

Yoruba Festival and the Dramatist: Satire as Spine in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*

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Abstract

In most African societies, festivals play especially important roles linked to the survival of the society. This paper investigates the festival motif in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* with the purpose of illuminating further his exploration of elements of indigenous African (Yoruba) lore. The paper contends that the satiric mode is explored trenchantly in the organizing and structuring principles of Soyinka's play. The paper posits that satiric mode is the fundamental backbone of his work, not just a decoration. The paper explains further that the festival's motif and cultural celebration built into the structure of the selected play and properly harnessed as raw material for his poetics. The methodology is analytical and complemented by hermeneutics theory. By vigorously exploiting African (Yoruba) experience, festival motif, and satiric modes, in a manner relevant to the moral development of his world, it will be seen that Soyinka, succeeds in laying the foundation for a truly Nigerian national literature and it is, in fact, on this that his strengths as a satirist playwright lie.

Keywords: African (Yoruba) Festival, Culture, Satire, Hermeneutics Theory

Introduction

As much as possible, Wole Soyinka tried to locate his plays within his own culture. Fundamentally, this is the very backbone of his work and not just a decoration. "His dramaturgy", according to Adeoti (2006:342), "is very much indebted to indigenous African performance culture and aesthetics. This point has been well made by critics and scholars of African drama." In addition, if his plays are broken down and the elements are scrutinized, "One sees that they reflect the cultural matrix that produces the plays" (Oyewo, 2006: 164).

Beyond doubt, a sizeable number of critics such as Roscoe (1979), and Eyoh (1987) have tried to establish his attachment to Yoruba cosmology from where he draws materials, freely, for his theatrical creations. Soyinka's work, according to Roscoe (1979:219) "... is essentially African in material and inspiration" because he is "a Yoruba who acknowledges his roots and clings to them". Similarly, Eyoh (1987:64) observes, "Soyinka's drama is very largely informed by the festivals and rituals steps out of the immediate thematic pre-occupation of the writing." Studying the immanent structure and the mode of interaction of various elements in the work denoted by form as well as the source of literary materials according to Adeoti (2006:343), can deepen a critic's perception and analysis. The audience, in turn, can derive considerable illumination through such an exercise. Because of this realization, some scholars in their study of Soyinka's drama locate his artistic influences in both Yoruba (indigenous) and Western (foreign) literary traditions. An important aspect of the former is the festival motif, which was severally identified. In the words of Moore (1987:44), "the idea of the festival lies at the very heart of Soyinka's vision of a true African Theatre. There is a festival celebration built into the structure of almost all his plays." As such in Soyinka's drama, festival is an artistic framework that sustains and excites the audience's interest in the enacted act.

The paper is not intended to provide an encyclopedia reference for all traditional Yoruba festivals in Soyinka's poetics or to account for their rituals. Rather, it foregrounds the motif of festivals in its exploration of satire in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. The paper is structured into five parts. The first part is the introduction. There will be a brief discussion of the meaning and nature of the festival, the underlying keyword of the paper in the second section. This is followed by the third section of the paper, which examines satirical symbology and the festival motif: the enduring nexus. The fourth section essentializes satire in Soyinka's selected play. The final part is the conclusion.

The foregoing and many other preliminary and major critical assumptions have conspired to create the template for the topic of this discourse "African Festival and the Dramatist: Satire as Spine in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of*

the Forests. With few exceptions, much of what is classified here as festival and satire in Soyinka's selected play could also be found in some of his other work. However, traditional festivals are 'primordial' among the Yoruba people because festivals are timeless for they are centuries old, while the beliefs and worship associated with them constitute traditional ideologies and tap-roots of African Culture.

Theoretical Focus and Relevance

The methodology of the paper analytically complemented hermeneutics theory. Hermeneutics theory originally applied to the interpretation of sacred texts. In modern times, shifts in hermeneutics, according to Adebawale (200:24) emphasis reflect broader academic pursuits. The essence of hermeneutics is to establish the meaning of a writer's work through in-depth research based on the culture of the society. Martin Heidegger (1927), the originator of the theory argued that as our consciousness project things, we could never adopt an attitude of detached contemplation of the world (Selden, 1985:111). Selden explains further that Hans-Georg Gadamer applied Heidegger's situational approach to literary theory in this *Truth and Method* (1960). Gadamer believes that our attempts to understand a work will depend on the question, that our cultural environment allows us to raise. He explains further that we also seek to discover the questions that the work itself is trying to answer.

