THEATRE AND POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE: AN EXAMINATION OF AHMED YERIMA'S *ATTAHIRU* AND OLA ROTIMI'S *OVONRAMWEN NOGBAISI*

MUBARAK IBRAHIM LAWAL

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APPROVAL PAGE

This Dissertation entitled "Theatre and Postcolonial Resistance: An Examination of Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi"* by Mubarak Ibrahim Lawal meets the regulations governing the award of Master of Arts in Literature of Bayero University, Kano, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary quality.

PROF. MUHAMMED O. BHADMUS **(SUPERVISOR)**	**DATE**
PROF. MUSTAPHA MUHAMMAD **(INTERNAL EXAMINER)**	**DATE**
PROF. MUHAMMAD INUWA UMAR BURATAI **(EXTERNAL EXAMINER)**	**DATE**
DR. AMINA ADAMU **(HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT)**	**DATE**
DR. AHMAD MURTALA **(SPS REPRESENTATIVE)**	**DATE**

DEDICATION

To my parents

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ABSTRACT

The upward trend in African historical plays drew much attention of researchers to the relationship between history proper and the historical plays or imaginative reconstruction of history. The contention was that, although these plays were primarily regarded as fiction or imaginative reconstruction of the past based on the playwrights' interpretation of history, theatre scholars like Scrubber (2001), argued that the value of these plays prevailed over history to the audience if there is a clash with history proper. This began with Aristotles's assertion that "poety/literature is more philosophical and elevated than history", and that literary plot tends to be unabridged, corrective and therefore more permanent. Following on from that, the researcher theorized, in this work, that historical plays counteract imperial discourse, or jaundiced imperial historians in their biased history of their clash with African monarchs and heroes. Secondly, since theatre is used as a means of education, celebration, protest and discovery, the work argued that through the shades of cultural resistance that hybridize conventional theatre, postcolonial plays are the most important media that promote anti-colonial resistance and therefore have the tendency to change a distorted history. Theatre, the most symbolic form of art, can be historically corrective and evocatively accurate. To illustrate this, the work examined two postcolonial plays, Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. These plays reconstruct and correct two awfully misrepresented African monarchs; Caliph Attahiru, the twelfth and last Caliph of the Sokoto Caliphate and Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi of the old Benin Empire. The researcher examined the colonial resistance captured by the plays, through postcolonial theory, and cast light on the attitudes the plays reflect regarding the coloniser and the colonised, the extent to which the plays help in decolonisation process and how the plays reconstruct the images of the damaged heroes, so as to restore national pride and integrity.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

1.1. Introduction

This work studies two historical plays and critcally uncovers their predisposition towards postcolonial resistance. Thus, it examines the role of theatre in postcolonial resistance. By the same token, the work studies the dramatists' effort to reconstruct the image of the historical villain but legendary figures in Nigerian history, so as to restore national pride and integrity. In justification of this effort, the researcher surveys the nature of modern theatre, which gives template to theatrical resistance, and the concepts concerned in order to contextualise the topic.

In the twentieth century, theatre has undergone a sort of complex revolutions. Technological innovations, said Downs, Wright & Ramsey (2013), and "new perspectives on the human experience led to avant - garde theatrical styles, each with its own systems and theories" (388). The word **avant garde,"** Downs et al., continued:

> can describe any artist or work of art that is experimental, innovative, or unconventional. Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Absurdism are some of the avant garde styles, or "isms," that playwrights, directors, and designers created in order to rebel against Realism and Naturalism and draw audiences back to the live stage" (388).

Furthermore, political developments, the two World Wars, the attainment of independence of many countries especially in Africa from erstwhile colonial masters, the rise of feminism and so forth have all made a profound impact on Theatre. Looking at the complex nature of the modern world, Dasylva (2004), examined modern theatrical forms as follows:

> (1) Theatre of entertainment: involves melodrama, farce, romantic comedy and musical plays which are now common with our mass media drama productions... (2) The Theatre of Realism involves plays that give insight into the problems of real people. The playwrights, as well as those who patronize the production of such plays believe in man's ability to improve through rational and pragmatic understanding.... and, thirdly, (3).. The theatre of disillusionment. This is generally informed by the post-world wars philosophy of Existentialism, which is foregrounded by despair, cruelty, and general absurdity. It has no faith in religion, conventional values or any rational ideas (97).

As Henrik Ibsen (1828- 1906) and August Strindberg (1849- 1912) championed The Theatre of Realism back in the nineteenth century, playwrights like Eugene Ionesco (1912 -1994), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Harold Pinter (1930-2008), and Edward Albee (1928-) were the promoters of the Ttheatre of disillusionment in the twentieth century. The disillusioned playwrights, after seeing the devastation and genocide of World War II, concluded that the universe is cold, hostile and that our existence is futile. Hence, **Absurdism,** one of the "isms", was born. This is a philosophy that regards human condition as “absurd” because, humans continue to seek order and reason in a universe that is not built on these principles. The absurdist dramatists experimented with audience' expectations and finally shared a rejection of Traditional, Cause-and-effect Realistic Drama and created characters of unusual theatrical traits. The **Absurdist's** central idea was that "there are no fixed standards of conduct, no verifiable moral codes. Each person must choose his own set of values and live by it. To live by the conventions of others is the response of a robot, not the act of a human (Downs et al., 398)".

In his *Waiting for Godot* (1952), Samuel Beckett examined humans' eternal vigilance for the revelation of God or of some transcendent meaning in their lives. Godot never comes, yet the characters do not give up hope. By and large, the playwrights explored themes of dramatic illusion and relationship of an audience to the stage and the players.

Furthermore, the famous German playwright and theatre practitioner, Bertolt Bretcht (1898 - 1956), introduced what he called Epic Theatre. In this theatre, Brecht rejected total immersion in a play, made his audience feel and think and finally forced them, during performance, to re-examine their true condition. In other words, Brecht used Theatre to arouse man's consciousness to the peril surrounding his existence. He began by attacking the ideological stance of bourgeois Theatre of Aristotle, which coaxed audience into sympathising with the tragic hero. To him Aristotelian theatre reflected an ideological belief that portrayed both man and the world as static and unchangeable. He advocated that reality is a dynamic process produced by men and can be changed by men. Therefore, if Theatre has to serve its function it must not reflect a static society and reality, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. He wanted his audience to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the Theatre and effect change in the world outside. Brecht observed: "The audience in the Epic Theatre says:

> I wouldn't have thought that- people shouldn't do things like that- that's extremely odd, almost unbelievable.- This has to stop.- this person's suffering shocks me, because there might be a way out for him.- This is great art: nothing in it is self-evident. I laugh over the weeping, weep over the laughing (cited in Weiss, 1968:680).

This observation explains that the objective of any Theatre is to stimulate the epic spectator into thinking through a process of questions and answers and by implication, stirring the desire and clamoring for change.

Downs et al., (2013), explained that:

> Brecht eliminated the vicarious experience of theatre by using various staging techniques. Sometimes he would have the actors step out of character and address the audience directly, or he might expose the theatrical lights and remove the curtains to remind the audience they are

> in theatre... Alienated from the play, the audience would then be motivated to intelligently and objectively reflect on the moral issues of the story rather than being lulled into the theatrical illusion that puts the audience into a non thinking, trance like state where they accept what they are told without serious contemplation (398).

Back in the 19th century, the famous Norwegian playwright and theatre director, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), asserted that Theatre "...should be a source of insight, a creator of discussion, a *convey-or* of ideas, something more than an entertainment...(1)." This statement gives the theatre practitioner a newer vision of his role rather than a mere clown of no ambition and purpose. He is expected to promote, revolutionise and facilitate change by unveiling the tyrannical antics of the oppressors. In essence, Boal (1979), asserted that theatre "Classifies concepts, reveals truth, exposes contradiction and proposes transformation... (61)." Hence, "theatre is used as a means of education, celebration, protest and discovery (Banham 1975:15).

Furthermore, in their relentless effort to capture human experience, the modern dramatists embark on telling, retelling and enacting some historical wars. Because war is one of the subjects that engage every society, institution and culture, many scholars have written extensively on its origin, scope, nature and reasons that make men go to war. Some writers insist that power or the urge to control other fellow human beings, gives the explanation for the torrent of war in our societies. Brown (1984), postulated that:

> Who should govern is often a fighting issue, for those in control of the government have a lot to say about who gets what, when and how. And since control of the government tends to give political legitimacy with the right to use force to some groups but to deprive others of this power, it is hardly surprising that human history has been marked by so many civil wars and violent changes of government (24).

In addition, as sociologists endeavour to unravel the causes of war, historians and creative writers are documenting and examining it. Ogunpitan observed:

> The link between literature and war is ancient, as ancient as human settlement. Myths, legends, epics and other forms of imaginative literature are replete with stories of wars, or heroism, and of courage. There certainly are more volumes of literary work on war than there are historical accounts (cited in Azeez, 2012:133).

Moreover, both the artist and historian are writing to correct certain impressions and misconceptions about war. The artists, in particular, retell the exploits, adventures, stoicisms, resistance and bravery of certain historical characters in an imaginative and more visionary style. Accordingly, Azeez (2012), argued that:

> Both the historical and the imaginative writer are men and women with keen research interest, seekers after truth. For this reason, they may not be content with the explanations or reasons of warring parties about the war. Thus, they, after the war, may want to portray an "objective" view of the war and by so doing inject, their "subjective" opinion on the issue (135).

By the same token, the Nigerian dramatists, specifically, write on some of the wars of colonial resistance of the 19th century, or rather on the heroes who resisted the conquering powers of the white colonialists. The dramatists examine or explore, arguably, some demeaning historical accounts of some noteworthy historical figures of such events. By so doing, the dramatists resist the domineering colonial powers in both content and technique, and finally reconstruct some certain historical facts and give voice to the colonized.

To cite an instance, this study examines two of such plays; *Attahiru* by Ahmed Yerima (which explores the historical clash between Caliph Attahiru I and Lugard's Army at the Battle of Burmi) and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (that re-enacts Benin Massacre). The researcher uses postcolonial theory to examine the attitudes that the plays reflect regarding the colonizer and the colonized, the extent to which they help in cultural resistance and how they reconstruct

the images of the historically misrepresented but great figures in Nigerian history, so as to restore national pride and integrity.

Conclusively, the above survey shows that theatre is used for different purposes and, therefore, there are different forms of theatre. Primarily, the forms include "conventional and non-conventional theatres" (Dasylva, 2004:25). The conventional theatre concerns "tragedy and other tragic forms, comedy and other comic forms" (Adelugba, 1990 in Dasylva: 25). These are those theorised by Aristotle, the first (arguably) theatre theorist. Having been identified with better use of "theatricals, thespians or dramaturgicals, these theatres are regarded as conventional. On the other hand, the non-conventional theatre subsumes modern theatres such as Brecht's revolutionary epic theatre, theatre of the absurd, the avant-garde theatre, the neo-rationalist theatre and so on. These are regarded by critics generally as non-conventional because they are characterized by an uncustomary use of theatricals. They are theatres that jolt their audience "and by so doing stir it to action" (Dasylva: 28). The primary texts of this research, Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and Yerima's *Attahiru*, belong to postcolonial theatre, a theatre that resists the power of colonial domination and comments on social and political situations of the country. So, it is good to know the background which will explain why this is so.

1.2. Background

It is imperative to begin this enterprise with giving apposite definitions of the concepts involved- Theatre-cum-Drama/play, and Postcolonial Resistance- in order to be practical and see things as they really are. Etymologically, "Theatre" comes from the Greek *theatron*; place for viewing, or *theasthai*; to look at. “Drama”, on the other hand, comes from the Greek *Dran*, meaning “action”. The other related term; "Play" is conceptually defined as a dramatic composition written for performance by actors on a stage, television or public arena. Hence, the twin terms;

"Drama/Play and Theatre" are here used interchangeably in some places as they overlap and dovetail.

As a genre of literature, drama is a story written to be presented by actors on stage in Theatre. Drama tells a story through the words and actions of actors who impersonate the characters on stage. Precisely, It is an adaptation, recreation and reflection of reality on stage. According to Marjourie Boulton (1983), "A play (Drama) is not really a piece of literature for reading. It is the literature that walks and talks before our eyes"(3). Boulton states that the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds, and actions which occur literally and physically on stage. Therefore, while drama can represent the literary genre that deals with works intended for performance or, a text / a published book in which a play is written, theatre is the performance or the place where the dramatic text is performed.

Hence, theatre is a form of art in which a series of events is acted out. In a broader sense, it includes all aspects of play production like the playwright, actors, direction, scene, costume, sound and lighting designers, and of course the audience. All these elements normally work together to form a production.

According to Brockett (1999), theatre is an extremely multifaceted institution encircling all aspects of life. Wilson and Goldfarb (2005), opined that theatre permeates and informs every aspect of our lives and is therefore an activity that we use to describe how we live. Hence, theatre is a recreation of life.

The recreation, by staging it, becomes a sort of sharing or interaction between performer and audience, which is the essence of theatre. This relationship between the performer and the audience is complex. This is because, films and videos provide mere image, but live Theatre

brings an interactive contact as the audience can actively influence the performance with their responses such as loud booings, cries, groans and so on. It is a spellbinding session; a sheer excitement that carries the audience along. It is that special indefinable quality that draws people to the Theatre.

Furthermore, Theatre resembles most intimately the patterns of people's experience and offers simultaneously meaning and entertainment. It gives a performance that lives on as a memory. Therefore, Theatre is not a form of "fine" arts, but a functional art. The essence of Theatre lies in its tradition of "immediacy" and not in the written text. Theatre is also exceptional in that it includes almost all other art forms in various ways. In modern life, there are many examples of performances that utilise theatrical elements: musical videos, staged productions based on films and extravaganzas or Olympiads' opening events. An example of the crossover of theatrical elements between the popular art of today and traditional theatre is the elaborate presentations of Rock Groups. For example, Madonna, at a certain show, stated emphatically that;

> my show is not a conventional Rock Show, but a theatrical presentation of my music. And like theatre, it asks questions, provokes thought, and takes you on an emotional journey, portraying good and bad, light and dark, joy and sorrow, redemption and salvation" (Wilson, 2005:4).

Hence, among the genres of literature, theatre is the most immediately involved in the life of its community. This is so, because theatre has more striking impact on audience and can arguably be an instrument for social transformation, an instrument for moulding and shaping people's attitudes towards their society, and also a social force that awakens the revolutionary consciousness in the socially and culturally oppressed, exploited and deprived people. Generally, Ebong (1986) put it that; "the writer, as a revolutionary thinker, strives always to change the

world, to redirect and channel the minds and conscience of his people towards a new set of values, a higher awareness or reality" (72).

1.3. African Theatre

“The roots of theatre in Africa are ancient---” (Banham, 1976:3). This shows that theatre performance in Africa began from time immemorial. However this claim has been disputed by some African and non-African scholars alike, who assert that it began after the coming of the European Colonial Whites. Ruth Finnegan (2012), opined that:

> Though some writers have very positively affirmed the existence of native African drama (Traore 1958, Delafosse 1916), it would perhaps be truer to say that in Africa, in contrast to Western Europe and Asia, drama is not typically a wide-spread or a developed form (485).

Based on the Aristotelian concept of drama, which makes emphasis on imitation, plot and dialogue, Finnegan, declares that theatre did not exist in African society before colonization. She describes the pre-colonial African theatre as mere "dramatic and quasi dramatic phenomena", cultural commodity, mytho-ritual re-enactments or un-programmed theatre. This creates controversy among African theatre scholars. Precisely, religious festivals, like in Greece, fuel theatre performance in Africa.

On the whole, because indigenous Africans were animists (those who believe that all natural things such as plants, animals, rocks and thunder have spirits and can influence their lives), masquerades and other ritualistic performances are familiar phenomena. At the time of these performances, a drama-like situation existed. Ogundeji (2000) explained that;

> During the (ancestral) festivals, masks of the dead fathers are brought out using theatrical effects as a means of ritual celebration. Masquerading is, in addition, used for purposes other than sacred or cultic function. It is,

> for example, used for political, judicial and entertainment purposes. These other functions, however, are generally considered secondary (2004:6).

Furthermore, J. C. de Graft (1976), suggested that;

> ...The term (African) 'drama' seems to cover almost every form of social expression that may be said to incorporate movement and gesture : singing, drumming, dancing, all ceremonial behaviour, enstoolment and destoolment of chiefs, child naming, circumcision rites, hunting, drinking palm wine, and eating goat's meat - literally everything (3).

This shows that African theatre is different from Western theatre in the sense that, Western theatre is practically divided into; (1) drama - for the spoken word; (2) Ballet and Mime - for dance; (3) Music - in concerts and operas; and (4) Fine Arts for painting and sculpture. But African theatre incorporates them all in a complex and totally integrated, indivisible dramatic performance. It is a cultural manifestation and the creative arts combined with religion and politics to become functional and relevant to the community that is involved; many times having not only an entertainment value, but a didactic function. It draws on themes relevant to the community it serves and provides a forum to communicate with the community. These expressionistic, communal and holistic features of indigenous African theatre oppose the individualistic and fragmented nature of Western theatre. This is because of the fact that "--- the African life is drama. Drama is life; it is interwoven throughout every aspect of the African's existence and experience (Freeman, 2005:5)".

1.4. Nigerian Theatre and Drama

To begin with, theatre and drama in Nigeria, as in other places in Africa, both have their beginning in traditional "festivals and religious rituals" (Ashiwaju, 1981). Ossie Enekwe and J. A. Adedeji identify these phenomena as the genesis of drama in Nigeria. They are of the opinion that "drama and ritual are... reciprocal in function and similar in structure, since one can easily

lead to the other, depending on the context" (Ogunbiyi, 1981:6). This assertion substantiates the view that the early Nigerian drama and theatre were not guided by the Aristotelian model, discussed above.

However, this conception was challenged by different critics such as M. J. C. Echeruo who argues that the traditional festivals are not drama but rituals. Echeruo contends that festivals and rituals are performances without plot and dialogue and, without these elements, can not therefore be termed drama. Furthermore, he argues that "there must be a story to be enacted or imitated for a performance to be classified as drama" (Ogunbiyi, 1981).

Ola Rotimi subscribes to Echeruo's proposition that imitation is necessary in drama and that "any ritual display which contains "mimetic impulse" ought to be classified as drama, not ritual" (Ogunbiyi, 1981:7). Kalu Uka summarised this view as follows:

> what is usually called traditional drama,... is not yet drama. It is the huge legacy upon which drama may draw and draw with ever increasing returns... What some usually and glibly call traditional drama is properly and essentially elements of drama" (Ogunbiyi, 1981:7).

Nevertheless, the theory of the development of drama in Nigeria through traditional and religious agencies was well established. The performances of 'anthropomorphic representatives' of ancestral spirits at *egungun* or masquerades have, in one way or the other, contributed or influenced the evolution of drama and theatre in Nigeria. From the bygone pre-colonial era, Sango, the Alaafin of Oyo, who reigned in the fourteenth century, introduced this masquerade that culminated in the present day drama. Sango started this phenomenon initially as ancestor-worship called *baba* (father) or later *egungun* (masquerade). Adedeji (1972), explained that;

> The egungun is the dead lineage-head who, upon being evoked, appears as a costumed figure. The evocation takes place at a special ceremony designed to give the impression that the deceased is making a temporary appearance on earth (255).

