka notes that the future of the society is in danger because its leaders will continue to repeat the

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah -

same mistakes as is in the present. What Soyinka posits here is the lack of glory in the African's colonial past and also that there is nothing so special about the present. For example, the numerous atrocities that were committed by the Mata Kharibu Court actors eight centuries earlier are repeated under several circumstances in the current world. In this play, Adenebi's prior existence was the historian to the court in Mata Kharibu. Adenebi argues that war is the sole consistency that the past ages could afford the society. This war, which he encouraged, facilitated the death of several soldiers. According to Reddy (2008), Adenebi is presently reincarnated into the deceitful social orator who is accountable for the death of about 100 passengers on a lorry that he had approved to carry passengers beyond its predetermined capacity (p. 57).

Another main character in the play is Madam Tortoise or Rola, who was a whore in the previous world. She is now the wife to Mata Kharibu and is responsible for the demise of the Dead Woman and the Dead Man. Madam Tortoise is in fact compared to Helen of Troy because it is her promiscuity, which caused the war. This war is described by Adenebi as divine bloodshed. In the current world, Madam Tortoise is still a whore responsible for the death of

- Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

- (*A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

two of her lovers. Further, there is the character of Demoke, who is the carver who killed the apprentice because of envy in the present. In the former existence, Demoke was the Mata Kharibu Court poet, who defended bloodshed by not speaking against the commission of senseless war. Soyinka's work focuses on disillusionment as he insists on confronting community problems, which appear to be unavoidable in the human nature. Soyinka's work suggests that the failure to take appropriate measures in the present will lead to failure in the future. The past and present brutal actions of the major characters in Soyinka's play are presented to evoke memories of bloodshed and violence in order to avoid such crimes in the future (McLeod, 2007, p. 163).

In *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka traces the account of a very hopeless past, comparing it with the defective present with the aim of forecasting a bleak future. This reality is depicted by Soyinka toward the end of the play as Forest Head says:

The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden – to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness – knowing full well it is all futility. Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah -

intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumored ineffectuality complete; hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings. (qtd. in Figueiredo, 2011,p. 110)

It becomes very clear to readers that Soyinka believes that through studying the past, people should come to face the future without any idealistic illusions. In this regard, Peyma (2009) says that although this play is entirely African, it has a universal application especially in other regions that have been colonized by the European imperialists.

The construction of past and present Africa by Soyinka is that of a place that can be conceived as bad or diseased. Gilbert (2013) argues that while he hopes that such positive attributes as beauty, moral order, and social harmony will be achieved in the future, the effects of colonization make the present community unable to enjoy such positive attributes (p.49). In fact, this realization is unmistakable in *A Dance*, which is a play characterized with effects of negativity which is strictly associated with colonization and the lack of necessary changes during the postcolonialism period. Reddy (2008) considers the play a pessimistic dramatic corpus and one of the most negative portrayals of postcolonialism (p.74).

- **Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's**

- *(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah*

The negative and pessimistic setting of the play is additionally made ambiguous and definite through the storyline in which there is the gathering of various tribes in a festivity. In this festivity, the living requests their gods to call upon some of their well-known ancestors. These well-known ancestors are supposed to remind the population about the magnificent past, which is supposed to give them hope of a wonderful future. However, instead of the valued ancestors, the supreme divinity sends two spirits belonging to the restless dead in the Dead Woman and the Dead Man. Msiska (2007) thinks that a logical interpretation of this development is that the human community possesses no great ancestors and that the supposed glory of such empires as Songhai, Lisabi, Zimbabwe, and Mali is nothing but a mirage (p. 7).

In the play's prolog, Aroni, who represents the Forest Father's Lieutenant, claims that Demoke was the victim of giddiness who could not gain the heights gained by Araba. By creating the situation in which Demoke strikes his apprentice because of jealousy and spite, Soyinka mocks the festivities that are held by this particular community of humans. The hypothetical symbol of unity in this specific human community is a symbol of resentment and conflict.

