

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**THE THEATRE OF MOHAMMED BEN-ABDALLAH: FRAMES OF RITUAL,
FACTION AND POSTCOLONIALITY**



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FACTION AND POSTCOLONIALITY**

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**of the requirements for the award of the degree of
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NOVEMBER, 2023

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

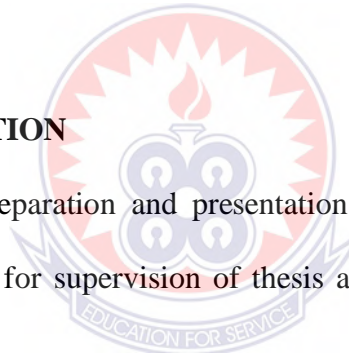
I, Samuel Arko Mensah, declare that this thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

SUPERVISORS' DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



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Date:

DEDICATION

Immanuella, Anna, Samuel and Elizabeth



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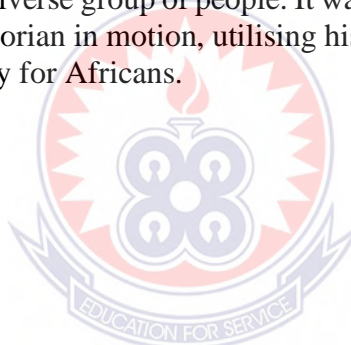
Fig. 1.1 Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatrical/dramatic vision

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ABSTRACT

The study was explicitly on the theatre of Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, a Ghanaian theatre personality. He is a dramatist, playwright, educator, and political activist. The study focused on how ritual, faction (fact and fiction), and postcolonial agenda are represented in the selected plays of the playwright. The purpose of the study was to interpret and analyse the adaptations of ritual and faction, which paves the way for a discourse on postcoloniality as composed by Abdallah through his theatre. It was argued that Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre portrays ritual and faction as its mine of knowledge. However, it appears that the array of scholarship relating to the dramaturgical functions of ritual and faction as symbols in interpreting social reality is not evident. The study sought to open new frontiers in Abdallah's theatre by delving into these elements through the lenses of ritual theory and post-colonial theory. The study used textual analysis as its methodology to venture into an exploration of the historical, cultural, political, religious, and social reality and context of the selected plays. The chosen plays were *Song of the Pharoah* (2022); *The Slaves* (2011); *The Fall of Kumbi* (2010); and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (2008). The plays are uniquely linked by the cord of history, which is the armature. In them are extraordinary cosmos carved in the complexity and multiplicity of ideas, notions, and the total theatre experiences of the proclivities of the essence of the people's identity and livelihood, which to a large extent have gone extinct, remained dormant, or failed to rekindle. The study revealed that the principal aim of Abdallah is to foster a broader comprehension and admiration for history among a diverse group of people. It was then concluded that Mohammed ben-Abdallah is a prominent historian in motion, utilising his plays to provide insights into the roles and significance of memory for Africans.





CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The theatrical landscape of a given society often reflects the diverse cultural elements present within that community. The phenomenon under consideration is primarily shaped by the diverse and evolving characteristics observed in numerous societies globally. The diversities observed can be due to the presence of multiple elements, including but not limited to belief systems, religious affiliations, educational backgrounds, individual thoughts and reasoning, upbringing, environmental factors, as well as ethnic and tribal heritage. It is important to acknowledge and value the endeavours of individuals from these cultures who are able to authentically portray and reinterpret their lived experiences through their written plays. These plays play a significant role in the development of a distinct theatrical tradition and cultural identity for their respective societies, while still maintaining a universal appeal and recognition (Amponsah, 2016; Mensah, 2016).

The existence of theatre in pre-colonial Africa has been a subject of enduring scholarly discourse. Certain schools of thought argue that lexicons such as ‘drama’, ‘theatre’, and ‘rituals’ are ingrained in the European vocabulary and possess distinct meanings and interpretations when compared to their African counterparts. According to Kerr (1995), it is crucial for Africans to employ indigenous aesthetic terms when defining theatre in the pre-colonial era in order to fully understand and effectively advocate for their own theatrical traditions. The emergence of this perspective can be attributed to the European critics who made a clear distinction between theatre and ceremonial performances, which largely serve as the foundation of African theatre.

In Edward Said's seminal work "Orientalism" published in 1978, he posits that Europe has effectively fashioned the culture of their colonies to align with their own, so bolstering their imperial dominance. Said's study of Europe's construction of the 'other' encompasses more than just the physical aspects, thereby evoking a sense of astonishment. The detrimental consequences of imperialism encompassed the intrusive penetration and subjugation through which the coloniser employed to establish dominant control over their conquered territories. Consequently, the many cultural manifestations within the conquered territories were impacted. Said's endeavour to expose the actions of the imperialist agenda on the Orient prompted numerous artists and writers in Africa and other regions, who were subject to European control, to consciously or unconsciously question the prevailing norms regarding European domination and cultural hegemony (Mensah, 2016; Said, 1978).

The development of procedures for establishing a cultural identity that challenges the European portrayal of the colonised subject has been facilitated by the narratives of liberated slaves and counter exercises undertaken by Africans. This phenomenon is supported by what scholars have referred to as the "Empire writes back to the centre," which has emerged as a prominent concept within postcolonial discourses (Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H., 2002).

In view of the assertions above, Abdallah (2008) asserts that the time is apt for African playwrights to set their own standards in determining the identity and the necessary ingredients that define an African theatre as well as the appropriate criteria for judging it works. In his particular interest in determining the tenets for an African theatre it must draw its muse from the barrage of indigenous knowledge as its source material. These indigenous knowledges include folklore, music, dance, mime, pantomime, rituals, values, history, ceremonies, legends, proverbs, myth and the total experiences of the people. These indigenous knowledge systems have in them dramatic elements that serve as the armature as well as the necessary ingredients for the creation of stories that reflect the behaviours of the society taking cognisance of the

communal living experience that foster pride and sense of belongingness. Playwrights of varied experiences draw inspiration from these indigenous-based theatrics for the crafting and creating of thought-provoking plays that mirror the society. The playwright then becomes a journalist of a sort observing the environment and creating drama that reflects it for the purposes of educating, informing and entertaining its audience. In effect, these variables that is, rituals, history, music and dance, ceremonies, legends and the total experience becomes a necessary motif that playwrights revolve their works on. It is upon this that the study ventures into an exploration on the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

This study is on the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah and how he has represented ritual, *faction* as coined by him (which is herein explained as facts plus fiction) and post coloniality in the fictional texts of his plays. I demonstrate this by engaging in an in-depth textual analysis and interpretation of these variables – rituals, *faction* and post coloniality in *Song of the Pharoah* (2022); *The Slaves* (2011) *The fall of Kumbi* (2010); and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (2008). The place of rituals, *faction* (fact + fiction) and post coloniality is studied in the socio-cultural context of the Akan ethnic group in the Ghanaian society.

The selected plays reflect the historical and mythical representations of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs of the Ghanaian theatrical space.

Similarly, the playwright, Mohammed ben-Abdallah appears to be one of the dramatists whose authorial signature touches predominately on the ethos and historic accounts of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial occurrences of the African with specific interest of his motherland, Ghana in a condensed dramatic form that is eidetic in imagery to the understanding of these accounts in the lives of its varied audience. Added to this, the playwright is one of the products of the doyenne of Ghanaian theatre Efua T. Sutherland tipped as the carrier of the promise to expand the frontiers of the *Anansegoro* (spider play) genre into what he created as *Abibigoro* (African or Black play) (Agovi, 1989). Unlike the *Anansegoro* which looks at the Ghanaian

society with the spider as the protagonist and as a representation of everyman, the latter postulate to venture into the historical, mythical, ritualistic and the total experiences of the African in revalorizing and reinterpreting all these happenings within the social, cultural and political context of its society.

In a unique sense, I am looking at what defines Abdallah's authorial signature as a dramatist. This engagement is basically an attempt to ascertain the theatricality of Abdallah's dramatic text and how he manipulates the variables – rituals, *faction* and post coloniality. Also, as constituents of his theatrical performance with particular attention given to significance of these variables to understand how social structure is seen in the aesthetic symbolic cosmos purveyed in the texts, characters and the intuitive varied language that drives his plays.

Furthermore, the whole scope of the study is to interpret the world discoverable in Abdallah's dramatic text with the view of giving meaning and understanding to how rituals and *faction* are deployed in the theatre and how these theatrical gest aid to understand the threshold of post coloniality in the four selected plays for the study. These frames in another instance is to give how they sustain the metaphoric, vivid imagery and varied iconoclasm in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Theatre possesses a distinctive capacity to effectively communicate and connect with the diverse behaviours, attitudes, goals, and needs present within a given society. When conducting a comprehensive analysis of theatrical spaces throughout the African continent, it becomes evident that there is a notable diversity in terms of composition, form, and presentation techniques. These investigations are widely seen as endeavours aimed at discovering and establishing an individual's sense of self. An identity that embodies the fundamental nature of the lives within a specific cultural context. Consequently, there would be divergences in the

methodology employed. Nevertheless, it introduces a vibrant competition of concepts and originality to theatrical presentations.

Upon initial examination of playwriting, it becomes apparent that there is a prevailing belief among certain individuals that colonial writing styles are regarded as sacred, while others argue that such styles do not afford Africans the opportunity to authentically depict their society's narrative as it should be. The prevailing issue lies in the tendency of many African playwrights, dramatists, and practitioners to emulate the Western method of presentation, rather than authentically capturing the essence of what they aim to depict. As a result, achieving the desired artistic representation becomes an elusive endeavour. Consequently, it is imperative for individuals of African descent to engage in theoretical discourse that is informed by their lived experiences, in order to effectively articulate the societal concerns that affect their community (Asiedu, 2011). The primary factor is that due to the persistent dependence on foreign norms and trends, it appears playwrights from Africa tend to adopt a conformist mindset rather than engaging in critical thinking to cultivate unique cultural attributes.

Abdallah (2008) emphasises the need for African playwrights to establish a genuine African theatre tradition. He argues that it is imperative for these playwrights to establish their own benchmarks, rooted in their cultural heritage, historical context, and the comprehensive African experience. This will enable them to develop criteria for evaluating their own artistic creations. This statement supports Nkrumah's pan-Africanist agenda, which emphasises the importance of African creative writers maintaining consistency in their writing in order to accurately represent African traditional values.

It is noteworthy to observe that the pursuit of this endeavour to explore one's identity is prevalent among African leaders. These leaders, particularly Nkrumah of Ghana, hold the belief that the arts have the capacity to establish and shape the African identity. Hence, because of his specific focus on cultivating the African identity, Nkrumah perceived the theatre as the

suitable medium for actualizing this aspiration. The connotation of this statement is that the theatre aims to explore the ideals inherent in traditional African history and African identity, with the intention of promoting development in all aspects of the socio-political landscape of the contemporary African society.

Abdallah's plays have engendered a significant body of scholarly research and analysis. The majority of scholarly attention is focused on the dramatic structure, thematic elements, linguistic aspects, and, in general, the genesis of *Abibigoro* as conceived by the playwright. Nevertheless, the existing body of scholarly work on Abdallah's theatre seems to have overlooked or given little attention to the topics of ritual, fiction, facts, and postcoloniality.

Asiedu (2011) conducted a study examining the work of Abdallah and his conceptualization of *Abibigoro* as a theoretical construct. The researcher specifically focused on two plays authored by Abdallah, analysing the employment of storytelling and aesthetics as key factors in the portrayal and definition of *Abibigoro*. The absence of references to historical facts and rituals is notable in the current discourse. In a similar vein, the study conducted by Yirenkyi and Mensah (2018) examined the structure and characterization of one of Abdallah's theatrical works, namely *The fall of Kumbi*. The aspects and/or features that characterise the authorship of the play in the *Abibigoro* genre were highlighted. The author did not provide much emphasis on the themes of *faction* and ritual in his works. Therefore, this creates a void that needs to be addressed.

Furthermore, the dramatic contributions of the playwright in question, including his experimental approach and the establishment of *Abibigoro*, have garnered acknowledgement and contributed to the rich theatrical heritage of Ghana, the African continent, and the diasporic communities. Abdallah possesses a significant influence in the realm of theatre due to his fervent dedication to radical ideological perspectives and his profound commitment to conducting dialectical analyses of historical, social, ritualistic, mythical, and political

narratives in the context of Africa. These qualities position him among the esteemed group of dramatists and playwrights.

This study seeks to interpret and analyse the adaptations of ritual, and *faction*, which paves way for a discourse in post coloniality as composed by Abdallah through his theatre. It is particularly driven by his gleanings of the traditions, religious and political cosmos of its people which are reinterpreted in challenging the status quo as transported and presented by the aforementioned frames which include ritual and faction in the selected texts. Given this perspective, it is the aforementioned frames that provide and maintain the metaphorical, vivid imagery, and diverse iconoclasm in Abdallah's theatre.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to interpret and analyse the adaptations of ritual, and faction, which paves way for a discourse in post coloniality as composed by Abdallah through his theatre.

The purpose of the study is to interpret the world discoverable in Abdallah's dramatic text of his plays with the view of giving meaning and understanding to how rituals and faction are deployed in the theatre and how these theatrical gest aid to understand the threshold of post coloniality and the vanguard of folklore, traditionalism and postmodernism in the four selected plays for the study. It further examines how his theatre challenges and/or comments on the social, political and religious issues in his cultural milieu.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study sought to:

1. Examine the structure employed by Mohammed ben-Abdallah to give meaning to his theatre.
2. Ascertain the philosophical underpinnings of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre.
3. Examine how *faction* is deployed as a symbol for interpreting social reality in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre.
4. Analyse the dramaturgical functions of ritual in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre.
5. Explore the postcolonial agenda created in the context of African identity in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the determinants used by the playwright Mohammed ben Abdallah in giving meaning to his theatre?
2. What are the philosophical underpinnings of Mohammed ben Abdallah's theatre?
3. How does Mohammed ben-Abdallah use *faction* as a symbol in interpreting social reality in his theatre?
4. How does Mohammed ben-Abdallah utilise ritual in his theatre?
5. How is the postcolonial agenda contextualised in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah?

1.6 Justification of the selected plays

The selected plays for the study included; *Song of the Pharoah* (2022); *The Slaves* (2011) *The fall of Kumbi* (2010); and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (2008). These selected plays in effect illustrate and illuminate the main issues this study focused on. The dramatist Abdallah is one unique writer who has shown fidelity to historical materials in almost all his dramaturgy. Thus, the aforementioned plays are uniquely linked by the cord of history which is the armature. In them are extraordinary cosmos carved in the complexity and multiplicity of ideas, notions and the total theatre experiences of the proclivities of the essence of the people's identity and livelihood which to a large extent have extinct or remained dormant and or failure to rekindle it.

Abdallah's plays are scripted for the stage with a unique and distinct expressive language characterized by intensive stories, impressive symbolic imageries and creatively driven with music that add aesthetical value to it. The beauty of his creative works is achieved via the embolden dramatis personae who serve as the carriers of the message to its varied audience across social, political structures of its constituency.

Given the circumstances that premise the theatre of Mohammed ben Abdallah, is largely in consonance with the amalgamation of history, ritual, music, dance and his postcolonial gleanings of the African to have its own unique identity and focus in managing its own affairs and notwithstanding, borrowing aspects of the colonizer's ideas and methods that are in tandem with the African beliefs and value system. This is what underlines the portraiture of Abdallah as a creator of a dramatic genre known as *Abibigoro* which is considered to be a kind of a model for African theatre.

Accordingly, a critical impulse of Abdallah as a dramatist does not deny the profundity of his art as Anti-European in his plays. It was this that seem to have motivated him to venture into research to come out with a model that can be seen and accepted as an African theatre. As

intimated earlier, this search gave birth to *Abibigoro*. Thus, Abdallah becomes the carrier of the promise set out by Sutherland the doyenne of Ghanaian theatre and her creation of *Anansegoro* (Agovi, 1989).

Conversely, ritual and *faction* (fact and fiction) is the very spirit that drives almost all his plays. In a sense, Abdallah has a kind of link or relationship between the world of history and ritual in crafting his theatre. It is thus, in these borders of ritual and faction that has flourished in triggering a revalorizing, re-writing, reinventing the connections between the dramaturgical elements to the performative ingredients in spicing the stage.

1.7 Significance of the Study

In focusing attention on the theatre of Mohammed ben Abdallah, students of drama will know the structure and form of his drama as well as how meaning is given prominence to the understanding of its audience and or readership. This would go further to enable students especially, to understand the creator's life, influences, development and impact his drama has on the world theatre space.

The study would serve as a reference material in the teaching and learning of African Dramatic theories since it tries to attempt in expanding the principles and philosophical approaches to the creation and appreciation of *Abibigoro* as a unique African dramatic genre.

Playwrights and budding creative writers may draw inspiration from the study to build on this genre and/or re-create other creative writings employing the features, techniques and elements that makes Abdallah's drama unique. It will also enable and equip stage directors to analyse scripts of Abdallah and other African plays taking cognizance of the features and presentation of history, myth, rituals, dance and music by contextualizing it to suit the totality of the African experience.

The study is also significant because it consciously seeks to find out the authenticity of Abdallah's theatre as a kind of African theatre that will give impetus to the identity search, form of writing for the African stage and its merits in the world theatre stage.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The scope of the study was delimited to among many other things to engage in an in-depth textual analysis of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre. The focus was primarily on four published plays of the playwright out of ten. They are; *Song of the Pharoah* (2022), *The Fall of Kumbi* (2010), *The Slaves* (2011) and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (2008). The criterion for the selection of the plays were purposively done as it captured the very essence of history, *faction* (fact +fiction) drama, ritual, music and dance in telling the story of the African with the total African theatre approach. Similarly, it also relied on literary works, essays, archival documents as well my own experiences with his plays.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This research report consists of five chapters. Chapter one begins with the introduction and explanation of the background of the study, the theoretical underpinning, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, justification of the selected plays, significance of the study and delimitation. Chapter two is the presentation of the related literature review on topical issues in the work while chapter three is the methodology. The detailed presentation and discussion of the results are contained in the fourth chapter. It has been presented chronologically in relation to the set objectives that necessitated the study. Summary, conclusions and recommendations occupy the fifth chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Overview

This chapter focused on providing and interrogating relevant literature on key topical issues on the African theatre space and how elements such as rituals and history are represented and interpreted in the cosmos of African playwrights. The review of related literature also adopted the functional approach where by the topical issues raised was discussed critically in a systematic manner with the view of understanding the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. The review also looked at theatre in colonial Africa, dramatic rituals in African plays, ritual representations in African plays through to theatre movement in Ghana until the genesis of contemporary theatre in Ghana which birthed the playwright this study looked at. The review is however, preceded by some significant theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks normally border around the very structure that gives shape and strength to the study. It is the frame fashioned out by the researcher in defining the direction or the travel plan of one's study. Therefore, the map or the travel plan of this study was hinged on two theoretical underpinnings; ritual theory and post-colonial theory.

2.2 Ritual theory

There has been an upsurge interest in the use of ritual as a cultural analytical tool in diverse fields of academic discourses. It is very surprising to read works of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, philosophers and experts in religious studies have turned to ritual as a unique dynamic cultural avenue to understand how people make and remake their worlds.