So, Sango, after failing to secure the remains of his father, Oranyan, the founder of Oyo, for burial at Oyo after the latter had died at Ife and, so said, metamorphosed into a stone staff, he (Sango) designed this dramatic performance to represent the spirit of his late father. Adedeji continued;

> Sango brought the reincarnated spirit of his father to the outskirts of Oyo, set up the 'Bara' (royal mausoleum) for his worship and placed 'Iyamode' (the old woman of the palace) in charge of the mystery. Her duty was to worship Oranyan's spirit and to bring him out as a masquerade during an evocation ceremony. Later this ceremony of bringing the spirit of the deceased head of the lineage to the homestead became formalised as a permanent feature of Yoruba funeral ceremony (255).

Sometimes in 16th century, during the reign of Alaafin Ogbolu, Adedeji reveals that this performance evolved into a court entertainment. And according to Ogunbiyi, "the refinement and perfection of those aspects, ostensibly for purely entertainment purposes, marked, by 1700, the birth of Yoruba Theatre" (6).

However, owing to its cultural and religious shade, this form of drama, until 1980s, had been the preserve of the indigenous language theatres outside the university walls. But, by the early 80s, a new development surfaced when English Theatre professionalism took over. Some students and even their theatre teachers began acting plays of an english flavour outside schools and universities. John Pepper Clark with his PEC Repertory Theatre in Lagos in 1982 can be a perfect example.

Historically therefore, the Aristotelian-like theatre tradition in Nigeria began, first, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Lagos, when a certain pseudo-English Theatre tradition thrived, featuring well-known English concerts and operas. Soon, the tradition spread and more concert groups were set up in lbadan and Abeokuta. The westernised elite happened to be both the actors and audience. Then, people began agitating for works based on indigenous Nigerian themes or issues. History shows that there was, somehow, an unpromising response because, in the early decades of the twentieth century, politics arrived in Nigeria and it drew the attention of many of the prominent stars of the leading Lagos theatre Movement. Stars like Herbert Macaulay soon found politics more lucrative than theatre and they, unhesitatingly, abandoned stage for political platforms. For almost three decades, there was no notable development in the Nigerian Theatre until Hubert Ogunde came into existence in 1944. (Ogunbiyi, 1981).

1.5. The Yoruba Travelling Theatre

In his essay "Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile", Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981), suggests two broad classification of Nigerian forms of drama- Traditional and Literary forms. He further explained:

> The Traditional forms can be further split into three sub-sections; Dramatic ritual, the Popular tradition and Yoruba travelling theatre. Dramatic ritual will include traditional festivals, whether they be held in celebration of cult or ancestral heroes, ritual ceremonies where Drama is patently discernible, serious masquerade plays (as distinct from the light ones) etc. The term "popular...is used in its usual sense- that is, art intended to be popular, art that is commonly approved and widely liked by the 'common' people in an ever-growing urban culture. The term is used in the finest tradition of a genuinely popular theatre where all that a living, popular performer needs is, not necessarily a text or an elaborate stage, but rather, a place, a time, an audience and himself.... In this category one must include all those plays in which amusement and entertainment are cited as the foremost functions (11).

Going by this analysis, one can infer that Theatre in Nigeria developed gradually with *Alarinjo*, the traditional Yoruba travelling theatre, in the West as the trail blazer. Alarinjo flourished from the late forties well into the late eighties when television, film and video productions replaced it. This travelling theatre tradition was a success to the extent that about a hundred different theatre groups came on stage criss-crossing the length and breadth of the country. The notable personalities that championed this travelling theatre were the famous Hubert Ogunde and his contemporaries; Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola. Oloye Hubert Adedeji Ogunde (31 May 1916 – 4 April 1990) was a an actor, playwright, theatre manager, and musician who founded the Ogunde Concert Party in 1945, the first professional theatrical company in Nigeria. Ogunbiyi asserted that:

> Ogunde's arrival on the scene in 1944 was to determine the course of Yoruba theatre for over three decades. Freeing the so-called "Native Air Opera" from the strict confines of the church and monotonous church rhythms, Ogunde imbued the "opera" with a sprinkling of Yoruba music and dances (22).

Therefore, Ogunde was the first professional theatre man in Nigeria who has been described as "the Father of Nigerian Theatre, or the father of contemporary Yoruba Theatre". Ogunde, together with his colleagues, stimulated and quickened a wonderful development in the Nigerian theatre.

By way of elaboration, these dramatists systematized their performances by always starting them with traditional drumming, dancing and invocation of the metaphysical realm and deities. Duro Ladipo for instance, was responsible for bringing the myths of Sango and some other Yoruba deities to the international stage by improvising a ritualised stage in which Yoruba deities such as Sango, Oya and Moremi thundered back to life in an amazing way.

Hubert Ogunde on the other hand, was popular with his operatic (a balance of speech and music) travelling theatre which created a certain awareness of the modern theatre tradition in Nigeria. He took his plays to various parts of the country and even further to some West African countries like Ghana. His plays have religious, political and social themes. Among them are titles like *Garden of Eden, Strike and Hunger, Nebuchadnezzar's Feign, Herbert Macaulay, Journey to Heaven, Tiger's Empire and Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba rethink*). At times, Ogunde came to be at loggerheads with the government and on particular occasions had his plays banned.

In the formative years of his theatre, Ogunde faced a challenge of the frequent resignation of his actresses and this posed a great threat to his career. The actresses would leave the company whenever they got married and their husbands, because of a stigma attached to the career, objected the business and forcefully, sometimes, stopped them. Ogunde then solved this problem in a practical way by resorting to marrying virtually all his actresses. This ended his tribulations.

1.6. The Literary or Modern Drama in Nigeria

This is a trend began by James Ene Henshaw (1924-2007), the first recognised Nigerian playwright, which departs radically from the Popular Theatre Tradition. Obafemi (2001) summarised it as "...a move from a celebratory communally-oriented, robust theatre to self-conscious, individualist and metaphysical dramatic theatre creations". This is known as **Literary Drama**, largely university-based and elitists. Henshaw wrote many plays including *This is Our Chance*, *Children of the Goddess, Medicine for Love,* and *Dinner for Promotion*. His Plays, and those of his contemporaries, address social, cultural and political issues in Nigeria. These kinds of plays become popular with students and literate people all over the country.

The leading literary drama icon of this period was the Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, who early in his career, established a theatre company known as "The 1960 Masks". He produced and published many plays including *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), *Madmen and Specialists* (1970), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *The Road*, *The Strong Breed* and so on. Thematically, Soyinka has two types of plays, namely: the political plays and the social/metaphysical plays. In his political plays, Soyinka castigates the primitive nature of governance in contemporary Africa. On the other hand, his social/metaphysical plays explore issues like the nature of sacrifices, the mysterious supernatural forces which control the universe, passing from life to death, prejudices, religious hypocrisy and conflicts. Obafemi (2001), observed:

> Soyinka is preoccupied in his creative work, especially his plays, with the socio-political and spiritual state of Africa. He sees African society in a state of transition, both on the material and the spiritual levels. He approaches this concern with the inextricable socio-spiritual search for liberation through the medium of ritual (123).

Another notable playwright of this era is John Pepper Clark. Clark has published plays like *Songs of a Goat, The Masquerade, The Raft, Ozidi, The Boat, The Return Home, Full Circle* and *The Wives' Revolt*. ljaw Delta environment, being Clark's home land, has influenced him greatly in setting his plays. Therefore, his settings are of storm and tide, boat capsizes, of drowning and of sand bars. "Clark has consistently been faithful to and drawn upon his Ijo background for inspiration both stylistically as well as thematically" (Obafemi, 71).

The list of the literary dramatists include Ola Rotimi. Being one of the playwrights under review in this study, he is discussed in the next few pages.

Meanwhile;

> Ola Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi are perhaps the most closest dramatists in English to the traditional performing arts in Nigeria both in terms of the use of oral tradition and history. They are both concerned, primarily, with reaching the Nigerian audience at whatever levels of competence in the English language in which they operate (Obafemi, 2001:89).

This assertion is clearly vindicated in Wale Ogunyemi's *ljaiye War* (1970) and Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*. Both plays come from the same historical sources with a little difference in the approach of the playwrights. Wale Ogunyemi (1939-2001) first wrote in the Yoruba language and that is why he was regarded as the most indigenous of all the Nigerian literary dramatists writing in English. Ogunyemi has published many other plays like *Eshu Elegbara (1970)*, *The Sign of the Rainbow and Eniyan (1987), Business Headache (1966), Be Mighty, Be Mine (1968)* and *The Divorce (1977).* The major concern of his plays is the quest for national unity.

Next on the list is Zulu Sofola (1935-1995) who is widely acknowledged as the first Nigerian female playwright. Sofola has published *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas (1971), Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), *King Emene* (1974), *The Wizard of Law* (1975), *The Sweet Trap* (1977), *Old Wines are Tasty* (1981) and *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986). Obafemi (2001), studied her and summarised her vision as:

> ...being a vision grounded more on her abiding conviction of the inviolability of cultural and traditional paradigms: myths, rituals and mores. She expounds the resultant tragic consequences that await defiers and rebels of traditional systems, codes and ethics, either through kinship, marital or social obligations (159).

This vision puts many feminist critics in a difficult position regarding her works as examples of feminist writing. Hence, they define her as a writer who celebrates African culture. Some critics

argue that "women are...poorly projected in (her) play, their education taken as unnecessary at critical points while men are favourably drawn" (Obafemi, 2001:161).

In the 1970s and 80s, a new group of playwrights rose to fame. These playwrights, according to Obafemi (2001), being tired of Soyinka's socio-spiritual search for liberation through the medium of ritual (as discussed above), advocate social revolution as the only way out of the country's present social incoherence. Obafemi (2001), described their work as one that:

> ... deals, urgently, with contemporary social problems in Nigeria with the aim of raising awareness of a positive revolutionary alternative to the present decadence.. (They) employ... the revolutionary potential of the theatrical medium to make firm political statements and their individual successes and limitations in creating art that is not just sheer propaganda: art that is both 'politically correct and artistically powerful' (168).

Among these writers are Fela Davis, Comish Ekiye, Soji Simpson, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Meki Nzewi, Laolu Ogunniyi, Bode Osanyin, Zulu Sofola, Ahmed Yerima, Femi Osofisan, Tunde Fatunde, Olu Obafemi and Sam Ukala (Ogunbiyi, 1981). Of these new playwrights, "Osofisan is the most articulate and the most ambitious in his use of the subversive potential of the theatre to shape the audience's perceptive awareness of the social revolution which they find inevitable in the country" (Obafemi, 2001: 174). Osofisan has published about three dozen plays, the most important of which are *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* (1978), *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) and *Morountodun* (1982).

1.7. Hausa Traditional Performances

Traditional musicians, entertainers and singers began what is now called literary drama in Hausa land. Scholars abound- U.B. Ahmed (1985), I.Y. Yahaya (1991), Ames and King (1971), Kofoworola (1981), Furniss (1996) and so on- have studied their performances and described

them to be Ogunbiyi's popular tradition or dramatic ritual that originated the literary drama as we know it today. There were *Yankama* (burlesque artists), who parody admonitions, serious religious songs and famous praise songs. "In each case, and again typical of *Yan Kamanchi*, the comical pastiche, involves the substitution of the topic of food for the serious subject of the original" (Furniss, 1996:97). There were *Yan Gambara* -strolling Minstrels (Kofoworola and Lateef 1987) or rap artists (S. B. Ahmad and Furniss 1994) - who deploy two or three people interacting with each other as they move through markets and other public places (Furniss, 1996:96). They use rhythmic style of speech to express funny anecdotes, exaggerated self-praise and banter with one another.

Further more, there were also *Wawan Sarki* (King's Jester), and *Yan hoto* (dancer-jugglers), who, according to Kofoworola and Lateef, 1987, "are associated with farmers, (they) throw heavy hoes high in the air and then catch them during dance routines to the accompaniment of drumming" (cited in Furniss, 1996). There were also *Yan tauri*, (the tough men) "who perform endurance tricks with sharp blades", *Yan dabo*, the magicians specialising in sleight of hand, *Yan wasan wuta*, performing feasts with red hot metal, and finally *Gardawa*, who perform with dangerous animals like snakes, hyenas, and scorpions. Also, there was a certain dramatic ritual, *Bori*- the spirit-possession cult. Furniss (1996), described it as follows:

> As a cult of affliction, people come to it to resolve physical and psychological problems. Cure involves initiation through participation in sessions where people, in trance, are 'mounted' by a particular spirit. They then speak as mediums for the spirit riding upon the adept's shoulders. The calling of the spirit involves the use of drums, shouted epithets, dance and a typical fall upon the buttocks by the adept as trance approaches (92).

As in the case of masquerade, the present day Hausa theatrical and video television arts are driven from these mimetic performances.

Furthermore, there are other "familiar acting traditions" in Hausa land that lie in the background. These performances include *Wasan Gauta*, *Kalankuwa* and *Tashe*. *Wasan Gauta* is a drama-like performance in which women of the royal household enact an entertaining play that imitates events in the court. A similar play, *Kalankuwa*, is enacted by and for ordinary people, sometimes, immediately after the harvest (Furniss, 1996: 122). *Tashe*, on the other hand, is a series of mini performances that go on through the second ten days of the month of Ramadan, normally at nightfall. "It involves moving from house to house enacting a particular scene and very often by being given *Sadaqa* 'alms' by the householders so entertained" (Furniss, 1996: 122).

The scripted play of modern period began, in Hausa land, in the 40s when Rupert East, a British colonial officer, published *Six Hausa Plays*. Yahaya (1991) reports that students, then, went on to sketch out their own plays and directed their fellow students in putting on their own productions (Furniss, 1996: 87). The students include Malam Aminu Kano (*Kai Wanene a Kasuwar Kano* and *Gudumar Dukan En-En Kano*) Yusif Maitama Sule, Alhaji Dogondaji (*Malam Inkuntum*), Shuaibu Makarfi (*Zamanin Nan Namu* -1959- and *Jatau Na Kyallu* -1960-) and Abubakar Tunau Marafa (*Wasan Marafa*- 1943-). Other playwrights of the period include Mohammed Sada (*Uwar Gulma*- 1968), Adamu Dan Goggo (*Tabarmar Kunya*, co-authored with David Hofstad known as Dauda Kano- 1969) and so on.

1.8. ON the Primary Playwrights

Ola Rotimi(1938-2000)

Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi, famously known as Ola Rotimi, was born on April 13, 1938, at Sapele, Nigeria. He had been a scholar, playwright, and director. Rotimi was one of Nigeria′s and Africa′s finest dramatists. Two of his plays; *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, are historical tragedies that re-enact the history of the Yoruba people and the glorious empire of Benin. Adding *The Gods Are not to Blame* to the collection, Rotimi became a notable playwright for the representation of monarchical tragedies in his dramatic work. By creating royal tragic heroes who fall as a result of particular personal flaws, scholars came to describe his style as "Aristotelian". *Kurunmi* (1971) and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974) are Rotimi′s original creations, while *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971), is an adaptation of the classical Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. His other plays like *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again,* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, examine the themes of struggle and integrity of leadership. This eclectic approach made Adelugba (1978) to describe him as a playwright who "achieved... a mastery of the theatrical medium and (that) his greatest strength as an artist seems to lie in directing... (His) proven excellence is in stage iconography" (In Ogunba & Irele, 1978:217).

Rotimi, being born by an Ijaw mother and a Yoruba father, made cultural diversity seem the frequent theme in his work. He received his early education in Port Harcourt and Lagos, and then travelled to the United States in 1959 to study at Boston University. After getting his B.A. in fine arts in 1963, he attended Yale School of Drama in 1966 for an M.A. in playwriting. On returning to Nigeria in the 1960s, he taught at the Universities of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and Port Harcourt. Because of a political unrest in Nigeria, Rotimi spent much of the

1990s living in the Caribbean and the United States, where he taught at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2000, he returned to Ile-Ife, and joined Obafemi Awolowo University.

Rotimi examined Nigeria's history and ethnic traditions in his works. Obafemi (2001), summarised his purpose of examining history as one that stems from his;

> conviction that the Nigerian historical past is instrumental to the shaping of our contemporary experience"...and therefore his "purpose is to raise his audience's perception of these (historical) events in a way that makes the material relevant to the contemporary reality (33).

His other plays include *To Stir the God of Iron* (1963), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971), *Kurunmi* (1971), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), *Holding Talks* (1979), *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled* (1983) and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988).

Yerima (1957-)

In his preface to *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Drama,* Adeoti (2007), declared that:

> Yerima is one of the most notable dramatists to have emerged on the Nigerian literary drama stage in the last decade of the twentieth century. Apart from being a playwright, he is an artistic director, a theatre manager, a teacher and a researcher.... Yerima's dramaturgy combines the practical orientation of a theatre practitioner with the aesthetic consciousness of a critic. He draws broadly from generic elements of tragedy, comedy, tragic-comedy and satire; freely experimenting, in sometimes eclectic manner, with theatrical forms known in theatre history (xi).

The quotation above encapsulates the basic profile of Yerima's successful career, and it provides a fascinating insight into the world of his theatre. Additionally, if ideological commitment and dramatic style are anything to go by, Ahmed Parker Yerima belongs to both Second and third generations of the Nigerian playwrights. On account of the thematic pre-occupation of Yerima's

historical plays, the playwright fits in the generation of those who opt for the recreation of history to protest and confront some historical misrepresentations. On the other hand, Yerima is a Third-generation playwright, who, like Osofisan, is dissatisfied with the Nigerian status quo and therefore, becomes committed to promoting revolutionary change through his plays. Yerima himself says:

> In some of my plays, sometimes I find out that I have to make a social comment. I look at contemporary Nigeria and I find that, for instance, the tragedy that exists is no longer that of Aristotle or even Soyinka. Theirs is the tragedy of destiny.... Break in social orders and ideological factors create tragedy these days (Inegbe, & Uwemedimo, 2007:6)

The foregoing shows that Yerima uses the medium of drama to comment on the Nigerian socio-economic and political situations. Similarly, Adeoti (ibid), said:

> His central focus is Nigeria. Indeed, life as lived in post-independence Nigeria as well as the history, culture and traditions of the people constitute the "Muse" that inspires his "Mimesis". He treats history with freedom and imagination. He is more interested, not in historical accuracy on stage, but rather, in a critical rendering of history, locating the gaps, distortions and impositions therein (xiii-xiv).

This is exactly the crux of the argument of this study; Yerima's and Rotimi's theatres recreate African history in order to respond to the biased imperial presentation. The aim of the work, therefore, is to study the dramaturgicals, theatricals or thespians that Ahmed Yerima (in *Attahiru*) and Ola Rotimi (in *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi)* use in order to resist the distorted versions of the colonial history of the Sokoto Caliphate and Benin Kingdom respectively, in a more effective and affective way.

Being an Edo man by naturalisation, Yerima speaks his an Auchi dialect alongside Hausa and Yoruba languages. This is because, he was born in Lagos on May, 1957, to Alhaji T. Musa

Yerima, a police officer who moved with his family where ever transfred. Ahmed Parker Yerima attended St. Bernadette′s Primary School at Abeokuta and later moved to the University of Ife where he obtained a certificate in Dramatic Arts and later a Bachelor of Arts in 1981. In 1982, he moved to the University College, Cardiff, where he did his postgraduate diploma in Theatre Arts. Yerima specialized in playwriting and acting. In 1982, he attended the prestigious Royal Holloway College, University of London where he did his doctorate degree in Theatre Studies and Dramatic Criticism.

Yerima, one of the playwrights at the centre of this dissertation, has written over two dozen plays and various scholarly publications. He is described by some scholars as a 'Historical Realist' who documents the relationship between powerful rulers of Nigerian kingdoms and their colonial masters. In a word, Yerima uses theatre to remind us of, and revive the appreciative past, the long lost glory and the richness of our culture and tradition. His historical plays include *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen, Erelu Kuti, Ameh Oboni the Great and Attahiru*. And, in this study, *Attahiru* will be discussed.