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

Further, although the totem depicted in the play was supposed to reach the sky, Demoke reduces its height. With that diminishing of the symbol which is supposed to reach the sky, metaphorically, the community of humans cannot liberate itself from its numerous imperfections. In addition, this metaphorical manifestation serves to show that the community of humans cannot escape their dilemma. Of equal significance is that both the Dead Woman and the Dead Man have come to judge the living and not to celebrate with them. The repeated request by the Dead pair, which is also the play's opening statement, indicates that the two have come to right the wrongs against them in the previous existence, which was eight centuries ago.

Instead of having social harmony in Soyinka's society, what is apparent is hostility and animosity between the citizens, between the dead and the living, and between the tribe's divinities. For instance, both the Dead Man and the Dead Woman do not give the living the hope they need. On the other hand, the living are trying all means to get rid of both the Dead Man and the Dead Woman. In the respect of this development, Azumurana (2014) assures that Soyinka believes that the human violence cannot be avoided. However, and

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

according to his ideal vision of community, the unavailability of such brutality becomes a real desire for an improved world (p.76). This play is an ideal dramatic response which takes a corrective form via condemnation of the social and human crises alongside the dilemmas of the postcolonial and post-independence Africa.

2.2. Postcolonialism in *The Road*

The Road presents the widespread influence of postcolonial cultural, social and technological changes on the lives of urbanized poor individuals working in cities in West Africa. The play is about a group of corrupt lorry drivers who take part in and thrive on Professor's business of pulling up road signs to cause accidents, collecting and selling second-hand spare parts and forging driving licenses in a small shack known as AKSIDENT STORES. Abdulwahab (2011) says that besides the play's suggestion of filth and boredom, the visual presence of the 'aksident store' provides much of the biting satire (265). As the case with the Most postcolonial works which focus on communities caught in the international capitalism, modern national identity, and the heritage of their tribal communities, Soyinka, with the sense of an artist, tries to explore all these postcolonial elements in *The Road*. The writer

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

24

claims that a new uniform deserves a new body, in reference to the need for new leaders in the countries that were formerly colonized to end the colonial tendencies of some leaders who oppress their people.

The Road is a postcolonial drama that addresses many issues that emanated from the period of colonialism. Soyinka has a vision of a new Africa; an Africa that would succeed in escaping the colonial past by inserting the technological advancement of the present time with its ancient tradition. He imagines a new future, which would embrace self-revival, cultural security and cultural recollection. Subsequently, he reformulates cultural myths to accommodate modern reality.

The play sheds light on the conflict and connection between the Yoruban and the Western framework. The author seeks to reintegrate and preserve the link between modern theater and ancient rituals. In the play, it is apparent that the colonizers demeaned the natives as being savages and called their land a dark continent. Further, the heart of the African was called the heart of darkness; he himself was a cannibal and his religion was barbarous. In addition, the Africans were termed as Subalterns, which is a

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(*A Dance of the Forests and The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

25

reference to a people of inferior rank, who are not conscious about their class, who are subjected to the domination of the ruling class. In the case of Africa, the imperialists are behind all the postcolonial chaos prevalent in most countries. In his book, *Wole Soyinka*, Gibbs (1986) reports that Soyinka believed that "after independence some of those new rulers were going to behave exactly like their forebears did" and that "the euphoria of independence should be tempered by the reality of the eternal history of repression" (63).

The Road is a play that is laid out during a transition phase in Nigeria through which Soyinka has been able to show his views and bring out the agony of postcolonialism in the country. Death is coming up, but that is not yet the end of life as life springs new form from death. This is a reference to the postcolonial solutions to the disruptions that have been caused by both colonization and post colonization. Elites in the modern Nigerian society are not concerned about the welfare of the society; they only focus on self-satisfaction. Roscoe (1971) says that *The Road* expresses the idea of existence as a becoming, as one long rite of passage. The Professor's search for the meaning of the Word is not only equivalent to the artist's groping towards its profound meaning, his effort to grasp its

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

26

hidden principle, but represents as well one's eternal quest for ultimate knowledge and truth (p.231). It is important to note that Soyinka was involved in political and social activism in which he did not believe that artists were supposed to compose works that were not relevant to society. Soyinka used the play to voice social concerns not only on the number of accidents and deaths, but also on the causes of such incidents.