There is no denying of the assertion that ritual studies have been central to research in religion and society in later years of nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. In recent years however, ritual has become a topic of interest in its own right and not just a tool for

understanding people, society or cultural phenomenon. It is now a subject, genre, style or theory by which scholarship across many disciplines fall on for discourses (Bell, 1992).

I wish to state that my use of the theory would be relatable to not just the act per se but an attempt to venture into an exploration to identify scenes or acts as ritual and its dramaturgical significance in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. Ritual theory investigates human cultural practises and symbolic actions. It goes on to study how these practises (culture, traditions) and activities affect social structures and interactions, as well as how they contribute to the construction of identity, meaning, and values. Simply described, ritual is a collection of acts or actions repeated by individuals or groups that have a specific meaning and significance within a cultural context.

As a result, the study utilising ritual theory serves as a framework for understanding how cultural practises and performances can be more than merely entertainment and have deeper social, cultural, and spiritual value and significance. This will also be utilised as a means of understanding the nature and practise of theatre through analysis.

However, there are some concerns about the conversation of ritual and theatre which inevitably makes its usage a challenge. The difficulty has been the argument about whether ritual and theatre are exclusive mutually or can be used interchangeably. In view of this, I venture into a discourse of some theorists and their positions on ritual and theatre to unravel some of the misconceptions about the theory of the study.

2.3 The Concept of Ritual Theory

There are various views on the concept of ritual in the study of theatre. Largely it is viewed from a perspective of religion thereby creating a space of horror and fear. The reason is that it is man's appreciation of his helplessness. Therefore, he relies on the supernatural for almost all his needs and actions. By this ritual becomes a stylized repetitive pattern of behaviour

associated with religious beliefs and practices and in some sense deemed to be sacred (Nwanaju, 2013).

Ritual in its performative standing, contains element that defines its setting for performance (time, location, atmosphere, tone) with a liturgical order, spatial element and actors who coordinate it. To the African ritual is an integral part of the society. It is the 'kra' (soul) of the culture and the survival of generations.

In the Introductory pages of the book *Ritual and identity* (Wulf, C., Althans, B., Audehm, K., Bausch, C., Göhlich, M., Sting, S., & Zirfas, J. 2010), they asserted that ritual is a complex social process that vary widely in their intention, content and context. This is because with its multi-faceted phases ritual may either compel people to order by following the status quo of the community or manage people to socially integrate and co-exist as a communal people.

With this they are bonded and have unified spirit in which ever endeavour the society seek to do.

2.4 From theory to theorist: Exploring Turner, Schechner and Bell theoretical models for ritual theory.

In an attempt to deconstruct ritual from drama or theatre, it must be understood that ritual is the basis that defines drama or theatre. The question that one may ask is what is the main thing that drives drama? It is conflict that drives drama as seen in the eyes of scholars. They argue that drama is a process-based construction of imagined experience which is interactive in nature which is done by creating and interpreting human meanings through imagined action and language that stimulates and corresponds to real life actions (Alhajri, 2019; Neelands, 1984).

This statement possibly is suggestive that there is an element of make-believe inherent in drama which is the imitation of life by means of creating conflict. Again, if this assertion is true then, the creation of conflict through by means of imitating life is true. Consequently, the idea above seems to corroborates with Turner's theory of social drama which is the drama of everyday life

and “theatrical potential of social life” (Turner, 1982, p.2). By implication, the social drama is an experiential matrix which have its source materials from oral and literary narratives generated from various genres of cultural performances.

Similarly, Turner (1982) in his attempt to compare drama under social and stage categories, he argued that social drama is generated by a process whereas stage drama is generated by an outcome. What this seeks to imply is the fact that stage drama must undergo a process of preparation before it becomes a product, nonetheless this does not make it separate from social drama but an extension of it.

Another theorist, Schechner adds credence to the above assertions that the essence of drama is transformation. He categorizes drama into social drama and aesthetic drama. In his view, social drama “works in the world” and the aesthetic drama “works on consciousness (Schechner, 1982, p.7). It could be inferred that social drama is same as that of Turner and the aesthetic drama is also same as stage drama. Thus, there is a kind of corroboration between the thinking of these theorist on ritual and drama. Nevertheless, Schechner opines that there could be variations in the execution of both aesthetic drama and stage drama across cultures. This is as a result of the specific principle that may be used. That is the everyday ritual activity carried out by the people.

On the part of Catherine Bell, another ritual theorist postulates that “ritual is an event, a set of activities that does not simply express cultural values or enact symbolic scripts but actually effect changes in people’s perceptions and interpretations (2009, p.74). A ritual must ignite a sense of transformative tendencies to enable the people make sense of the world. This transformation must be progressive and developmental. What kind of transformation effect is she looking up to in the lives of the people? This is because like all ritual actions, it must have its symbolic meanings. For instance, in the African perspective of ritual, the ritual action is transitional which begins from a familiar position to the unknown. In the familiar stage of life

where one moves from childhood to adulthood assumes the mantle of responsibility. This assumption of the role as an adult symbolizes that one is developed, able and capable to provide for others.

Bell (2009) again argues that ritual does not necessarily have to imitate life as prescribed by Turner, but it is the very grounds for reality. She sees ritual to have a lasting transformative effect on the players. Something that the player can tangibly possess, move with it and also extend the same effect on others. By this the society would see the tangibility of the ritual action lived and or experienced in the society.

Accordingly, Bell in deconstructing ritual opines that ritual, dance, music, sports, games are activities related to theatre. All these activities are events that are performed in public for its aesthetical appreciation. Thus, if ritual driven by conflict as opined by Turner then in effect drama, be it social drama or staged drama – either way is correct. Hence ritual can be both.

2.5 Emile Durkheim's Sociological point of view on ritual theory

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was a fundamentalist and a father of sociological theories that gave Turner a ritual theorist the impetus to revolutionize his idea of social drama. In particular interest to understanding the behaviour of man he proposed that sociology must be approached scientifically just as any other physical sciences. Thus, he set out to prove his hypothesis on some socially and culturally constructed ideas about the beliefs, norms, practices and actions of a group of people. His study revealed that there are social facts that determine the existence of the people which in turn dictate the 'ways of acting', on the individual or members in that society. According to Durkheim (1966):

A social fact is to be recognized by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals, and the presence of this power may be recognized in its turn either by the existence of some specific sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual effort that tends to violate it. (p.10).

These social facts as intimated by Durkheim is the embodied truth or practice which is learnt and passed on from one generation to another through oral tradition. In effect they become the

collective habits manifested in their culture – way of life. This could be in the action of their eating, dressing, social integration and cohesion, festivals and even their language as a people.

He further explained the collective habits as;

Collective habits are inherent not only in the successive acts which they determine but, by a privilege of which we find no example in the biological realm, they are given permanent expression in a formula which is repeated from mouth to mouth, transmitted by education, and fixed even in writing. Such is the origin and nature of legal and moral rules, popular aphorisms and proverbs, articles of faith wherein religious or political groups condense their beliefs, standards of taste established by literary schools, etc. (Durkheim, 1966, p.7).

Gleanings from this explanation gives the impression that the collective habits are not just narratives but dramatic in nature. Because habits need to be exhibited, acted, showcased or performed. So, by its performance by the people, in a permanent expression in formula proves the drama or theatre bit of the whole ritual process. For instance, in transmitting the origin, nature, proverbs and articles of faith needs the lead of someone or a classified home who are endowed and seen as the custodian of these social fact which I will want to call it the archival documents of the people. Consequently, a kind of entertainment and art is produced since their collective habits have been translated into collective consciousness, the repetitive nature of their social facts becomes ritual and theatre. The simple reason is that the society's consciousness and collective experience becomes an audience watching a performance.

Therefore, rituals are socio-cultural and religious constructs in traditional societies (Ilori, 2014). Ritual in its entirety is mined from the barrage of folktales existing in the indigenous knowledge system of the traditional society. As intimated earlier in the study, my concern is the way Abdallah deploys or use rituals in his works as it appears to support Layiwola (2000) argument that ritual has the ingredients to help in the creation and development of dramatic conflict, tension, suspense in a dramatic piece. Burkets (1982) also seem to corroborates the assertion that ritual is a performance which reinforces and provide a socializing function. It is these characteristics that appear as one of the uniqueness in the craft of Abdallah theatre as well as

the dramatization of the historical account of traditional society gives impetus to its rituals which then invigorate it by giving it some sort of sacred power or authority.

2.6 Postcolonial Theory

Literature as a broad discipline encapsulate writings on drama, prose, poetry, essays as major blocs that portray historical, cultural and social aspects of the eras they were written. Postcolonial theory has over the period been a voice for critics in the arts especially theatre and literature. It is still, an attempt to describe the contemporary situation and its culture with the spotlight on the effects of western imperialism on the subaltern in the colonized countries especially Africa. The discourse on post-colonialism is to give voice to the oppressed by understanding and critiquing the structures of oppression and articulating for liberation and revolution in their respective societies. It is also the voice that give opportunity to the colonized to negotiate their identities and proudly and freely recover their past.

Furthermore, postcolonial discourses and its proponents have not been for a long time settled on a specific definition (s). However, theorists and students of postcolonialism study seem to accept postcolonialism generally as that, it concerns itself with the impact of colonization on cultural, political and economic dimensions as expressed by the colonizer for the colonized (Strongman, 2014; Thekkevallyara, 2013). Thus, postcolonial is a term used to describe the period when colonies of European were freed. It literally concerns itself with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies by the imperialists.

Ampka (2000) defines postcolonial “as the moments and activities produced when colonial oppressions were understood and strategies for resisting them were demonstrably articulated” (p.1). Postcolonial is also expressed as the historical period after decolonization but it includes the cultural and literary concepts conveying the meaning that mirrored the lives of the people under the influence of the colonizer (Guyen, 2023). In another instance, Ashcroft et al define postcolonial theory as a discussion of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance,

representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of the imperial Europe ... and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come to being” (Ashcroft et al, 1995, p.2). The critical nature of postcolonial theory illuminates the awareness and consciousness of the ‘other’ to decolonize their minds and become assertive in speaking for the marginalized as alternative voice dominant than the colonizer. In effect, the goal of postcolonial theory is to replace the inaccurate perception of the colonized people as inferior. Binns (1997) points out that by exposing a cultures colonial history it serves as an avenue for empowerment as the society becomes self-conscious and put a premium on their lives. So, the counter voices that rose against the dominance of the imperialist are Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. They are the proponents for this theory.

The act of oppression hitherto, in the peak of colonialism was quite fatal and not to be countenanced. In considering the impact of colonialism on the *other* as Said (1978) put it, the *other* was exploited economically, culturally and politically. The dominance of the colonialist and their powers was aimed to extract and maintain control over the colonized. However, what might have really opened up the wounds for the African to be conscious of their state is the territorial dominance and cultural imposition of their arts and tradition.

Therefore, the usage of cultural imposition on the African by the colonizers did a grave harm to the theatre. This according to Graham-White (1974), posit that ‘colonization was not only of territory but also of the mind’. By this, the African lost track of his real identity that affected the art and the numerous missionaries and converted Africans did a massive blow to the arts. It then overshadowed talents by the circumstances and the framework that determines how plays were to be written.

Fanon in his bid in contributing to the debate had three phases of how the African has been overshadowed before and after independence that:

In the first, the colonized intellectual proves that he has assimilated the occupier's culture. The inspiration is European, and so are the forms he chooses. In a second period the colonized writer becomes uncertain and decides to go back into his past. However, his education has been a process of assimilation of European ways and attitudes, with corresponding alienation from his own... As he is not integrated with his people as his relations with them are from outside, he confides himself to remembering (Cited by Graham-White, 1974, p.61).

The implication of this view is that the African has been shoved with attitudes and perhaps orientation that makes him uncertain and continues to struggle to assert himself. It has also really made him limited and borrowed aesthetics that is foreign.

Nevertheless, postcolonial theatre has forged a new paradigm that thrives on its own context and content that is relevant and related to its native culture. The discourses on post colonialism largely serves as an avenue for the oppressed to assert themselves by articulating their understanding of the structures of oppression through critiquing to encourage liberation and revolution from the entanglements of the oppressor. Thus, Said (1978) in his inaugural publication of *Orientalism* brought the awakening while he asserted that it was the West that constructed the cultures of the *other*. By this the *other* is denied of his real identity and way of living.

Similarly, postcolonial work seeks to challenge the status quo of Western art. This challenge takes numerous forms, outright rejection to re-appropriation and reformulation. For instance, the use of European literature especially English literatures was used as a tool in manipulating the *other* on the standard of works in the arts. This brought uncertainties among playwrights with the question, which are the standards to follow? In effect the coloniser saw the African incapable of thinking or take up any action. They literally deposited their information and ideology in the supposed 'empty' minds of the African. Said (1978) further argues that it would be prudent to acknowledge and accept *hybridity* with the reason being that considering the cultural identities that are entangled with the orient being subjective would rather put a kind of restraint. Sawant (2011) corroborates the assertion by Said that we have to distance ourselves

from subjectivity and engage in activities that would enable us avail ourselves to see things as others might which in effect, create the avenue for learning from each other to foster change and development.

Postcolonial theory involves a number of characteristics which directly or indirectly in the works of some playwrights in the orient such as Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Femi Osofisan, Athol Fugard, August Wilson, Yaw Asare, and Mohammed ben-Abdallah. The challenge of defining history in the context of questioning the reality of it in the frame of postcoloniality and its definition; the plurality of identities as a consequence of fragmented lives and cultures; and hybridity of language are some of the concepts of the postcolonial theory that this study sought to review. Mohammed ben-Abdallah mirrors largely these concepts in the selected works for the study. This theory is essential in the analysis of the fifth objective of the study.

2.7 Postcolonial Theory and the African Identity

The African identity as a matter of fact is germane irrespective of its associated challenges it poses to most people in the continent. The critical thing that did happen to the African and upon which this study modestly seeks to unravel to a large extent is the conditions that define the identity of the African. By postcolonial, I mean the historical, psychological, economic, and political complexities that result from the colonial experience. In its historical sense I appropriate what Bill Ashcroft and others have quite simply described as “all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p.2)

Accordingly, post colonialism is a notion that stresses on the role of postcolonial writers or people in the world and to bring to life their unique voices that seem to have marginalized by the West as distinctively succinct from their coloniser's voice. The postcolonial theory highlights postcolonial identity as different from the coloniser. To this, Paolini (1999)

articulates that the postcolonial “other” comes back in a newly formed identity that is far away from European identity, as he reports Helen Tiffen’s words that:

Postcolonial writers “rehabilitate” the self against European appropriation. In fracturing imposed European master narratives and perspectives, post colonialism replaces them with an “alternative vision”. This is particularly the case for “indigenous people” (India, Africa) who are able “to challenge European perspectives with their own metaphysical systems (p.79).

The identity of the African in postcolonial era is purely an entity that emerges in relation to an ‘other’ or ‘others’. In effect it is a dual or a plural self. This is because the question of postcolonial identity forms a large disagreement among many postcolonial theorists. According to Hawley (2001) he postulates that there are two types of identity. They are that which are viewed by the essentialists and constructionists respectively. Thus, the essentialists have the opinion that the nationalists who go for the establishment of a pre-colonial identity on a specific racial basis that is harmless to individual differences is the basis for assertiveness; whereas constructionists think that identity is shaped by external forces such as society and this fact causes a split in the identity.

Contrastingly, the fact of achieving an establishment of pre-colonial identity for Vermeulen and D’haen (2006), it is practically impossible. They argue that the abolishment of the influence of colonization is a way to legitimize the failure of nationalists to as it were “transcend the imperial legacy” since they use the same principles to highlight one side of the national identity over the other sides. Therefore, the question on identity of the African as posed by Orr (2008) is the “question of identity affects anyone brought up in the shadow of imperialism” (p.77).

This notwithstanding the wreckage done by the imperialist as the society became hollow, culture imposition, the grave syndrome of fear and inferiority complex that crippled the African with regards to space, politics, education, culture among many others. This effect has a toll on the real identity of the African. It must be admitted again that had it not been the unavoidably

presence of the imperialist, the African would have developed its own unique education system rich in intellectual property that promotes and upholds indigenous knowledge, medical treatment and systems of government pertinent to the culture and traditions of the African people. To put it simply, imperialism has rather created disintegration in the cohesive nature of the culture of African. Hence, dent in the identity of the African.

There are some scholars in Africa and in the diaspora, who do not subscribe to the above assertions. They in their purview have resolved to couch a path that redefines and reconstruct the mindset of their people in the world of literature specifically theatre to echo their voices in the discursive hegemony of the African identity.

One of such scholars is Ngugi wa Thiong'o who has continuously and persistently challenged the status quo of ensuring that the African decolonises its mind. The literature on cultural history and anthropology in Africa lays the negative images concerning the nature of African identity. These are perceptions crafted on the political and ideological propaganda meant to denigrate and desecrate the essence of the 'African'. Conversely, the relevance and perhaps the significance of memory, awareness and the ability to remember presume a sense of history. It is upon this that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in order not to be implicated and caged in the perceptions of the colonizer trying to portray all is good but on the other side using its power of dominance to take over the wealth of the African to better Europe. He asserts that the colonizer has displaced the African most importantly its culture. Killam (1984) in *Critical perspectives* on Ngugi quoted him as:

To make economic and political control the more complete the colonizing power tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of expression, hoping to control a people's values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self (p. 26).

Postcolonial literature interprets the identity question in diverse ways but mostly those ways have a unity against the colonial power. The scene of the identity of the African in a colonized society, the people or indigenes feel themselves in search of identity but only to realize that the

ruling power's culture has been rather assimilated resulting in disintegration of their own cultures (Guyen, 2023). In the voice of Huddart (2006) asserts that:

If you know only too well where your identity ends and the rest of the world begins, it can be easy to define that world as other different, inferior, and threatening to your identity and interests. If cultures are taken to have stable, discrete identities then the divisions between cultures can always become antagonistic (Huddart, 2006, p.4).

In essence, the colonized is put in a furnace and when brought out a new soul forged who speaks the colonizer's language, new customs and sometimes even attempt his colour and hair styles. The colonized then lives in a way brought by the colonizer which then becomes a culturally hybridized lifestyle. The critic Homi Bhabha accordingly, articulates that "the liberatory 'people' who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity. They are caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation (Bhabha, 1994, p.208).

Therefore, the selected plays of Mohammed ben-Abdallah attempt to find true identities of the African. This is done through narrative skills and deep characterizations as well as themes evident in the plays to foster a significant and over all messages linked to the identities.

2.8 Postcolonial Theory and History

In the discourse of history as fiction has posed a lot of challenges in determining an appropriate definition for it. A dictionary definition of history is the continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even to the future. History on the other hand can be seen as the study and interpretation of past events, actions, and experiences of human societies and individuals. It could also be seen as the systematic examination of the past to understand how societies, cultures, economies, political systems and individuals have evolved over time. But Seldon and Widdowson (1993) state that there are no stable, fixed or single history only discontinuous and contradictory histories (p. 163). Huchon (2004) also asserts that "there appears that there is no true history because the history is the subject in history, subject to history and to history" (p. 177). The recording of history is always viewed in the

eyes of the narrator and the focus it wants the audience to know and follow if need be. In effect the reflection of the entire observations and documents that support the narrative of historical accounts are largely bereft of the unique cultures and traditions of a people for instance in the colonies of the West. It is therefore not surprising that advocate of postcolonial theory is has been very outright and forthright in rejecting the colonizers views of history about them.