His plays include *Three Plays in Transition* (1980), *The Silent Gods* (1996), *The Bishop and The Soul* and *Thank You Lord* (1996), *The Trials of Ovoramwen Nogbaisi* (1998), *Attahiru* (1999), *The Sick People* (2000), *Kaffir Last Game* (2001), *Dry Leaves on Ukan Tree* (2001), *Tafida* (2001), *The Lottery Ticket* (2002), *Yemoja* (2002), *Otaelo* (2003), *The Twist* (2004), *Limam and Ade Ire* (2004), *The Angels and Other Plays* (2004), *Hard Ground* (2006), *Ameh Oboni The Great* (2006), *Idemili* (2006) *Aetu* (2007), *The Wives* (2007), *Tuti* (2008), *Akuabata* (2008), *Mojagbe* (2008) and *The Little Drops* (2009).

Yerima has also written and edited several other works like *Theatre and Democracy in Nigeria* (with Ayo Akinwale) in 2002, *Fragmented Thoughts and Specifics: Essays in Dramatic Literature* (2003), *Basic Techniques in Playwriting* (2004), *Ideology and Stagecraft in the Nigerian Theatre* (with Olu Obafemi) in 2004 and *Modern Nigeria Theatre: The Geoffrey Axworthy Years*(1956-1967) in 2005.

Conclusively, having introduced the thesis, surveyed the background of the theatrical cultures that gave birth to the playwrights under discussion, and introduced the playwrights individually, now the work moves to reveal the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, scope and limitations of the study and significance of the study.

1.9. Problem Statement

It has been discovered that the heroes of the selected texts, *Attahiru* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, have suffered so much vilifications in the hands of European historians and even some ill-informed African writers. They propagate that the historical monarchs were fetish and murderous who revelled in ritual killings. Similarly, in the Southern part of this country, teachers of history in Secondary schools teach their students that there was no any resistance to colonial rulers in the North. Rather, they were warmly welcomed even in the Sokoto Caliphate. These false accounts are the problems that justify this study.

Secondly, postcolonial writers, generally, were devoiced and reduced to mimicking European tradition in their art. Therefore, the research justifies itself in discovering the voice of the two postcolonial playwrights at the centre of the work.

1.10. Objectives of the study

1. To examine the attitudes of the African writers towards colonization.

2. To vindicate, through the heroes of the plays, a certain culture consciousness as against the "barbarism or culturelessness" attributed to post-colonial countries.

3. To assess the extent to which the plays re-construct the distorted images of the precolonial monarchs.

4. To examine how the playwrights respond to the biased imperial presentation of the past.

5. To examine the roles of theatre in postcolonial resistance, nation building and societal orientation.

1.11. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This research is limited to the selected primary texts; Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogabaisi*. The two plays are chosen for the research because they are dramaturgically predisposed to postcolonial resistance. Hence, the examination is kept within limits of their resistance shades. Being plays that concern domination, identity and culture, postcolonial theory is the yardstick to examine the success or otherwise of the works in counteracting colonial discourse

1.12. Significance of the Study

The significance lies in the possiblity of creating awareness about how postcolonial theatre of resistance aids the decolonization process in most post-colonial countries; and in showing how theatre, especially in Africa, contributes to the development of people's culture, tradition, religion and to the restoration of national pride and integrity.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Review of Related Literature on *Attahiru* and Historical Drama

It appears that the primary texts (*Attahiru* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*) of this work have not been studied much in the academic world. There is an acute paucity of literature about them. Therefore, this chapter discusses the available literatures on the texts. To begin with, *Attahiru*, is a historical drama that recreates a long-gone past through theatre in order to protest and resist historical misrepresentation. Historical drama is defined by Etherton (1979) as:

> a shift from the re-creation of oral traditions in dramatic terms to the re-creation of a past contained in written histories. It is concerned with the colonial; and also with the immediate pre-colonial period and with those once powerful and extensive African empires like Benin which have an indigenous chronology of rulers giving some access to a more remote past (65).

This reveals that the plays at the centre of this study, being about pre-colonial encounter between colonial rulers and indigenous Africans, can undoubtedly be classified as historical plays. In this context, Okoh (2007), stated that:

> Over time, history has remained a dynamic source material for play creating and playwritng. From the first to the present generations of playwrights in Nigeria, the trend remains the same. Whether the focus is on distinguished figures or events, the historical material is adapted, recreated or subverted to serve a purpose, depending on the social vision or ideological persuasion of the individual writer (Adeoti, ibid.:110)

This is debatably true to Ahmed Yerima's plays like *Attahiru, The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* and *Ameh Oboni The Great.* These three historical plays have a nationalistic theme as evidenced by the subject matter of colonialism which connects them together. Therefore, the Nigerian colonial history serves as a dramatic material for Yerima. His plays do not aspire to literal

representations of the past in the way historical texts do. They are imaginative recreations of the past, based on his interpretation of the historical events. Therefore, drama and history may look alike, but they are not the same. They are two different but mutually related disciplines, as both complement each other. Scrubber (2001), noted that the value of Drama will prevail over history to the audience if there is a clash with history. He argued that; "If the play is going to work and hold the interest of the audience, the value of drama must prevail"(133-137).

Moreover, while the dramatist may adhere strictly to historical facts, he is often at liberty to add or deduct or even refract facts in order to suit his purpose of writing such a play or the aesthetic formalities of his genre. Therefore, he has a creative license that allows him to distil his opinions, thoughts and wishes in his text. This way, there is, at his disposal, the possibility of recreating history in a significant way. This however, does not mean that the creative license permits the dramatist to extend his input to fabricating facts. Rotimi (1978), suggested that "the dramatist's input does not forget historical truth" (10). Similarly, Yerima (2013), explained that:

> The use of historical materials in a work of art, is the attempt by man to further explain the significance of the historical event in a less serious story-telling version or style even while using the facts of the historical event... "Less serious" means the addition of the entertainment element, and aesthetic embellishment values to the facts of history.... In this case by giving life to the historical acts, and using his power of imagination, he (the dramatist) endows history with characters, dialogue, new argument, culture of music; dance, religion, to create an environment, so that history moves from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first in visual form, without loosing its original essence (189-190).

Therefore, a dramatist is free to select that aspect of history which he feels will enhance his creativity and give it a new interpretation for the enjoyment of his audience. According to Soyinka (1988), "the artist or the ideologue is quite free to reconstruct history on the current ideological premises and, thereby prescribe for the future through lessons thus provoked" (126).

Incidentally, for African writers, whose history was disputed, damaged and misrepresented, dramatizing historical materials can be a process of imaginative recovery and an affirmation of existence, culture and tradition. Accordingly, Muhammad Inuwa Umar-Buratai (2007), reasoned that:

> This is because colonialism undermined and misrepresented African people and their cultural practices. There is the crucial need to project aspects of the people's precolonial and colonial history in imaginative form, to correct colonial misrepresentations... Thus, the historical play presents and re-asserts what it adjuge as the authentic history of the people in order to achieve a kind of self-appreciation (In Adeoti, 2007:144).

The argument here is that, through the visual and auditory advantages that theatre has, historical plays have the tendency to change, recreate and resist distorted histories of Africa in a more revealing and descriptive way. Hence, African playwrights, like Ahmed Yerima, choose to use historical materials to create their script.

Yerima is widely recognised now as a playwright of repute who treats historical, political, social, economic, religious and cultural issues in his plays. Using the medium of theatre, Yerima calls on the general public to revolutionize or bring a change to their sorry status quo; re-enacts a distant past in a resistive method and style; and finally contrasts African culture with that of the colonizer. Therefore, his plays can generally be divided into Religious, Political and Historical. Adeoti (2007), commented on his Historical plays that:

> His historical plays not only seek to dramatize history, but also to redefine it, interrrogate it, draw a connection overtly or covertly between the past and the now with a view to shaping the course of future actions. Sometimes, the stage presentation tries to redress the percieved gaps and omission in a particular strand of extant history, while paying attention to the artistic and entertainment goals of drama (34).

This quotation corroborates the fact that through historical re-construction (of *Attahiru* in particular), Yerima probes and protests the European imperial discourse that controls the means of representation. In this way, he tries to substitute the hegemonic versions of the history of Attahiru with his play, *Attahiru*. Therefore, the veracity of, at least the hegemonic or euro-centric, history is deflated by Yerima's play as it is equated and substituted with an "illusion-producing art". Dryden wrote in his preface to *Don Sebastian* that, "where the event of a great action is left doubtful, there the poet is left master" (Lindenberger, 1975:2). This issue can be one of the topics at stake here. This is because, the previous researchers on Attahiru did not seal this interstice as they mostly stopped at issues regarding the historicity and historiography of the play, cultural identity, the contribution of such historical drama towards nation building and so on.

For instance, in his essay; "Towards a Historiography of the Text: The Plays of Ahmed Yerima", Akoh (in Adeoti, 2007), observes that "the playwright is not wholly faithful to the full text of the history, but to the specific events sorrounding (it)" (121). Akoh is certainly right that the playwright's reproduction is not truthful to the History proper. Yet, the play resists and counteracts biased histories of pre-colonial Nigeria. As no one can know and write everything about anything, Akoh says nothing about the level of this postcolonial resistance put up by the play. Therefore, this work explores this Resistance and finally equates the dramatic text with the historical account in credibility or faithfulness.

Uwatt (in Adeoti, 2007), examines Yerima's justifications in resorting to history in his art. Uwatt found that, "his recourse to history is for specific dramatic purpose of either absolving the

Nigerian monarchs from alleged guilt of complicity, or celebrating their heroism in resistance of imperialism" (142).

But how can Yerima exenorate these monarchs if historical drama is not, in the least, equated with history proper? How can we honestly celebrate the heroic deeds of the "make-believe historical hero" if somewhere in the corners of our hearts we know of their otherwise adventure? May be the answer is, as Linderberger (1975) puts it, "reality or plausibility exists essentially within the consciousness of the audience"(2). Therefore, this work claims that, as drama creates and gives pictures of make-believe reality in theatrical performance, historical drama can then be more truthful and hence a substitution of history proper.

Moreover, in his effort to re-create the past on stage, Yerima wrote *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen,* a play that dramatises the British invasion of Benin Kingdom at the dawn of colonial rule in Nigeria. This is another attempt by the playwright to counteract both the European colonial history and a previous play by Ola Rotimi based on the same historical figure, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. Jigede (2007), summarised that:

> ...*The Trials* pays particular attention to the gaps, omissions, silences and absences in Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, especially those that have to do with portraying the king in the right light. Rotimi portrays the king as weakling who is troubled within by political unrest and without by British attack. In the face of attack, he goes into hiding and later comes begging to surrender to British supremacy (in Adeoti, 85).

But, Yerima portrays the Oba as a courageous character who, like Attahiru, stands against all odds. However, both Yerima and Rotimi are successful in changing the course of history to the favourable direction. Hence, this research examines the resistant techniques and mechanisms that make Yerima's *Attahiru* and Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* arguably succesful "enactments"

that counteract European historians in their hegemonic and perverted representations of Africa. To that effect, Yerima, being a dialectic playwright, believes that history never represents "what really happened" and, like literature, it is just a verisimilitude to that reality.

Similarly, Idegu (in Adeoti, 2007), sees *Attahiru* as a play that politically promotes the identity, honour, glory and pride of Caliph Attahiru in the face of Colonial Domination. Because of the religious fervour shown by the Caliph and his followers in the play, Idegu concludes that "the war recorded is not only a resistance against political domination but also a defence of the Islamic faith by the Sokoto Caliphate" (165). As Idegu studied the religious elements of the play, the efforts made by Luggard to avoid religious conflict and the Sultan's faulty interpretation of the situation as such, this work examines elements of postcolonial resistance that lie in the language and theatricals used by the playwright.

In another development, Ewejobi, (in Yerima, A. & Aliyu, S.: 2012), explores Yerima's *Attahiru* and its reasons for the zero use of women in representing history. He says:

> Examines the crucial nature of religion and tradition as it relates to Attahiru and Yerima's negligence in utilizing the power of the playwright to have women represented. It concludes by analyzing the belief that the inclusion of women waters down the seriousness of the context and the major theme in the play (war in history) (252).

Certainly, there is a zero use of women in the play. This attracts the attention of feminist writers and other women activists in academia. Although, as Ewejobi pointed out, Yerima (2003) responds to the criticism, but some readers are still unsatisfied. Therefore, more comments and interpretations on the issue are surfacing.

Again, *Pragmatic Reading of Proverbs in Yerima's Drama* is another research conducted on Yerima's plays, carried out by Odebunmi (in Adeoti; 2007). Odebunmi establishes that Yerima's proverbs, especially in *Attahiru* and *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees,* "explore the flora and fauna resources of the environment (211)". Thus:

> Yerima's style of handling proverbs naturally shows that his plays are accessible to readers, local and foreign, who desire to come to terms with Nigerian culture and tradition through proverbs, and are indespensable materials for proverbial pedagogy (Adeoti; 216).

This analysis is undoubtedly a good move in reading postcolonial plays. Since postcolonial playwrights hybridize the language (as discussed in theoretical framework), theatricals and setting of their plays, proverb, as a part of language that embodies culture, is a smart way of showing cultural resistance. This thesis widens the exploration to include all that is deliberately used by the playwright as a way of showing cultural resistance in theatre. Now, having reviewed the available literatures on the first primary text, *Attahiru*, what follows is the other text, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, laced with discussions on the relationship between literature and history. As a saying goes, "the aim of argument, or of discussion, should be not victory, but progress" (Joseph Joubert Pensées), this is also expected to keep the work going at an increasing tempo.

2.2. Review of Critical Scholarship on Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*

Although many scholars, ancient and modern, have discussed the relationship between history and literature, this part, with reference to Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi,* adds a layer of discourse upon the existing data on the debate. Bhadmus (2006), for example, observed that:

> The conflictual, if not outrightly dubious relationship between history and literature, dates back to the antiquity. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who in their treatises such as *The Republic* and *Poetics,* tested the boundaries and veracity of factuality (110).

Bhadmus argued, conclusively, that "neither history nor literature has greater claim to truth...as they are both compromises of, and compromised by language (110-112)". However, this research argues that, in situations where the veracity of a certain history is contentious, theatre, the most symbolic form of literature, can be historically corrective and evocatively accurate. As *Poetics* IX put it, literature generally or Theatre in particular,"is more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry (literature) states more univerasal things whereas history states particular things" (1995:5-9).

Adeniyi (2007), explained that:

> History which is written in the form of drama is, on a higher plane, more intense, more universal, and more philosophical than history which is written in a chronological manner and is more particular. A historical drama (therefore) deals with a particular point in the history of the society. It gives insight into what life was like at the particular period chosen by the playwright as focus (In Adeoti (ed), 2007:97-8)

This view is definitely linked with another Aristotelian conception that the unity of plot in literature differs from that of history. While the former, being always chiselled after a long and hard thought, tends to be unabridged, corrective and therefore more permanent, the latter is automatically fragmentary, one-sided, and eternally boring. And, as a result, history always brings about discord, mistrust and conflicts. For example, Abdurrahman al-Jabarti's *History of French Occupation of Egypt*, exposes the falsehood of the ideological template upon which the French invasion of Egypt took place. And, antithetically, Napoleon Bonarparte's *Description of Egypt* seeks to portray the conquest as the best thing that could ever happened to Egypt. To that effect, Oladosu (2009), explained that:

> The two works appear to be "monumentalistic" in nature.They call attention to the inner fissures, frictions, and contradictions in the historiography of domination and resistance in and on the (African)

> continent. For example, whereas Al-Jabartî details, in part, the inhumanity and violence that Napoleon′s invasion eventuated in Egypt, the writers of the Napoleonic′s version, on the other hand, chronicle the invasion as that of a benevolent conqueror who respects the culture of the dominated (186).

This explains why literary writers and historians are always at loggerheads over the veracity of African history. So, the question: Can there be an unbiased history that gives true accounts of pre-colonial Africa? This mind-boggling question gives intellectuals, in and outside Africa, a reason to parade their theories, philosophies and their intellectual depths on the subject. But the answer remains hitherto elusive as African history is still seen as disputable and conflicting in nature. Oladosu (2009) continued:

> The dissonance and lack of complimentarity in versions of African history by the European historians (perpetrators) and that of African griots (victims), show...and awaken us to the fact that extant histories of domination and resistance written in/on Africa are patently and essentially human records, that are, according to Ibn Khaldum, "by their nature prone to error" (187).

May be this is the reason why Femi Osofisan (1977), when commenting on the relationship between the Dramatist and Historian, submitted that:

> A similarity of purpose unites the playwright and the historiographer, both apparently feeding, as contemporaries fashioned by and responding to the same historical mutations, from essentially the same sources (cited in Adeoti (ed), 2007:97).

Following on from that, some scholars have interpreted the Africa of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a period of struggle between imperialism and resistance. Abu Alfa Umar Muhammad Shareef bin Farid (2005), noted two types of African resistance to European colonialism, namely; primary resistance and secondary resistance. Bin Farid defined primary resistance as "the type of resistance wherein there is a cohesive African belief system intact

backed up by an African nation-state or polity and a continuous sense of historical conscience" (13).

There, he gives examples of this resistance such as the resistance of the Unitary State of Ethiopia to Italy, Asante against the British, the resistance of Samore Taore in Guinea, Muhammad Ahmad Al-mahdi in the Sudan, Abdalqadiri al-Jaza,iri in Algeria, Somalian resistance against Britian, Italy and France led by Muhammad Abdalla Hassan, the undaunted Sokoto resistance against the British hegemony in Northern Nigeria and a host of others. These victims intended to end what they percieved as unjust and inhumane occupation and control.

Similarly, Bin Farid (2005) defined the Secondary Resistace as:

> The type of resistance which emerges after the loss of national sovereignty and the destruction of the collective historical conscience, which then forces the people to adopt the ideals of the colonizers to liberate themselves from colonization (13).

At this juncture, anti-colonial writers like Franz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Amilcar Cabral, Ali Mazrui, Cheikh Anta Diop, Aime Cessaire, Julius Nyerere and a host of others, appear on the scene. These writers develop the ideas of liberation, identity and independence. They write to encounter the historiography of European domination which, prejudicially, portrays Africans as primordially inferior, brutish and backward.

In the light of that, historical drama, or, in a more general sense, postcolonial theatre, evolved to reclaim the precolonial forms of history and culture, and to re-construct national identity based on specific local knowledge and histories. By enacting oral traditions and surviving national myths of the indigenous cultures, theatrical performances allow those who fight against the colonial power to rediscover their ancestors, histories and their identity in creative ways.

Furthermore, re-enacting the life of heroes and heroic episodes in the precolonial history becomes a significant means of developing the fervour of national revolution in the postcolonial context. Thus, post-colonial dramatists seek to revise their history while simultaneously celebrating their precolonial heritage and traditions. A number of playwrights explore history in their dramatic works, echoing Fredric Jameson (1981), who believed that "the literary text must be seen as the re-writing or restructuring of a prior historical or ideological sub-text" (81-2). Also, Ola Rotimi in his play; *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi,* re-writes, re-constructs and re-enacts the contentious reign of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and the subsequent Benin Massacre of 1897. Many scholars have studied both the play and the history and thereafter discovered some chasms and lacunas in the historical versions of the happenings which, accidentally, influence the play. But, this work examines the playwright's effort in counteracting the history.