The Relevance of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics will help us to understand that the author's perception of the festival could only be within his knowledge about society. The play, *A Dance of the Forests* is based upon the belief and culture of the Yoruba society; hence, our knowledge about this cultural background would help our understanding of the work interpreted. The totality of meaning which makes up the unity of the text would also emerge through our use of hermeneutics theory. The theoretical framework for the paper is, though, broad-based, nevertheless, it is a literary analytical study of Soyinka's play.

The Meaning and Nature of the Festival

Festivals are part of the cultural heritage of Africa. According to Olaoba (2006:443), they are structurally patterned to exhibit a one or the other aspects of the cultural life of the people. To Adeoti (2000:346), "the significance of festivals in African societies needs no emphasis. They lie at the socio-cultural and theological substructure of the society". Mbiti (1975:37) also expresses the same idea that festivals are religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of a society. Through festivals, these values are preserved

and transferred from generation to generation. Festivals are normally joyful occasions when people sing, dance, eat and celebrate a particular occasion or event, (Mbiti, 1975:10) remarks. Apart from these, festivals provide for the exhibition of artistic talents through music, drama, dance, poetry, and carvings.

More importantly, according to Adeoti (2006:346), some festivals are occasions for the purgation of those obnoxious elements that may disturb the existing social harmony in a community or invoke calamities in such a community. Communal purification is an important aspect of African tradition that takes care of likely infractions conducted during some festivals. The manifestation of purification during festivals, is based on the people's belief that festivals are occasions for the return of metaphysical beings to the human realm. As Ogunba (2002:25-26) has noted elsewhere, "The physical presence of supernatural beings at festivals of all categories is regarded as laden with purification possibilities and people do take advantage of them for their own benefits". He further states that the people use such occasions to purge themselves of "all the accumulated spiritual filth of the old year in order to enter the New Year as a chastened, reborn person".

Ogunba (1973:87-110), Ayasi (1979:82-88) and Nketia (1981:9-10) lend credence to the fact that festivals and traditional ceremonies are crucial to the nation building process in African society. Structurally, songs, dances, and feasts are essential features of festivals in African society. Songs and dances are obviously of dramatic value in African society.

Clearly identified elsewhere, are the salient features of festivals:

Fundamentally, all traditional ceremonies have some glaring features such as songs and music, dance drama and acrobatic displays which are meant to entertain, inform and educate the participating audience. These features, however, usually explain the dynamic and symbiotic relationship among members of the society and living dead. The spirit of the ancestors thus becomes involved for spiritual participation, especially in the unfolding dance-drama. What emerges could best be described as dance of god, dance of man. In a nutshell, justice and fair play, at that point in time, apparently becomes ritualistic and spiritualized. The serene atmosphere provides an avenue for occasioning comic relief in all its ramifications (Oloba, 2002:38-39).

The festival construct, according to Adeoti (2006) constantly reminds the audience, from play to play, of participating in a "universal" experience whose significance transcends the immediate literary spatio-temporal frontiers. It also underscores intrinsic complexity of the plays and their tendency to generate new meaning(s)." Therefore, in a way, the festival motif ensures the relevance

of Soyinka's dramaturgy beyond the here and now, into the vast province of other climes and times.

In the interrogation of Soyinka's dramaturgy for its sources and resources in indigenous African performance tradition, Ogunba is one of the most consistent scholars. Ogunba (1972:17) offers a clarification of Soyinka's constant recourse to Yoruba lore in the following words:

The prevailing mood is that of the preparation of a great event which produced so much excitement or tension in the whole populace that everybody thinks of nothing else but the great event.