Again, the subjectivity of history as narrated or written by the imperialist is challenged as it is not the true reflection of the oppressed. This is because the selection of the information from the sources as viewed by the colonizers may be their own particular hierarchy of significance thus not giving the true reflection of the event.

Contrastingly, the African having realized the distortions in their culture and traditions as documented as historical account by the colonizer began to question the fidelity or otherwise the authenticity of it. The wake-up call to the realization of the conventional history by the West on the *other* writings such as plays, speeches, essays among many others were done. It was to seek for an objective, factual and not just one-sided view of the past of the colonized. It is said that history is best told by the people who have experienced it. In the light of this, history told by a ruling power -imperialists obviously will be bereft of the facts that speaks or reflects the colonial country or society and its soul. As a consequent of this the colonized in an attempt to search for their identities recreate the past and this may be viewed as subjective in putting the colonizer in an identity crisis.

Therefore, in order not to be put in an ambivalent position, Abdallah asserts that the time is right for the African to tell its own story capturing the total experience of their lived lives. History thus forms a subject and creates a background for the selected plays of Mohammed ben-Abdallah for the study.

2.9 Postcolonial Theory and Hybridity

Postcolonial theory's core components include cultural subjectivity and the linkages between colonised and coloniser identities. By challenging the dichotomous categories that colonised and coloniser are willing to accept, Homi Bhabha and Ann Laura Stoler, for instance, have argued that areas of "mixing" pose the biggest threat to colonialism. The imperial obsession with maintaining the distinction between the two categories through extensive colonial policy regarding the mixing of the racialized categories of colonized/colonizer demonstrates a clear desire on the part of the imperial authority to maintain which is the Other (Stoler, 2001).

Homi Bhabha has expounded on the post-colonial concept of hybridity in great detail. Hybridity is a reaction that undermines colonial rigidity and fixity. It serves as an alternative to the lightness or darkness of the skin. It becomes say "Fantish" and a substitute for either English or Fanti. Bhabha emphasises that the coloniser and the colonised are not brought together amicably by hybridity, and neither are any associated binary oppositions. As it gives a third language, culture, and identity that is neither useful to the coloniser nor to the colonised, in postcolonial vision it heightens the conflict rather than alleviates it. It is stated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin that:

The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognize cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity', and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized (1989, p.35).

Not only does the colonised lose its pure cultural conceits as a result of hybridity, but the coloniser, by donating its culture, language, and perspective, also begins to observe changes in its strict culture and language. Bhabha also calls attention to the places where hybridity may be found: not merely on the outskirts of geographical borders, in writings and laws derived from many sources, but also within, for example, the body of "the coloured" who shows an "in-between" reality. He writes;

The voice of command is interrupted by questions that arise from these heterogeneous sites and circuits of power which, though momentarily 'fixed' in the authoritative alignment of subjects, must continually be re-presented in the production of terror or fear. The paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside (Bhabha, 1994, p.116).

Furthermore, on the part of Kuortti and Nyman “hybridity is often discussed in connection with a set of other terms denoting ‘intercultural transfer’ and the forms of identity such a change generates” (Kuortti & Nyman, 2007, p.4). The view of Kuortti and Nyman addresses a kind of mutual interchange between the colonizer and the colonized as a consequent of change. Hence hybridity according to Guven (2023) is referred to as “the ways in which two or more cultures mix and blend in a metropolitan area without giving preference to any one of the constituent parts but embracing elements both” (p. 20).

Therefore, considering the significant contributions made by Homi Bhabha in postcolonial discourses is noteworthy. It was his concept of hybridity that positioned the place of culture in the postcolonial theory’s vision. In this vision, culture as expressed by Bhabha is intertwined and cannot be separated.

Accordingly, Abdallah (2008) lends credence to the aforementioned assertions that;

Our theatre must mirror to us what in our culture we must keep and improve upon and what we must reject and discard. At the same time, we must not be ashamed to take out of the example of the Western world what will help us in our bid for progress and development while at the same time we must learn not to repeat their mistakes (p. v).

The above assertion made by Abdallah creates the impression that as Africans we have a major part to play in ensuring we develop our own set rules in governing us with the focus on keeping the heritage and making sure we borrow ideas and best practices in the arts perhaps bequeathed to us in the attempts of couching and chattering our own paths in the world of theatre and all art forms. Most definitely there were traces of imposition which gravely made the theatre of the African lose its timbre and use in the eyes of the coloniser. Conversely, Mabweazara (2000) opines that “a hybridization of African theatre forms a phenomenon that has overtly manifested

itself in the post-colonial era in which varying global forces have prescribed what the performing artist can produce on stage” (p.1).

It must be stated clearly that post-colonial theory is broad and does not necessarily mean the period where people were colonized, attained independence but spans from the varied experiences shared before, during and after colonialism. Thus, post-colonial drama or theatre could be inferred as a response to colonialism.

2.10 Theatre in Colonial Africa

Before the advent of imperialism, most African countries had a similar patterned theatre that identifies them as unique entity. It is evident that the African expresses its tradition and culture through the performances of rituals, ceremonies, epic narratives, festivals, music, and dance among many others in their respective communities. Therefore, it created a certain form of social bonding that became the moral fabric of the society to be passed on to other generations to consciously uphold and spread the beliefs and values of their respective communities. Unfortunately, the various theatrical forms that existed lacked a comprehensive recording in contrast to Western theatre but had it more orally and did not help enough in preservation.

Therefore, the invasion of the European in Africa believes that Africa had no theatre as Mabweazara (2002) strongly objects to that assertion and expresses that it was cultural sublimation, which might have blinded some imperial forces to perceive that Africa as Ruth Finnegan claimed that theatre was first introduced to Africa by the European. Indeed, she has been castigated for her hasty generalisation and point out the syndrome of superiority complex that blinds them to accept the existence of the ‘other’. Albeit, Ruth Finnegan after her grave assertion, subsequently backtracked on her contentious point as far as the existence of theatre in Africa was concerned (Agovi, 1991, Amponsah, 2008). Frantz Fanon also observed and had an impression about the imperialist as he rightly put it saying, “colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonisation came to enlighten their darkness”. As the colonisers

entrenched their stay in Africa, they managed to introduce their theatre, which was going through transformation as the formal way to go. They then built theatres and performed plays to entertain themselves. It was in these theatres that they gathered to escape the reality of being in a different environment. They then introduced a foreign culture that they ensured that it is well articulated, reinforced and enforced to the detriment of the African's culture. Thus, Banham (2001) refers to the period as a 'theatre of surrender to the colonialist' (p.30).

The relationship that existed between the European and the African was not just political or social dominance but culture too. As it has been established earlier the former sees its culture as progressive enlightenment whereas the culture of the latter is fetishistic and uncivilized. Therefore, in their quest to dominate and influence the African, saw the incorporation of formal European literary theatre into African theatre. It then sprung up as the form of theatre the African must conform to regardless of its beliefs and traditions. The missionaries mainly carried out this literacy concept through the establishment of schools and churches. In effect, Shakespearean plays among many others were introduced and became the standard of how theatre must be viewed and written.

There is no denying the fact that literary theatre or drama was the creation of the coloniser. It had its root from the school drama, the drama clubs, and not forgetting the churches too.

According to Hatar (2001), he has the opinion that:

The fact that most of the traditional artistic reproductions were not written and so were unavailable for comparative purposes did not help either. These were powerful people with their texts, their schools, their churches, their guns, their colour and so on, with a people who talked only of having these things in their heads. Naturally, the bigger force would carry the day (p.8).

Considering the submission of Hatar it gives credence to the fact that to be able to have a sustaining culture proper documentation in written form is paramount as against the notion of having it in your head. The lapses created gave the coloniser the edge to impose what is best for their operations in Africa. Therefore, literary theatre or drama is any written play that

conforms to lay down procedure that consist of form, structure, style and language which can be classified as literature.

Consequently, concerning African literature it appears that the majority of its rich tradition and perhaps theatre were exclusively preserved orally which largely created a gap to ascertain its originality. It is because of this, that Emeryonu (1971) adds his voice to stress that perhaps, “the literary world was not prepared for the emergence of African writing when it did. Those who posed as its judges knew little or nothing of the true roots of written African literature. Some of them were gaining their first insight into the African social scenes and approached African writing for its socio-logical rather than its literary interest” (p. 1).

This expresses the huge gap that has resulted in culminating that there was no history as to whether theatre did exist or not in pre-colonial Africa. The effect of this lapse is in the acculturation, assimilation and indoctrination of the African to accept the alien culture and endowed with beliefs and practices that unequivocally designed to alienate the colonised from hitherto his or her culture and values through their system of education.

Furthermore, the exploitative nature of the coloniser was made strong through the churches that ensured that anything traditional especially dancing and drumming, festivals among many others were made to appear fetishistic. Hence, they replaced them with skits from the Bible such as the creation story of Adam and Eve, Noah and the floods, Abraham and Isaac just to mention but a few. In all of these, it is a classic venture as done in the medieval era with its mystery plays to win more people into Christianity. What is more devastating was the fact that European considered all performing art forms as primitive, uncivilised and postulated these parameters as what defines an African theatre; it must be primarily be a storytelling, simple and must be based on drumming and dancing. These assertions give credence to the fact that as the coloniser in his bid to entrench his stay in Africa sought to break the spirit that binds the

African as a unified entity therefore ensuring the initiation of Western theatre forms into the African without any insight of the theatre of the African.

In addition, colonialism in Africa made some black bourgeoisies had different attitudes towards indigenous traditions and practices as synonymous to primitive. Their concern was anything indigenous here is most likely to be subjected to the standards of the Whiteman as they will rant we must maintain standards. What standards too you are not told but clearly, it is the colonisers' (Kerr, 1995). Most Africans who were able to speak and write the language of the European felt more important and pride themselves with having consort with the coloniser. Amponsah and Yirenkyi (2008) agrees to this 'foreignization' of the African by stating that "this made the Africans, especially the elites, portray the foreign "components" (dressing, eating, talking, accent etc) as that would define and determine the status of a human being" (p.1).

Moreover, during the period of colonialism, many plays written by Africans were fashioned after the Westerners style and its language. Plays will never be published if it does not conform to the canons stipulated. In addition, the work must be under the patronage of the colonial rulers. Anything besides it is an affront to them. Few playwrights as a result of their quest to write rose to prominence especially in the Sub-Sahara Africa. Their prominence was precipitated by the fact that they were involved in the governance of their colonies. Eventually those who had both local and European education had the assertiveness to search for cultural identity since some of the regions notably Ghana and Nigeria had vibrant local cultures that contributed to their works. Gradually the establishment of schools and training given to these playwrights inculcated in them cultural nationalism that contributed to the rewriting of the ills the coloniser have imputed on the African culture and arts. Addo (2013) states that, "these writers saw an urgent need for literary reclamation of their history and native cultures" (p. 16). On his

contribution towards the rise of Africans asserting and rewriting the past and their experiences with the coloniser, Femi Osofisan (2001) affirms that:

These playwrights were all, without exception keenly tuned to the beating pulse of the age. The pressing problems, at least from their elitist perspectives as members of the ruling, western- educated class, bore on the cultural implications of the society's transforms. Hence, they ploughed assiduously the theme of cultural alienation, trying to demonstrate, now the splendour of our ancient past, now the inanity or parasitism of certain recrudescing customs (p. 119).

Invariably this affirmation by Osofisan has been one of the major themes and/or subject matters of many playwrights during colonisation through to post colonisation. This is because they realised the urgency and the need to decolonise the society through the medium of theatre to search for an authentic theatrical form that best identifies the African. It appears that conforming to the straitjacket kind of theatre of the European is not worth edifying. However, this does not imply that hybridity is not good. The intent is that it is about time the African consciously and deliberately makes the effort of having a stake in the world literature and not that which the coloniser wanted to make them feel and appear inferior. Thus, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996) orate that "post colonialism's agenda, however, is more specifically political: to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power based on binary oppositions such as 'us and them', 'first world and third world', 'white and black', 'coloniser and colonised' (p. 3). To this end, it is vivid that it is a conscious move to reassemble and rewrite what the coloniser relegated and wrote them off as primitive.

In effect, the zeal of these playwrights used theatre as a medium to seek for political liberation. As the political oppression and struggle reached a crescendo, cultural activities concerning performances changed significantly hence the ban and arrest of some playwrights such as Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong 'O among many others in the continent.

Amponsah and Yirenkyi remark that, “colonialism fractured our culture and arts. Africans were made to see their cultural practices as fetish, uncivilized and damaging” (Amponsah and Yirenkyi, 2014, p. 2). This devastating phenomenon had left an indelible imprint on the minds of the African, which made most Africans employ the administrative style of the colonialist in their governance. In the pursuit of their crafts, most of them were preoccupied with political oppression and social related issues that affected the theatre significantly. Mention can be made of Femi Osofisan’s *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), Uganda's John Ruganda's *The Floods* (1980), *The Black Hermit* (1962) by Ngugi wa Thiong’O and Soyinka’s *The Swamp-Dwellers* (1963).

These notwithstanding, many of the plays written were in the form of copying the western style as Abdallah (2008) contends that it is about time the African assert themselves and really set standards that guides them in their crafts *visa-a-vis* the totality of their own experiences. This connotes that the African must begin to experiment and draw ideas from indigenous knowledge in creating the theatre that is relevant to its society. Again, in creating a theatre Abdallah believes that it should be an all-encompassing interest of the people's culture and tradition such as music, dance, rituals, and proverbs among many others that uniquely identifies the people and original. Abdallah in his particular interest to the development of literary theatre and performance hinges on the fact that authenticity is very crucial and a necessity for identity. Amponsah (2013) gives credence to the assertions made by Abdallah as he adds that:

African writers should move towards charting a course to the creation of authentic theatres if not for Africa in general, at least for their specific motherland. These theatres should reflect their societies’, remote past, present... (p. 50).

In addition to the above discussion, I agree with Wilson and Goldfarb (2000) who stated, “Early African societies had many traditional performances that were connected to ceremonies and rituals and used music, song and dance. African theatre artists in the C20th and beyond should

use these traditional forms and subvert forms of popular western theatre in order to create a work that reflects anti-colonial struggles”.

By implication, the African is therefore empowered to have a new paradigm thought and zeal of changing the old order and identity by charting this path of the anti-colonial struggle and again consider having a means of reaching larger audience beyond their native land. This would inevitably place Africa in a better position in the world literature of drama

2.11 Dramatic Rituals in African Theatre

The concept of ritual as a conduit for dramatic writing is an established fact in the historiography of theatre. Since its inception in the milieu of human existence, drama and ritual are not separate entities. They are intertwined or perhaps similar in nature. This is because one serves as the source upon which the other feeds on for its lived nature in the society. In ancient Egypt, Greece, and the other theatre origins, have their theatres evolved from ritual, and myth.

Ritual in essence dates back the existence of human history however, its genesis appears to sprout and take a definite shape in 4000 B.C during the peak of civilization in ancient Egypt (Brockett, 1979). Rituals are inventions by humans

Rituals in African theatre are not just about entertainment but carry deep cultural, spiritual and communal meanings. It is important to note that irrespective of the significant role that ritual plays in African theatre as the source of the inspiration or foundation for performance or storytelling, it varies and specific to each culture or society in the African cultural setting. That notwithstanding, the similarities or parallels are quite significant as it is the spiritual which serves as the epistemological view of the people in that society. Maduakor (1991) posits that;

... that drama originated from these ritualised activities and as such, cannot be separated in its communal import from ritual. The first ritual actors are the primordial deities, Ogun, Obatala, Sango, whom Soyinka calls “the ritual archetypes”, and the first drama was a ritual enactment (p. 275).

The above assertion by Maduakor is suggestive that ritual in the view of Soyinka is the very foundation that drama is enacted. Hence, ritual ceremonies such as festivals, marriages, naming ceremonies, divinations, dances among many others are dramatic in itself because drama is an imitation of actions or series of actions and performance. It is these actions that define African theatre in its style of presentation, purpose, promotion and value which to a large extent serves as a preservation and entertainment.

Rotimi (1981) add credence to the above assertion that ‘ritual and its display reveal in their style of presentation in their purpose, and value evidence of imitation, enlightenment and entertainment can be said to be drama’ (p.77). Similarly, Grillo (2012) in his attempt to conceptualise ritual opines that;

“Ritual” is as abstract and reified a notion as “religion” and neither concept enjoys consensual definition. However, focusing on what ritual does rather than what it is, allows for greater appreciation of African ritual as the powerful and effective mode of religious expression that it is (p.112).

The primacy of ritual is the purpose and value evident in the presentation. It is in the presentation that gives enlightenment which is crucial. This intonation further buttresses Rotimi’s view that the efficacy of the ritual is what it does and not what it is. In effect, the imitation becomes the medium for transmitting the message the ritual activity carries to its audience. Through the performance of the ritual in question opens the avenue for the needed understanding and appreciation of the activity.

African playwrights in their attempts to present, promote and preserve these rituals which to a large extent are oral narratives which cannot be seen, became a challenge to imagine them. It then presupposes that even in the days of our forebears, the memories were held by those who saw, heard, learned and performed in them. Hence, the oral transmission of the activity is visualized to ascertain creative ways by which they can be written and performed for its verisimilitude purposes. It takes the creative process of these playwrights to ignite the sense of

vision to fashion out the world view of performative ritual activities for the actors to imitate the movement for the audience to relate to the supposed ritual described or performed. The body has the potential to learn, develop and perform such narratives since the neuroscience has shown that the human memory has the capacity to absorb and absorb words, pictures, sounds, and smell through movements practised and performed (Doyon, Penhune & Ungerleider, 2003). In essence, for playwrights to re-enact rituals as a binge to craft plays is really a daunting task of creativity worth celebrating and appreciated.

Furthermore, the African perceives ritual as part of its livelihood. It is that which gives the sense of identity, heritage and a consciousness of belongingness. In the presentation of ritual activity, the individual or the community through the enactment of the ritual performative rites (marriage, divination, or funeral) gives the individual and the community a sense of pride, meaning and cohesiveness. Opoku (1990) intimates that during festivals the ritual rites observed at regular intervals have the purpose of expressing beliefs held by the community as well as evokes a sense of meaning and cohesiveness through the re-living of the ritual performative rites. The intriguing thing about rituals in the worldview of the African is not its entertainment but must be analysed with the intent of understanding the purpose of the activity and its impact either positive or negative on the lives of the people in that specific cultural setting.

2.12 Ritual Representations in African Plays

Rituals has been represented in almost all African plays in many different ways. The representation of it has been the fulcrum that most African plays revolves to reflect the customs, traditions identity and the ethos of the society. The inspiration or perhaps the motivation by many playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Fred Agbeyegbe, Martin Owusu, Asiedu Yirekyi, Efo Kodjo Mawugbe, Mohammed ben-Abdallah among many others employ and deploy rituals in their plays as suggestive of the importance of it in the world of African theatre.