To begin with, Rotimi's literary popularity comes from his historical recreation and interpretation. In an interview with Kunle Ajibade of the *African Concord* (1991), Rotimi said:

> I'm concerned with history first of all because of its pedagogic motivation. Most of us Africans are ignorant of our history. When I was in secondary school, we learnt tangentially African History and usually **from a myopic, jaundiced perspective of Western scholars**.... My second mission is, of course, to see whether we could emulate some heroic figures in history (7).

On the play *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Uwatt (2002), quotes Rotimi affirming that: "I set out to write a drama of resistance. Resistance to imperialist incursion on a people united in espousal of the cause of the land and king" (28). This declaration can testify the claim that the playwright is correcting a crooked history.

In an attempt to capture the substance of the play, Adeniyi, (In Adeoti; 2007) makes a comparative study of Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and Yerima's *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen.* Both plays re-interpret the historical materials on the same historical figure in order to correct some misrepresentations of African history. The plays, Adeniyi asserts:

> ...assess the past, comment on the present and warn about the future. It is noteworhty that the plays end tragically with the looting of the Benin Kingdom, the massive massacre of Benin people, and the deposition and exile of Oba Ovonramwen. Although they are produced to unravel the inhumanity and cruelty associated with the era of colonialism in African history, they provide insights into the disposition of the imperial West towards Africa. They equally provide warnings against neocolonialism, which is colonialism in native apparel (109).

Nevertheless, Ola Rotimi's characterization of Ovonramwen in the play causes dissatisfaction among crritics like Michael Etherton (1982) and Chris Dunton (1992). Etherton reveals some gaps in the characterization of the Oba that should have been filled by the playwright. After exposing the lacunas, Etherton's study shows that Rotimi's play signifies that "Ovonramwen was the victim of fate (155)". The conclusion is that "Ola Rotimi would appear to be fatalistic, therefore, in his view of history. The colonial biases of history have been replaced by a fatalistic bias: 'this was the way it was bound to happen (155)."

On the other hand, Chris Dunton (1992) describes Rotimi's Ovonramwen as "a totally inflexible entity,.. neurasthenic.. and a statuesque figure" (21/22). Because Rotimi presents him as weak and slow all round; failure among his people and coward in confronting external agressors, Dunton observes that Ovonramwen's characterization is a faulty depiction of tragic hero who is supposed to be noble by birth and by conduct; passionate, committed and strong; good-natured but with a flaw that ruins him and causes his downfall at the end. But Rotimi's Ovonramwen lacks these traits and he is beset by more than one flaw. These are indeed excellent explorations

that help students understand and appreciate the play much better. Nonetheless, this work pays attention to resistant markers of the play (discussed in chapter three).

Obafemi (2001) explores Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. He examines the playwrights's recourse to Nigerian pre-colonial and colonial history, his dramatic vision of the tragic hero and, finally, his creative vision of the protagonist's fate in society. Obafemi maintains that:

> Rotimi succeeds in appropriating the theatrical and dramatic potential of history to project a tragic vision: the tragic heroism of grand historical figures whose inevitable fall is a result of the flaws in their own character combined with unforseen external forces. The relevance of the struggles of these individuals to our contemporary existence is that their struggles lend insight to our own present struggles (107).

Thus, the axiomatic relationship between theatre/drama and history is accentuated in these historical plays to the extent that their seemingness blurs the boundary between reality and fiction. One important thing about the plays is that they resist colonial domination in the language used, the culture portrayed and the theatricals. Therefore, this study explores these elements as forms of cultural resistance put up by postcolonial playwrights in their postcolonial theatre.

2.3. On Postcolonial Resistance

This can be regarded as any critical perspective or radical movement against a certain social order characterized by probing and protesting (against) the idealisations and rationalisations that justify the order. Therefore, "postcolonial resistance" in theatre is definitely an offshoot of protest literature which is both written and enacted, always by revolutionary writers. By way of

clarification, protest literature generally voice out varying degrees of resistance, rage and a hint of resolve. Protest literature is defined broadly by John Stauffer:

> …to mean the use of language to transform the self and change society. By language I refer not only to words, but to visual art, music and film. Protest literature functions as a catalyst, guide, or mirror of social change. It not only critique some aspects of society, but suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, a solution to society's ills (cited in Trodd, 2006:xii).

The definition above tells us that protest literature awakes the public to injustices, disturbing and frustrating events, and corrupt policies or situations. Similarly, In his essay, *Protest Premise in Drama and Theatre of Africa: a Spotlight on Cultural Nationalism,* Binebai (2003) disclosed that:

> In literature, protest is registered in book banning, culture jamming and misrepresentation or under representation of a people. Protest is therefore conceived as any human struggle that reclaims space from oppressors. It also means asserting right to life and forms of natural freedom that are denied (2:2).

Also, in the words of Richard Wright (1945), "All literature is protest, you cannot name a single literary work that isn't protest"(1). This can be true to African literature as in the words of Saint Gbilekaa (2006) that "This (African) literature was created as a form of revolt and protest against doctrinal colonial literary heritage that was introduced by the whites (3)".

It is in this context that African literature today is used as a political and social weapon wielded by the African artists to effect social changes. The foregoing signifies that literature or art, in general, can be used as a force that instigates resistance or revolution.

However, the champions of "Art for Art's Sake**"** criticise the issue of using 'art' to instigate or effect any social changes. This is what they interpret as the use of politics in literature or rather

judging literature by social, political or moral standards. In his *Drama and Politics in Nigeria,* Umukoro (1994), summarised the view thus:

> Their argument is that imaginative literature is self – sufficient; its principles of order, its claim to truth and its values are bounded by the confines of the literary work itself; and that the end of the work is not to teach, not even to please, but simply to exist and to be beautiful. Therefore, it should not be judged by social, political, moral or other non-aesthetic standards (9).

However, Mao Tse-Tung (1967), argued that, in the world today, all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics (25).

Furthermore, some scholars stress the element of fictionality and entertainment in Literature. They argue that literature is meant to entertain only through fantasy. "But, entertainment in literature" continues Umukoro (1994), "is not an end but a means for the writer to explore the realities of the human condition' (8). Therefore, the assumption of aestheticism, fictionality and entertainment as the crux of literature is arguably not applicable in Africa, where literature is generally judged by non-aesthetic standards. Thus, Umukoru claims that "politics is more than suitable subject for literature, it is *sine quanon* of the writer"(8). In like manner, Taiwo (1968), maintained while explaining the creed of Negritude writers that:

> They believe that any writing worthy of attention of Africans should be irrevocably committed to the cause of African liberation, both political and cultural. They consider that in the present African context, any work of art should be judged not on its intrinsic value but by the contributions it makes towards the restoration of the dignity of the Africans (43)

In the same vein, Achebe (1975), declared that:

> It is clear to me that an African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like the absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (78).

Furthermore, the Kenyan dramatist, novelist and radical critic, Ngugi, says that "all artists, all writers are in politics" (1981:14). And, Soyinka in 1967 proclaimed that "the artist has always functioned as the interpreter and conscience of his society" (Gbilekaa, 2006:9). In his paper "*Theatre and Politics in Nigeria*", presented at the 9th convention of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists, MD Daily Times of Nigeria Plc, Chief Tola Adeniyi, sided with Soyinka as follows:

> Soyinka, in fact, insisted that the relevance of the artist in this milieu is measured by how acutely he mirrors the reality of his society and points the way forward to higher ideals and more humane alternatives. So, whether as traditionalists, modernists, radicals, reactionaries or revolutionaries, all artists are in politics (Gbilekaa, 2006:IV).

The preceding argument is encapsulated in the question; "should art (literature) educate, inform, organise, influence, incite to action, or should it simply be an object of pleasure (Boal, 2008:2)"? Mao Tse-Tung (1980), answered this mind-boggling question that, art can stir the people into action, awaken them and impel them to unite, to carry on an organised struggle through which the masses will take their destiny in their own hands (12).

After all, now resistance is understood as a near-violent or opposing move in oder to change a certain idealisation. But, Ashcroft (2001) raises a question: "can one resist without violence? Can one even resist without obviously opposing? The answer to this is obviously 'yes!' Ghandhi's 'passive resistance' to the British Raj is a famous and effective example" (20). Bearing this in

mind, this study examines such elements of passive resistance in post-colonial plays of Ahmed Yerima (*Attahiru*) and Ola Rotimi (*Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*).

Owing to the above, this work explores the interpolation of language, dramaturgicals and how interpolating history disrupts and blurs the boundary between literature and history. This is because, according to Ashcroft (2001):

> the most fascinating feature of postcolonial societies is a 'resistance' that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in a different way, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being (20).

2.4. On Resistibility of Theatre

Mao (1967) contends that an individual can not fight the forces of oppression alone and succeed. And, theatre, being a live art and a rehearsal for revolution, spreads the gospel of change that can not be achieved by an individual. Similarly, Soyinka once said, "…theatre is perhaps the most revolutionary art form known to man" (Brown, 1980:51). This brings about the main thesis of the work that "Theatre serves as a platform of Postcolonial Resistance. Examining Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*" would vindicate the proposition. To wit, the concern of this work is to examine the two historical plays in order to find out whether theatre reconstructs history and gives voice to the marginalized.

Because of the theatrical use of non-verbal devices combined with bold physical acts of protest, disobedience and defiance, theatre could become a powerful medium for asserting dissent. In other words, the multiplicity of communicative modes utilised by theatrical performance more than merely the use of language, as in other genres, can make Theatre more expressive and symbolic. These modes include actions and gestures, aesthetic and visual codes of

communication such as metaphor and symbolism, aural modes beyond the linguistic, such as musical and tonal. These forms of communication make the most of all the senses, and in turn achieve transmission of meaning through effective, emotional and experiential learning as well as cognitive understanding. Therefore, theatrical performance enables resistance to hegemonic discourse by facilitating among subordinated groups,"the collective human capacity for self production, self determination and the creation of new values" (Shohat & Stam, 1995:15).

Furthermore, theatre, from Greek to modern times, has always reflected the socio–political, cultural, economic, philosophical, religious and political beliefs of man. However, over the years, the term has been misconstrued as a mere place we go for watching a kind of fantasy about human activities in specially organised way. Indeed, this is in consonance with the Greek's derivation of "Theatre" from "Theatron" which means a "seeing-place", (Crow, 1983:2). But after some years, theatre comes to belong not only to the world of creativity but measurably to the world of revolution, resistance or protest. This is because, theatre uses various expressive forms of a given society to provide solutions to antagonizing social problems.

In the dawn of 20th century, the famous German playwright and theatre practitioner, Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), had used theatre to arouse man's consciousness to the peril surrounding his existence. Bertolt began by attacking the ideological stance of bourgeois theatre of Aristotle, which coaxed audience into sympathising with the tragic hero. To him Aristotelian theatre reflected an ideological belief that portrayed both man and the world as static and unchangeable. He advocated that reality is dynamic process produced by men and can be changed by men. Therefore, if theatre has to serve its function it must not reflect a static society and reality, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. He

wanted his audience to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the Theatre and effect change in the world outside. Brecht observed: "The audience in the epic theatre says:

> I wouldn't have thought that- people shouldn't do things like that- that's extremely odd, almost unbelievable.- This has to stop.- this person's suffering shocks me, because there might be a way out for him.- This is great art: nothing in it is self-evident. I laugh over the weeping, weep over the laughing (Weiss, 1968:680).

This observation explains that the objective of any theatre is to stimulate the epic spectator into thinking through a process of questions and answers and by implication, stirring the desire and clamoring for change.

Back in the 19th century, the famous Norwegian playwright and theatre director, Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), asserted that theatre "...should be a source of insight, a creator of discussion, a *convey-or* of ideas, something more than an entertainment...(1)." This statement gives the theatre practitioner a newer vision of his role rather than a mere clown of no ambition and purpose. He is expected to promote, revolutionise and facilitate change by unveiling the tyrannical antics of the oppressors. In essence, Boal (1979), also asserted that theatre "classifies concepts, reveals truth, exposes contradiction and proposes transformation... (61)." This can be an elucidation of the revolutionary function of Theatre as against its entertaining one. Holistically, Theatre is a preparatory and training ground for revolution as was also cited by Boal (1979); "…theatre is not a revolution itself, but it is a rehearsal for revolution...(122)"

Brown (1980), claimed that, Theatre:

> Would seem to be the better bet as a medium for protest. Of its very nature, it is a communal experience and has to do with a corporate rather than an individual response. It will move more people more quickly (50).

Therefore, Theatre should not only serve human's purpose of entertainment but should also be a weapon in the hands of the oppressed, that should be wielded as a powerful instrument for revolution to achieve liberation. Aptly put, "theatre is a weapon…. a weapon for liberation (Boal 1979:1x)". Therefore, as in Boal's theory of "theatre for development", it begets critical reflection, reawakens the sleepy man into concrete determination of moving the wheel of change. Theatre is a vital tool for political education, it also reveals and deals with political events in the society.

Boal (ibid) maintains that theatre was duly utilised in the political activities of the Greeks right from the 5th Century B.C. He strictly agrees to changing the people (spectators) into active beings rather than passive spectators who allow the characters to act and think for them. And, this is contrary to what Aristotle proposes in his *Poetics* in which, the spectators delegate powers to the dramatic characters who act and think for them, thereby evoking an emotional situation as "Catharsis". Boal refers to catharsis situation as theory of intimidation. Hence, In Boal's postulation, theatre should awake critical consciousness that would bring about changing people's perception for transfer of power which is against Aristotle's theory. The spectator, according to Boal, "should assume the protagonist role, change the dramatic action, try out solution and discuss plans for change rather than erroneously accepting their plights as divinely ordained" (122). This insinuates that theatre is a medium for a successful war of liberation which involves all and sundry and makes them aware of the circumstances around them. Thus, he defines theatre as a "rehearsal for revolution".

Furthermore, Boal continually sees art as people oriented and as such, the change sought for is dependent on the collective struggle and immense desire of the same people who can actualize

the change. He stresses on “collective struggle” by pointing out that theatre should not be a divided wall that is belonging to a social class alone. He poses that “...to transform the world is not the privilege of some few men, but the right of every man...”(9). This assertion stipulates that theatre is a social art that involves every social stratum. It also shows that freedom is not a divine gift but, it is always acquired through collective effort. Hence, Boal highlights that "change is not acquired through divination but can be actualized by man...(and) theatre is a weapon... and it is only people who should wield it" (9).

2.5. Theatre and Postcolonial Resistance in Africa

Theatrical performances in Africa today are, undoubtedly, aimed at liberating the masses through cultural resistance, asserting the African identity and legitimating African nationalism. To begin with, In her paper, ″Acting Protest: Theatre of Resistance in Apartheid South Africa", Moore (2010), explained how radical South African freedom fighters turn their Theatre into a weapon against the tyrannical apartheid system to liberate the masses. She said:

> in the context of South African Apartheid, amid segregation laws, propound state violence and suppression of all opposition, black communities and their allies” began to turn theatre as a necessary and effective forum for political resistance (8).

Throughout the history of apartheid in South Africa, “cultural struggle", observed Horn (1996), "has always formed an integral part of efforts of the oppressed in the fight for democracy and national liberation" (116), (Moore, 8). Moreover, theatre, in particular, was considered its most powerful vehicle and, to some extent, taking the place of open dissent during apartheid’s darkest years (Blumberg & Walder 1999:5).“As a form of political protest, resistant theatre reflects and responds appropriately to the socio-political conditions of its context" (Moore, 9).

This way, South African protest theatre addresses a wide range of issues related to apartheid, examines their nature and consequences and explores political and ideological alternatives. Unfortunately, many producers, playwrights and actors of this protest theatre have been repeatedly detained, arrested, exiled, intimidated and harassed. Moore (11), cited the following examples: the author of “Shanti”, "one of the most influential resistant plays of the period, was thrown infront of a train before the first night of performance, while cast members were arrested and charged with treason under the Terrorism Act" (Orkin 1991:1-2).

Furthermore, Gibson Kante, responsible for the creation of a distinctly Black Popular Theatre, was arrested and detained while trying to film his play “*How long*” (Wakashe, 41), while Black Consciousness playwright, Reverend Julius Magina, increasingly popular in the townships from 1976 on, was harassed, detained, and put under house arrest (Orkin, 214). In 1975, along with political Black Consciousness Organisations, the People’s Experimental Theatre (PET) and the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) were put on trial for “inflammatory, provocative, anti-white, racialistic, subversive and, or revolutionary” activities (Solberg, 17). Brustein (1965), captured this situation; "The rebel dramatist... pays for his revolt by being rejected in turn. The modern dramatist spends much of his creative life in exile- a fugitive, outcast, or outlaw" (10).

But this maltreatment and ill-treatment never deter the well-meaning dramatists and, instead, they get more courage and more nationalistic fervour to carry on. This is vividly seen in Ngugi Wathiongo who was firstly detained in 1977. Ngugi (1981), wrote; “...detained simply because I had written the truth about certain aspect of Keyan life?” (188). But Ngugi Continues his attack by rejecting the values of the country’s regime and the elite in his powerful play “*I will Marry When I Want”*. And even while in detention, between 31st December 1977 and 12th December

1978, Ngugi kept himself busy by writing an account of his experience; using toilet paper to pin down notes that would later become his prison memoirs; "*Detained: A writer's Prison Diary"*. He also wrote, still in prison, his novel: *Devil on the Cross.*

Hubert Ogunde's theatre, opens a new phase in the history of Nigerian **t**heatre in its using plays to comment on the political and social situations in the country. *Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba Think)*, for example, was a serious political play which severely criticises the then Nigerian government to the extent that the play was consequently banned from being staged.

Immediately after independence, a new form of theatre in Nigeria with a more revolutionary vision emerges. The playwrights of this phase are "exotic, profound and 'esoteric" with self-conscious, individual, tragic and metaphysical vision"(Obafemi, 2001:67–68). Departing from the "celebratory communally oriented and robust theatre" of Ogunde, Wole Soyinka and Clark, the second phase shinning figures, become, in the words of J. C. de Graft;

> Fundamentally individualists with a fierce pride in their individual effort, their unique ideas, their artistic integrity, concerned at the start of their writing career with aesthetics and entertainment rather than with instruction (African Literature Today, no. 8, 1976:17).

Furthermore, a fresh radical theatre of protest appears in 1970s. The theatre has been described as 'radical, revolutionary, and progressive', capable of providing the "panacea for Nigeria's political and economic problems", (Umukoro, 21). This radicalism is seen in the plays whose content shows a lot of agitation and protest against the status quo. They make sarcastic and biting comments on the socio-political and economic systems of the country. Prominent figures in this phase are Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde, Tess Onwueme, Ahmed Yerima and a host of other current Nigerian playwrights. Obafemi (2001), observed that:

> Their work deals, urgently, with contemporary social problems in Nigeria with the aim of raising mass awareness of a positive revolutionary alternative to the present decadence. … through their markedly different approaches, (they) advocate social revolution as the only way out of the country's present social incoherence. …they are all committed to the need to use theatre as a weapon for generating social change in the country (168).

Osofisan, in particular, claims that the younger generation of writers professes radical, ideological inclination in their art and they "sow regenerative seeds in the community's flesh (171)". They also employ laconic language, music and dance, democratized styles and direct communication with the audience to express their political statements, and to achieve a pleasing aesthetic standard. Thus, Obafemi (2001), commented that:

> In order to make drama shape people's awareness and furnish society with the right perspective, these dramatists have moved away from the sophistication of the linguistic apparatus used by Soyinka which may hinder understanding and limit his audience. For theatre to appeal to the masses, it has to do away with obscurity (170).