Furthermore, according to Shamsi (2015), while the mask rituals, used by Soyinka, conceal the face of the character, they show the position of culture and imply a return to the traditional value as well as a shift away from the imperial hopes. By doing so, Soyinka tries to make the colonized people remember their roots and origin. This ritual festivity reaches its peak, in the play, when Murano appears with a mask as the ancestral Egungun spirit during the Drivers' Festival; which reflects the visual representation of transferring to the other world (p.1938).

The Road is dominated by a Professor, who is a symbol of the western domination. He is a mysterious figure obeyed and respected by everybody in the play. Like the colonizers, the Professor harbors contempt toward the natives or individuals of the lower class. He

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

27

employs his intellectual resources to make money. Further, he charges excessive fees for consultations even when he is only involved in solving a simple problem. Similar to the colonizers, he justifies such illegal activities as compensation, and a balance of inequalities while ignoring its awful implications. Besides the Professor, there are other characters in the play whose names are taken from the western culture. Such characters as Say Tokyo Kid assume a Chicago gangster intonation while singing Yoruba traditional songs. Say Tokyo Kid stands for a horrible fusion of the material alien culture and the traditionally African culture. Alongside the Professor, the character of Sergeant Burma embodies the point of view of the colonizers as they are indifferent and ruthless toward human losses. Abdulwahab (2011) allegorically, thinks that the road stands for the possibility of salvation and recovery, and a movement from disillusionment to enlightenment (p. 265).

By presenting the Professor with a double identity of the colonized and the colonizer, the recognition of such a double identity is the strength of postcolonist views. Soyinka also criticizes the successive corrupt governments in Nigeria (Gilbert, 2013, p.48).

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

28

The Professor is depicted as a man in a continuous pursuit of the meaning of the Word. The life of human beings brings up relentless challenges and invariable choices, in a set up whereby man is expected to force his way through the contradictory alternatives. In expressing his thoughts, Soyinka prefers the Ogun's (Yoruba God of Iron) personality. Ogun has constantly lived a life characterized by challenges and risks that result from wrong choices. It is after learning from personal experiences that individuals are able to attain true wisdom. The depiction of tragedies in Soyinka's works is attained via metaphor and visual images, and death, for him, remains the most outstanding one. Such death could be spiritual, physical, mental, or emotional.

Msiska (2007) sees *The Road* as an incarnation of the "literal and the metaphysical" aspects of the road. He thinks that the road is a symbol of life and the only source of social status for Samson as it gives him the sense of identity in life as well as providing him with the unique sense of personal selfhood (p.114). On the contrary, it represents the agent of death for Kotonu who escapes being killed in an accident by a lorry on the bridge.

3- Imagery

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

29

Soyinka employs imagery in his plays to convey interest, sense of wonder, and frustrations; reality and language are related in terms of intimacy. The metaphors provide the means in which words are raised up into living things. The dramas of *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* combine diverse elements from dissimilar presentation methods and traditions of thought. The product of fusion is both new and striking because it transforms the unique particularities from which it emerges. According to Shamsi (2015), Soyinka has searched out his origins in myth and history so as to revive identity for his people (p.1936). Although such plays are set in Africa, it is hard to get the impression that the writer merely sets out to explain his people's traditions only. The sentiments expressed by Soyinka have far and wide significance. He is actually distinguished for creating a hybrid drama, combining Western and African conventions, and choosing the English language as his primary medium, though it is an English mingled with and inflected by indigenous languages (Innes, 2007, p.26). Some characters in his plays are images of particular kinds of feelings and emotions.