This is because, the African art forms such as music, dance, songs, proverbs, folktales and rituals have remained an important explorable mine of indigenous knowledge and a resource potent enough in written African literature. It is quite symbolic and a pathway that shapes, preserves, present and promotes the African heritage which hitherto, were not written until after colonization. Thus, playwrights in authenticating the Africaness, sought to pitch their stories from indigenous- base theatrics just as how the Greeks began their plays from the religious festival of Dionysus (Cohen, 2003; Brockett, 1979). The attempt again, was to proof the existence of theatre in Africa. The African had its own culture, civilization and literature (oral) that guided and entertain them. Nwanaju (2013) asserts that:

It is indeed fallacious to think that the African has really nothing called theatre either as a building or performance. Each hour in an African's life affords him the opportunity to express emotions: emotions of joy, sadness, victory or thanksgiving. These expressions are exhibited often with songs, dance, or music and often put together (p.5).

The above assertion considerably affirms the institution of theatre with its roles rightfully prescribed. The theatre in the African cultural milieu is chiefly a communal activity. It involves the entire community where each individual is a performer. For instance, if a hunter kills a beast or a wild game which appears to be disturbing the peace of the community, his victory is heralded with music, dance, and his act ritually animated. Diala (2002) also expresses that:

Traditional African societies were particularly rich in dramatic performances. Some of these have indeed survived to date. Varying in complexity and intent, they are essentially distinctive of the multiple ceremonies and rituals that flourished in Africa (p.65).

It could be inferred from the above assertion that distinctive art forms of literature blossomed in pre-colonial Africa. Mention can be made of festivals, dances, songs and rituals. These art forms are particularly performative and dramatic in nature. It is from these dramatic elements of ritual performances that perhaps have been an avenue for African dramatists to use them as motifs in their creative works in propagating the African heritage. Therefore, reflecting on rituals in African theatre appears to counter the assertion raised by Ruth Finnegan that Africa

did not have any form of theatre which she later retracted the statement and acknowledged that indeed theatre has been and is still a formidable art form of the African.

Similarly, the ritual performances explored and used in dramatic writings in the view of Osu (2011) is that “Modern African writers have always fallen back on their different people’s traditional, religious, and cultural myth as a reliable source of inspiration for literary expression” (p.151). The sense of inspiration derived from these traditional, religious and cultural myth are predominantly an affirmation what drama is. Drama is the composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or tell a story involving conflicts and the motions through action and dialogue (Agyekum, 2013). It seems that drama is a unique universal medium that gives the platform for playwrights to express a condition of existence in a given period of time and space (Dahami, 2023). This is because, it has that tendency of reinventing, re-living, reminiscence and even express the voice of the soul and liberating it by stimulating the imagination of its audience.

Consequently, African playwrights have relied on the mine of indigenous-based theatrics (folksongs, folktales, rituals, rites of passage, games among many others) for their motivations as well as re-inventing the social order for collective reasoning in a bid to glean the significance of the rituals, customs, traditions for the development of their societies. Also, these cultural and religious activities serve as a heritage, identity and originality in their works to its varied audience. The reason being that the themes presented in them resonates with the local people. In any case drama is primarily written for a chosen audience in a society be it the immediate or the world at large for appreciation and criticism.

The representation of rituals as a matter of fact is a necessary ingredient in the writer’s tool-kit. However, rituals are used for its aesthetical purposes. The African playwrights in their attempt to stand out in their creative industry blended elements from indigenous drama as a basis to create a modern drama. This was stemmed from the general desire of African theatre scholars

to perpetuate through literature the oral dramatic forms of their cultures. The indigenous-based theatrics as intimated earlier are the barrage of dramatic activities that playwrights explore the elements of drama in crafting plays for its local milieu and by extension the world of theatre globally.

A critical look at some unique dramatic indigenous-based theatrics, mention can be made of libation making, rites of passage (birth, puberty rites, marriage, death), divination, funeral (death rituals), ritual dances and songs. These theatrics are ritualised activities that the communities engage in regularly for purposes of transitions, cleansing and entertainment for their collective edification and wellbeing.

Accordingly, libation making is one of the indigenous-based theatrics that is reflected and represented in most works of playwrights in Africa. This ritual activity is basically evident in rites of passage, ceremonies and festivals as well as any gathering of a group of people for the purposes of collective reasoning and decision making on matters of interest to them. Libation is a form of communication between man, the Supreme being and lesser gods as well as ancestors. “Libation making is the activity whereby water, alcohol or any beverage such as wine is poured on the ground with the intention of invoking the spirits and requesting their assistance” (Ayim-Aboagye, 1993, p.165). Libation is basically a prayer in an African indigenous religion (Kubi, 2023). A libation ritual can consist of an individual making up the script or priests and their acolytes. The structure of libation formally opens up with reverence and praise given to the Supreme Being (God) with the showing of the liquid substance. It then follows with showers of praises to the lesser deities and spirits, ancestors and the living who are present or unavoidably absent. After this the petition to the spirits (deity of worship) for either blessings, or averting a curse. When all is said and done the liquid is poured to the ground. During this ritual ceremony there are a number of dramatic elements such as characters, props, costume, music, dance, among many others at play. For instance, in Asiedu Yirenkyi’s

Dasebere, Tano the revered Holy Father of the state is cleansing the palace of some sort of bewilderment that has befallen the state. In this ritual cleansing, libation is offered to the gods and the spirits for calm and peace upon the community.

Tano

Agoo... Agoo! Agoo!

Tano, our river god

Asraman, the snake god of the state.

Agoo... I knock, let me in!

I speak, listen to your people

I plead, hear my plea.

Adwera ooo... Adwera ooo...

This liquid is squeezed from fresh herbal plants. I cleanse.

Adwera oo... Adwera oo... Cleanse us... Cleanse us ...

(Picks another bowl)

This is clean water...

Tano, this is pure water from your unpolluted stream.

It is pure; it is holy.

I pray you, as I pour drops of water from your sacred stream ... this water to clear the sight of those who prefer to remain blind. Open the eyes of friends.

(Picks the first bowl)

I pour down this herbal liquid blind our enemies.

The sun rises in the morning.

The sun sets in the evening.

Man is born and given comfort by mother earth

Man dies and is swallowed up by the same hot earth.

Chiefs are made by King-makers and by god.

Men who try to make themselves chiefs, might as well decree and turn themselves into gods.

Let such misfortunes go away;

Let good fortunes come in,

Misfortunes away... Fortunes in

Misfortunes away... Fortunes in

(Turns two calabashes upside down)

Kose...Kose ...Kose... Peace... Peace ... Peace... (Yirenkyi, 2003, Act 1, pp.11-12)

In the above elaborate prayer lies some dramatic elements such as characters Tano the priest and its acolytes. In the discharge of his ritual duties, the acolytes are there to support in the various responses in engaging Tano and them in a dialogue. This dialogue is experienced in a chorus form as *Adwera ooo... Adwera ooo...* The object of worship which is the deity or the spirit is respectfully acknowledged with their needed appellations. For instance, in the extract above, Yirenkyi observes that with the lines:

Agoo... Agoo! Agoo!

Tano, our river god

Asraman, the snake god of the state... (Yirenkyi, 2003, Act 1, pp.11-12)

These lines signify plea, reverence and obeisance to the deity. By so doing access is granted for the petition to be served for the desired or otherwise answers.

Again, the priest in the ritual action of making the libation has the matter which is water in a calabash as well as other liquids specifically for the cleansing action.

By implication, the ritual action of libation in the script or on the stage is not necessarily to invoke the spirits to be present on stage but to aid in the development of the plot of the drama. This is what Layiwola (2000) intimates that ritual can be likened to the creation and development of dramatic conflicts, the kind which heightens and sustains tension and suspense in a dramatic piece. What this implies is the fact that ritual drama or indigenous-base theatrics shares a lot of characteristics with drama. Thus, if drama is a slice or reflection of life then it is drama or theatre that feeds on the culture of the society (Yerima, 2007).

Furthermore, in exploring how ritual has been aesthetically represented with regards to the development of drama, Ola Rotimi in his play *The gods are not to blame* presents a ritual of confidence in the gods in developing the plot. Rotimi emphasizes the ritual life of the Yoruba people anchoring the development and resolution of the plot of the tragic incidence that has

befallen the community on the wisdom, direction, knowledge and judgement of the gods. The ritual solution sought in this scenario was evident in the lines;

Odewale [To Ogun Priest].

Elder One you tell them.

Priest

We have sent Aderope to Ile-Ife, land of Orunmila to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain.

Odewale [To Townspeople].

Now you know. Those of you who thought the we, my chiefs and I, slept while you suffered, what have you now to say? (Rotimi, 2002, Act 1, Scene1, p.12).

Another indigenous-based theatrics that is aesthetically represented in the advancement of the drama is puberty rite. This indigenous ritual drama is a crucial transition rite observed for young girls who have menstruated for the first time. It is the transition from girlhood to womanhood. The ritual rite is celebrated with music and dancing which has the incorporation of elements of drama. The puberty rite is observed by the Akans and the Krobos. The Akans call it *Bragoro* and the Krobos *Dipo*. In this ritual activity particularly, the Krobos admit all the girls into a *dipo* puberty institution for instruction in mother craft. They are taught songs, dances, for the activity. Again, rites and customs as well as the history of the society is taught. At the confining chamber or the institution, these girls are put on fattening diet so that they may look plump, beautiful on their graduation. On their graduation, they are prepared, paraded for a procession amidst music and dance. They are also adorned with colourful clothing, precious beads around their waists, necks, ankles (buzzers), arms and wrists as well as gold ornaments.

This unique ritual was used by Yaw Asare in his play *Ananse in the land of idiots* to creatively create the conflicts and narrative hook for his story. He used the character Ananse to intercept the ritual process of the maidens and most importantly Sodzisa the crowned Princess into womanhood.

Akpala

You there! Who are you?

Ananse

Er... errr... you see... errr ...

Akpala

Speak up, now, or I shall release this bow.

Ananse

O no ... no ... no! Please, shift that arrow to the right... That's my heart you're aiming at. Shift it a bit, please...

Akpala

And why should I? You expect me to miss my mark? Look, I mean to drive this poisoned arrowhead right through your heart ... that is if you fail to tell me who you are, and why you are here, munching a sacrificial egg ... Now!

Ananse

Well, you see, I am only a lonely, hungry traveller. I came across this meal and couldn't help but ...

Akpala

Help yourself to it... uninvited, eh? Well, I must take you to the King. You have broken a crucial taboo...intercepted a very critical ritual process. You must answer to the King.

(Asare, 2006, 1st Movement, pp.6-7).

Asare's plot used this ritual action in conveying the deep thought his play seeks to unravel in the social, political and cultural systems of the world of the play. The ritual and its relevance in the society is somehow questioned. Thus, Yaw Asare emphasizes the need for leadership and the general populace to question some of its practices and see its resonating effect for better advancement else Ananse is still lurking to chance on yet another ritual and intercepts it.

Consequently, I argue that the representation of rituals from the indigenous-based theatrics is not for its spirituality as many scholars have touted but for the purposes of aesthetics, identification, and preservation in the creation, development of the plot, acceptance and curating.

2.13 Trance and Divination in African Plays

The African theatre landscape is generally religious. It is indeed out of these rituals that theatre was birthed. Trances are seen as hypnotic or partial conscious states of mind which are largely driven or achieved through music and dance. For instance, in the traditional Ghanaian religion, the priest, through incantations, chants, recitals, and libation, is set in this state of being with the help of songs, drumming and dancing. This hypnotic state is expressed with suggestive rhythmic music, whirling, gyrations, jumps and leaps. At times they even depict the movement and gestures of animals believe to be their totems. During these grotesque and exaggerated movements and expressions, the priest can divine and translate or communicate them to the people.

On the other hand, divination has been a sought-after human intervention to understand their fate and get answers to life's dilemmas. Guinan (2002) explains that divination is more often than not a revelation or prophecy when a deity communicates through a mediator by intercepting his cognitive faculties. Similarly, LaGamma (2000) put it simply as a description of what the future holds or an event expected to happen in the future from the present. Divination is seen across all religious faith and practices. It intends to gain insight into future circumstances, thereby minimising dilemmas, uncertainties, and confusion by accruing control over expected events (Chahine, 2021). On the part of Turner (1975), he sees divination as solicited readings of the future through mediums and ritual actions as an act of magic. It appears to him that divination is illogical and unscientific. Nevertheless, divination, be it illogical, unscientific, magic, superstitious, or false cognitive process, tends to be the system that people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, creeds, faith, beliefs, and religions seek knowledge to understand the phenomenon of life.

To the Africans, there is the belief that true reasons for all events can be known not through mundane means of inquiry but through divination. They see it as the embodiment of all truth,

certain that relevant information is assured for participating in any venture. It must be noted that for fear of the unknown, this practice is revered and regarded as an important aspect of the culture of the Africans.

In traditional African culture, divination could have many twists. In some cultures, the person needing knowledge goes to the diviner for consultation. In contrast, in some, too, the diviner sends invitations to the whole community, representatives of clans, families or a prominent person such as the chief or the queen. In all these, the mediator gets into a trance and further forthtell or foretells the message the deity states. This process is characterised by music, dance, and gestures by the diviner, who is observed by those seeking help.

Moreover, among the Akan ethnic group in Ghana, the diviner is often the High Priest of the community that leads it. The event is greatly influenced by music and dance. The dance here is normally referred to as *Akɔm*. It is a ritual dance where the priests and priestesses are thrown into trances and possession by the spirits. In their states of possession, they dance with whirling, jumps, quick turns, short pauses, and exaggerated rhythmic expressions to depict the spirits or totems they bear and worship. The High priest (diviner) chooses to pause and then give the message to the people. The mimicking of animal movements is evidence of gratification and exhibition of the great powers inherent in these objects and symbols. It is also a manifestation of their dependence on the spirits of these totems for the protection, bond and preservation of the family and the community as a whole. The totems are the signification of the life of the people linked to them, both those dead, living and the yet-to-be-born generations.

2.14 Momome Ritual

Momome is a female ritual cleansing performance aimed at cleansing or purging the community in times of impending crisis or the crisis itself. It explicitly aims to represent the yearly re-establishment of a cultural, spiritual and political order through a cathartic societal purification (Boni, 2003; McCaskie, 1995; Gilbert, 1994). The potent forces that guarantee the

ceremony are the gods and the ancestors who had lived honourable lives and from a prominent kin (clan). In his capacity as the overseer of the society, the chief serves as a mediator between the earthly beings and the community during the performance of this ritual.

The ritual is common to the Akan ethnic group, including Asante, Akuapem, Akyem, Ahafo, Ahanta, Fantse, Nzema and Sefwi, and South West of Ivory Coast. This ritual was held by the Asantes and referred to as a *musuo* (McCaskie, 2000). History has it that *Momome* - the cathartic societal purification is performed to cleanse, purify and protect themselves (women) and the community from chasing away danger or any evil threatening their settlements. It is expected that crises that are seen as evil spirits are to be experienced intermittently. These strikes of evil spirits (*sunsum bɔn*) are viewed as real spiritual attacks, and their bad omen is contagious to the health of society by the supernatural powers behind them. In effect, a mock battle is depicted in the performance as the earthly manifestation of a spiritual conflict between evil forces and the supernatural allies safeguarding the community. These women participate in an allegoric war to support the guardian spirits as these unearthly beings iron out the conflict. The *Momome* serves as a protective shield against external threats to the community.

Accordingly, the *Momome*, as asserted by Akyeampong and Obeng (1995), was “distinctly a female form of spiritual warfare” (p.492). The import or the rationale behind this ritual is to influence the outcome of confrontation and further disgrace weaklings who dodge wars. It is a serious and obligatory exercise for women in society. They perform this sacred rite to ward off and spiritually fortify the warriors as they engage in warfare on the battlefields (Boni, 2003).

Aside from the *Momome* used for warding off bad omens, cleansing and purification, it is also used to avert the spread of diseases. This ritual is also done to protect the community from epidemics and other environmental disasters such as flooding, drought, and unusual astronomical occurrences. The *Momome*, in essence, is done to a broad spectrum of negative spiritual signals. For instance, Busia’s government exit in 1972 and the expulsion of

repatriation of Ghanaians from Nigeria to Ghana in 1983 saw a performance to that effect. Society saw political instability as a bad omen (Perrot & Van Dantzig, 1994). The ritual appears to be an event done as and when there seems to be a confrontation, misunderstanding, threats or conflicts emerging in the community.

Interestingly, however, the performance of the ritual has seen a sharp decline in contemporary times. Hitherto, in the pre-colonial, colonial and even at the threshold of the post-colonial era, as Boni (2003) will put it was to some extent a “self-evident”, but now, due to the legitimate interpreter of cosmological dangers in determining the appropriate day and time for the ritual performance has been a threat to it staging in the country. Given this, the High priest, chief and elders of the community, through reflections and brainstorming on events and the gravity of the threat as presented, decides on which day such a ceremony is possibly to be held. It is done through the announcement, and the appropriate preparation is also conveyed for the performance.

2.15 The Ritual Cycle of *Momome*

The ritual cycle of *Momome* is a repetition of standardised happening done thrice daily for up to three weeks. It usually starts on Thursday, believed to be the day dedicated to the god of soil – Asaase Yaa. It is the day when it is forbidden to go farming. Under the day being a restful one, all community members will be at home to witness it. The participation includes all women in the community except women who have given birth, are menstruating, and widows who have not completed their post-widowhood rites and purification. Again, men are prohibited from being present or seen near the ceremony.

The women smear themselves with kaolin (*hyere*) and wear beads, white headgear and white cloths over it. The procession starts from the centre of the town or the religious or political head of the community by the chief’s palace through the principal street. It starts from the north (*kurow ti*) to the south (*kurowtiawaa*) to block the evil forces at the ends of the community.

This performance also commences with songs rather than the usual ritual pouring of libation to the gods. During the procession, there are howling and hooting sounds at the ends of the settlement. Depending on the *musuo* (evil), they deal with properties such as mortars and pestles used as a symbol to torture the enemy, brooms for sweeping away epidemics, musketeers, *nyanya* an herb known as ginger lily and foodstuffs. Also, all the women sit and drag their buttocks on the ground to avert any curse on the community. The whole event ends at the chief's palace. The leader reports on the completion of the ritual. The chief gives them money as a token of appreciation for their responsiveness to the call to cleanse the community. There is a cultural memory identified with the Akan ethnicity. It has been held and passed on to date even though its participation has been marginal compared to pre-colonial, colonial, and even early years after independence. Boni (2003) explains that *Momome* is still an important and crucial ritual, especially among women who are not adherents of the Christian faith. They believe that its benefits are enormous to those who participate in it. Given the whole background to the *Momome* ritual performance, it appears that this crucial ritual of cleansing and purification among the Akan ethnic group, if not extinct, then its performance is less felt in the communities.

2.16 Performing History: The Muse of Playwrights

The act of performing history has been a long-standing relationship with creative writers especially playwrights who write for the stage. The relationship between theatre and history appears to be symbiotic in nature. While history is taken to mean all the events that happened in the past, drama, on the other hand, is a literary and visual representation of human behaviour using action, words and symbols (Indrisano, 2018). The main difference between both disciplines is that history records facts while drama dissolves facts into fiction. It should be added that this is a kind of fiction which reflects fact.