Now, in a word, the difference between Soyinka et al's theatre and their successors is that, Soyinkas satirizes the nation's social vices without providing solutions to them. Thus, "the tragic world view which the first generation Nigerian "literary theatre" painted was somewhat static and bizarre" (Gbilekaa, 1977:3). The weak, the exploited and the downtrodden masses are portrayed as being incapable of will and action to effect a change in their society.

On the other hand, Osofisan and others look at the problems of hunger, poverty and starvation, then, awaken the masses to the injustices, urge and inject them to take action and systematically plant in them a sense of hope and optimism. Therefore theatre, being a mechanism that "makes and shapes the soul of man", has been a classroom, x-ray room, or laboratory that educates,

protests and “awakens the revolutionary consciousness in the majority group of the society who are oppressed, exploited and deprived of good social living conditions” (Ebong, 1986:72).

The Ogunde Travelling Theatre in Nigeria (1945-60) was contributory in protesting against colonialism and exploitative nature of British imperial power. This can be seen in some of Hubert Ogunde's works like “*Hunger and Strike* (1945), *Worse Than Crime* (1945), *Bread and Butter* (1950) etc.

In *Worse than Crime,* Ogunde shows clearly that, “colonialism in any shape or form is worse than crime” (Clark, 1979). Ogunde, with his nationalistic zeal, kept performing plays that attracted government's attention until finally, his Travelling Theatre was banned in Jos, in 1946 and fined. In precision, Ogunde Travelling Theatre, as observed by Biodun Jeyifo, succeeded to a large extent because it engaged in "a conscious perpetuation of nationalistic cultural assertion in the face of historic and sustained external cultural aggression" (Molomo & Gbilekaa, 2006:22).

Other Nigerian playwrights; Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi and Ahmed Yerima, opt for recreation of history to protest, confront and nullify some historical misrepresentations. In precision, the thesis of this research lies here in examining the recreation of history in theatre to protest and resist historical misrepresentations. This gives rise to postcolonial **t**heatre**,** the theatre that deals with the intricate amalgamation of imported discourses and languages of the colonizer with the indigenous culture and language. It gives a very useful analytic frame for looking at the theatre, dramatic practices and theories of the former colonies. Moreover, it is an attempt by the playwrights of the once colonized countries to shed their marginal position and to move on to the

centre spot. Therefore, the postcolonial dramatists use cultural resistance as the most important tool in their dramatic productions.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

It is generally believed that literary works contain layers or levels of meaning and therefore readers study them, through critical reading, in order to detect the complex meanings. Thus, the critical reading of texts is an act of analysis, interpretation and evaluation. **However**, since readers are different in respects of gender, race, religion and nationality, understanding the meaning of those works in the same way is impossible. Hence, readers eternally see literary texts differently or rather, see different meanings in them. Furthermore, these differences come about because of the varying assumptions, presuppositions, tendencies or attitudes about literature and life that readers bear in mind while reading.

Eventually, these attitudes grow into methods or approaches to reading that further evolve into various schools or trends like Formalism, Structuralism, Postcolonialism and so on. Moreover, the methods themselves are not left undefined or unexplained. "Literary theory tries to shed light (philosophically) on the very methods used in ...readings of...texts" (Klarer, 1999:77). Therefore, literary theory helps in understanding and contextualising literature. Withal, because of the never-ending polical, historical, racial and gender related debates in the analysis of literature, literary theory splits up into various theories. Based on this conception, this research adopts postcolonial theory, one of the theories, to analyse, interpret and evaluate the primary texts of the work (Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi)*.

At a conference organised in New York in May 1991 titled '*Critical Fictions*', Homi K. Bhabha asserted that:

> The term 'Postcolonial' is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonised Third World comes to be framed in the West (in Mongia 1997:1).

Furthermore, Alan Lawson (1992), described postcolonialism as:

> A politically motivated historical – analytical movement (which) engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural, political, pedagogical, discursive and textual domains (Cited in Adeoti, (Ed) 2007:102).

In short, postcolonial theory involves discussions of various cultural effects of colonialism such as slavery, forced migration, suppression, resistance, race, gender and place. Therefore, postcolonialism, as Bressler (1999) observes, "is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries" (265). It concentrates on writings from colonized cultures in Africa, South America, New Zealand, Australia and other places that were once colonized culturally, politically and philosophically, by European powers. Therefore, postcolonial theory "emerges from the inability of European theory to deal with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing" (Ashcroft et al, 1989:11).

Being a critical ideology like other postmodern approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism has acquired various interpretations. In the first place, critics disagree on whether the term should be used with or without hyphen: "post-colonial" or "postcolonial". To resolve the issue, the critics suggest that the hyphenated one (post-colonialism) marks a historical period as is suggested by phrases like 'after colonialism', 'after independence' and 'after the end of the

empire'. On the other hand, the un-hyphenated (postcolonialism), is defined to mean all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of the colonization to the present. On the more general view of the critics on these two differing meanings, Mukherjee (1996), observed:

> Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of the empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory conceept particularly for the students of literature outside Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location (3-4).

Therefore, the interpretation is that 'Post-colonialism' marks the end of Colonialism by giving the indigenous people their political and cultural freedom so that they take their place and gain independence by overcoming political and cultural imperialism.

By way of explanation, **Colonialism,** the precursor of the Postcolonial Literature, is the Imperialists' interference in Africa's and The Orient's social relations, political arrangements and economic set-up that denigrated the natives' cultures, political systems and languages. In Africa, especially, this terminated the sovereignty of traditional African monarchies in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as portrayed in Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. Here, the concept of **"mperialism"** is used almost interchangeably with "Colonialism" because of their seemingness in meaning. However, there is a slight difference between the two. Imperialism is a situation whereby "one nation has extended its domination over one or several neighbouring nations" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Helen, 1998: 122). In a more precise attempt, Said (1993), defined imperialism as a "practice, theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; (whereas) "colonialism",

which is always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (8). Thus, 'postcolonialism is about understanding Imperialism'.

Accordingly, colonialism is only one form of the ideology of imperialism, and specifically, it concerns the settlement of one group of people in a new location. Ashish Nandy (1983) states two forms of colonization: (a) physical conquest of territories and (b) the colonization of the minds, selves and cultures. While the first mode is violent, the second is that of the rationalists and the liberals who claim to have responsibility of civilizing the uncivilized world. So, the Imperialists' meddle in Africa happened as a result of their view of themselves as civilised, characterised by industrialisation, democracy, relative affluence and similar cultural assumptions. And, by contrast, they regard the "other" world of those unlike themselves as uncivilised, savages, deceitful, irrational, immoral and therefore objectionable. In other words, "they consider and portray African lifestyle as representing simply a deviation from Western norms which were held to possess universal (normal, natural) and absolute validity" (Bergham, 1977:4). Hence, this brings about the concpts of "the rational, superior Self and the irrational, inferior Other". This analysis juxtaposes the Colonized as the binary opposite of the West. In *Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies,* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1990), cited:

> As Marianna Torgovnik notes, terms like "primitive, savage, pre-columbian, tribal, third world, underdeveloped, developing, archaic, traditional, exotic, 'the anthropological record', non-western and other … all take the West as norm and define the rest (Other) as inferior, different, deviant, subordinate and ordinateable" (21).

So, the West intruded on the pretext of civilising Africans, to bring them out of a state of barbarism, to instruct them in the arts of life and to enlighten them. Furthermore, they thought that the colonized nations embraced traditional religions that were repugnant to that of the

colonizers. So it is god's given duty of the colonizers to bring those who went astray to the right path. Because of these so-called reasons, the Europeans colonized and subjugated the Orients and Africans, especially; imposed their will, eroded the natives' cultures and languages and plundered the natives' wealth. They established their orders, using their culture as the standard for what any culture should be, a practice known as "Euro-centrism". They oppressed and dehumanized the natives. They designated them; 'the Subaltern'. "Subaltern is a British word for someone of inferior military rank, and (etymologically), combined the Latin terms for "under" (sub) and "other" (alter)" (Abrams, & Harpham, 2012:307).

Unfortunately, no such altruism and humanitarianism in the colonialists' activities. The Great Britain, for example, was only compelled by the threats of economic meltdown and political instability at home. That is their reason for reaching out to Africa for market. In their *Europe: 1783-1914*, Simpson and Jones (2000), quoted Cecil Rhode, explaining Britain's need to conquer colonies:

> In order to save the forty million inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, our colonial statesmen must acquire new lands for settling surplus population of this country, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialist (237).

Moreover, their ‘eurocentric' behaviour is also present in the assumptions and practices of Christianity. Initially, the Christendom, owing to a Christian faith, regards black skin as a symbol of hell, ugliness, night, bad, evil and Satan. According to Hill, et al:

> the Calvinists (The Puritans) insist that Africans represent evil and are "cast among the non-elect" and for this they are "ideal subjects for enslavement". They also insisted that Africans were really offspring of Satan who was himself a black man, and the black skin

> was the mark for certain old testament curses (cited in Olatunji, 2010:130).

Hence, "The colour of a person was believed to be nothing less than the outward expression of his character and race" (Bergham, 1977:4). "In short, …a dark skin was (then) the emanation of 'black' and hence satanic soul" (Bergham, 5). Accordingly, Aime Cessaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972), concluded that:

> The chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations: Christianity = civilisation, paganism = savagery, from which there could not but ensure abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the yellow peoples and the negroes (2).

Also, the colonialist literature by Western writers residing in the colonized areas or at home, which sets out "to justify the conquest, occupation and destruction of non-western societies", is also another blatant attempt to malign Africans. Works like *Robinson Cruesoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe, *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900) by Joseph Conrad and *Mister Johnson* (1939) by Joyce Cary are examples of such debasing literature.

Clearly, the whites regard Africans as mere savages, sub-humans and culturally inferior. Ogude (1988), in an essay titled "*Olaudah Equiano*", quoted America's third president, Thomas Jefferson:

> …who in his moments of revolutionary zeal proclaimed that all men were born equal, (and) was later in his "notes on the state of Virginia" (1787) to confirm the suspicion that "the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in endowments both of body and mind (Ogunbiyi (ed), 1988:3).

David Hulme (1952), a Britsh Professor of Development Studies at The University of Manchester, expresses his perverted view on Africans. He says:

> I'm apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the white. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation … no ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no science (Okoh, 2008:13).

Eventually, they jettison their pretended civilising mission and embark on, through Colonialism, exploiting the continent, brutalising, de-civilising and subjugating the helpless Africans. Colonialism, being the highest stage of imperialism, creates some economic, political and social tensions, confusions and contradictions through physical and cultural or rather ideological conquest of the continent. It is this Colonialism, as Mahmud Lawal (2000), put it, that occasioned:

> resistant movements or traditional nationalism" which were the early efforts of the Africans, mostly organised under their local leaders to resist the imposition of European rule over them…".This resulted in many violent clashes between the local communities and the colonial forces. The resultant violent clashes of these resistant movements are what come to be referred to, in some academic circles, as the "colonial wars" (Olofin, (ed), 2000: 15).

Furthermore, the colonizers used myths, history, language and literature as powerful tools in the process of colonization. Therefore, Western historians-cum-explorers, marginalized Africa through various misrepresentations in history and literature, especially. Thus, "imperial and colonial histories have become the most widely discussed and contested areas in post-colonial studies" (Quayson, 2000:51). Silenieks also notes how the European historians "have either distorted accounts of the past, or even worse, deliberately neglected the history of the black race as essentially unworthy of the historical interest" (In Jones, 1980:162). This is evident in a repulsive statement of a renowned Regius Professor of History at Oxford, Hugh Trevor Roper, 1963, who denied the existence of African history when he said:

> Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present, there is none; there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness … and darkness is not a subject of history (Okoh, 2008:13).

It was against this self-serving rationalisation that Postcolonial Theorists and Practitioners start depicting colonialism for what it truly is; recounting the historical potency of the once-colonized black and other post-colonial cultures; celebrating their history and culture as against the Eurocentric description of the universality and centrality of Western culture and history; combatting and interrogating, resisting and repudiating the colonialists' philosophy, and finally fighting against colonialism by demanding for cultural, ideological and political equality. In a nutshell, postcolonial writers and theorists redefine and restructure politics, identity, gender, history, ethnicity, culture, literature, education and psychology of the former European colonies. This urge began in the wake of political independence sought by Third World countries in Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, etc), Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and the Caribbean (Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana, etc). The Postcolonial theorists include big names like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Charkravarthy Spivak, Aime Cesaire and so on.

Frantz Fanon (1925 - 1961) is an important figure in the discussion of colonial resistance. Fanon, the pace-setter and author of some polemical books in the field; *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), *A Dying Colonialism* (1959) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), is influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre and Aime Cesaire. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon examined the main psychological effect of Colonialism. According to Fanon, the colonizers paralyse the natives' consciousness and insert their ideology into the consciousness of the colonized with an aim to justify their occupation of the natives' land. This way, the Natives are easily forced to believe in the superiority of the West against their so-called inferiority.

Since, according to Cesaire (1972), our "societies (are) drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religion smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed and the extraordinary possibilities wiped out" (21-22), Fanon (1967) launched "a search for nativism" and "the recovery of past" through the celebration of the native values and traditions (10).

Edward Said (1935 - 2003), the founder of postcolonial theory, wrote *Orientalism* In 1978. Said defines Orientalism as "Western style for dominating, restructuring having authority over Orient" (3). In a nutshell, Said's Orientalism analyzes the historical and ideological processes whereby false images and myths of Middle Eastern, African and Asian cultures are unjustly constructed in various Western discourses. Loomba (1998) opines that "Said argues that the representation of the Orient in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its "others" (44).

Homi K. Bhabha (1949 -), in his edited books; *Nation and Narration* and *Location of Culture* (1990), theorises Postcolonial discourse and develops some key concepts that describe ways in which colonized people resist the power of the colonizer. The terms include Hybridity, Mimicry, Difference and Ambivalence.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942 -) becomes famous mostly through her essay; *Can the Subaltern Speak?* This female theorist exposes the status of the Indian woman and therefore contributes to both Feminism and Subaltern studies.

Furthermore, Nationalists, prose writers, poets and playwrights all engage in the same struggle. The list of such prose writers include. Thomas Mofolo, Chinua Achebe, Mungo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Camara Laye and so on. Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima and a host of

others populate the list of the playwights. These intellectuals engage in unearthing the rich history, culture, philosophy, poetry and dignity of Africa that the colonialists had wantonly entombed and destroyed.

Hence, exploring history in African dramatic works is seen by David Kerr, ‘as a means of asserting the African identity and legitimating African nationalism”. Ngugi's *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi,* for example, is a play that expresses the selfless contribution of Kimathi to the general liberation of his people from the colonial rulers. It also describes how he was tortured, tested and even hired by the same colonial masters in order to aid their perpetration, yet he refused to be used as a weapon against his people. At the end of the play, Kimathi was sentenced to death by the colonial rulers. Immaculate Kizza (2001), looking at the antecedent of the play, opined that "the play was written in response to 1974 play by Kenneth Watene, which characterised Kimathi, the leader of the Mau-Mau uprising, as a crazed and brutal paranoiac" (95).

Similarly, Umokoro (1995), opined that “Ola Rotimi’s *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* are devoted to the examination of our pre-colonial and colonial past as a way of reclaiming indigenous histories and cultures” (9). *Kurunmi* recreates the intense struggles and power politics of the second half of the nineteenth century which culminated in the Ijaye war of 1860’s. Also, In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, he narrates the story of European scramble for Africa, based on the British expedition which brought about the Benin massacre in 1897. Additionally, in Femi Osofisan’s *Moruntodun,* we see a recreation of Moremi Myth to suit the exigencies of contemporary Post-colonial society. Osofisan deploys the energy of the past to defeat the forces of exploitation, oppression and injustice of the present society. In *Tegoni,* an adaptation of *Sophocles’ Antigone,* Osofisan twists history to serve as his artistic and post colonial vision. He

shows how, even in the past, the excess of power did not go unchallenged. These and a host of other historical plays enable the playwrights to correct acute biases of colonial history.

Hence, African playwrights today are modern nationalists who write and enact to restore the honour, dignity and identity of the black race, to reconstruct the defamed historical heroes and to set the records straight. In addition, as Knipp (1980), put it, the playwrights “write to create a useable past, to relate and interpret their culture and its past in their own subjective confession, and define their own relationship to it” (42).

Similarly, the plays at the centre of this study: Ahmed Yerima’s *Attahiru*, and Ola Rotimi’s *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, are very much frontal attacks on colonialism. They are indeed good examples of how postcolonial plays rehabilitate historical figures through post-colonial reconstruction of history and critical efforts to encounter the eurocentric images and impressions of the Sokoto Caliphate and Benin Kingdom respectively. These concerns are central to the thesis of this research and shall therefore be the recurring themes in the following chapters.

2.7. Key Concepts

Hegemony: According to Ashcroft et al (1998), "...hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all" (116). Therefore, Hegemony is a sort of domination exerted not by force, but by a subtle and inclusive power over the economy, education and the media, by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and therefore comes to be taken for granted. "Thus, the Postcolonial literature exposes Western hegemonny and the construction of the colonial subject" (Widdowson, 89).

Ambivalence: The term 'ambivalence' was first used in psychology to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. Adapted by Homi Bhabha in postcolonial discourse, ambivalence describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

Bhabha (1994) describes **Mimicry** "as one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (35). This is because, the term describes how colonizers encourage the colonized to "mimic" them by adopting their cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values. And finally, the result is never a simple reproduction of these traits. Rather, it results in a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because, the mimic men are not slavish. They also have power to menace the colonizers. Bhabha thinks that by virtue of their expertise in the language of the colonizer (English language in particular), they become the source of anti-colonial resistance. Therefore, "mimicry", Leela (1999) says, "inaugurates the process of anti-colonial self-differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation (150).

The term **'Hybridity'**, "commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization... Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc." (Ashcroft et al, 118). According to Bhabha, hybridity describes the political and cultural interdependence between the colonizer and the colonized. Because of their understanding, through their "hybrid status and knowledge", of both European and indigenous traditions, the postcolonial writers and critics analyse the West easily as insiders as well as outsiders. Furthermore, the Postcolonial writers hybridize language, culture, politics and techniques of writing, in order to have voice of their own.

Cultural Resistance: Stephen Duncombe observes (in his *Cultural Resistance Reader,* 2002) that "cultural resistance is used to describe culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure" (5). Hence, cultural resistance offers a sort of "free space" for developing ideas and practices. The freedom from the limits and constraints of the dominant Western culture gives ample scope for experiments with new ways that help in developing tools and resources for resistance. Transforming or decolonizing the imperial culture itself is a source of cultural resistance or is an attempt to subvert the colonial strategies that try to erase the native culture.

In postcolonial theory, therefore, cultural resistance is affected by the process of hybridization. The colonized carefully reshape and adapt the tools of the masters to dismantle the master's own voice or power. Because of its potential to actively involve a wide range of physical, emotional and imaginative resources, theatre is one such powerful cultural tool of the master. It brings together many facets of cultural creativity; socio-political, religious, ritualistic, mythological and story-telling; dance, music, satire, mimicry, role-playing and the festive celebration of a community.

In other words, cultural resistance can be expressed through narrative discourses like myths and tales, rituals and ceremonies. Therefore, resistance can be demystified as a practice of everyday life. Dramatization of these cultural practices of everyday life finds expression in postcolonial theatre. In their method, the postcolonial dramatists domesticate the techniques of Western dramaturgy. Their incorporation of native forms is in fact a part of this resistance to dominant forms. The by-product of this incorporation is a syncretic theatre which can be defined as those theatrical products which result from the interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic

tradition and the indigenous performance forms of postcolonial culture. Finally, the narratives of postcolonial playwrights are strongly anchored in the native culture.