For a play to gain universal acceptance, it must fulfill important conditions like a subject matter that is accessible by many individuals of several societies. Also, the craftsmanship associated in the construction of the play and the language should be commendable. Further, for such African playwrights as Wole Soyinka, the difficult task is to convey customs, emotions, daily life, and rituals of the Africans in a foreign tongue. Gilbert (2013) states that Soyinka masters the English language and this makes his work well versed in its tones and what he cannot say directly is implied through word pictures (p. 34). *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* are good examples of elaborate imagery formulations. His works sometimes look obscure as a result of his spontaneous use of the

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(*A Dance of the Forests and The Road* Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

heritage of Yoruba. The entire Yoruba culture is melted in his language, which is so highly musical and tonal that his works give the impression of being chanted instead of being spoken. The tonal and rhythmic qualities of his Yoruba language do not fit into the English language because of the inherent differences. Reddy (2008) claims that what does flow into the English used by him is a wealth of proverbial formulas and imageries that he uses with commendable effect. The use of Yoruba tradition is meant to keep up with the expression of common sentiments and emotions (p. 47). Human suffering is present everywhere, especially in societies that have previously colonized; the causes may be different, but man rarely changes and the sensitive writers, like Soyinka, have the capacity to reach the soul of people via their art.

4. Assessing the Identity of Postcolonialism of Wole Soyinka

In his book *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka*, Msiska (2007) provides details about the role of Soyinka in African literature and cultural theories of the postcolonial era. His critical sense in delivering the message largely appeals to scholars, African literature students, and individuals with a keen interest on cultural theories and postcolonialism. In the previously mentioned dramatic works, there are recurrent aspects of theoretical and philosophical comments about Soyinka's conception about the crisis emerging in the postcolonial era, the responsibility of the colonized people, culture, literature, art, and politics. Rebellion against colonialism is the fundamental foundation upon which he has founded all his works; therefore, he uses it as the basic criterion for interpretation of his politics and writing for a comprehensive understanding (p. 53).

Life as a journey is a symbol that Soyinka has repeatedly used in his plays. In *The Road*, the road is used as an image for that journey. The term "Journey" is also used in the West and in the East

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

to stand for the spiritual quest by man to find meaning of his life. Further, the road is a passage from a single place to another, and it also stands for the journey from the cradle to the grave. In *A Dance of the Forests*, life as a cyclic view has been used as a fundamental metaphor whereby Soyinka takes a notion inside the traditional beliefs and extends it into a totally new and imaginative framework. In both *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*, Soyinka has perfectly linked the present, future, and the past by bringing the dead and the living into contact; where he uses the past to comment on the present with giving hints to the future through the physical body of the Half-child. He also links the earthly and the unearthly. He always borrows the Egungun masque concept from the Yoruba culture. Egungun society is a very serious affair whose main function is to deal with worshipping the dead. The great masks used in these plays are effective in impersonating the ancestors. They are sacred and touching them amounts to death (Msiska, 2007, p. 7). Soyinka uses tradition with the postcolonial modernity as a means to achieve the political justice which is absent at his time.

Actually, Soyinka succeeded in restoring the tragic word its real power of meaning. This is because the tragic death is not causal or incidental, but death which is endowed with significance for the community witnessing it. In case death has no meaning, then life does not have either. Sometimes, the death of man can have dignity, which was apparently lacking in one's life. However, deaths such as those emanating from the absurdity of the contemporary times presented in *The Road* are insignificant. Such deaths only succeed in personifying the widespread corruption in modern times. The pursuit for ambition and power leads to suffering and tragic ends. Hence, such pursuits tend to become tragedies for the modern man. Nevertheless, the aspirations for something higher than what man is

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

32

in the contemporary times, reveal his progress. Death becomes insignificant only when man's life deviates from his straight living toward the corrupted power and ambition. As revealed in Soyinka's drama, man kills the beauty inside himself so as to obtain material possessions, rank, prestige, and money.