Largely, it is the history that serves as the data and the theatre becomes the litmus for the promulgation of the historical event in a dramatic manner (Rokem, 2000). So, the engagement of ancient men as they entertained their audience with adventures of hunts, legends, and their own experiences, they were engaged in performance fuelled by historical event. Similarly, with the reading, playing of music and interpreting the hieroglyphs of Pharaohs is a performance (Hedges, 2022; Brockett, 1979). The retelling of Iliad and Odessey by Greek poets is also a kind of performance reliving the past heroes and their achievements (Nagy, 2023; Worthen, 2004; Cohen, 2003; Brockett, 1979). Again, Medieval theatre in Western Europe sought to portray and teach Biblical stories to its audience as well as morality drama which focused on symbolic allegory of the Christian's spiritual journey through life (Worthen, 2004). We cannot also leave out Shakespeare and his portrayal of England's history in his works. Shakespeare's gleanings, reliance and condensation of large masses of materials into the demands of the stage is worth commenting for giving historical events life and easy assimilation (Alsten, 1986; Brockett, 1979).

In more recent times playwrights have continued to draw inspiration from historical events and figures for their crafts. Mention can be made of Tony Krushner's *Angels in America* (1990) which explores and raises concern about the cancerous menace of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and the political system of the society. In effect, if playwrights are still exploring this phenomenon in their industry, it then means that history is still a viable space for motifs for creating and performing drama.

Schneider (2004) expresses that theatre and history are intertwined and interwoven. It is the theatre that gives life to the history (which appears dead). In essence, theatre or drama is a living archaeology if history is seen as an embodied subject. But Schneider argues that it is theatre that convey meanings which are themselves 'real' in ways that transcend boundaries that are temporal. Therefore, to provide a mechanism by which theatre can be utilized

appropriately in the re-living of history then it behoves upon the playwrights to see history as forgetting (Indrisano, 2018). In view of this, Schneider orates that:

To explore a nation's history, its construction and transmission as nation is necessarily to engage in an analysis of the generative properties of false recall – of the (mis) telling in retelling – the “real as forged by the faux” and this, it seems to me suggests that the history of any nation is a theatre history (2004, p.76).

The implication of the above statement is that the history of a nation and its identity is dependent on what the populace chooses to forget with reference to the event which truly occurred. Considering this opinion of Schneider is based on the performative however, the playwright in chronicling history for the theatre is concerned about the generative properties of false recall purposefully engaging and disengaging with the historical record, but an aspect of the real lived experience of that history for their audience (Indrisano, 2018; Schneider, 2004). Furthermore, borrowing from the Brechtian theatre approach, a work of theatre must have a socially practical significance. This is because the understanding of a practical theatre is the alienation effect created by Brecht. This is how Brecht put it:

What is involved here is briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this ‘effect’ is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view (Brecht, 1977, p.125).

To Brecht, the audience must not become too immersed in the theatre but instead, to be intimately aware of the imitative nature of theatre. By this awareness, the audience will be encouraged to put active thought into how they felt about the actions performed. Accordingly, Brecht's theatre technique is a conscious effort to bring its audience to the plot, how characters actions are not inevitable and the effect of character actions on the plot. In all, this is an engagement with the audience to be active participants and not otherwise to directly provoke them to challenge the status quo in the society and not to lull them into the sense that the plot was inevitable and determined primarily by human nature. I wish to remark that the primacy of the *A-effect* by Brecht was to historicize incidents in a work of theatre. By historicising is to

consciously incorporate the cultural and lived elements of a character's situation which necessarily impact the story. Again, though it is geared toward the future, it has specific relationship to the past. This is because the playwright must ensure the audience feel that if they had been living in the conditions so portrayed what things would they have changed or modified and or maintained to a desired social life presently.

Consequently, this conversation appears to be the basics of most playwright of which Mohammed ben-Abdallah is not an exception. Considering Abdallah and his dramaturgy it appears history is the process but the real narrative is forged by the faux (Schneider, 2004) and reminding the audience of the aspects of history so taken for granted. This space of historical events and figures has not been an alien to the African and its playwrights. Most African playwrights are ardent students of their culture, traditions and belief systems. In their attempts to assert themselves from the coloniser, playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Efua Sutherland, Martin Owusu, Asiedu Yirenkyi, Fred Agbeyegbe, among many others saw the need to write plays that resonates with their people and culture.

2.17 African Playwrights as Historians

Identifying playwrights belonging to a specific generation can be a challenging endeavour. The rationale for this assertion is because the plays in question not only prioritise human experiences, but also encompass various ideological paths that align with the objectives of drama or theatre. This study aimed to examine the literature on Fred Agbeyegbe, specifically focusing on his play titled *The King Must Dance Naked* (1983). Agbeyegbe possesses exceptional artistic abilities and demonstrates proficiency in various creative disciplines, particularly in the field of playwriting. The playwright in question possesses a professional background in law, although his aptitude for writing has been cultivated by his exposure to several storytelling sessions during his developmental years, where he observed, listened, and actively engaged. Due to his diligent efforts and extensive training as a human rights advocate,

he exhibits remarkable proficiency in the realm of creative arts, particularly as a playwright. His artistic endeavours are primarily focused on the integration of culture and history, serving as a source of inspiration for his work. According to Okofu (2016), Agbeyegebe is a “saluted revolutionary democrat and activist, anti-apartheid militant, Pan Africanist and an ideological rebel” (p.1). The portrayal of this dramatist, who possesses qualities like to those of a historian, serves as substantiation for the abundant reservoir of indigenous-oriented theatrical productions inside African cultures.

The narrative of Agbeyegebe’s theatrical work, *The King Must Dance Naked*, is rooted in the historical context of the Itsekeri community in Nigeria. Princess Idolu, the offspring of Erejuma I (1760–1795 AD), strategically manoeuvre herself into a position of regency, assuming control over her subjects. The royal house of Akengbuwa I experienced a state of disorder and instability in the year 1848. As a result, Princess Idolu was motivated to seize power. Following the demise of Prince Eyolusum, who held the title of Akengbuwa I in the year 1848, his two offspring, namely Princes Omatseye and Ejo, inexplicably passed away on the very same day. Consequently, the enigmatic demise of the princes spurred an uprising among the Otonlu, Omajajas, and the royal regiment. Moreover, there existed a vacancy in the position of monarch for a prolonged period of eighty-eight years, during which the incumbent ruler remained in a state of coma. Considering the aforementioned circumstances, Princess Idolu's endeavour to shift from the role of regent to that of a monarch proved unproductive. Nevertheless, the fervour of her ardent pursuit was disrupted by an unexpected surge of her monthly flow, a phenomenon that is considered taboo in the society.

In a cunning manner, Odosun, a nonconformist figure, deceives the inhabitants of Ogbodume by orchestrating a scheme in which Omajuwa, cleverly disguised, is falsely portrayed as the rightful heir to the male lineage of the monarchy. Consequently, the region is afflicted by widespread famine and diseases, with the prevailing belief attributing these issues to the

reigning monarch's reproductive incapacity. The aetiology behind the monarch's incapacity to conceive a legitimate successor remains undisclosed until the emergence of Mejebi. Mejebi is the offspring of Omagbemi. Prior to succumbing to death, Omagbemi discloses the narrative pertaining to the deceit enveloping the monarchy of Ogbodume to Mejebi. Omagbemi reveals the maternal lineage of Mejebi and discloses his own involvement in impregnating Omajuwa, his stepsister and the current monarch. This phenomenon serves as the underlying cause for the occurrence of the plagues that are imposed upon the territory. The arrival of Mejebi in Ogbodume is attributed to fate, which subsequently leads to the revelation of concealed information from the community. The individual asserts that the monarch is their biological mother. The aforementioned revelation occurs when the oracle, facilitated by Afinotan, prophesies that the resolution to the ongoing affliction of the populace entails the king engaging in a ritualistic dance devoid of clothing in the presence of the tribal leaders. The king engages in a dancing performance while unclothed, so exposing the feminine attributes. The drama sheds light on the problem of ineffective leadership in Africa, with a specific focus on Nigerian society. This phenomenon is highly informative as it highlights how traditional practices have historically marginalised individuals who possess the potential for growth and progress in various aspects of governance within society. Similar to Femi Osofisan, the dramatist challenges societal practices that seem to exclusively benefit a privileged few. This pertains to the topic of monarchy and the exclusion of women from specific roles within society. The individual employs the characters Odosun and Omajuwa the tenth as a means to contest this long-standing convention. It is plausible that the conventional milieu will become cognizant of the diverse contributions that individuals can make toward societal progress.

Another playwright who has recently distinguished himself as a historian is John Osei Tutu Agyeman. Agyeman's play, *Asanteman* (2022) is based on the historical account of the bravery and fortitude of the Asante and their resolve not to be oppressed by any state or nation. History

has it that there was a great war between the Asante people and the people of Denkyira in the seventeenth century at Feyiase. Ntim Gyakari, a capricious young man, of uncertain judgement persistently and continuously suppressed and provoked the Asante people who were by then not a kingdom. Ntim Gyakari whose overarching demands triggered the resistance from Osei Tutu, chief of Kwaman, other states and ably supported by Okomfo Anokye. Osei Kofi Tutu had just returned from Akwamu with his priest friend Anokye after the death of his uncle Obiri Yeboah in a war between Kwaman and Dormaa. Oral narrative also has it that Osei Tutu hitherto was serving under Boa Amponsem of Denkyira. At Abankeseso, in Denkyira, Osei Kofi had an amorous relationship with Ntim Gyakari's niece. An affair that made him fled from Denkyira.

On his return to take over the rulership of Kwaman, he led a coalition of Asante states fought and defeated Dormaa. Later the coalition resisted the growing provocative and the harsh treatment meted out to them by Ntim Gyakari. Therefore, in May 1701 there was a heavy warfare that span for a period of three years between Denkyira and the Kwaman coalition. The battle was really intense however, the Kwaman insurgents won a complete victory over Denkyira. The victors plundered and ransacked Abankeseso of all its treasures – gold, gold dusts, guns, gun powders among many others. It was at Feyiase that Ntim Gyakari encountered Osei Tutu and his forces. He was killed with his head severed and placed on a javelin as a trophy. This epochal battle was the genesis for the formation of the Asante Kingdom led by Osei Tutu. It also gave them the control over the Offin-Pra river basin and particularly, opened them up to trade with the Europeans and became a dominant force in Gold Coast. It is indeed a story of uncommon bravery, resilience, and grit.

The play is based on the formation of the Asante empire during the reign of Osei Kofi Tutu the third chief of Kwaman state and the first Asantehene. Kwaman is a vassal state ruled by

Denkyira and suppressed by Dormaa. At the death of Obiri Yeboah, Osei Tutu had returned from Akwamu. He was installed as the third Kwamanhene. His return from Akwamu was the turning point in the formation of a new nation. He was ably supported, empowered and directed by Anokye his priest friend. It was Anokye whose power and divination catapulted Osei Tutu into ruling the people. He ensured that he planted fear in the smaller states. He later led the forces of the coalition in overcoming Dormaa and later the victory over Denkyira. Thus, in the formation of the Asante empire, he solidifies it with the conjuring of the sacred golden stool from the sky (Agyeman, 2022, McCaskie, 2007, Buah, 1980).

From the discussion above I cannot but agree with Rokem (2000) as he opines that “theatre engages in debates about the past in order to challenge the dominants narratives about history or sometimes intensify them” (p.3). The playwrights who engage with historical events and figures are not necessarily recounting history for the sake of it but most importantly, as an allusion in commenting certain social, political and other concerns relevant to the collective wellbeing of the society. History as an organization of time or the knowledge regarding the past and its crucial role it plays in creating, enforcing and establishing collective identities (Budzowska, 2023) becomes a confrontation to possible to awaken emotions, values and traditions of the society. In this scenario the actors, text, audience become witnesses of the past and it benefits or otherwise in the present.

Contributing to the discussion of playwrights utilizing historical events as metaphors to comment on present and future phenomenon is a craft since the conception of drama. Appiah-Adjei (2014) in his particular interest in conceptualizing this idea borrowed from the Akan axiom and Adinkra symbol *Sankɔfa*. *Sankɔfa* translates as; it is not forbidden to go into history to validate or reclaim the past. Appiah-Adjei asserts that the theoretical foundation of playwrights across the various periods of drama and theatre development have profusely relied and utilized the *Sankɔfa* in their creative representations. He further expresses that there is none

in the space of theatre or drama who has entirely been sacrosanct without either borrowing entirely from past experiences or inspired of it no matter how fictional the work may be. It may seem that history is void of culture. History as intimated earlier in the study are the experiences of the past of icons, predicaments, victories or experiences that reflected a past society. It is in these attributes, values, systems, beliefs and philosophies that playwrights capitalize on to advance debates for social, political, cultural, and religious change.

On the flipside, there seem to be a growing perception that drama is easy and that everybody can deal with it without much effort (Appiah-Adjei, 2014). This kind of perception is indeed worrying. The crafter of plays for the theatre must be well groomed in research to be able to condense words for the understanding of its audience. It is the sharpening of the writers' research skills that will enable them to bring up to speed the histories, traditions, philosophies, values, ethics and the total experiences of their people to engage in thought-provoking discourses for development. Is research not *Sankofa* – go back for it. Thus, this is what Welty orates:

The history of mankind is of compelling significance and interest. The man of today's world is very much what he is because of he urges, the thoughts, and the deeds of the many men who precede him. And man, today is involved in the process, consciously or unconsciously, shaping the world of tomorrow's man. There is a close and vital relationship between the past, the present, and the future. Our ancestors conceived ideas and fostered attitudes which continue substantially to direct our lives and colour our viewpoints; and they set in motion forces which swirl about us, influencing the total fabric of our lives (Welty, 1965, p.v).

The pointers in the above assertion is basically four. The cardinality of it has to do first and foremost the compelling significance and interest of human history. It is suggestive that understanding our past is key because it shapes who we are today. The second cardinal point is the influence of predecessors. The people of today are largely defined by the desires, thoughts and actions of those who came before them. It is indeed the deeds, principles and decisions of our forebears have contributed immensely towards the moulding of the contemporary society. Shaping the future is actively or passively engaged in shaping the world of tomorrow. The

present actions, thoughts and choices have a direct impact on the future and the people who will come after us. The fourth cardinal point emphasizes the interconnectedness of the past present and the future. The vivid ideas, attitudes and experiences of our ancestors continue to shape and influence our lives as well as shape our perspectives. Additionally, the actions and forces set in motion by previous generations continue to impact the overall fabric of our lives. The historical events and figures are indeed of a certain magnitude and importance. The significance of it is its ability to use them as allusions and metaphors to comment on present social concerns and even predict the future. In effect, it is to expand those values deemed fit and pass it on for the next generation.

2.18 The Significance of History Plays

History plays are genre of dramatic literature that have played a significant role in both theatre and education for centuries. These plays which dramatizes historical events and figures serve as a bridge between the past and the present offering unique insights and perspectives on the human experiences. This review explores the multifaceted significance of historical plays on educational, cultural, political and artistic values.

History is not given but constructed. In the space of theatre or drama knowledge regarding the past that plays an essential role in creating and enforcing collective identities is given. This is because, it is politically engaging since playwrights will want to exercise their powers of manipulating the views of its audience towards how people behave, how events and issues are presented. The shaping of culture and memory are re-called by playwrights through their narrations of the indigenous knowledge available to them. To this, exploring the significance of historical plays from the African theatre space becomes very prudent since it is said that until the lion tells his side of the story, the tale of the hunt will forever, glorify the hunter.

One of the significances of history plays is preservation and dissemination of past events. History in itself serves as a valuable educational tool by bringing historical events and figures

to life. They engage audience and make the past accessible and relatable. For instance, in his attempts to re-live the bravery with which the Asante empire came to being, Agyeman (2022) in his play *Asanteman* shows how history is passed down from generation to generation and how even in today's Kumasi, the seat of the Asante Kings and culture, many customs and traditions have not changed. By this, Kumasi is generally referred to as the cultural hub of Ghana. Similarly, the preservation of history is portrayed through characters and situations to encourage a deeper understanding of the event that shaped the world. It is again observed from Agyeman's *Asanteman* that projecting the bravery, exceptionality, resilience, fortitude, grit and excellence of Osei Kofi Tutu in combating to build a strong empire that still reverberates in the annals of history and even in contemporary times is worth disseminating. Through the act of telling especially in the theatre space brings to live the experiences of the figures projected to bear to serve as icons for emulation and reference.

Furthermore, history plays serve as a means of preserving cultural heritage. Playwrights engagement with historical issues celebrate the traditions, rituals and storytelling of a particular culture or society. This is to ensure that these elements are passed down to future generations. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the king's Horseman* is one of the plays that celebrates tradition. For example, the ritual of death is celebrated since it stands as a passage to the spiritual realm. Elesin as a central character and the king's horseman is mandated to prepare to fulfil the ritual process to die and accompany the king to the ancestral world.

The preservation of the cultural heritage is not only limited to the narrations but the presentations in the area of language, props, songs and even costumes and some iconographic elements. Language which has been a major debate among scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiongo appears to be a challenge. He advocates for the usage of the indigenous, native language as the medium of communicating in the performance of any dramatic piece. However, his attempt of proposing the use of Swahili as a common language among the people of Eastern Africa and

South Africa could not survive. What even makes it more serious is his play *I will Marry when I want*, which was initially in Gikuyi was successful just among his people and could not penetrate the whole of Kenya. It is therefore interesting to note that the playwrights in their attempt of presenting and keeping the texture of some ritual action such as libation, they try to intersperse it with some terminologies in their native languages. For example, in *Asanteman* this is how language of the people is appropriated;

Master Drummer

Yaa, Mother of the Earth, Drink.

Odomankoma Kyerema, the divine drummer, I bring you drink.

Asante Kotoko, spirits that emerged from the holes ... (Agyeman, 2022, p.12).

The language usage is a direct translation. For instance, *Odomankoma Kyerema* is divine drummer. It therefore implied that domesticating the English language to suit purpose of preserving the heritage of the African becomes crucial. The reason is that it is the English language that is the medium with greater reception than that of the African.

On the preservation of the cultural heritage of the African, the playwrights give clues and sometimes give the appropriate props, costumes, and the symbols needed for a setting in a given dramatic piece. The clues and the directions given in this sense, are some indication for the appropriateness of the ritual, tradition, culture and philosophy of the historical account being given. An example is Agyeman's *Asanteman* where at the opening scene he writes:

{ A spotlight picks two *Atumpane* drums standing majestically centre stage wrapped in white calico. A master drummer in black cloth known as *birisi* walks on stage holding his drum sticks. He places the drum sticks on top of the drums, takes a gourd of palm wine from his cloth which is carefully but skilfully wrapped around his waist revealing his bare chest. He pours libation to the gods of drum } (Agyeman, 2022, p. 12).

The above extract from the play typically gives the indication of the appropriateness of the attitude towards the ritual of libation. Mention can be made of the costume – *birisi* a cloth that signifies sadness, sorrow, pain and mourning. The white calico that drapes the drum also indicates the purity of the drum and the god of the drum. Agyeman further gives the correct posture that a person making libation must assume and even with the wearing of the costume.

This and many others are some of ways that playwrights are doing to preserve the best practices of the African culture for posterity.