Unarguably, there is hardly any Yoruba community without one or two festivals. Described in the above is what obtains during important traditional festivals and ceremonies in Yoruba societies. Perhaps, one should dwell more on this point-taking cognizance of its specific relevance to Soyinka's satiric drama (Adeoti, 2006:345). Commenting on the festival motif (Eyoh, 1987:64) remarks that festivals and rituals associated with Yoruba religious practices very largely inform the drama of Soyinka. As stated earlier, Moore (1987) sees festivals as the organizing and structuring principles of Soyinka's plays.

Nonetheless, in terms of analyses, what often follows the above assertions reveal a common reliance on Soyinka's plays adjudged 'mythopoeic' plays? What needs to be established as well is that the overall design of the festival in Soyinka's drama is meaningful and realizable not only within the framework of the mythopoeic plays, but also in the satiric plays. Therefore, the playwright should not be seen merely as a folklorist, but foremost as an aesthete who trenchantly explores materials from indigenous performance culture to advance satiric ends (Adeoti, 2006:345-346). Festivals are part of the cultural heritage of Africa. Structurally patterned to exhibit one or the other aspects of the cultural life of the people. They play very significant roles linked to the survival of society. Festivals are expressions of a desire or an instinctive desire for representation and artistic expressivity from the standpoint of not simply the individual but the entire society as a collective community. Structurally, songs, dances, and feasts are essential features of festivals in African society.

Akporobaro (2006:363) reminds us that in festivals the mimetic instinct, the desire to act, to demonstrate and mask and dance and speak and worship and to be spectacular all come together to generate a unifying social activity that generates both social pleasure and the fulfillment of multiple needs of the society. In this new creation, dramatic enactment, song and dance, history, and religious beliefs fused together in terms of artistic and social-logical formations that are peculiar to the society in which the festival is taking place. Mbiti (1975:10) remarks, "Festivals are normally joyful occasions when people sing,

dance, eat and celebrates a particular occasion or event. He adds that festivals are religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of a society. Values are preserved and transferred from generation to generation through festivals (Mbiti, 1975:37). Apart from the above, festivals provide an opportunity for the propitiation of gods, goddesses, and spiritual powers, to re-invoke the gods, secure their attention, and help towards the protection of the society. Festivals provide for the celebration of some past historical events in the life of the community and empower the people in times of war. Festivals do serve as social means of ushering in a period of prosperity and fertility in the life of the community. Also, festivals provide a context for merry-making, arranging marriages, and for ushering in the new seasons. More importantly, some festivals are occasions for the purification of the land and for warding off evil forces, and showing off to neighbors the power, strength, and invulnerability of the community against external threats. In the same vein, Ogunba (2002:25-26) observes elsewhere:

The physical presence of supernatural beings at festivals of all categories is regarded as laden with purification possibilities and people do take advantage of them for their own benefit. The people use such occasions to purge themselves of all the accumulated spiritual filth of the old year in order to enter the New Year a chastened, reborn person.

The dramatization of cultural life in Africa through festivals usually enhanced justice and fair play as well as the propriety of manners. This is why “immoral behavior and unethical social malaise were collectively rebuked through abusive songs during the celebration of festivals in some African societies” (Olaoba, 2006:445). All of these roles fused together and each festival fulfills one, some, or all of these aspects to varying degrees of cultural aesthetic, dramatic, and literary significance. From the foregoing, one can thereby assert that festivals share certain attributes of satire. This is “evident in their affirmative and regenerative schema on the one hand and in their admixture of solemnity with light soreness on the other hand” (Adeoti, 2006:347). Against this backdrop, Soyinka had to employ a vibrant dramaturgic characteristic. This is responsible for the satiric tone of some of his plays.

As Ogunba (1975:25) rightly observes, “Satire is, therefore, one of Soyinka’s chief artistic weapons and he uses it consistently to expose the crudities and sufferings of a society in a state of transition.” Soyinka’s voice, according to Ogunba, is often that of an angry non-conformist who seeks to be the conscience of his community. “Satire as an art that is after the moral wellbeing of the target uses wit or ridicule in its attack on vices” (Griffin, 1994:1). While they last, festivals do witness a transformation in the daily realities of

the celebrating community as it obtains in the context of satire. That is why some Yoruba festivals, especially those that ridicule people's wrongdoings, are a seedbed of satire. Such festivals often celebrate a total release from social restrictions to denounce the latest transgressions of social norms. Indeed, a festival is conducive to the expression of satire (Adeoti, 2006:347-348).