Similarly, cultural resistance to Western tradition can be observed in the choice of language. The choice is often a political one. As Gilbert and Tompkins observe in their *Postcolonial Drama: Theory, Practice and Politics:* "when a playwright chooses an indigenous language over English, s/he refuses to submit to the dominance of the imposed standard language and to subscribe to the 'realty' it sustains" (169).

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter has so far reviewed the available scholarship on the primary texts (*Attahiru* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*), discussed postcolonial resistance, resistibility of theatre and African theatre of postcolonial resistance. To provide a framework for the work, Postcolonial theory has been called into play. That the theory seeks to understand the political, social, cultural, and psychological operations of colonialist ideologies; and that the primary texts of this work reject the colonialist ideology and reclaim African precolonial past, make the theory suitable for the work. Thus, the theory, as the analytical framework, key figures and key concepts of the theory and the argument of this work in relation to the theory, have also been discussed in the chapter. Now, what follows, in the next chapter, is the postcolonial analysis of the primary texts.

CHAPTER THREE

POST-COLONIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY TEXT

3.1. *ATTAHIRU*: Plot Summary

Attahiru is a play that re-enacts the history of the twelfth or last Caliph, Attahiru I, of the Sokoto Caliphate in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria. The play dramatizes the clash between the imperial, colonialists' ideology under Lugard and the patriotically Islamic fervour that reigned the Caliphate, which resulted in the heroic death of the Caliph and hundreds of his followers at the battle of Burmi. It is at the height of the scramble of Africa and so, the Great Britain is eager to take control of the Caliphate before France as they are fast approaching through Niger. Therefore, Lugard speeds up and extends his encroachment to Sokoto by, first, sending a 'so-called' friendship letter that asks the Caliph to befriend, whether desired or not, the European 'infidel'. The Caliph, after consultations with the Sokoto warriors, chooses to go to war with Lugard. However, this history is much repudiated by some prejudiced historians (*see* Balogun, 2000) and, as a result, they eclipse this shining and fearless resistance to colonialism by the Northerners in pre-colonial Nigeria.

Hence, this chapter critiques the play, *Attahiru*, in order to assess the extent to which the play re-constructs the distorted images of the precolonial monarch; whether it resists such a hegemonic and biased presentation of history; whether its theatrical performance is a corrective attempt to straighten the crooked and distorted history and that it achieves the set goal by assuming the same veracity or credibility as history.

3.2. The Historical Account

Historically, when Sir Fredrick Lugard became the chief agent of the British colonial government in colonial Nigeria, he thought it good to conquer the northern region in good time.

In accordance with some commercial treaties of 1885, allegedly secured from the then Sultan of Sokoto and the Emir of Gwandu by National African Company, later the Royal Niger company, Sir Fredrick Lugard proclaimed at Lokoja on 1st January, 1900 that, the administrations of the territories of the royal Niger company, had henceforth become the responsibility of the British government of which he was a representative. Tibenderana (1988), observed that:

> Because of conflicting interpretations of the treaty, relation between Sokoto and Gwandu on the one hand and the royal Niger company on the other became strained with the result that by the close of the nineteenth century, Europeans as a whole had come to be hated and mistrusted throughout Sokoto because of their apparent political designs within the area (4).

Furthermore, on the eve of the battle of Burmi, Lord Lugard, being the high commissioner, saw fit to safeguard the frontiers of the northern Nigeria. He said that this was necessary "for this country is close to the country of the French and we are responsible for keeping peace and good order on our frontiers" (Lugard, 21 March 1903, Report No. 406). Thus Lugard sent a trusted messenger to take his salutation to the Sultan of Sokoto and to remind him about the promises, made by the company. But his trick didn't work well, because, Caliph Attahiru, being an unflinching Muslim and a patriot, turned a deaf ear to the friendship invitations and finally declared that "the only relationship that can exist between a believer and an infidel is...war! "(*Attahiru*, 33). This declaration caused all forms of resistance and set backs to the British colonial officers, all over the caliphate. The Caliph's gesture of refusal was a sheer resistance or revolt against cultural colonization in defense of the native culture.

On 15th march, 1903, the British army launched war on Sokoto Caliphate and was successful as they got the Caliph on the run. He left on Hijrah to the East for the fear of the lives of women and children. Also, in the words of Yerima (2003):

> He did not want the British to rule Sokoto over him. (And that) he did not want a situation where he would be Sultan only in name- a stooge, stripped of his powers as a spiritual and temporal leader" (187).

After his departure, Lugard gave an addresss to the emir-elect and other leading officials of the disbanded Sokoto government. Lugard asserted that:

> Every sultan and emir and the principal officers of state will be appointed by the high commissioner throughout all this country. The high commissioner will be guided by the usual laws of succession and the wishes of people and chiefs, but will set them aside if he desires for good cause to do so. The emirs and chiefs who are appointed will rule over the people as of old time and take such taxes as are approved by the high commissioner, but they will obey the laws of the governor and will act in accordance with the advice of the resident....The government will, in future, hold the rights in land which the Fulani took by conquest from the people, and if government requires land it will take it for any purpose. The government holds the right of taxation, and will tell the emirs and chiefs what taxes they may levy, and what part of them must be paid to government. The government will have the right to all minerals, but the people may dig for iron and work it subject to the approval of the high commissioner, and may take salt and other minerals subject to any excise imposed by law. Traders will not be taxed by chiefs, but only by government. The coinage of the British will be accepted as legal tender, and a rate of exchange for cowries fixed, in consultation with chiefs, and the will enforce it (Cited in Tibenderana, 265- appendix II).

This speech indicates a hegemonic, imperial and Eurocentric desire of the colonizers to replace the practices and beliefs of the native culture with their own values, governance, laws and belief.

In no time, there was, like a wildfire, a widespread resistance and discontent over this dictatorship and people from every nook and cranny of the Caliphate decided to join the Caliph on the run. His followers trooped out from Kontagora, Bida, Keffi, Zaria, Kano Katsina, Misau, Muri, Jama'are, Gombe, Katagun and Bauchi. This alarmed the British more as the number of the people in coalition with Attahiru grew rapidly. Thus, according to Abba & Shea (1988), the

high commissioner Lord Lugard, resolved that the Sultan at large should be captured by all means to curtail the escalation of the resistance. Therefore, the British flung themselves into manhunt.

3.3. The First Battle of Burmi

"The hunt that led to the first battle of Burmi on 13th May, 1903, was waged on the erroneous belief that the Caliph was at Burmi" (Adeleye, 1977:302). Being a large town with over ten thousand residents, surrounded by strong mud walls built around the whole town with seven gates, Burmi was also circled by a ditch of about two to three feet deep. The British soldiers attacked the town, under Major Plummer's command, but were dispersed and defeated by a shower of arrows.

The success of the Ansar, the residents of Burmi, over the British attracted more people to Burmi, including Caliph Attahiru who had camped at the foot of the famous Bima Hill. The British on the other side gathered more forces to capture the Caliph and to destroy Burmi which was considered as the headquarter of "The Resistance."

3.4. The Second Battle of Burmi

Abba & Shea (1990:19-21), wrote that on 27th July, 1903, the second battle of Burmi broke out. It was gruesome as over 600 people were killed, including the Caliph Attahiru, whose death marked the end of the Sokoto Caliphate. The British won the war because they came with superior weapons against mere swords, cutlasses, arrows and spears wielded by Burmis. However, the fighters of the resistance were psychologically prepared to face the invading British army. This is captured in a poem that was attributed to Caliph Attahiru on the coming of

the Europeans to Hausa land known as "*Wakar Zawan Annasara Kasar Hausa*". In one of the stanzas, Caliph wrote:

> Idan mun samu iko munka tashi:
>
> If we get the chance to migrate
>
> Ka kaimu Madina Nesa ga Annasara
>
> (Oh lord) take us to Madina away from the Christian Europeans.
>
> (Abba & Shea, 48)

3.5. Postcolonial Analysis of *Attahiru*

Yerima's *Attahiru* has been studied by many researchers for sometimes now. Some have interpreted the work as a successful attempt to correct a certain precolonial past, while others established that it counteracts hegemonic histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Africa. Looking at it critically, this work wants to establish that it is also a work that exemplifies postcolonial resistance through its language and enactment of pre-colonial culture. In this chapter, the researcher identifies some cultural rhetoric that signify cultural resistance. Duncombe (2002) put it that, cultural resistance "is used to describe culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social order" (5).

Now, In a simple and down-to earth style, Yerima, in *Attahiru*, "*gives life to the past and to the dead,"* or rather takes history from the written word into the visual images on stage. In effect, the play portrays the conflict between a colonial past and the post-colonial present, between the pre-colonial identity and colonial legacy, and finally, it reveals the "hybrid" situation of the playwright himself who is now searching for his cultural identity prior to colonization. Thus, he

attempts to rediscover a cultural identity obliterated by the hegemonic power structures of colonization.

Moreover, although Yerima selects and organizes the fact, as “every work of art imposes an order, an organization, a unity on its materials” (Wellek & Warren, 1978), the facticity is not marred but, arguably, corrected by the imaginative construction in the work. Therefore, the work is successful, to a greater extent, in portraying a historical colonial resistance in northern Nigeria.

The play begins with the information of the death of Caliph Abdurrahman who is to be succeeded by a prince. Muhammad Attahiru I, being one of the princes, emerges as the new caliph. He ascends the throne during a hard time of colonial domination as he himself confirms this threatening, gloomy and uncertain time: "I am becoming the Caliph at a time when the history of our lives is at a delicate balance. At a time when the white man is determined to upset the peace of our lives" (21).

However, the degree of this tension is dramatically reduced in the opening discussion of the play by Ahmad, Abbas and Yakubu;

> Yakubu: We got over Kano, but when we heard about what the Whiteman did to the people of Zaria, we started to worry about the safety of Sokoto and the Caiph’s untimely death (17).
>
> Ahmad: A thousand curses on his white evil soul. Did you hear what they said he did to Kontagora, Bida and Yola? (17).
>
> Abbas: We can not waste much time my friends. The first shooting gun of the Whiteman spits bullets of death. It talks to soldiers from afar. The princes should not squabble over who should be caliph, there is no time. I heard the Whitemen are marching towards Argungu and Gwandu, already (17).

These minor characters, two beggars and a soldier, provoke laughter or comic relief that eases tension as the events in the play rise to climax. They also represent the major cultural attitudes and impressions of the general public in the north. Although, as Balogun (2000) pointed out, some historians in the Southern part of the country deny the resistance in the north, Ahmad, in the above quotation, disproves the assertion. He showers curses on the white Colonialists and shows, in a sort of alarming cum rhetorical question, the people's disapproval of the Colonialists' wanton physical domination. Yakubu's words establish the same resistant attitude.

Since language is a political medium and an index of the ideology and social class of dramatists, some syntactic structures should be studied. To begin with, looking at the structure of the English used by Yerima to curse the whitemen, there is a tinge of contamination of Standard English, or rather, there is a hybrid mix of standard English and Nigeria English syntax. In Hausa Language, people use the expression "Thousand curses" to damn an extremely abominable or condemnable deed or person. This hybrid construction abounds as in:

- "...and that it is evil in the eye of Annabi Isah Alaihi Salam to... (18).
- "A man who will stand shoulder to shoulder and eyeball to eyeball with the whiteman" (18).
- "...My father Caliph Atiku told me that Allah chooses his Sarkin Musulmi" (21).
- Malam: Salama Alaikum, Caliph: Alaikassalam, malam (39).
- Mai Wurno: Sannu Malam (40).
- Sarkin Kwanni: ...not with us unwrapping our Rawanis for the whitemen to see our bald heads...(47).

Here, Yerima indigenizes words, phrases and local idioms of Hausa language in order to give English language an indigenous flavour. By using a native language and appropriating the colonial one, Yerima makes a fitting linguistic medium to reclaim his precolonial past. In other words, Yerima, a hybrid African, uses a hybrid narrative language, a programmatic strategy to reach the common people by appealing to their sensibility and to subvert the power of the colonial superincumbent language. Moreover, even though English is used as a means of imperial oppression, its transformation has potentially turned it into a tool of resistance.

Furthermore, this fusion of native and Western conventions reflects the playwright's desire to express his own postcolonial identity and heritage. In effect, this is viewed as part of cultural resistance by the colonized people who try to naturalize the Western forms. In this context, Ashcroft (2001) in *Post-colonial Transformation*, observes:

> The most sustained, far-reaching and effective interpretation of Postcolonial resistance has been the 'resistance to absorption', the appropriation and transformation of dominant technologies for the purpose of re-inscribing and representing post-colonial cultural identity (143).

The play, next, moves to the Court where the new Caliph, seated in the courtroom, invites his warriors to deliberate on the situation. The court sitting is a refutation of the previously held views that colonised people do/did not have a culture, political system and history of their own. By staging this pre-contact past, Ahmed Yerima re-establishes a tradition, lays claim to a cultural heritage and recuperates the royal culture of the old Sokoto Caliphate. There in the court, a letter from Lugard, of a so-called friendship, and which also shows how the British eroded the power of the Emirates under the Caliphate, is read by Waziri, thus:

> ...Since the Emirs of Kontagora and Bida have been oppressing the people, engaging in slave trade, attacking traders, organising stealing parties, I have because of these evils of theirs, taken their crowns from them and banished them. (*A quiet murmur is heard among the officers, the Waziri clears his voice and continues*) ... Need I rmind you great Caliph, that though the British Government is willing to work with you, our soldiers have already established British rule over Muslim Lands all over the world. Your co-operation will be highly apppreciateed in these circumstance (sic). (*Clears his voice*) Signed, Sir Frederick D. Lugard (27).

This letter portrays the British false and baseless claims for perpetrating their colonial activities in the Caliphate. Be that as it may, the quiet murmur that goes round among the court officials is a sign of disapproving reactions and deep distrust of the friendship. Further more, the letter, instead of generating diplomatic relationship between the two opposing powers, spoils the cordiality which lingers between the them because, the Caliph and his court officials interpret it as usurpation of Caliph's power. As it appears, the Caliph has to either succumb and become just an advisor to the British officials, or go to war. Yet, the Caliph seeks advice from his court officials. Divided opinions are suggested. Some of them (Marafa) opt for peace, others (Waziri, Madawaki, Sarkin Kwanni) for war, while the majority, (Galadima and Dan Magaji, included) choose emigration from Sokoto before the arrival of the British. Madawaki, being one of those subscribe to the idea of war asserts that:

> ...No matter how well one glorifies a donkey with beautiful apparels of a horse at a durbar, a donkey is still a donkey, and a horse is still a horse. I beg his royal highness to ignore the Whiteman (28) ....The Whiteman is an uninvited guest to our land, he must observe not dictate, he must appreciate, not criticize. Allah picks the caliph not man! (29).

Madawaki, in his point blank statement, expresses the view of the majority that insists upon going to war, to resist the white political and cultural domination. They refuse to be 'stooges' of

the Whites for they fully understand the corrosive nature of such political and cultural domination. And, this is another combative scene that counteracts many historians.

This daring resolution is more vivid in Madawaki's angry reply to Ubandoma. The reply shows the valour of those who opt for war and, if hands were put together, that would usher them into victory. Madawaki asserts that:

> ...The black race makes me want to cry. The Whitemen are only a handful, then how come he is such a big bully, that we all shiver because we all are to blame. We all created the big bully...(30).

Ubandoma, on the other hand, diapproves of the war. He goes against the war when he asks:

> ...But my concern is how prepared are we? How safe is it to dare the Whiteman? ...how prepared are we? We heard how Zaria walls fell and how quickly the Whiteman filled the Kano moat with the bodies and bones of Kano warriors. Sad. We must ponder deeply great one. For it is only in pondering that Allah may reveal the true meaning of all these to us. For now we are like children offended by the threat of a bully (sits) (30).

Similarly Marafa, another court official, at a later meeting, has the same idea in his remark:

> Your highness. If reason can prevail on an issue, why rush to spoil blood? Right now, Sokoto is not ready for war. If Katsina can avert war by talking to Whiteman why not us? (44).

Being a dedicated, honest and patriotic leader, who prefers to die defending his honour, people and political integrity, Attahiru, gallantly and bravely orders Waziri to reply the Whiteman that:

> We did not invite him to interfere with our problems. He has his religion and we have ours. (Rises. The whole court rise). As my predecessor caliph Abdurahman has earlier said, the only relationship that can exist between a believer and an infidel...is war! (33).

The Caliph, at another occasion, declares that:

> You spoke well Sarkin Kwanni. I now decree. As with my earlier letter to the Whiteman, war is our only answer to his threats. We shall meet him, however, to avoid too much danger to the wives and children, outside the walls of the city (47).

According to Yerima (2003), "this daring resistance reflects the first “spirit of nationalism” in Nigeria" (187).

However, the caliph’s choice of action, at this tragic moment, can be interpreted as his “Hamartia”, “error”, mistake of judgement” or tragic flaw” which makes him a tragic hero like Oedipus in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the king* or King Odewale in Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame.* His action moves readers to pity and tear for the catastrophic turn of events. Heedless of all the observations of some court officials regarding their unpreparedness, lack of sophisticated weapons compared to the Whiteman’s and the futility of bloodshed, the Caliph goes on with the preparation for the war.

The powerful character of Attahiru is infused with the maximum level of human traits although, at a time, moves to a higher level. This occurs when Attahiru accepts and embraces death in place of dishonor. He sacrifices his life for what he believes to be just. Therefore, Ahmed Yerima dramatizes the tragic mental set-up of Attahiru, which is, indubitably, an agreeably accurate portrayal of the hero’s praiseworthy hubris and legendary guts to defend the honour and cultural institutions of the Caliphate.

The surrender to this fatalistic death is captured in the caliph's words:

> If indeed, there is a prophecy that must end in shehu’s empire in my reign as caliph, then this is no time to mourn, but a time of gratitude. A time of prayers and great thanks to Allah that I am the chosen one. A time to stand firm, defending the faith, and carrying out the wish of the Almighty. (pause) And what can I say to him, but, Alhamdu lillah! (43).

Meanwhile, Lord Lugard, the high commissioner, decides to attack Sokoto since the caliphate refuses his invitation of friendship. Lugard is eager to take Sokoto of course. When Willcocks, an important officer observes "My major worry is the French. They are moving closer to Sokoto through the north of Katsina" (35).

Lugard, in whose office the discussion takes place, replies:

> I have studied the situation myself. It means that we either fight and take Sokoto now, or the French would cross the Niger and join Sokoto and thereby cutting us off totally. This must never be allowed (35).

All these are overt political statements that are translated in Lugard's long speech delivered on 15th March, 1903, after the departure of the caliph. The real motive of Colonization then is to exploit or siphon off the wealth of the Colonized countries, not that what they claim with regard to Fulani rule. This explains their rush to take over the Caliphate before their rival France does so.

Lamentably, the most unfortunate thing is the betrayal act of prince Muhammad al-Tahiru Aliyu who allies with Lugard at this delicate moment. Muhammad al-Tahiru Aliyu Babba dan Caliph Muhammad Bello is the popular choice of most Sokoto king-makers to succeed Caliph Abdurrahman in October 1902, but was forced to step down in favor of Muhammad Attahiru Dan Ahmad Atiku dan Caliph Abubakar Atiku who is his closest rival, to avoid civil strife (Last, 1967:175).