Another significance of history play is that it challenges stereotypes and biases associated with certain historical periods and principles. They provide a platform to present a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of different cultures and historical experiences. In Agbeyegbe's *The King Must Dance Naked*, the issue of stereotyping and biases towards the female gender was explored. The playwright expresses the distasteful nature of the society towards females in governance or leadership position. The trickery of Oduson disguising her female child to pose as a male child to ascend the throne of the people of Ogbodume is what the playwright used to challenge that leadership and for that matter kingship should be opened to all for better governance and development. The traditional society has made it that it is only the male child of the royal line that can ascend the throne after the demise of the king – his father. So, in an event where the king had no son and have daughters are they not capable of ruling? It is therefore not surprising when Adams (2007) expresses that rituals are archaic and that the human society that invented them to punctuate its life and beyond is dynamic. By implication, holding on tight to some strict traditional beliefs might appear irrelevant to trends today. Besides, culture is dynamic and it would not change much if some of the traditions could be reviewed and revised for a better society for all. For instance, in the play *The King Must Dance Naked*, a king must have many wives and concubines is fast dwindling even if not anymore as evidenced in the lines;

Ogodobiri

It was a lean period for the king. Harems
dwindled to mere hamlets, housing less than
fifty women! Fifty women for a king,
imagine! ... and the scarcity continued
unabated since then. Look at your empty
court for instance, Ogioke. The beautiful

maidens have gone to the new market in
the city.

Omajuwa

(*Feigning ignorance*) I lost interest in women. I said to myself, let them go with
all the age-long tradition that have now
been neglected by our people. (Agbeyegbe, 1983, Scene 1 Act 1 pp.9-10)

It is clearly evident from the text that it is tradition that has created such biases towards women especially as objects for man's pleasure. There could be some merit but is that all there is that the woman can be used for. That is the reason why Omajuwa said he/she has lost interest in women to undo that kind of tradition.

The significance of historical plays is used as metaphors to comment on political upheavals in the society. Most of the African plays written were vehicles for political commentary. Playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, Wole Soyinka, Mohammed ben-Abdallah, Ngugi Wa Thiongo use historical events and characters to draw parallels with contemporary issues. By this they are able to critique or highlight problems within the society. In Abdallah's *Land of a Million Magicians* (1993), he creatively uses the three main religions in Ghana as a conduit to change the fortunes of the people.

Reflections on identity and nationhood, most playwrights whose work are historically based especially explore the questions of identity and nationhood. Such playwrights delve into the complexities of what it means to be African. The complexities are premised on colonialism and postcolonial struggles. In attempting this, playwrights trigger or encourage the audience to reflect on their own identities and the collective identity of their nations. Ngugi wa Thiong'o asserts that Kenya's history needs to be written again. The justification has to do with the fact that the colonial masters have distorted the historical account of the people including the very Africans who had the privilege to study at their schools abroad even those in the African's society. The distortions are grave and dehumanizing since it does not necessarily reflect the experiences of the African. In essence, if the historical account of the people is left in the bosom

of the colonialist, it will be bereft of salient pointers of the identity of the people and love for nation. Accordingly, as intimated earlier history is not given but constructed. The implication is that the colonizer will fashion it out to suit its whims and that will be the image presented (Ogunde, 1997). This in part explains why the quest for playwrights as espoused by Abdallah (2008) that it is prudent and wise for the African to couch its own path to create a drama or theatre that will be judged by the lenses of the African and not standards that may appear demeaning and demoralizing.

2.20 Theatre in Ghana: A Historical Perspective

Long before the arrival of the European culture around the fifteen centuries, Ghana then Gold Coast had its rich culture of pageantry. The celebration of this culture of pageantry was characterized by the adornments of gold ornaments and iron encapsulated with music, dance and drama which was led by mothers to their daughters. The awareness and consciousness of a theatre has been a long fundamental part of the socio-cultural life of the people of Ghana. The issue perhaps has to do with name that Kerr (1995) expresses that it would be preferred that the African could devise a name that defines its theatre from what the colonizer has given. However, good this suggestion may be, the concept of theatre ultimately existed since time immemorial when early tribesmen dressed in the skin of a previous catch, danced and dramatized their hunts.

This awareness of theatre in Ghana is corroborated by Owusu (1988) who describes that theatre or drama exist in diverse forms. He intimates that that the concept of drama is traditional, informal and spontaneous activity found in towns and villages and may involve the whole community or some portions of it. Oscar Brockett place this assertion in proper perspective that:

The basic elements of theatre and drama are found in every society no matter how primitive or advanced. They may be seen in the dances and ceremonies of primitive peoples, just as they can be found today in such diverse activities as religious services, political campaigns, parades, sports and children's make-believe (Brockett, 1968, p.1).

Indeed, the basic elements of theatre and drama are fundamental aspects of human expression and communication. They can be found in various forms across societies, regardless of their level of development. The elements observed can be in activities beyond traditional theatre including religious ceremonies such as rituals, storytelling and dramatic re-enactment of religious narratives. These dramatic elements are achieved through the active participation, reactions and engagement from the audience presence. It should be noted that the audience in the theatre experience are communal which contributes to the total experience of the performance. There are various forms of drama and theatre enshrined in the cultural fabric of all the ethnic groups in Ghana. Mention can be made of drumming, dancing and the rites of passage. The customary rites especially use music, dance, drama to teach morals, values held in sacred language.

Consequently, theatre in Ghana has existed long before the arrival of the Europeans. Its existence is found in the dramatic expressions primarily in the rituals. Considering the various forms of drama in Ghana – namely dance, ceremonial rites, festivals, narrative or storytelling, cantata, concert party it becomes a wonder how ritual is transformed into drama. Interestingly, there are parallels that exist between the features of ancient Greek drama and contemporary theatre in Ghana and Africa generally.

2.21 Forms of Theatre in Ghana

Theatre has been influenced by the past to become what it is now. It is well known that theatre existed in precolonial Africa and Ghana is not an exception. It represented the idea of life which is made up of people's values, beliefs and cultures. Drama in West Africa takes on an array of distinct forms according to Owusu (1988). He highlights how drama in the sub region includes traditional or customary, informal and spontaneous theatrical events that take place in the villages and may involve the entire community or a portion of it. Asiedu (1999), states that there are three significant theatrical forms, which include traditional drama, popular drama and

literary drama. The traditional drama includes rituals, festivals and storytelling. The popular drama is referred to as the concert party while the literary drama is that drama that is written down with adherence to form, structure and genre. It is similar or same as the Western type of drama. This assertion is given credence by Agovi (1991) that in Africa, there exist three forms of theatre traditions; they are indigenous base theatrics, concert party and the literary. In Agovi's view the concert party is borne out of urbanization and westernisation processes. Its inspiration emanates from traditional dramatic activities to express and highlight contemporary issues of concern.

Angmor (1996) on his part, describes the dramatic scene in Ghana into having the verbal art, which is generated from indigenous knowledge, and the modern drama thrives on the European style. He further describes that the modern drama is in two forms namely, operatic which includes cantatas, concert party and folk drama that which is fashioned after the Western style of presentation. Besides his acknowledgement of the existence of the theatrical forms in Ghana, I argue that Agmor seems not to validate the inspirations that drive the kind of theatre he described as driven by the indigenous based theatrics. The reason being that Asiedu (1999) and Agovi (1990) in their assertions affirm that the source of inspiration is borne out of indigenous dramatic activities.

It therefore appears that in Ghana there are three main forms of theatre. To this I shall espouse on the three namely; traditional drama, popular drama and the literary drama.

2.22 Ghanaian Traditional Theatre

Traditional Ghanaian society is highly concentrated with religiosity, collectivism and commemorative in its arts. These activities are very much evident in the organisation of their festivals and rituals. Festivals are highly revered. This is because it reflects and commemorates some historic events passed on to the next generation from the old order. Owusu (1988) asserts that in the Ghanaian society rituals and festivals are the day-to-day activities of the society that

observes strict adherence and commemorated. With the belief in the ancestors and their existence among the living required the people of Ghana ardently, relate to these unseen powers by performing rituals to acknowledge their providence and appeasement. Asiedu (1999) postulate that the Ghanaian beliefs that life was a cycle revolving around the dead and the unborn in a mysterious web with the living. Thus, their heroes are celebrated when dead and the new born too duly acknowledged with the requisite traditional rituals. For example, performances of rituals are done to welcome a new-born and to send off the dead. It must be acknowledged that rituals are not only commemorated with birth and death but also associated with every stage in the life of an individual in the community. This has to with puberty rites and marriage ceremonies. These traditional activities are theatrical and very dramatic and involve the whole community. The celebration of one individual's marriage ceremony, puberty rites, funeral and any other social occasion in traditional Ghana, is hinged on collectivism that is the spirit of the community.

Apart from rituals and ceremonies come festivals, which in part is exclusive to some ethnic or tribal groups in Ghana. It is a significant milestone in the life of the living as their forebears participated to ensure the beliefs and the events surrounding the festival is adhered to in order not to attract the wrath of the gods. Kemevor and Duku (2013) state, “traditionally, festivals were enacted as a way of remembering ancestors to celebrate victories over dangerous animals, to worship the gods and deities, and to venerate the spirit of the dead” (p.54). In a sense these enactments are characterised by artistic element that make it more dramatic. It then becomes a representation and the dramatization of the historic heroism and allegiance to the spirits and the deities. In the celebration of festivals and other related ritualistic events, one can identify dramatic elements as Nketia expresses the significance of these dramatic elements as he states that:

Another very important focus for performing art is festival. There is hardly any month in which a festival of some sort is not celebrated in some locality in Ghana... as festival

is an integrative event in community life and a means of upholding a people's way of life... from the beginning to the end of the public rites of a festival, one sees nothing but the dramatic enactment of belief or tradition against a general background of music and dance (as cited by Owusu 1988, p.7).

Inevitably, the commemoration of festivals takes days in culminating them however, it is the drumming, dancing and singing that are integral part that makes it theatrical. The events therefore, become a representation as it reflects the actual enactment of the historic experience. Another form of traditional drama is storytelling, which is predominantly the oral transmission of values, beliefs and traditional practices. Mabweazara (2002), states that the tradition of storytelling is ubiquitous and hinges on the oral transmission of the values and norms of the society to its recipients. Its interest has always been very didactic in nature. The transmissions were done orally. In effect, the stories kept, reveals the values and the belief systems that are coded to the new generation. Interestingly storytelling as one of the oral narratives in Ghana fit unquestionably in the Western concept of Aristotelian views.

In addition, storytelling in Ghana has been a long-standing tradition that is well lived by the society since time immemorial. It is a significant art form that has been with humanity as a preserve of our forebears by providing moral values as well as a unique kind of entertainment for wellbeing. Traditionally, storytelling in Ghana exemplifies the communal ideals of the society (Kwakyee-Opong & Gharbin, 2017). Gyekye (1996) in his contribution to storytelling as a communal art posit that "communal beliefs are those values that express appreciation of the worth and importance of the community, those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good".

Again, Wilson (1998) intimates that many cultures of the world hold storytelling tradition dearly because it is the medium that morals and lessons of life are taught. I argue that storytelling epistemologically serves as the determiner for the moulding and shaping of the morals, norms and values of the society.

Storytelling is an integration dramatic art that consists of dialogue, music, dance, mime, role-playing or acting and active audience participation. Usually an elderly woman or man in the community leads the event at moonlit in an open space. The seating is always circular. This style of seating in the round creates the atmosphere for intimacy. This art form revolves around one stock character called *Ananse* (spider). It is the favourite character found among the Akans and the Ewes as they call it *ayiyi*. The storytelling art form tradition resulted in giving the form the name *Anansesem*. It is imperative to note that it was out of the *Ananse* tales or stories that informed the pragmatic measures taken in creating a Ghanaian theatre called *Anansegoro* from *Anansesem*. Since its evolution some centuries ago is still practiced and enjoyed by all and sundry especially the village folks.

2.23 Popular Theatre in Ghana

The concept of popular theatre within the Ghanaian theatrical landscape pertains to a genre of performance that is designed to be easily approachable and captivating for a wide-ranging audience. The artistic expression frequently integrates components of both traditional and current Ghanaian culture, thereby offering amusement and engaging with matters pertaining to social, political, and cultural contexts. The theatre scene in Ghana is distinguished by its capacity to effectively captivate and connect with a broad spectrum of viewers.

2.23.1 The Concert Party

This form of Ghanaian theatre is popular because it is a widely renowned drama among the Ghanaian populace. Angmor (1996) expresses that it is a comic play of itinerant musical bands. He adds that it is operatic due to the incorporation of music as its major element. Gibbs (2008) explains, “The concert party is the most exciting development of theatre and dramatic art form. The concert parties of coastal Ghana and the neighbouring republic of Togo are the only professional theatres in the region” (p.39).

The origin of concert parties in Ghana was partly the result of foreign influences and basically the Ghanaian passion for dancing, singing and dramatizing. It is a form of drama that borrows and exhibits some European elements, however, a purely Ghanaian. Asiedu (1999) gives credit of the beginnings of concert party drama in Ghana to one Master Yalley, a schoolteacher at Sekondi in the year 1918. He gave one-man shows of piano and instrumental music with short skits at intervals. These performances were exhibited during Empire days to the admiration of the elites in the society, which included the colonial authorities, and the medium of communication was in English. He looked funny and comic in his costumes and make-ups as he was greatly influenced by American vaudeville and comic acts of Charlie Chaplin. Owusu (1988) then argues that the concert party drama in Ghana has no bearing in the Ghanaian context as he states that “it did not grow out of African sources and although the plays reflect contemporary social and cultural issues, their style and form are initiation of western forms” (p.9). Later on, concert party became famous under ‘Bob’ Johnson in the 1930’s. This was because of understudying the acts of Yalley. Johnson having inherited the musical instrument of Yalley and then again been influenced by Glass and Grant natives of America who performed in Ghana between 1924 and 1926, made an impression on Johnson. Johnson formed a group by name the Two Bobs and the Carolina Girl. It was a professional group and later changed their name to Axim Trios. The Axim Trios became the most popular concert party group in Ghana. Its spectacular performances were well appreciated in Ghana and some African countries like Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone.

As they became popular, its form changed from the influences of the Western style, that is, the literary to a more indigenous focused form. This new form is explained by Banham et al as the form of concert party has “moved away from the western influence as theatre practice attempted to link the depiction of Ghanaian attitudes to the sensibilities of the audience” (1994, p.39).

Today the form of concert party drama includes music, dance and drama. The actual performance comes up after a protracted live band music session. The comic aspect of the show is unscripted and so in essence it belongs to the oral tradition. However, talented actors project these comic dramatic scenes. In addition, their form of comedy is a slapstick jokes, farcical and sheer buffoonery. Asiedu (1999) adds, “There is no specific writer of the plays. They rely heavily on improvisation and performances have to be quick and adept at creating dialogue as the play proceeds” (p. 14).

Consequently, the concert party drama has shown to be very proactive as a vehicle for societal change and development. It is an advocacy tool for some social elegiac conditions and campaign for change and development. It serves as the platform for the revival of the non-existent live band groups in the country. The concert party drama functions as a therapy for its audiences as it tries to involve the audience in their performances. This is achieved through the comic skits that poke laughter thereby releasing stress.

2.24 Literary Theatre

This form of drama in Ghana is by far a fledgling one than the traditional drama. Asiedu (1999), expresses that literary theatre is “the natural child of the literate Ghanaian” (p. 6). The theatre is written in the form of a play. By this it serves as a document that can be read for its appreciation or with the intention to be performed. Ghanaian literary theatre or drama is basically a derivative of the influences of the European on some educated sons and daughters of the land who had gained knowledge of European literature and aesthetics. Accordingly, it is an absolute impact of colonial influence and perhaps 'civilisation' on the educated Ghanaian with some snippet of knowledge in the areas of the arts and sciences that they saw in transforming and translating some traditional drama under the lenses of the colonisers theatrical operative.

Before the attainment of independence from the coloniser, most African countries had formal education under the tutelage of missionaries who indoctrinated the people to disregard their own traditional values, religions and embrace Christianity. Obviously therefore, early writings of the educated Ghanaian fashioned their writings after the models of the Greeks, Romans, medieval and Elizabethan. For these were the sources of their writings in lieu of their own religion and traditional values. Therefore, the seed of literary theatre began in the early C20th when Europe colonised most African nations. Angmor (1996) gives the flowering of literary drama in Ghana through the plays of Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*, J. B. Danquah's *The Third Woman* and *The Fifth Landing Stage* written by F. K. Fiawoo. At the time, there was no professional theatre in the country. It is evident that the reading and performances of Greek classics and the likes at school inspired these playwrights. Therefore, they asserted themselves by making the effort to institute a type of Ghanaian literature.

On the other hand, Agovi (1989) posit that literary theatre in Ghana started during colonialism and it was aimed at the educated African. The colonisers sought to create a target audience who would be loyal to the British models of theatre and would not offer any resistance. The coloniser in his quest to realize his intents provided the enabling environment such as provision of schools for the training of the African, patronage and sponsorship of productions, and provided leadership and guidance to the canons of the theatre as well as to facilitate their ideology of entrenchment in Ghana. Thus, the insipid Ghanaian oblivious to the decoy of the Europeans agenda began aping after the white man and consciously assimilating the tenets of him. This is how Amanklor (1993) expresses it that:

The major aim of colonialism was not to promote indigenous culture and give the Africans a sense of pride in themselves and in their institutions, but, to the contrary, to 'civilize' Africa which means bringing up its people in the image and likeness of the colonizers (p.143).

Agovi (1991) tend to argue that the emergence of literary theatre in Ghana did not help in promoting the spirit of allegiance to the people, traditions and culture. Rather it only

collaborated with the educational institutions in the promotion of literary theatre in concert with European traditions. Yet, in the midst of all these anomalies and denial of the Ghanaian's traditions and culture in the development of the theatre, gave rise to incipient but powerful dissenting minority who emerged and sought to modify the colonial theatre by the introduction of costumes, music and themes that are relevant and in sync with the experiences of the people. Mention can therefore be made of the contribution made by Kobina Sekyi of *The Blinkards* fame who single handedly challenged the status quo and “satirized the ideology of imitation and called for attention to oral traditions” (Agovi 1991, p.68). Therefore, the passion for cultural identity with particular interest in the preservation and promotion of African traditions and values propelled playwrights to concentrate on history, oral traditions and folklore to be pivotal in their creative thoughts and expression.

At independence, cultural debates centred on the need to have a homogenous society that will culminate in having a national theatre audience. In ensuring this, a National Theatre Movement started with the aim of bringing into being “a theatre that will derive its vitality and authenticity from roots planted in the traditions of the people” (Agovi 1989, p.2). Though this did not yield the expected results, it gave birth to some ministries and committees, culture and the arts council. However, under the able baton of Efua Sutherland, a research oriented Ghanaian literary drama began. It was under her experimentations of Ghanaian folklore that gave birth to a theatre called *Anansegoro* which was derived from the famous Akan storytelling tradition by name *Anansesem* (*Ananse* stories). Therefore, the play *The Marriage of Anansewa* is a classic example of this created model theatre called *Anansegoro* (*Ananse* plays).