A legitimate component of festivals like Oke-badan, Egungun, Orisa-Oko and Ogiyan festivals in Ibadan, Oro, Agemo, Ebi, and Obirin Ojowu, ('the jealous woman') festivals among the Ijebu and Edi in Ile-Ife to mention only a few, is an unrestrained attack on people and social institutions. These festivals, according to Adeoti (2006:348) "accommodate prurient jests, crude banter, blasphemy, curses and coarse invectives engaged in by the participants under the atmosphere of enlarged freedom of expression". In other words, they can abuse anybody; without being penalized, sing abusive songs to relegate the high and mighty in society. Everything you say during these festivals most especially the Oro festival is privileged. Since satire endorses all these in its reformative roles Adeoti (2006:348), submits that such festivals hold abundant possibilities for the expression of satire, which a dramatist-satirist can easily turn to for artistic influence.

Satiric Symbology and the Festival Motif: The Enduring Nexus

Wole Soyinka has displayed remarkable consistency as a social critic deeply concerned with the non spirituality of modern Africans in social life. Apart from the intellectual perceptiveness, strength of moral purpose, and commitment to social values through which he speaks about African humanistic achievements in the past and present, what is however most striking about his literary oeuvre is the sheer satirical impulse that is always given in his works.

Next, since the performer/participant is allowed to say anything without inhibition or any fear of persecution during joyful events, Soyinka often adopts this phenomenal freedom, especially those associated with satire in Yoruba culture. The created festive milieu influences the structure and provides an impetus for action in his satiric drama. At the beginning of the play, according to Adeoti (2006:349), the audience is led into a moment of anticipation and preparation for an occasion of great social and aesthetic consequence. "The accompanying mood of expectation" Adeoti further states, "is well disposed to the presentation of persons and institutions whose conduct violates the idea of propriety as defined by the playwright and the society. The suspense that is created in the process helps to arouse and sustain the audience's interest in the unfolding action."

It is this paper's contention that the propensity for excesses that features during African festivals, is also in here in Soyinka's satiric plays. Significantly, therefore, his *dramatic personae*, especially the satiric butts, sometimes act beyond the limit of socially permitted conduct. Adeoti (2006:350) observes, congeals in the fact that "the spectator in his theatre encounters a censure of vices in modern African society; deceit, gullibility, tyranny, hypocrisy, and phoniness." It is, therefore, refulgent that Soyinka has a crucial role to play in his society. This point resonates further with the political undertone and significance in his dramatic specimen, *A Dance of the Forests*, prognosticating Nigeria's failed and agonizing nationhood at independence. This play also weaves a dramatic world that cascades with Soyinka's satiric manifestation. In his *The Movement of Transition*, Oyin Ogunba states "satire is one of Soyinka's 'chief artistic weapons'. However, there is a consensus among critics, especially Gerald Moore (1971), E.D. Jones (1973), Oyin Ogunba (1975), and James Gibbs (1986) that there is a continuity of themes and social concern in all of Soyinka's plays. In his own very early study, Moore (1971:19) even remarks on the difficulty of being categorical about the genre of certain plays.

Soyinka's concentration is 'not only on artistic creation but also on the struggle for identity and emancipation (Oyewo, 2006:164). Against this backdrop of post-colonialism, Soyinka had to employ a vibrant dramaturgical characteristic. This is responsible for the satiric tone of his comedies. One observes, according to Oyewo (2006:164) that Soyinka even considers comedy as a weak genre for getting his message across: that is why only a few of his plays to date are entirely comic (see Wole Soyinka's *The Jero Plays: The Trial of Brother Jero, Jero's Metamorphosis* (1981), *The Lion and the Jewel* (1974), *Childe Internationale* (1987). African societies, as far as Soyinka is concerned, are undergoing a kind of transition and an artist creating within that milieu cannot afford the luxury of romanticism in dramaturgic construct. So, Soyinka's voice, "is often that of an angry non-conformist who seeks to be the conscience of his community" (Ogunba, 1975:10). It is, therefore, refulgent that "satire", according to Ogunba (1975:35), "is, therefore, one of Soyinka's chief artistic weapons and he uses it consistently to expose the crudities and sufferings of a society in a state of transition."