By the same token, the surpressed sentiments of the sons of Ali Muhammad Bello means that the Caliphate is internally divided at such a crucial moment. The British take advantage of the succession matter and, thus make the most of it by appointing Muhammad Al-Tahir Aliyu as Caliph, to intentionally aggravate the fugitive Caliph. Moreland suggests this ploy as captured in:

> We need our man there. There is this prince, the present Caliph is supposed to have beaten in the race as the final choice, Muhammad Al-Tahir Aliyu. He could be more amiable towards us. I have my contact that can get him (34 - 35).

Furthermore, Muhammad Al–Tahir is not alone in accepting and collaborating with the British. Marafa and Muhammad Mai Tuarare also join him. And, incidentally, the pre-existing division or disunity in the Caliphate, also fans the flames. This has to do with an indifferent attitude of the Caliphate towards the invasions of the weaker emirates by the stronger ones. When the Caliphate refuses to intervene, the weaker emirates are then forced to invite the British to interfere. Ubandoma confirms this when he says:

> When Zaria fell, I ran to the house of some of you here. And, what did they say?.. Sokoto and Zaria have not been friends. They were even ready to forget that the Zaria people are our Muslim brothers. They felt that as long as Ibrahim, the former emir of Kontagora, attacked zaria in order to feed his men, it was a zaria problem. When the emir of Zazzau sent to us for help it was in this very palace that we decided not to interfere. The emir of Zazzau was forced to call the Whiteman, who helped him chase away Ibrahim, a fellow Muslim, and now the white man have refused to leave. They have become the egrets, who help the cows to pick out bad worms and flies, but also peck at the wounds of the cows which sometimes kill the cows (31-32).

Consequently, Sokoto is captured by Lugard but, Caliph Attahiru flees to Burmi, where he gathers brave warriors from Kano, Gombe, Kontagora, Nupe, Bauchi, and Misau. He gives a morale boosting speech before the war begins. The war scene is clearly explained in stage direction:

> *...In darkness, noises of fighting men, cannons booming: metal clapping, swords cutting into swords. Noises of wounded and dying, etc. coming from all around the stage and backstage, auditorium and wings . . . (*61).

Through this description, the detail of the war comes to mind. But the gory picture of the battle field and the valour and courage of Attahiru are captured more vividly in the account of a survivor, Yakubu. Thus:

> Yet, the greatest moment was when the caliph fell. As the bullet struck him, he raised up his sword and screamed. With the bullet he still cut down two more soldiers, then his Rawani loosened, and his cap fell. He twisted in pain. Holding on to nothing but his guts. Slowly, he started to fall. And as he fell, the Madawaki noticed him, he covered him with his shield, the Ubandoma, all forming a human shield. But the Caliph had fallen, and with his last breath, he screamed again. Amidst the noise of the guns and dying men, a gentle breeze blew, and as if we all knew... the caliph had gone with the passing breeze. That was when the thunderous call came… (63)

Of course, Caliph Attahiru I, and his warriors are venturesome and courageous. They show a sheer resistance against the British political, religious and cultural domination. However, the more gallant and venturesome patriotism is seen through the action of the blind beggar Abbas and his friend Ahmad who decide to join the fighters. Despite their helpless situation, when captured sneaking out of Sokoto in disguise, they refuse to divulge the hideout of the Caliph. Abbas tells Lugard to his face that "It will be better for me to die on the side of my Caliph than to die a coward" (55).

This admiring act shows how common people of the pre-colonial northern Nigeria, represented by these characters, stood for the cause, and resisted colonialism. In the play, the people's determination to fight alongside the Caliph is first captured in Abbas' proclamation:

> The caliph. I must get to him. I must fight by his side. I must give up my life for him. I must be somebody for once in my life, eyes or no eyes I must be somebody (48).

Additionally, as the ideology of the playwright manifests itself not only in the content, but also in the techniques and devices he uses to present the content, the colonial resistance dramatized by Yerima in this racy and urgent work of Attahiru, is also seen in the characterization and action. The structure of the play, itself, seems to be signaling such a resistance as it lacks all the conventional arrangement of Western Theatre. No scenes, acts or any form of division. The end of each segment and the beginning of another is illustrated through the use of stage lighting. Therefore, Yerima's theatre can be seen as a visual presentation of resistance to colonialists' discourses of theatre. In a hybrid style, he develops a syncretic or interfusional post-colonial theatre, indigenizing each of the Western dramatic elements in the play.

In a nutshell, the play, in every turn, shows how literature counteracts historical records of such a historical pandemonium, which remains, indelibly, part of the history of northern Nigeria. Now, the play is remembered and discussed more than the crooked history in schools, colleges and universities. And, any time it is read, studied or watched, the play touches and enlivens the patriotism in the audience which consequently, promotes a particular social agenda.

In the final analysis, Yerima concentrates immensely on the events leading to the war, and, this is what makes the play very moving and compelling. This way, Yerima corrects the errorneous teachings in schools for several years, especially in the Southern part of this country, by some historians regarding the relationship between the precolonial northerners and colonial government. This is because of the fact that it was baselessly being taught that there was no any form of indigenous Resistance to foreign rule in the North. Sola Balogun, writes in the *Guardian* that:

> Much as the play (Attahiru) is a cultural revelation especially in the light of the Sokoto caliphate and the unfolding social climate of the time, it makes a refreshing statement on the country's political history by debunking the notion that Islam, either condoned or encouraged colonial ride in the northern part of Nigeria. While historians would want to affirm that British colonialists were resisted in the southern part of the country but were welcomed in the northern part, *Attahiru* seemingly takes rather a departure from this general belief, stating clearly, though tragically, that the sokoto caliphate was once inimical to British dominance (Wed, 12 January, 2000).

3.6. *OVONRAMWEN NOGBAISI*: Plot Summary

Ovonramwen Nogbaisi by Ola Rotimi, the other primary text of this study, is also a historical play about the historically damaged Oba of Benin Empire who reigned between 1888 and 1897. The play, in precision, centres on the political tension, after the death of Oba Adolo, that surrounds the ascension of his son, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, and his hubris on the one hand, and the pressure of colonialists on the other. The play begins with the Oba Ovonramwen sentencing some prisoners to death. These people happened to be Oba's chiefs before they connived in killing his Chief Adviser who killed their dissenting brothers on Oba's ascension. Therefore, the Oba turns deaf ears to the plea for mercy of other chiefs in the palace and executes the prisoners. This gesture explains part of the tension within the Empire.

Subsequently, Ola Rotimi presents us with the other tension which the Oba faces on the inside by introducing the traders from Ijekiri and the elders of Ekpoma. The Ijekiris have cheated, traded with the whiteman and wanted to break away from Benin. On account of that, the Oba warns them. The Ekpomas rebel against the Oba's choice of a leader. He warns them too and enforces them. Throughout these judgements, Uzazakpo, the court jester, tells the Oba that "that is not the

way to go about it... the way you talked to the chiefs was not the right way". There after, comes the Ifa Priest who foretells the doom of Benin.

The tension on the outside comes from the Whiteman. The white imperialists bring with them a tricky trade treaty to the Oba, persuading him to sign, so that they buy the rubber trees from him. But, the Oba refuses to sign. Like in *Attahiru*, the whiteman, being in a mysterious haste to trade or rather siphon off Benin, the unwelcome Phillips and his company enter Benin, calamitously, during Ague Festival. According to Bini tradition, it is a taboo for the Oba to receive strangers during Ague Festival. Therefore, when Consul Phillips and his party enter the city, Benin warriors kill them and subsequently, the British launches a punitive expedition, sacks Benin city, sends the Oba on exile to Calabar, and takes over the area in order to establish a British colony.

However, European historians portray Oba Ovonramwen as the "most abominable sadist", "a fetish priest-king" and "murderous monarch". This serves as their justification for launching war against him in order to "free" his people from his so called tyranny. This study, argues that the play, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, counteracts both the biased histories and literature by, verisimilarly or authentically, providing a template for African version of the history. Using postcolonial theatre, the playwright (Ola Rotimi) dramatizes political, literary, linguistic and historical resistance. In the play, Rotimi adopts a common strategy of post-colonial self assertion by rediscovering some authentic pre-colonial cultural practices in order to redress the impact of the destructive colonial imperialism.

3.7. The Historical Account

To begin with, some scholars portray Oba Ovonramwen as a reckless, cruel and uncivil King among other things, whose foolhardy caused the punitive destruction of Benin. They interpret

Oba's personality as haughty and, therefore, calamitously flawed. For example, Victor (2013), wrote that:

> in all these engagements, the Oba first of all commits hubris (actions that transgress the bounds of law, conventions or pious decency, which the actor enjoys at the expense of the victim. Here, the Oba transgresses the limits of custom, tradition, and civility), by the death sentence on some chiefs who committed murder, and in defending himself and his empire, he makes statements that invoke the essences of things in / and by nature (physis) (204).

This raises so many questions especially about the characterization of Oba Ovonramwen in Ola Rotimi's play. Was the Oba faithfully presented? How has the playwright exploited the historical materials to, supposedly, question the hegemony that underlies this imperial representation? In the first place, according to J.C. Anene (1966), following adverse reports about Benin by British traders and agents:

> The British protectorate officials began in 1895 to nurse plans for the overthrow of the kingdom of Benin... In the following year, the Acting Consul- General, J.R. Phillips, decided that the time had come to deal with Benin. He asked the British government for permission to visit Benin City and depose the Oba. This permission was not given... because troops were not available to accomplish, without a hitch, the Acting Consul-General's objectives. Phillips at last decided to pay a friendly visit to Benin. Although he was advised by the Oba of Benin that the time was not the right one for receiving foreigners, the British agent insisted on going (274).

This suggets that the British intended to capture Benin and that phillip, the Acting Consul-General, got an impulsive urge, in the first place, that instigated him to provoke Benin warriors into action. This is because of some economic and expansionist drives that repulsively presented him with the reasons to conquer Benin, the famous city that remained central to prosperous business adventure in the Niger Delta sub-region of the pre-colonial Nigeria.

As Ofonagoro (1997), recounted: "Oba Ovonramwen as his cognomen "Nogbaisi" (meaning the Enlightened) implies, was fully conversant with the truth of international politics of his era..."(9–10). Having understood the growing power of the British Government at the time; the power that had captured and subdued great people and great kingdoms such as Warri, Lagos and Itesekiri, Ovonramwen, diplomatically, signed a dubious treaty with the British government. It was clear, according to Ofonagoro (1997), Egharevba (1968) and other Benin historians that the British, then, were eager to develop their own economy at home and to build their future monopolistic image. In his essay, *The Theatre of Ovonramwen: A Reflection on the Dramaturgy and Politics of Historical Reconstruction in the Nigerian Theatre,* Rasheed Abiodun Musa (2006), observed that the treaty had nine articles of faith. Articles fve and six summarized the intentions of the British Government towards the great people of Benin Kingdom as follows:

> The king of Benin hereby engages to assist the British consular or other officials in the execution of such duties as may be assigned to them; and, further, to act upon their advice in matters relating to the administration of justice, the development of the resources of the country, the interest of commerce, or in any other matter in relation to peace, order and good government and the general progress of civilization...The subjects and citizens of all countries may freely carry on trade in every part of the territories of the king, partly hereto, and may have houses and factories therein (Egharevba, 1968:87; cited in Musa, 2006:6).

Now, going by these it is obvious that James R. Phillips' urgent and zestful desire to enforce the treaty can be seen as the early move of the imperialists to introduce capitalist relations of production and distribution which, according to Rodney (1981), "blunted, halved and turned back" previous African development without offering anything of compensatory value"(244). Philliphs' urgency is only an instance of the grasping quirk of the imperialists to exploit Africa. Their insistence that they must see the king against the tradition and custom of the Benin people

which forbid strangers to see the king during Igue festival, can also be interpreted as an effort to undermine and suppress indigenous culture and institutions. And, imperialists domination, argued Cabral (1980), "for its own security, requires cultural oppression and the attempt at direct or indirect destruction of the essential elements of the culture of the dominated people" (142). Many historians concured that the insistence also led to ‟the massacre of Phillips party which took place on the 17th February 1897″.

On the other hand, there was, at the time, a hanging political tension for the throne of Benin Kingdom between Ovonramwen and his brother. And, coincidetally, the killings of some internal rebels by Oba Ovonramwen created a sharp division in the kingdom which made some of his chiefs disobeyed him when he instructed that Phillips and his men should be allowed to enter Benin. In short, the massacre of "the Phillips' party" was the extenuation the British capitalized on to destroy Benin. This imperial war:

> ...was entrusted to the Cape Squadron under Admiral Sir Harry Rawson; Colonel Hamilton, Major Gallwey, Consul and Executive Commander Bacon and others Commonwealth the land forces (Egharevba, 1968:50).

On the 17th February, 1897, the powerful king of Benin and his kingdom fell to the hands of the British just as an oracle had once predicted. And, this tragic history was earlier written in biased ways which prompted some Post-colonial writers and playwrights, in particular, to re-write the incident from the insiders' point of views.

3.8. Postcolonial Analysis of *Ovoramwen Nogbaisi*

The ever continuous struggle between the imperial power and post-colonial identity has been captured by this play in the highly interpolated language and dramaturgicals used that finally give birth to a hybrid mode of representation. Rotimi blends the traditional indigenous

performance arts, which need to be rediscovered and reinvented, with the sophisticated western theatrical techniques. Analysing this practice in *Postcolonial Theatre*, Crow (1996) commented that:

> In contrast with the Western tradtion of realist drama and acting, these traditional modes of performance are usually stylized, often incorporate dance, music and song and operate from an oral rather than a literary base (12).

The play opens with a certain traditional song sung by *female voices, punctuating drumbeats; rhythmic clatter of gourd-rattles, as the Isikhien (members of the royal women's cult) enter and take position.* Since, "indigenous song/music recalls pre-contact methods of communication, affirms the continued validity of oral traditions, and helps to break the bonds of conventional (western) representation" (Gilbert & Tompkins, 2002: 78), Rotimi resists the dominant western forms here. While other dramatists infuse the indigenous music with western to create a hybrid version, Rotimi uses indigenous songs/music in its pure form. This is a considerable act of resistance against cultural imperialism. Such a thing is repeated everywhere in the play as in the following examples:

O-o-o-o-o- Evbavba!

Obugie O! Evbavba!

Obugie O! Evbavba!

Ugie gha do re ofurhufurhu

Oba gha to o kpere!

The crowd, excepting the prisoners, thunder:

I-s-e ! (4).

Omi, Omi- Omi-o!

O-omi-o!

Omi, Omi-o!...(5).

Osa wo-o-o, Iwori wo-wo-wo-o-o! (16). E .T. C.

This is indeed a stylistic device of Postcolonial Theatre. "It highlights the fact that colonialism has not destroyed local pre-contact customs or traditions" (Gilbert & Tompkins, 67). The music/songs, dance and traditional musical instruments used bring in some indigenous moods and enhance the overall effect of the play. Furthermore, in place of using lighting to signify change of scene, music, drumming and songs are used as the theatrical device. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) observed that:

> When music is combined with theatre, its signifying power inevitably multiplies: in addition to its own signification, music contributes to the *mise-en-scene* to, for instance, enhance a mood, or effect an atmosphere. Moreover, if post-colonial pheatre provides an occasion for a vocal expression of solidarity, resistance, or even presence, song can intensify the reactions of both the actors and the audience (194).

As in Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*, Rotimi in *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* uses native language in order to invoke the gods, to ceremonially bless the king and, accordingly, challenge western tradition. Gilbert and Tomkins (1996) observed; "when a playwright chooses an indigenous language over English, s/he refuses to submit to the dominance of the imposed standard language and to subscribe to the 'reality' it sustains" (169).

The play addresses the story of Ovonramwen in a wider scope. It includes "Ovonramwen's tasks of controlling a growing rebellion within and outside his kingdom". He confronts and executes some of his rebellious chiefs and, at the same time, stands up to the British who are searching for economic domination over the rest of the world. This historical play is divided into three Acts, with a prologue at the beginning and an Epilogue at the end. Act One establishes Ovonramwen's

revenge judgment on his two chiefs (Obaruduagbon and Esasoyen) that both of them must die for killing Uwangue Egiebo, Ovonramwen's Chief Adviser, after the Oba had executed their own brothers, who opposed his enthronement. This is captured in:

Ovonramwen: ...This night, you all die...I have spoken.

Obaruduagbon: Today is your day: Tomorrow belongs to another!

Esasoyen: Indeed: the white man who is stronger than you, will soon come! (6)

At the same time, the Oba places a ban on trading with the Ijekiris and also imposes on them some drastic conditions that they must meet so he may lift the ban. He sends messengers and soldiers to warn and recapture the loyalty of neighbouring towns and tribes, whom his forefathers had ruled, but are now signalling or hoping for freedom: Ijekiriland, Ekpoma, Akure, Ife, Agbor, et cetera. This is captured in:

> Ovonramwen: ...if you want the ban on trade removed, your chiefs must meet my terms: first, Ijekiriland is still part of thr Benin Empire. In matters of trade, you listen to me and not to the Whiteman. Secondly, no more cheating (8-9).

Furthermore, the Ifa Priest enters. He comes to tell the Oba that his oracle sees death coming to Benin, "not the death of one man. Bodies of men...fire...and blood bodies floating " and warns that all that can be done to avoid this fire is "Caution" (15). There, enter two white men, Gallwey and Hutton, bringing him gifts and greeting from Queen Victoria as well as a trade treaty, which Her Majesty requires him to sign. The Oba rejects the gifts and the treaty as he has some qualms about making business with the Queen. In fact, the Oba interprets the white men's visit as a bad omen for the empire.

The revelation that death is coming, casts fear in the Oba's mind and therefore becomes doubtful of everybody including his chiefs. Hence, on the advice of the aged court jester, Uzazakpo, who

admonishes the King to beware of people, especially his chiefs, and to also seek the loyalty of Ologbosere, the third in command, against the growing hypocrisy of his Chiefs, the Oba secures the loyalty by giving Ologbosere his eldest daughter, Evbakhabokun, as wife. The Oba confides and warns his new son-in-law: "Disaster threatens the empire, Ologbosere. Even the oracle of Oghene n'Uhe has seen its face: heavy, dark, closing upon the land" (23).

Act II begins with a dramatic celebration of a Benin's traditional festival, the Ague festival, and the irreverent intrusion into the Kingdom by the white men under the command of Acting Consul-General Phillips. Now, Ague Festival, being a traditional enactment in form of ritual, contributes to the hybrid nature of the play. It also serves as a form of resistance to dominant European traditions. In this context, Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) asserted that:

> Rooted in folk culture, these enactments are not only mnemonic devices that assist in the preservation of history but are also effective strategies for maintaining cultural differences through specific systems of communication- aural, visual, and kinetic- and through specific values related to local customs (54).

This cultural event asserts and maintains the precolonial structure of the community. As a ritual of a kind, it subsumes a non-european element into Theatre, so that the playwright indigenizes theatrical practice. In the same context, Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) discuss how Postcolonial playwrights use Ritual to provide the context of their plays. Thus:

> Rather than being the central thematic and/ or structural focus, ritual supports the action in such a play and tends to be used as part of a larger recuperation of tradition/history, as an expression of hybridization, as a device to establish settings/context, or as a performative model for various sections of the action/dialogue (73).

Furthermore, employing rituals in Postcolonial plays, according to Gilbert and Tompkins (1996), can be a subversive political act that resists the colonial ban of rituals. Therefore, the Ague

Festival in this play is a subversive act. It revives the community and encourages the people to return to their root and defend the honour of what they are. The aforementioned critics observe that:

> ...many rituals were officially banned by imperial agents. Such forbidden events became subversive activities under colonial role and can now function as symbols of liberty for an independent post-colonial system, especially when ritual is contextualized by-and/or located in a particular community (76).