The Ghanaian heritage of literary theatre is not complete without the mention of Mohammed ben Abdallah. However, there were some playwrights such as Martin Owusu and Asiedu Yirenkyi they tried to recreate and modify well-known folktales into written forms for performance. They charted on Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* that Djisenu describes

as “the play that sets the tone for the genre” (Djisenu, 2000, p.37). In Abdallah's particular experimentations in the creation of *Abibigoro*, which appears to be an extension of Sutherland's *Anansegoro*, has a broader scope that absorbs *Anansegoro* entirely. This is because Abdallah's dramatic form incorporates folklore, blending traditional elements from the western tradition and the use of facts and fiction as he calls it 'faction' in creating a theatre. Similarly, *Abibigoro* encourages playwrights to combine multiple African, diasporic, and Western performance styles into a flexible theatrical experience for the modern stage.

2.25. An Overview of the National Theatre Movement in Ghana

With the attainment of political independence in 1957 in Ghana, there was the need for a national identity. At this stage, the young Ghanaian nation embraced the challenge of decolonization and ensured the restructuring and reaffirmation of the African culture that has been perceived as barbaric and suppressed by the colonialists. Kwame Nkrumah orates that:

We were denied the knowledge of our African past and informed that we had no present. What future could there be for us? We were taught to regard our culture and traditions as barbarous and primitive. Our text-books were English text-books, telling us about English history, English customs, English ideas, English weather ... All this has to be changed. And it is a stupendous task... This is something that we are, however, getting on with (Nkrumah, 1963, p.49).

This assertion is quite crucial in that, the time is right for us to nurture our own culture and history. There is the need for the provision of the needed education and intellectual foundation if indeed we want to develop the African personality described by Nkrumah.

To Nkrumah, the time was apt to cast off the yoke of the colonizer and to revive the indigenous cultural values as well as adapt them to the vanguard of our history. Nkrumah's vision was oriented toward the Pan-Africanist agenda of liberating all of Africa from the powers of the colonizers. However, his primary focus was on the new nation – Ghana.

The overarching questions that pressed the minds of the elites in Ghana at the time was; 1. How could this all European model be established as an indigenous form of government? 2. In what

ways should a national identity be formed that would have relevance for all sectors of the society? Accordingly, an ideology of this nature demands a body of expertise in culture, arts and politics to be put together. Such a committee of experts especially in the arts and culture would be in a better position to draw from the innumerable diverse cultural practices and traditions that are relevant and could be the image of the society. This was the genesis for the formation of the National Theatre Movement committee in 1955. They were formed by the then Education Ministry to examine how best a national theatre could be developed. It was also mandated to preserve, present and promote Ghanaian Arts and Culture. Again, the movement aimed to counter the influence of Western cultural imperialism and rekindle pride in Ghana's rich cultural heritage. The committee's work resulted in the formation of the interim Arts Council which was later on inaugurated in 1958 by an Act of Parliament. They were charged to come out with concepts, ideas and policy guidelines to fashion out how practical it could be in the creation of National Theatre Movement.

Amponsah (2013), lends credence to the formation of the National Theatre Movement as he intimates that the committee developed a national policy documents as blueprint which aimed at suggesting more concrete steps and well spelt out lay down procedure to augment the development of the theatre in Ghana. The National Theatre Movement emphasized the importance of folklore, traditional music, dance, drama and other indigenous arts forms. These were seen as tools crucial for educating and mobilizing the Ghanaian population in the lead up to independence.

Analogously, the committee was to ensure that the policy document is essentially motivating and will serve as a catalyst to derive its vitality and authenticity from the roots firmly planted in the true tradition of the people. Thus, in ensuring that all cultures and traditions were captured since Ghana is diverse in its culture and traditions, the concept of unity in diversity was key in the dealings of the committee.

In view of this the Ghanaian theatre at independence received a high-profile attention. The reception again, nonetheless was a clarion call to scholars especially, playwrights as it were to write plays that are patterned after the ideals of the Ghanaian culture and tradition. It must be noted that the writing is not necessarily to satisfy literature but most importantly create theatre.

2.26 The Activation of The Ghanaian Theatre: Staging our Culture

Africans have to adopt a critical stance to define their cultural heritage in response to the increasing cries for nationalistic forms of theatre across the continent of Africa following independence. As a leader in the fight for liberation and independence, Ghana had to deal with the enormous negative attitudes towards traditional cultural values and, in particular, towards performing arts, which colonisers had made the Africans perceive as barbaric in their attempt to impose their imperialistic ideals. This tendency was brought about by colonial brainwashing and cultural confusion, particularly on the part of the missionaries. The epoch of independence saw the need for cultural nationalism as Mlama (1995) explains as:

A sense of national cultural unity and identity, suggests the overcoming of some of these contradictions. Cultural nationalism was an inseparable companion of the political nationalism of post-independence Africa seeking to free the newly independent states from the humiliation of belonging to colonial empires. Assertion of national identities called for political, economic, social and cultural self-determination and national cultural identity became a necessary component of nationalism (p.23).

Adeyemi (2010) adds his voice to the debate that cultural nationalism is a necessary catalyst to fight the pervasive foreign cultural influence on African culture. He opines that:

The kernel of cultural nationalism as a revolutionary weapon is to provide concepts of leadership, community collaboration, economic structures and socio-political mobilization capable of engendering radical change which will help blacks define their own culture based on their heritage and history (p.64).

In their quest to rewrite the damage caused by foreign cultural dominance in the society, the Ghanaian in a draft cultural policy state that:

Colonialism, consisted of the total denial of our history, the denigration of our system of values and the replacement of our essential religious, social, political and economic structures, carefully fashioned to ensure the perpetration of the subjugation of our people. The nurturing and enhancement of an inferiority complex in our personality

and the continual servicing of both the ego and the material well-being of the colonial metropolis by the colonial structures were so established (Agovi, 1989, p.2).

The policy inherently raises questions or doubt about the authenticity of plays written by playwrights whether there are no traits of colonial syndrome in them. This Amponsah affirms when he says:

Nevertheless, the 'new Ghanaian', after gaining independence, took up the challenge to rewrite his history and theatre. This is an indication that, most of the already existing written plays, by Africans, were viewed as having serious colonial traits. The most important fact, to be considered here, is the new Ghanaian's will to correct the wrongs engineered by the colonialist (2013, p.46).

Agovi (1988) reinforces this assertion when he states that:

On the eve of decolonisation and after, African scholars, researchers, creative artists and writers, caught up in the new wave of African nationalism took up the challenge of refuting colonial assertions (p.3).

This served as the impetus for African academics, researchers, and playwrights to embark on the task of exploring and producing literary works that will aid in establishing and constructing a cultural identity that is distinct. According to his claim, theatre appears to have a foundational function and be a means by which an institution might respond to the quest for, promotion of, and preservation of the traditional cultural values of Africa. In light of the fact that theatre serves as a vehicle for upholding society's highest principles, it would seem that its effectiveness and efficacy cannot be understated. It is the remedy for serenity, transformation, and stabilization.

Therefore, Nkrumah saw the significance of theatre and music as a vehicle of developing a formidable image for Ghana's cultural identity in his efforts to actively reinvent and galvanise the identity of a new nation. Moreover, it is no coincidence that in that same era practitioners such as Efua Sutherland under the sponsorship of government researched into areas of the people that can help in creating a theatre that can be classified as uniquely Ghanaian. She then creatively weaved a theatre from *Ananse* tales into *Anansegoro*. When Efua Sutherland has been able to create a theatre that chart the path of Ghanaian identity, it saw many Ghanaian

playwrights made a conscious attempt to propagate cultural identity in their plays. The plays produced dealt with themes and subject matters that were often far-reaching in their moral and philosophical implication (Banham et al, 1994, p.40). The themes were solely, not on political liberation but to expose the people's cultural psyche that appears to be a unique voice for identity after independence. It also paved the way for the playwright, the opportunity to explore by looking into the mine of indigenous knowledge to free itself from the fixation of the European form (Agovi, 1991).

Almost all the noticeable, published and influential Ghanaian playwrights, like Abdallah, Owusu, Yirenkyi, Asare among many others took up the legacy of Sutherland. They wrote plays which followed the Sutherland tradition, but Owusu and Yirenkyi dwelt more on creating folktale effects. Abdallah also attempted to broaden the scope of the theatre, thus lifting it a step higher from just the Ghanaian experience to something of a sub-regional or continental appeal, by placing a “balance between traditional and western elements and attempts to place all within the context of the contemporary state of West African theatre”, (Deandrea, 2002, p. 221).

Nevertheless, Abdallah who Agovi describes as “the carrier of promise” somehow took the theatre to a different level by substituting *Ananse* (which refers to the trickster protagonist in *Anansegoro* with *Abibi* to create *Abibigoro*, which translates as 'black theatre' or 'black play'. To this, it appears that Abdallah felt that the convention of *Anansegoro* would stifle the growth of the Ghanaian theatre. Thus, some playwrights like J. C. deGraft, Yaw Asare and even Owusu wrote plays that did not really fit the convention. Yet it contributed to the theatre growth in Ghana. It is therefore, this new paradigm of theatre created by Abdallah brings to bear as he looks into the cultural heritage, history and the totality of the African experience in its form of theatre.

It is upon this premise that the theatre created by Abdallah, which is deeply rooted, in the Ghanaian cultural heritage, political unrest, relationships and the total experience of the society is analysed.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

The methodology section focused on the presentation of the process and the research tools used in gathering and analysing the data.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study was approached from the interpretive viewpoint situated in the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research basically, offers researchers the opportunity to examine the experiences of an individual in detail by employing the usage of tools such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, biographies or life histories, observation and content and visual analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This approach further allows the researcher to identify issues peculiar to the perspective of the study which is hinged on in giving meaning and understanding to the interpretations that they give to the behaviour or events with regards to its distinctive feature.

Furthermore, the interpretive research approach put the meaning making of those studied at the centre of the project. The interpretive research generates data through talk, observation, and/or document selection and analyse them through an array of literary analysis, discourse analysis, story-telling analysis and textual analysis. In effect, the interpretive paradigm allowed the researcher to purposively select and seek for knowledge from the play text for the study as it illuminated meanings discoverable in the usage of the variables (ritual, and faction) socially constructed in the theatre of Abdallah. Consequently, the research approach provided a well detailed, richer and a more in-depth understanding of the issues in the study. This is because it produced textual elucidations of the occurrences under the study. Also, the position given by the qualitative methodological approach gave the researcher the assurance of its appropriateness for the study taking note of the objectives of the thesis.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is the “procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p.58). It is the overall structure that sets the procedure on the required data, the methods to be applied to collect and analyse data and how all of this is going to answer the research question (Grey, 2014). Considering the study which is largely text based will require an appropriate methodological stance that this study will hinge on. Among the numerous research designs documentation appears to be relevant to the occupation in this study. Documentation is an essential design in literary studies (Vickery 1978). It primarily involves systematically collecting and analysing various types of texts documents and written sources to explore and interpret literary phenomena. The term document is used to refer to a wide range of variety of materials including visual sources such as photographs, videos and film (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the view of Patton (2015) any document containing text is a potential source for qualitative analysis. In effect documentation as a research design is often used to explore latent meaning in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documentation as a design therefore, encompasses a wide range of materials such as literary texts (plays, poetry, prose) critical essays, historical documents, letters, diaries and any other written artefacts that may provide insights into the study of the literature (Morgan, 2022). The main objective of this design in literary studies as this study sought to do is to gather and analyse textual or written materials to gain deeper understanding of the literary works that is, the play texts in this study, its historical contexts and critical discourse. It is a method of gathering evidence and supporting literary analysis. This design also enabled the researcher to design and formulate specific questions that guided the data collection and analysis. The questions in this regard sought to analyse the dramaturgical functions of ritual, faction as a symbol of social reality all in the context of the worldview of the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

Additionally, the utilization of the design helped in drawing connections, and contrasts from the play texts and their contexts. It also served as a conduit or catalyst in creating comprehensive view of the subject matter and themes inferred from the texts in making meaning of the theatre of the Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

Furthermore, since data analysis of literary documentation involves close reading and interpretation of texts, the plays as the primary source data were subjected to analysis within the world of the play and its relevance to the society. These were done through an exploration of the themes, motifs within the literary material. The design also dealt with some historical accounts which provided valuable insights into the historical backgrounds of the plays selected for the study. Accordingly, it helped in understanding the symbolic social realities of history, rituals and its context in both the natural setting and the world of the play and the influence of culture on the plays.

In summary, documentation as a research design in literary studies offers a rich and multifaceted approach to exploring and understanding literary works such as Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre. It also allows scholars to draw from a wide range of written sources to construct a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter under investigation.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Textual analysis was used as the analytical framework for this study because it deals with the interpretation of texts. Textual analysis in the view of McKee (2003) explains that textual analysis basically is a way researcher use to gather information about how other human beings make sense of a phenomenon. It is generally, used as methodological tool for researchers to understand the ways of people living in varied cultures and subcultures make sense of peculiar phenomenon. Inferring from McKee's textual analysis approach, it gives the researcher the opportunity to make an educative guess of some of the most likely interpretations that might

be made of the text. It is therefore incumbent on the researcher to make meaning of the text through analysis and interpretation with regards to a particular culture and time. It then becomes necessary to make sense of the world around them.

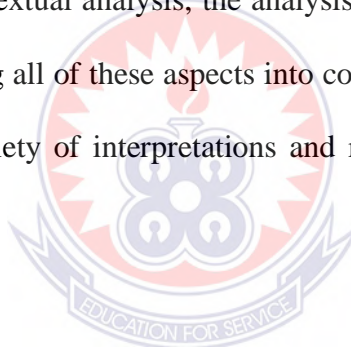
Textual analysis as a qualitative analytical tool, is quite familiar with researchers in cultural and literary studies. It is based on numerous factors such as originality, creativity, inspiration, history, and the cultures in which we live or learn (McKee 2003). Textual analysis is a sort of qualitative analysis based on interpretive methodologies that focuses on a text's underlying ideological and cultural assumptions. Textual analysis, according to Smith (2014), is widely employed in the field of communications since it is a trans-disciplinary method that can also be found in the social sciences and humanities. He also discusses the approach of textual analysis, inculcating certain variations such as content analysis, semiotics, interactional analysis, and rhetoric critique.

Belsey (2014) contends that literary analysis necessitates an understanding of how meaning works, as it is neither an individual's responsibility nor a fixed idea. Therefore, language creates meaning, and words become meaningful only when they are understood by others, implying that codes are intelligible. The primary goal of textual analysis is the ability of the researcher to understand something from a text. To make this analytical tool more grounded is the assertion made by Barthes (1977) that the “text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture” (p.146). He sees the text as a unique substance capable of standing on its own without the influence or ideology of the author. In effect, Barthes arguments render the author oblivion to the text since the text’s unity lies not in its origins ...but in its destinations” (p.148). So, the wholeness of a text which lies in its destination, not its origin, enables the reader collect all traces of the written text in a single field. It is in the light of this, that the text incorporates all levels of meaning through its articulation and prioritization by the readership or audience. The text since it has the capacity to be subjected to analysis and

interpretation without the author's influence, the issue of rituals, *faction* and post coloniality was espoused to ascertain its place in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

Thus, the text and its analysis became the fertile ground that enabled the researcher interpret and deduce meaning in examining the determinants, philosophical underpinning, dramaturgical functions of ritual and *faction* that make up the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. Primarily, textual analysis probes into the historical, cultural and the social context of the selected plays which were used in achieving the objectives of the study.

A researcher must be familiar with the cultural and social background of the indicators in the text he is analysing in order to prevent personal bias. Various cultural and historical secondary sources are then analysed in relation to the text's cultural and historical context or set up for textual analysis. In addition to textual analysis, the analysis employs a number of techniques and research approaches. Taking all of these aspects into consideration, the process of textual analysis provides a diverse variety of interpretations and readings, which contribute to the corpus of knowledge.



CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Overview

This chapter presents and discusses the outcomes of the study. It analyses, synthesises and interprets the data collected to suit each of the five objectives. The chapter employed textual analysis and analysis and interpretation as well as thematic analysis to engage in eliciting the themes and concepts for the study.

4.1 The Man: Mohammed ben-Abdallah

Mohammed ben-Abdallah is a Ghanaian playwright, politician and academic who was born on 25th April, 1944 to Muslim parents and raised in the city of Kumasi, the centre of erstwhile Asante empire and a cosmopolitan trading crossroads. He traces his ancestry to a mixture of Mauritanian and Moroccan blood who settled in Ghana in the 1900's. The maternal side is of Guinean and Moroccan blood. He started life in Kumasi with two languages (Hausa and Twi). He grew up at a time when Muslims were suspicious of secular education as they thought it would sway their wards from their Islamic faith. But his father despite the pressure and ridicule by friends and relatives was undaunted.

He started his education in Kumasi, which to him meant a great deal of work for Young Abdallah. He had to attend secular as well as the 'Makaranta' (the traditional Islamic school). The 'Makaranta' was a priority so far as his family was concerned. Thus, he memorized verses from the Holy Qur'an under the tutelage of an Islamic scholar from Timbuktu, Mali who had visited the family. The training was so rigorous that at 4:00 a.m the exercise starts till 5:00 am morning prayers before he is allowed to attend school.

However, the unexpected happened just two weeks after he wrote the Common Entrance that the father died. He then left Kumasi after the funeral with his uncle to live in Nima, Accra to

continue his schooling. He was enrolled in St. John's Grammar School then at Kokomlemle in Accra.

At age fifteen young Abdallah trekked on foot from Nima where he resides to St. John's Grammar School at Kokomlemle every day. Life at St. John's Grammar school was unbearable, as his uncle could not afford to pay the tuition fees let alone the boarding fees. This made the young lad absented himself from school many times. However, there was a window of hope for the lad as at the same time, the drama troupe of the school was rehearsing one of Shakespeare's plays *Macbeth* to commemorate the school's Speech and Prize-giving Day.

He was playing the lead role as Macbeth with the director or instructor being Miss Urrei a Scottish teacher. She was his inspirer.

According to him, the play went well that the Headmaster asked for the player of the character to step forward. He being so frightened stepped out still in his costume, was however, and applauded for the splendid performance he put up. He was then awarded full scholarship by the school. He was asked to go back to the house and pack, bag and baggage to the school as a border in form three.

After completing his secondary education, he pursued a course in Theatre Arts in the School of Music, Drama and Dance now the School of Performing Arts of the University of Ghana, Legon. He majored in costume and scenic designing. This he did because of the inspiration her teacher gave him and the scholarship received having put up a good performance as a lead character in no other play than *Macbeth*. So, he believed that it is the performing arts that will make him realize his dream.

In 1972, when he was in the final year that he wrote his first play, *The Slaves* which was nominated for a competition in America. It won the contest and became the first play from Africa to achieve that feat. He was once again awarded a scholarship by the University of

Ghana to pursue a post graduate course in Georgia in the United States. He later had his PhD at the University of Texas at Austin in U.S.A.

He has been a lecturer at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ghana for many years where was instrumental in the formation and establishment of *Abibigoro* the University's resident theatre company. He became the head of the Department of Theatre Arts of the School of Performing Arts briefly around 2003.

It must be noted that the doyen and the creator of Ghanaian theatre Efua Sutherland had a great influence on him as he and Sandy Arkhurst served as research fellows for her after his diploma studies. Mohammed ben-Abdallah was also influenced by James Gibbs' Legon 7 Drama Troupe out of which he formed the Legon Road Theatre.