Essentializing Satire in A Dance of the Forests

In Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, Demoke, an artist and an Ogunnian character, murders his apprentice, Oremule, because the latter was trying to tower above him. Demoke cannot climb great heights because he is subject to dizziness, and yet the totem must be carved standing in its majestic height, not diminished. Oremule, who does not have his master's disability, offers to

do the top carving. Once there, his master treacherously pulls him down to his death, he was not going to stand and receive wood chippings on his head from an apprentice. A similar scenario is played out by Ogun and Eshuoro, the patrons respectively of Demoke and Oremule, although Ogun does not have mortal powers over Eshuoro, both being gods (Ogunba, 2005:11).

In the play, the word “dance” operates at various levels of meaning, and it is not always associated with agitated body movement. Dances, a step or two might be sufficient in most of the Yoruba ritual dances. “We have dance as drama, dance as ritual, dance as the movement of transition; and dance as festival”, according to Maduakor (1987:178), “the entire dramatic enactment itself, as the title of the play implies, is conceived as dance.” Aroni has used the term, in this sense, in the following context:

The apprentice (Oremole) began to work above his master’s head; Demoke reached a hand and plucked him down... the final link was complete- the Dance could proceed (Soyinka, 1963:6).

In this play, Soyinka uses dance, ritual, mime, and masquerade:

I tried to interpret a modern theme, using one of the idioms of dance and mime.... I tried to use a lot of the rites, a number of religious rites, and there is one of exorcism... which I tried to use to interpret a theme which is quite completely remote from the source of its particular idiom (Mphahlele, 1972:170).

Owing to the cultural specificity of Soyinka’s poetics in the African worldview and philosophy, his critical enterprise and temperament in *A Dance of the Forests* decidedly espouse satiric manifestation. The play written against the backdrop of the festival, was to mark Nigeria’s political independence from colonial rule in 1960. In spite of its deep exploration of peculiarly strange Yoruba mythopoetic characters and pantheon, the play is a classic example of an intensely satirical representation of Africa’s socio-cultural achievement in the past, and present. Prophetically, here, Soyinka indicts Nigeria as a nation of what terror the country may yet expect in the future if it fails to reassert its lost human values.

Soyinka “contends that the human race is continually plagued with unattainable hopes. Man’s depravity is essentially repeated from one epoch to the other with almost infallible predictability” (Adeoti, 2006:350). The basic situation from which the play takes is what the dramatist calls “the Gathering of the Tribes, of the people for ceremony. The community gathers to celebrate the past with a view to ushering in a new dispensation. The objective of the Gathering of the Tribes is to bring together in a re-union the ‘living’, the

'dead' and the 'unborn'. This ceremony is really a symbolic representation of the nation composed of so many different tribes who come together to form an organic body politic.

The community is made up of so many perfidious spirits, strange characters, and at times devilish characters such as Aroni, Demoke, Bola, the prostitute, and the irascible god Ogun. The re-created medieval court of Mata-Kharibu in a play-within-the-play is a brilliantly orchestrated dramatic presentation directed towards the revelation of the chaos in the soul of men at all times. It is the center of the dramatic interest in the play. Ironically, the activities and performances of the past ruler turn out to be as heinous as those committed in the present day. The key dramatic motifs are opulence, abuse of power, irrationality, and cruelty.

As King, Mata Kharibu is a despot who considers his subjects as "mere human property" manipulated according to his whims. To think is treachery. The king is the mind of the people; his orders are followed without any challenging voice. Sure, of his absolutist power, he sets the empire on the brink of a ridiculous, bloody war to recover the trousseau of a woman, Madame Tortoise, who was snatched by him from a fellow chief. The physician in the court of the king advises the warrior to simply obey and wage the war if he does not want to lose his head. He advances his naïve point ironically, by saying:

A man cannot take a wife without a dowry. Mata Kharibu asks for what is rightly his, the dowry of a woman he takes for a wife (Soyinka, 1963:54).