Back to the play, Okavbiogbe, the Chief Policeman of the Kingdom, stops and warns the white men against seeing the Oba during the Ague festival and this encounter with Phillips sets the confict of this play. Still, Phillips insists on entering Benin and the Oba together with his people hold this in contempt. The spiritual nature of the ritual emphasises the profanity of Philiph's act. For Phillps, that is necessary: it is the first crucial step in the implementation of his decision "to deal with Benin". This encounter runs as follows:

Okavbiogbe: you cannot see the Oba...

Phillips: I am sorry, but we've come a long way and we have been sent by the queen of-.

Okavbiogbe: I said go--you!

Etherton (1982), summarized the tragic conflict that ensues this argument as follows:

> They arrogantly decide to press on into Benin City despite being warned by one of the Benin war lords that the Ague Festival is in progress which debars foreigners from entering the city during its seven days duration. The whites are massacred. This action has been taken by the Benin war lords against the advice and instruction of Ovonramwen.... They go out and ambush the whites who ignorantly insist on entering the city, and decapitate them (149).

After a while, the Benin people celebrate the death of Phillips and his party through a dance drama ritual where the *'warriors re-appear, dancing wildly, but the chiefs among them are carrying decapitated heads of white men*'. This shocks the Oba as he says:

Ovonramwen: Children of our fathers, Benin, I fear, has this day swallowed a long pestle: now we shall have to sleep standing upright (37).

In Act III, two Benin chiefs, Obaseki and Osodin, meet acting Resident Roupell and they promise to find Ovonramwen and give him up. The king, however, gives himself up and Roupell demands that he surrenders to the British authority and after serious persuasion from his Chiefs, Ovonramwen removes his crown from his head and surrenders to the British Monarch; an act which Roupell confidently and heroically celebrates:

Roupell: (*himself perturbed, but...her imperial Majesty's task must be done.)* From this day, this land of Benin belongs to her Royal Majesty Queen Victoria! (54).

The chiefs are tried and seven of them are to die for killing seven white men. Obayuwana (a Benin Chief), however, refuses to be shot, instead he heroically stabs himself and Ovonramwen leaves for Obaseki's house to re-strategise for the continuation of the war against the white imperialists. Ovanramwen hides and sleeps in the bush with Uzazakpo, the Court Jester who makes things easy for him on their way to Okemue to meet Ologbosere. Before they reach Okemue, Roupell and his soldiers apprehend Ovonramwen, and he paradoxically rejoices with the white men on their success in capturing Benin:

Not much. Tell Queen Victoria that at last the big pot of corn has been toppled; now mother hen and her children may rejoice! (78).

In order to have a distinct voice and to return to his indigenous culture and traditions, Rotimi uses proverbs of cultural tastes and a hybrid narrative language as in:

- Obaruduagbon: If a provoked houseboy can not match his wicked master strength with strength, he maims the master's favourite goat! (5)

- Ologbogsere:.. Our brothers, a man does not test the depth of a river with both feet together (5).

- Ifa Priest: ..when the little child boasts that he can kill a riddle, he lies: he can only solve a riddle. When the elder swears he is about to kill a riddle, he too lies, for he will only solve a riddle (15).

- Ovonramwen: children of our fathers, Benin, I fear, has this day swallowed a long pestle; now we shall have to sleep standing upright (37).

These are but few of the instances of the use of proverbs in the play for cultural resistance. It also takes a gut to claim that the post-colonial theatre of this play resists the dominating tendencies of Western forms as native narrative structures are used. A new theatrical form is then born through the traditional contamination of Standard English and the hybridization of the theatricals. Therefore, the playwright now has a voice, after being subjected to mere mimicry or even silenced by the western dominance, to reach the common people and to appeal to their sensiblity. In other words, this is a quest for identity in the postcolonial scene. Crow (1996), describes this movement as "return to roots" (9).

On the other hand, many scholars and literary writers concur that Rotimi has flawed the characterization of Ovonramwen. The fact that Oba Ovonramwen surrenders at the end, without rebelling to death against the tyrannical power of the imperialists, that is an unfortunate lacuna that modern African playwrights avoid. But, why has Rotimi focused solely on Ovonramwen as an individual? The answer to this may be that Rotimi's intention was to correct "the biases of colonial History", which painted the Oba "in the mien of the most abominable sadist" ("Background" to Ovonramwen Nogbaisi xi). Also, Rotimi intended this to be a response to Evbinma Ogie's play; *Oba Ovonramwen* (first performed in 1965 and published in 1977), that characterised the Oba as "bland, unable to engage in the defence of the empire" (152). However, as Etheron rightly observed, "his hero seems to end up more deeply indicted than before" (146). Here, this research looks at the characterization of the Oba from a totally different perspective. It examines the lavish infiltration of cultural performances into the play in an effort to reclaim the Oba's imperially ruined cultural honour. And, it is clear that Oba Ovonramwen's royalty, kingliness, or regal dignity has been restored by the enactment of the exuberant bini pre-colonial royal life.

In response to Rotimi's play, Ahmed Yerima's play under the title of *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, comes on stage. Jegede (2007), after a rather comparative analysis of both plays, noted that Yerima's version:

> Pays particular attention to the gaps, omissions, silences and absences in Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, especially those that have to do with portraying the king in the right light. Rotimi portrays the king as weakling who is troubled within by political unrest and without by British attack. In the face of attack, he goes into hiding and later comes begging to surrender to British supremacy. In Yerima's portrait, the king is a more courageous character who, despite all the wrangling within and without, could

> still face the challenge without subjecting his position to ridicule (85).

This disclosure may damage or spoil the joyful flow of this important history in some ways, but the major imperial distortions in the history are successfully corrected by both plays. These include; the objective of Phillips' visit to Benin, exonerating African kings from being allegedly fetish and ritualistic, and finally, exposing the hideous issues in the 1892 Treaty. Therefore, one can boldly claim that the plays are successful.

3.9. Conclusion

Conclusively, the two plays exemplify cultural resistance. They transform, decolonize or subvert the colonial strategies that try to erase the native culture. Many facets of cultural activity have been analysed here. Having analysed how the playwrights hybridized and reshaped the dramaturgicals, this research can boldly claim that the colonial rulers' voice has been dismantled or, at least, muffled. This is achieved because theatre is one such powerful cultural tool that involves a wide range of physical, emotional and imaginative resources. So, the playwrights chose it as their medium in order to resist cultural imperialism. This Postcolonial resistance is obvious in their choice of language, presentation of narrative discourses such as ceremonies and rituals, or rather, in their reshaping or interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic tradition and the indigenous performances. In the following chapter, the two texts will be compared and contrasted.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Comparative Analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*

4.1. Comparative Analysis

Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* are both plays that enact historic clashes between colonial rulers and native Africans. Both use the history of Britain's Age of Empire as background and they critically enact the narrative of the British rule in Benin Empire and Sokoto Caliphate respectively. Therefore, both works are historical plays that exemplify postcolonial resistance against the British cultural imperialism. Since *Attahiru* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* are both about historical events of almost similar occurences and a nearly same time in the history of precolonial Nigeria, this chapter concentrates on their similarities and differences in enacting the histories of the usurpation of the two kingdoms and exploitation of their native inhabitants.

To begin with, *Attahiru* depicts the Britain's unbending will to colonise Sokoto Caliphate and the consequential bloodshed. *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* concentrates on the events that lead to the usurpation of Benin Empire by the British colonial government. For the fact that both works were commissioned by the governments of the respective present day kingdoms, their presentations seem to be stagey. However, the two works are obviously different in terms of structure as Yerima's *Attahiru* has neither act nor scene division style, whereas Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* has prologue, three acts in the middle and epilogue at the end. The action of each work takes place against the backdrop of empire. *Attahiru* is set in the last days of Sokoto Caliphate, between 1902 and 1903, when British government was expanding the frontiers of its empire. While *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* is set in just few years before the turn of 1900s (1888- 1897), when the colonial masters were busy exploiting and siphoning off Africa;

depriving it the chance to grow economically. In this respect, both are historical plays that are realistically typical in their representations of history. They are also similar in portraying culture clashes between colonial rulers' and that of the natives.

Apart from their similarity in historical setting, both plays portray colonialists' wanton disregard for the culture of the"Other". In Attahiru, Lugard and his men disregard Caliph Attahiru's belief that "the only relationship that can exist between a believer and an infidel is war" (34). They force him to either be their friend or they fight him. In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Philip and his men are told that during Ague Festival, the Oba must not receive a visitor. But they belittle the issue and go on to enter Benin. These acts show that whatever the "Other" believes in or keeps as a cultural practice does not hold any validity if it is not in accord with the colonial rulers' culture. Therfore, this proves the colonizers' claim that their culture is more highly advanced and, hence, they are at the centre of the world whereas the colonized are at the margins. They regard themselves as the embodiment of what human being should be, the proper self; while Africans or the colonized are savages, evil, the demonic other and therefore inferior to the level of being less than fully human.

Furthermore, both *Attahiru* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* are significant examinations of the psychology of the heroes and the underlying cultural ideologies that inform it. The plays dramatise, additionally, the imperialists' duties in a culture that neither understands them nor welcomes them. Thus, in both plays, the imperial intruders are shown as tyrants who disregard African religions and cultures in their quest for power and economic stability. They, first, try to decietfully convince the natives that they are friends, business partners and a civilising force. For example, in Act Two, Scene Two of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, Phillips men try to convince the

chief police of the Benin Empire, Okavbiogbe, that they are only coming to greet the Oba. But when the chief police deny them entrance, Phillips whines that "...For how long, gentlemen, must British trade policy remain crippled by the whims and ritual taboos of a fetish priest-king? " (31-32).

Moreover, one can say that both plays show the oppression of imperialism at its peak since it kills the spirits of individual and culture of the colonised societies. It leads to the destruction of Benin Empire and the death of Caliph Attahiru I. It leads to the loss of many lives, including women and children in Benin; all in order to secure the land for their economic purposes. Therefore, this brutal force is, as Conrad said, "just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind". The colonisers applied force to guard the sources of the raw material needed for their economic prosperity. This is clearly seen in Philips' rantings and Lugard's answer to Abbas as follows:

> For how long, gentlemen, must British trade policy remain crippled by the whims and ritual taboos of a fetish priest-king? Forever? What then ate we in Africa for? What object brings us here? Commerce, gentlemen! Commerce brought us to Africa; commerce determines our actions in Africa!" (*Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*; 31- 32).
>
> ...It is a war of the superiority of wills. I have the machines and guns; you have what I need to trade with, so if one of us is stubborn, or refuses to cooperate, then a little nudge is needed. But, you all get excited, with your charms, amulets, and religion, you refuse to be our friends. It is simple really (*Attahiru*; 56).

In the last analysis, both plays show how colonial rulers treated the colonised with repulsion and contempt. In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, the Oba is just a "fetish priest-king (ibid.)" and in *Attahiru*, Lugard regards the Caliphate's revolt as nonsense when he says "we must stop this nonsense now (52)". Further more, the plays are discourse of the British unwelcome presence in Africa and it portrays the British's ideology and racial attitudes towards Africans. Indeed, the plays reveal the

extreme nature of imperialists, their self-conceited pride and cruelty towards the colonised. The heroes of both plays suffer internal crisis and external with regard to the colonial intruders. In each play, there are hybrid men. In *Attahiru*, there is Kyari, a native African, shown in uniform and turban, who reads letters to Lugard. Morland also talks of prince Muhammad al-Tahir Aliyu and of the contacts who could get to the prince. In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Boisragon is a typical hybrid character who thinks like the europeans and works for them. Simply, these are transcultural figures within the contact zone, produced by colonisation.

Finally, the plays are works that try to correct historically distorted heroes. The playwrights, therefore, paid attention to the more controversial incidents of the histories. While doing this, they transculturally domesticate the dramaturgicals of the plays, so they create their Postcolonial voice.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Summary and Conclusion

5.1. Summary

The researcher has studied resistant predispositions of two historical plays -*Attahiru* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*- in an effort to know the role of theatre in postcolonial resistance. In the work, he has also examined the dramatists' effort to reconstruct the image of the historically damaged, but prominent figures in Nigerian history, so as to restore national pride and integrity.

Politically, Nigerian history is replete with an intense and deep search for the rational meaning of a nation. Development is always beset with vicissitudes from various forces; political misconducts, misgovernment, tribal wars, military coup de tats, and other deleterious cataclysms. From the outside or rather, from the historical perspective, the violence and dislocations, ideologies and cultures brought about by colonialism have continued to shape the nation.

Against this background, the two plays at the centre of this study, Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi,* show the need to resist the historical, cultural and political dominations if our society is to progress. The playwrights revisit the past, re-write it and encounter the dominant versions of the historical heroes of the plays. They present us with, though traumatic, histories that inflame the feelings of new blood. Also, the exploration of these historical events allow the playwrights to raise certain political, moral and epistemological questions about contemporary African situation.

Subordinating and lebelling Africans as the "other" is the focal issue in both plays. This is so because, the playwrights seek to find a voice and contribute to the on-going Post-colonial discourse that fills up pages of literary books. Coincidentally, both plays expose the motive force

behind colonialism, and hint at the fact that what led to the invasion of Sokoto Caliphate and the so called "punitive expedition" of Benin Kingdom was not the need to extend the frontier of Christianity and humanitarian ethos, but a capitalist agenda.

The work is structured into five chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher surveys the nature of modern drama that gives template for the plays under discussion. Then, what follows is a discussion on Nigerian theatre, Yoruba travelling theatre, Hausa traditional performances and the roles played by Nigerian postcolonial playwrights in reconstructing the history of wars of colonial resistance.

In the second chapter of this work, the researcher reviews some related literature on the primary texts- Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. Because the question of history or rather, the question of representation in history is a prominent feature in post-colonial discourse, the researcher uses Potcolonial theory to queston the attitude the plays reflect regarding the colonisers and the colonised, and the extents to which the plays emphasize the sanity and value of pre-colonial African societies. This is done only in order to reveal the hegemony that underlies imperial representation, and to show how postcolonial theatre helps in nation building.

The third chapter explores Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi,* the primary texts, and exposes how the playwrights exploit historical materials to respond to the biased imperial representation of pre-colonial Africa. Similarly, some elements of Cultural Resistance are put on view, so that the plays appear typically to have come from the pen of a Postcolonial playwright. Accordingly, the chapter explores the relationship between history and theatre/literature with reference to *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. Many scholars, from Greek

philosophers to the present-day theorists, have debated on veracity of history and literature. On this, Bhadmus, M. O. (2006), postulates that "neither history nor literature has greater claim to truth...as they are both compromises of, and compromised by language". Eventhough, in situations where the veracity of a certain history is contentious, theatre, the most symbolic form of literature, can be historically corrective and evocatively accurate, as it opens, ad infinitum, the world of possibilities.

Chapter four of this work compares the two plays and reveals their similarities and some differences, in order to justify their being chosen as the primary texts.

Chapter five summarises and concludes that the plays at the centre of this study, are unique expressions of the divided postcolonial voice; a blend of western sensibility and native aethetics. They are therefore hybridized texts used as a political strategy whereby the colonized playwrights develop their independent voice.

On the final note, the study establishes the relevance of theatre in national development. It conclusively be establishes that theatre, in whatever form, plays a vital role in developing or changing a nation into a strong, responsive and effective society. Theatre scholars have debated for long, trying to tie-up theatre with development and, today, the existing corpus of literature on the debate proves that theatre, whether literary or performative, has a contribution to make to the development of a society. This is because, Theatre is a significant part of the culture of any society. Hence, while researching the theatrical culture of a particular period, one can draw conclusions about specified periods, people, social and national identities and issues of the community in question. Therefore, theatre holds an integral position in investigating the culture of any nation and significantly expands the knowledge of the nation and its identity.

Additionally, theatre has been among the favourite media of recreation for both intellectuals and the wider population for many centuries. It is an important segment of a nation's culture and it plays a significant role in representation of history and spirit of societies. It expresses social, economic, moral, political and philosophical issues of a particular period and therefore affects the formation of public opinion.

Undoubtedly, theatre achieves a lot, as Nasidi (2003) put it, through an "integrated manipulation of various forms of art such as music, mime, poetry, dance, painting and symbols which are directed either at our auditory or visual senses (2)". Therefore, it inevitably "engages and appeals to all the senses at the same time (Vincent, 1980:2). Hence, national consciousness and development can possibly be achieved through any enactment that engages us in learning about some ethics, customs, true identity and history of our nation. On this issue, Umar Buratai (2007), observed that:

> In view of the negative influence of colonialism and neo-colonialism on the modern African states' processes of development, there is a growing consensus that committed intellectuals, historians, sociologists, literary and creative artists need to re-address African peoples' past. This is imperative in order to redress the ills of colonialism and as a prelude for effective nation building (In Adeoti, (ed), 146).

Indeed, the ills of colonialism need to be dealt with in a more imaginative and symbolic manner as they are deeply ingrained in the way Africans see their world today, their heroes of the past, their history and even their beliefs. Theatre, as a graphic medium, serves as a device to free these mentally enslaved Africans from the shackles of ideological, economic, social and political imperialism.

Furthermore, theatre can be used to attack social vices, economic mismanagement and political malaise that bring about an ever widening disparity between the rulers and the ruled, masses and

technocrats. When these hurdles are removed, development can flow, criss-crossing the borders of tribe, ethnicity and religion.

The history of modern Theatre in Nigeria shows that theatre can be used as a tool for national development. Back in history, the Yoruba travelling theatre, pioneered by the late Hubert Ogunde, happened to be a fusion of tradition of indigenous Alarinjo masquerade, itinerant performance and the church developed open air opera. This was the early period in record when Ogunde, the acclaimed Nigerian Theatre artist, used Theatre actively in the struggle for independence, self rule and in the fight against oppression and tyranny of the colonial government. This was evident in his works like *Strike and Hunger, Bread and Bullet* and *Yoruba Ronu*— the works which resulted in his company being banned in Western Region by the Akintola led NNDP government. Ogunde paved way for other theatre practitioners of that period and beyond to perform works that condemn falsehood, oppression and, at the same time, celebrate the virtues of truth, justice and honesty in every national affair.

Later, dramatists like James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ahmed Yerima and Felix Okolo among others bond theatre with development into a closely-knit relationship. They use theatre to reconstruct their history by bringing their legendary, folk and mythical heroes alive on stage, venerating and romanticising them; enacting historical events to tell the world that Africans have history; straightening it by filling in the lacunas and chasms carved deliberately by the racists European historians and explorers, and finally celebrating African cultures that are wantonly destroyed by the corrosive European imperialism.

Finally, theatre, besides being a recreation, is a medium that gives room to non-literates to analyse their communal issues in their lingua franca, so that they learn to solve their problems at community level, in their own way. Furthermore, theatre is a means of cultural expression through which everyone in a community is ready to partake. Therefore, theatre is a public or social activity that brings people together and creates for them a context for collaborative thinking and action.

5.2. Conclusion

Having examined the various functions of theatre, the playwrights' use of indigenous theatrical devices such as indigenous songs/music, dance and drumming in order to resist western forms; this work has seminally argued that their effort to bring back the precontact culture and past glory, is technically not appreciated by the target audience. However hard they tried to domesticate the language used in writing the plays, a substantial number of, or majority of the audience do not understand it. Still few do. Therefore, if *Attahiru* or *ovonramwen Nogbaisi* is to be performed in Hausa or Yoruba language respectively, it could make more impact.

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