Soyinka is well aware of the postcolonial times he is in and how they have exerted influence on his views. The process of decolonization has to some extent led to the search for basic cultural purity, which is yet to be achieved. One might seek cultural purity as an important step toward self-identity, but the truth remains that the Nigerian culture has been contaminated by foreign influences. Soyinka has perhaps been recognized as the most diverse among African writers who has completely absorbed the Western language and still writes in English. M.F. Borch (2008) says that the uniqueness of Soyinka's work can be attributed to his return to Yoruba traditions, its ideas, themes and language, which dramatizes his main concerns for fusion in contemporary African work (p. 84).

5. Conclusion

In summary, the postcolonial concept in English drama seeks to address the consequences of colonization on cultures and societies. Soyinka is among a host of renowned postcolonial English dramatists that have largely pointed out the cultural subjugation as a key influence to their work. Soyinka sought to revitalize the traditions of his society by producing literature that has succeeded in reconstructing the mixed identity of the colonized people. Mixed identity is a very vital concept in postcolonialism because it is a reference to the integration of practices from both colonized and colonizing cultures. *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* revealed how Soyinka recovered tradition and merged it into the postcolonial

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

modernity to facilitate the transformation of moral and political justice.

This paper sought to inform leaders about the political identity in Soyinka's two plays where they highlighted the postcolonial conditions of the former colonies. In both plays, the focus on the postcolonial disillusionment in societies that expected the end of colonialism to bring a new free era is apparent. Contrary to the expectations of people in these societies, the leaders of these societies created disillusionment in the population because of an apparent lack of much-desired progress. In fact, Soyinka succeeded to highlight the conflict that emerges when people in the postcolonial societies attempt to merge the values of the Western societies with those of their own.

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

34

References

- Abdulwahab, N. H. (2011). The Absurd in Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers and The Road*. *Journal of King Abdulaziz University*, 19 (1), 251-275.
- Anonymous. (n.d.). Chapter One: An Understanding of Wole Soyinka's Yoruban World View. Retrieved from <http://www.shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7588/6/06chapter%201.pdf>.
- Azumurana, S.O. (2014). Wole Soyinka's dystopian/utopian vision in *A Dance of the Forests*. *African Journals Online*, 51 (2), 71-81.
Retrieved from <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/tvl/article/view/107305>.
- Bhargavi, G. V. (2013). Welcoming the New Beginnings of the Nation in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2(4), 1-7.
- Borch, M. F. (2008). *Bodies and Voices: The Force-field of Representation and Discourse in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Etherton, Michael. (1982) *The Development of African Drama*. London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa.
- Gibbs, James (1986) *Wole Soyinka*. London : Macmillan.
----- "Review" of Jean-Pierre Durix' *Wole Soyinka: A Dance of the Forests*". *Research in African Literatures* 21.3 (Autumn - 1990): 154-58.
- Gilbert, H. (2013). *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*. London: Routledge.

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

35

- Figueiredo, R. (2011). The Drama of Existence: Myths and Rituals in Wole Soyinka's Theatre. *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 4(1), 105-113.
- Innes, C. L. (2007). *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McLeod, J. (2007). *The Routledge Companion To Postcolonial Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Msiska, Mpalive-Hangson. (2007). *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Peyma, N. D. (2009). *Postcolonial Drama: A Comparative Study of Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, and Girish Karnad*. Daryaganj : Rawat Publications.
- Phillips, K. J. (1990). Exorcising Faustus from Africa: Wole Soyinka's *The Road*. *Comparative Literature Studies*. Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 140-157.
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246743>.
- Reddy, P. B. (2008). *Aspects of Contemporary World Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist.
- Roscoe, Adrian (1971) *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shamsi, Marzieh and others. (2015). Ritual/Carnival Performance in Wole Soyinka's *The Road*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 9, pp. 1935-1939.
- Shantz, J. (2010). *A Creative Passion: Anarchism and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Postcolonial Identity in Soyinka's

(A Dance of the Forests and The Road Dr. Ashraf Abdel-Fattah

36

Shantz, J. (2012). *Against All Authority: Anarchism and the Literary Imagination*. London: Andrews UK Limited.

Soyinka, Wole (1974). *Collected Plays II*. London: Oxford University Press.

-----, Wole (1976) *Myth, Literature and the African World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.