The audience sees that the king's action is most unnatural in the African context. A man does not demand a dowry from a wife, he pays a dowry. A man who takes another man's wife does not expect the former husband to bring the wife's luggage and possessions to him or face consequences. There is always a justification for the policy of power which the Court Historian who is also in the service of the king supplies. He dances to the whims of Kharibu. Just like the warrior, he tells the king only what he wants to hear. He encourages him to suppress the voice of reason and all sentiments and human feelings. The Court Historian says he has looked into human history for the past thousand years and what he sees is that reason and sentimentality are unheard of:

Mata Kharibu: (apprehensive) Did you find anything?

Historian: There is no precedent, your Highness.

Mata Kharibu: You have looked thoroughly:

Historian: It is unheard of. War is the only consistency that past ages afford us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident your Majesty and war is the Destiny. This man is a traitor. He must be in the enemy's pay (Soyinka, 1963:57).

The play affirms that 'war' is the only constant that past ages afford us. It is the legacy that new nations seek to perpetuate. Through the dialogue between these characters, Wole Soyinka introduces in an explicit satirical tone the corruption and inhumanities seen as constant elements in the African socio-political past. There is always a justification for the policy of power which the Court Historian supplies: "There is the need to achieve worldwide, legendary fame like the Greeks and the Trojans who, simply to win back the beautiful Helen, exhausted themselves in internecine wars" (Ibitokun, 1995:138).

And as often happens, according to Ibitokun (1995:138), "power dotes on trifles, rottenness and crudities, looking, as it were, in this instance, for its alternative, for Madame Tortoise is, after, all is said and done, a slut, as morally depraved as Mata Kharibu. However, she has been absolutized as the only female beauty around for whom blood must be shed as if to a goddess". As power-hungry kings and chiefs, like corrupt dictators, enchanted by the power they wield, Mata Kharibu cannot, therefore, believe his ears when his general refuses to undertake, with his regiment, a murderous mission into a fellow chief's territory. His hell-bent irrationality is conveyed in the dramatic exchange between him and the warrior:

Mata Kharibu: You it was who dared to think

Warrior: I plead guilty to the possession of thoughts. I did not know that it was in me to exercise until your inhuman commands.

Mata Kharibu :(Slaps him across the face) You have not even begun to repent of your madness? (Soyinka, 1963:69).

The general seems to be no less adamant than his master is. "He has that acute 'thought cancer' and his altruistic feelings are long-ranged. Just to pander to the caprices of one besotted despot, he does not think that it is humane to hurl a whole regiment into senseless deaths and thereby create widows and orphans in families" (Ibitokun, 1995:138). Describing the origin of the war, he says He not only usurps another man's wife, but also humiliates him:

Warrior: An affair of honor? Since when was it an honorable thing to steal the wife of a brother chieftain?

Physician: Can you really judge the action of another?

Warrior: No but the results, and when they affect me and men who place their trust in me. If the king steals another's wife, it is his affairs. However, let it remain so. Mata Kharibu thought that the dishonored king would go to war on her account. There he was wrong. It seems her rightful husband does not consider that your new queen is worth a battle. However, Mata Kharibu bent on bloodshed so he sends him a new messenger. "Release the goods of this woman, I took from you if there will be peace between us". Is this the action of a ruler who values the peace of his subjects? (Soyinka, 1963:54).

The satire in the play is presented against the deleterious irrationality of Mata Kharibu. There is also the satiric evocation of sheer callousness and a-morality- the callousness and cruelty of African rulers in their total disregard for the welfare of their subjects. Thwarted in his seat of power, Mata Kharibu becomes nervous and disregards the warnings of the soothsayer. The general is either to be killed or sold into slavery. On what is constant in power psychology, the soothsayer philosophizes:

Soothsayer: (Looking at him, musingly). It is in the nature of man to seek power over the lives of others, and there is something lower than a servant [Goes] (Soyinka, 1963:54).

Even the physician who is so servile reminds the king of the terrible suffering of the soldiers who survive the bloodshed of the battlefield. A rival is always disposed of in one form or another. "Every creature", according to the Court Historian "is a mere cog in the wheel of Destiny." There is only one Power, that molds subjects into automation and human determinates. The warrior's treasonable felony is his humanistic revolt against a tyrannical, absolutist order" (Ibitokun, 1995:139).

In turning to Mata Kharibu the king-chief, Wole Soyinka's satire becomes explosive, nullifying all flattering pictures of African greatness in political and social behavior. The center of dramatic focus, according to Akporobaro (2015:207), is not simply court life-but all wielders of power, kings and chiefs-their use of men, their attitude to life, and their use of the wealth of the state put at their disposal. The scene represents King Mata Kharibu as being

embroiled in a state of war in which he does not care about what happens to men.

The scene following that of the court of Mata Kharibu also shows how the festival motif provides a context for the manifestation of satire in this play. It is a masque in which several “spirits”, and apparitions, masked and miming appear one after the other on the stage “in the manner reminiscent of the procession of spirits in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.” Those who appear on stage in their grotesqueness and bizarre costumes has a wider implications for satire. They include the spirit of precious stones, the spirit of darkness, the spirit of water, of the river, the ants, volcanoes, and the pachyderms. Also, are the fantastic figures of the half child whose dance portends incalculable disaster, the triplets, and the dead man and woman, As each of these enters the stage, he or she is asked by the fearless questioner to voice their experiences and ideas of life down the ages to the hearing of “the gathering of the tribe.”

As each apparition speaks, one hears the voice of the master satirist as he expresses, according to Akporobaro (2015:212) “his historical vision and his insistent interest in reminding his audience of the state of crisis in our emergent culture and social psychology.” The action of the scene is significant not only for the vision of social ills, Akporobaro further states, but in the cumulative way in which these fantastic characters brings into the audience’s consciousness and awareness of the gathering storm of decadence, tyranny and greediness for wealth and power which have created so much hardship and political instability in the African world. By bringing this bleak vision before the gathering of notable leaders, chiefs and politicians assembled for independence in 1960, Akporobaro (2015:215) elucidates, Soyinka was not merely revealing the past in some of its negative colours; he had also hoped to use such an imaginatively portrayed dramatic experience to lead rulers and men of power to sober self reflection and a better understanding of themselves, their relationship to the past and their need for self improvement.

Whatever the symbolism of the Demoke/Oremule and Ogun/Eshuoro confrontations is, according to Ogunba (2005:11), it is clear that Demoke and Ogun represent aggression and crime and that they pose great problems for the future of the community, irrespective of whatever other positive qualities they may possess. If the symbolism is political, as it may well be, it would represent Soyinka’s appraisal of the measure of crime that is at the background of the making of modern Nigeria and, therefore, a prognosis of the problems which have to be tackled before a truly functioning modern state can be attained. Quite evidence from the foregoing “is the similarity between the exposition and the excoriation of wrong doers in some Yoruba festivals and the censure of greed and tyranny in *A Dance of the Forests* under the atmosphere of celebration” (Adeoti, 2006:352).

Conclusion

As illustrated with *A Dance of the Forests*, the foregoing paradigms show that satire is the spine of Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. However, by making use of the satiric whip to attack social vices in the play, Soyinka, is creating, in the words of Traore (1972:9) "a theatre which attempts to be part of reality and to serve a social purpose, a transposition into a stage of characters from real life carefully studied and rendered with great veracity." Indeed, in *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka portrays the social reality of contemporary Nigeria by using appropriate dramatic experience, technique and style to make sure that his social message is well realized.

In addition, the paper sets out by acknowledging the festival as the organizing and structuring principle of Soyinka's dramaturgy. As done in the paper, the festival motif that recurs frequently provides a framework through which a generic investigation of the selected play can be conducted. The paper has emphasized the point that the festival motif constitutes a rich cultural mosaic on which Soyinka's satiric plays boldly etched as it is done in the mythopoeic plays. "Festivals, though underlined by diverse socio-historical, mythical, structural and functional purpose, according to Adeoti (2006:361), are generally a means of life renewal. To this extent, they correlate with satire in their social goals. Like satire, festivals aim at cleansing the society to secure social and cosmic harmony.

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