He is also a politician who emerged at a point when Ghana was in the revolutionary stage. He became the Minister or Secretary of Education and Culture. Abdallah was the main proponent of the national cultural policy during the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime. The PNDC at the time wanted a cultural policy that would reinforce those elements of unification that tended to de-emphasize ethnic differences and mitigate against the influence of Western consumerism and cultural imperialism, but, at the same time, enhance and create a new national cultural unity. It was during his reign that he created the Malcom X shrine at the Du Bois Centre in Accra. They were all in bit to expand the frontiers of Pan-Africanism and emancipation of the African and its identity. Under his tenure too, the National Theatre movement was invigorated and produced the current edifice of a National Theatre at the heart of Accra.

Though Mohammed ben-Abdallah is retired from the University of Ghana, Legon, he assisted in the setting up of the University of Cape Coast Theatre Arts and Film Studies Department. He was also a part-time senior lecturer at the Department of Theatre Arts of the University of Education, Winneba. He has been a visiting professor of theatre in and around the globe

preaching, teaching African theatre and culture. Abdallah was a visiting professor recently at the University of New Hampshire Department of Theatre and Dance in the USA. There he taught undergraduate course in playwriting and later staged his twenty-five-year research on the play *Song of the Pharaoh*.

To his credit, Abdallah has written several plays. Such as *Song of the Pharaoh*, *The Verdict of the Cobra*, *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, *The Alien King*, *The Slaves*, *The Fall of Kumbi*, *The Witch of Mopti*, *The Black Molatoress (unpublished)* *Ananse and the Golden Drum* and *Ananse and the Rain god*. He is married to Akosua Amponsah Abdallah and they have four children.

4.2 The Selected Plays

4.2.1 Synopsis of *Song of the Pharaoh*

Song of the Pharaoh recounts the history of Pharaoh Akhenaten also known as Amenhotep IV who ruled Ancient Egypt 1353 to 1336. He is famous for changing the traditional religion of Egypt from the worship of many gods to the worship of a single god named Aten.

The play opens at the chamber of the pregnant Queen Tiye in labour. Almost everyone from the palace is there with the queen except Prince Tuthmose. Huyah, Queen Tiye's steward and Bek, the chief sculptor, talk about how the arrival of prince Tuthmose to his mother's chamber is delayed. Their conversation is interrupted by noise from the Queen's chamber. The midwife comes out to say the Queen has delivered a baby boy. He hands the baby over to Ayeh, the Queen's brother. Ayeh presents the baby to Amenhotep III the king to have a look at his newborn son. A second midwife comes in to announce that a baby girl has been born to Ayeh, whose wife was also in labor. Unfortunately, Ayeh's wife could not survive labor and died after giving birth to the baby girl. Amenhotep III takes the baby from the midwife. He shares his condolences with his friend and brother-in-law. The Pharaoh proposes to name the girl Nerfitite, which means "the beautiful one is here", he also suggests that the baby be betrothed to his son who was born on the same day as her. Just as they celebrate, a messenger comes in

to announce the death of Prince Thutmose which occurred on his way to her mother's chamber. Ayeh fumes with anger and orders the messenger to be seized and killed.

The Three Storytellers moves in to interrupt what appears as false start and interact with the audience and travel in time and space. They begin the story by insisting that proper homage is paid in a manner that befits *Abibigoro* a traditional story telling session. Sekouba suggest they begin with a prayer and Adowahemaa instructs them to call Kumoji who can raise Amenhotep S.H to tell the story better. The gong, gong beaters beat their gong gong as they call Kumoji. Kumoji appears and the storytellers implore him to invoke the spirit of Amenhotep into his body. Kumoji pours libation and evokes the spirit of Amenhotep S.H in his body for the story to begin properly. As the storytellers prepare to tell the story, Kumoji who has transformed into Amenhotep S.H engages in a conversation with Iya Laye, his assistant, who tells him about a dream she has had the previous night. In the dream she confesses to engaging in a passionate sexual activity with Amenhotep and tells Amenhotep that she is pregnant with his baby. Amenhotep tells her that the baby she is carrying is him, and Iya Laye will be his mother. He also tells him that as soon as the baby is born, Amenhotep S.H will die. Amenhotep S.H instructs the scribe to write as he recounts the story to him.

The scene fades in on Amenhotep III and Ayeh, the two raise questions about how the death of Tuthmose could happen as he was left in the protection of his uncle Amun, who is the priest, and custodian of the god Amun. They insinuate Amun must have killed Tuthmose through Aanan and are infuriated by that. Tiye, suggest they do not take the newborn prince to Amun to be baptized but Ayeh advises them that it's a bad idea since Amun is their god and would not hurt the newborn prince. Ayeh tells them that they should be obedient to Amun till they have a good stand to fight back since Amun is a supernatural being.

Light fades in again on the story tellers. Amuzu, sekouba and Adowahemaa, engage in a discussion about the power of Amun. They give a foreshadow on how the worship of Aten will

later take over the land. Adowahemaa and Amuzu hint that the prince, Thutmose died because of the rivalry and confrontations in the royal family and that his Uncle Aanan, priest of Amun should be blamed.

Light fades in at the temple of Amun at Karnak where Ayeh goes to see his elder brother Aanan. They are left alone with Meryt-amon the mute priestess. Amun fumes at Ayeh for the murder of seven priest and priestesses to abate the anger of the grieving Pharaoh, but his brother Ayeh insists that it is in order, looking at the magnitude of the crime committed. Ayeh tells Aanan that the whole land accuses him of killing his nephew, Tuthmose. Ayeh issues a warning to Aanan that he first owes his obligation to Pharaoh Amenhotep before Amun. He implores Aanan to consider his family in discharging his duty as the priest of Amun. Ayeh later informs him that for the sake of peace the newborn prince will be brought to the temple of Amun for dedication. Aanan in turn tells him that they will give the royal family a designated time to bring the crown prince when the necessary arrangements are completed for the celebration. They bid each other goodbye.

Lights fade in on storytellers again. They praise Ayeh for reconciling his family with his wisdom. They talk about how beautiful the ceremony for the crown prince was. The joy on the faces of the people and the royal family. Unfortunately, the ceremony is marred by a priestess of Amun as she rises up to utter a curse on the crown prince. She pronounces that the newborn prince is cursed to kill his father and fornicate with his mother. The royal family is terrified by this, and the priestess is slaughtered. According to the storytellers, the crown prince is sent to be nurtured by a friendly monarch due to the curse, also some townspeople insinuated that the curse left a physical impediment on the crown prince which is why he was sent in hiding. However, the storytellers mention that as the prince was in hiding, nerfitite and Tiye, mother of the prince sneak out to visit him.

Light fades in on Nefertite and the prince at the prince's hiding place. Nefertite visits the prince, and they express their love to each other. Nefertite enquires about his leg. He tells her he is okay and that his leg began healing when he prayed to Aten. The prince hints that he will no longer bear Amun's name when he becomes Pharaoh as he will change from the title Amonhotep to Akhenaten. Nefertite talks about her fear anytime the prince visits Thebes and cautions him to be careful during his visits. The prince then tells Nefertite that the Pharaoh and his Uncle Ayeh, Nefertite's father are planning his return as he needs to train to rule as Pharaoh. This news makes Nefertite very happy. Light fades in on Amonhotep S.H who comes to announce the return of the crown prince. The crown prince Amenhotep IV is in Thebes now he is welcomed by a grand ceremony Nefertite expresses her happiness that her lover, and cousin, is with her again. Tiye Amenhotep's mother out of excitement, instructs Amenhotep to sit on her lap and suck her breast which he does.

The story tellers cut the scene, fuming with anger. They are disgusted by the act. They tell the audience that is how rumors about an affair between the mother and son began. They also mention that queen Tiye will teach the crown prince a lot about his origin. Light fades in on Tiye and Amenhotep. Tiye is talking to Amenhotep IV about Amun and Aten. She mentions that Pharaoh Amenhotep III does not hate Amun, but respects both Amun and Aten. The crown prince objects by asking why the Pharaoh gives more power to Aten then. Tiye tells him, it's because Aten has been good to Pharaoh, while Amun is a greedy and vengeful god. The prince tells his mother how his knowledge of Aten and relationship has grown during his time in exile. Tiye cautions him to be careful, Tiye assures her that Amenhotep IV can match up to Amun as Aten's chosen instrument. Amenhotep III declares that the crown prince rule aside him. This infuriates Amun as he was not consulted.

Amonhotep S.H, the Kayires and Bek continue the story. According to them Amonhotep IV after being declared Pharaoh alongside his father, to the chagrin of Amun, the young Pharaoh

began building a city which according to them, Amonhotep himself and kayires and Bek, helped to build Amonhotep also visited the people and taught them about Aten after the god was rejected this helped the people to warm up to Aten also, the people were glad that City of light was built as it provided work for the laborers. This act by the young Pharaoh stirred the conflict between Amun and the royal family. Amonhotep III dies during the climax of Amun's festival. The storytellers insinuate that some people suspect foul play in the death of the Pharaoh. They also mention that as the old Pharaoh died, Amun rejected the reign of the young Pharaoh, however his uncle Aanan was present at his coronation and officiated the ceremony. The old Pharaoh has been buried and Amonhotep has been enstooled. The young Pharaoh has also married Nefertite his childhood friend and cousin.

Amonhotep IV changes his name to Akhenaten after the god, Aten. On one of the days, Aanan secretly visits his niece Nefertite to ask if she is comfortable with the relationship between the young Pharaoh and his mother. She confides in him that she doesn't bother much about that but is afraid for Amonhotep IV (also Akhenaten). She pleads that Aanan should not hurt Amonhotep IV. Aanan assures her that he would do his part to keep him safe, but he must also do his part. The royal family holds a meeting in the secret chamber at the temple of Amun to address the issue of disintegration in Kemet. Aanan confronts Tiye about her relationship with her son, Akhenaten (Amonhotep IV). Akhenaten comes in. He confronts his uncle and calls him a traitor. He then orders Amun to be seized and drowned in the river. Aanan leaves. Tiye turns to Nefertite who blames her for what is happening

The storytellers come in to announce that Akhenaten has been attacked on his way to the palace and the people of Kemet are agitated. Akhenaten meets his family in the palace. His kids, mother and wife stay indoors with his uncles. They are being watched by the people through the window of appearance. Tiye suggests they do something to curb the people's agitation before things get out of hand, but Aanan says nothing can be done and the only thing that can

be done is that Akhenaton must leave Kemet and the City of Light be destroyed. The people demand that Kemet be washed with the blood of villains and martyrs. After confrontation, Tiye tells them he is not feeling well, and that the physician should be called. Zenat her chamber maid, takes her in to lie down, but later comes back to tell them that Tiye has drunk poison and is dead. Akhenaton decides to leave out of grief and regret and his son Tutankhaten is selected by Aanan to rule in his absence, however the boy's name will be changed to Tutankhamun after the god Amun.

4.2.2 Synopsis of *The fall of Kumbi*

The historical lavish wedding between Aklilu, the Prince of Audoghost, and Zainata, a Tuareg Princess, is all but planned, but the bride's heart belongs to another man, the Prince of Kumbi Saleh, the legendary city of gold. The bride is nowhere to be found when the wedding morning arrives! The prince of the country of riches and power, Amu Diata, elopes with their princess when Audoghost is asleep.

Prince Aklilu seeks advice from Ibn Yacin and joins forces with the moors after feeling betrayed by one of his own. The Moor now has a perfect excuse to loot Kumbi's wealth, as he has had his eyes on Kumbi in the past. They raid Kumbi Saleh with the intention of killing, looting, enslaving, and giving up many of their war victims as slaves in foreign lands.

Due to the people's resistance to the gods' warnings not to wage war against the Audoghost merchants who value peace, an unjustifiably coarsely horrific incident is inflicted upon them. To get her hands on an unfaithful woman's wardrobe, Kumbi rejected the advice and went to battle. In her account of the leaders of Kumbi's foolish choice, the Temple Attendant—the matron of the temple virgins—states:

Kumbi then slapped Audoghost in the face and demand that they should not weep. We went to shit in their courtyard and turned around and asked them to wipe our arse for us (Abdallah, 2010, p. 33).

The High Priest calls the seven Kumbi priests and priestesses in preparation for the Marabouts onslaught. The High Priest warns them of the gods' constant presence and protection on their trek to the southern rain forest after a lengthy, strenuous ceremony filled with rituals, trances, and praise singing. But he assures them that the Golden Stool is safe in the heavens' womb and would emerge when a new High Priest is outdoored. This demonstrates the theme of Abdallah's encounter with the local history and culture.

Ibn Yacin and his warriors stroll in at the critical moment of their crucial encounter. Grave insults are hurled at one another by the two spiritual leaders. The maddened daughter of the Queen mother of Kumbi, Khunata, used a knife to stab the High Priest in the chest since he was unable to take the disdain. The women were exiled to Ibn Yacin's palace in Sijilmasa as slaves alongside Astimalinke and Khunatta. The last "pagan" ceremony was carried out by Khunata with the Moor's approval. The prophesies Khunata made to her fellow prisoners during this rite assured them of Kumbi's ascent and the return of the golden stool when a new High Priest was born.

She then cautions them to be strong to withstand the upcoming challenges after giving them these guarantees of hope. However, she takes the High Priest's advice and kills herself during the terrifying final initiation dance, saying the following:

Sisters!

Women of Kumbi!

My sisters! Remember!

... My people! Remember!

Ignorance is a terrible curse indeed!

And there is no ignorance more pathetic

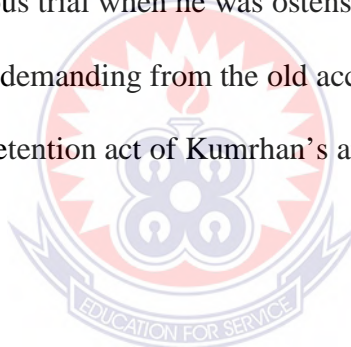
Than the ignorance of the worth of your own soul! (p.79).

4.2.3 Synopsis of *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*

The city of Angah is beleaguered with political insurgent of coups and counter coup d'états. The insurrection saw the death of a woman and the arrest of their chief target wrapped in a mat. The culprit is revealed as Mallam Ilya caretaker of the Mosques of Angah. He is an archetype of a generation that sucked from high places with incredible agility. He is arrested and arraigned before a kangaroo or guerrillas court presided over by Malwal where he is accused of treason. Previously he was arrested and sentenced to death with the charge of conspiracy and treason. Nevertheless, he was fortunately got freed from prison to a position of honour a hero for the oppressed.

That notwithstanding, in the court of Malwal and his men, Ilya is tried with the accusations found in his docket in the previous trial when he was ostensibly freed and honoured. The trial is also a generation of the youth demanding from the old accounts of their stewardship.

The play reveals the infamous detention act of Kumrhan's an anagram of Nkrumah during his regime in the first republic.



4.2.4 Synopsis of *The Slaves*

The scene opens with a search hunt for lost Africans. Seven voices call out to various people lost in Africa, they recall their character, the memories and the role they played.

The action moves to a slave dungeon. The captives in there are the people the search party looks for. Binta, a young girl who happens to be a captive is in a conversation with her big sister Ayanda, also a slave. Naa, a captive, moves to another slave who keeps working and never says a word. He cajoles him to speak or at least mention his name, which he refuses. The other slaves tell to leave the man alone and Margan another slave, suggests that Naa only moved to the man because she wants to seduce him, this turns into a fight between Margan and Naa. The slaves try to dissolve the fight before it catches the slave master's attention, as he might whip them if he comes to meet an uproar, but to no avail. The other slaves through

frustration reveal that Naa is intimate with their slave master and thus do not feel the pain they feel, which explains her behaviour. Thomas, the slave master comes in and questions them about what is happening. As the other slaves explain, Naa provokes Margan and he retorts, Thomas strikes Margan's back with a whip. Thomas leaves with Naa afterwards. Binta moves to her sister, and quizzes her about what happened while the other slave advice Margan to watch his temper.

As they retire to bed, Tunde, a young slave, begins to play the flute. The man moves to Tunde. He engages in a conversation with Tunde. Tunde tells him about a Bambara tune Segou, an old slave in the dungeon taught him. The man asked him to play and Tunde bets that he will tell them about himself if he plays the flute. Binta adds that she will dance for the man as Tunde plays the flute, Binta breaks down in the middle of her dance and the man rushes to him to console him. Dikko also a slave suggested that Binta must have felt that way because she remembered how they danced under the moonlight in the village when they were free.

The man tells them about himself and where he came from. As he was on it, Naa enters. They begin to retire to bed after the man's introduction, but fight breaks out between Naa and Margan again, which the man stops. They then start a conversation about their state and whose fault it was. Segou recalls how he was captured and pointed that it was actually a black man that captured them and sold them to white man. There is a flashback that takes him to the scene and replays what happened. They plan to escape, though not the safest plan they can think of, they are ready to try at least. A priest amongst them leads them to swear an oath which will urge them to stick to the plan with determination. Thomas gets to the cell while they are swearing and asks them what is going on, but they deny it. He then takes Naa outside to get the information from her, but Naa tries to distract her with her pregnancy she asks Thomas to tell him what he has planned for their unborn child, but Thomas chains her instead and whips her till she tells him about what ensued in the cell earlier. Naa lets the truth out amidst pain and

Thomas lets her go. He also promises to get a flat for her and her child when she gives birth, and also that he would not hurt anyone when he stops the escape.

The next evening, they meet in the cell for the final rites, but Thomas finds them and arrests the man, who is the mastermind. As the guards are getting hold of the man, Ayanda disarms one of them, but Thomas shoots Ayanda and the man is taken away. Terrified, Naa begins to scream and cry as Thomas breaks his promise of not hurting anyone. The priest confronts Naa about her behaviour and leaves her to join the others as they surround Ayanda's body and sing a dirge.

The voices come in again to mourn Ayanda, angry at the White Man.

4.3 The determinants used by Mohammed ben-Abdallah in giving meaning to his theatre

African theatre and its playwrights have contributed immensely to the development of this unique creative industry. Playwrights who serve as architect of the space with Mohammed ben-Abdallah included have structured their plays in a variety of ways that include but not limited to culture and traditions, artistic vision, ritual, and the specific context or thematic thrust in which the play is to be performed. Abdallah, however, share in some of these elements that situate his theatre as an African theatre.

4.3.1 History

One of the determinants used by Abdallah in giving meaning to his theatre is history. Historical accounts of nations, empires, legends, and icons are symbols that is audible in either shaping concepts, instilling values, beliefs, challenging the status quo for the good of the society or an avenue for personal or national identity. These historical events serve as the backdrop for almost all the plays written and performed by Mohammed ben-Abdallah. In the historical narratives, experiences of the African and the Ghanaian especially are explored to either comment on contemporary issues, provide insights into cultural, traditional, moral, economic,

political challenges faced by its varied audience. For instance, what occasioned the writing of *The Slaves* (2011) in 1972 which became the first non-American play to win the Randolph Edmund's Award of the National Association for Speech and Dramatic Arts holds a very interesting twist to the history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The playwright in various instances, held the view that the African in one way or the other played a role in the gruesome and poignant event of slave commoditization in the shores of Ghana and other parts of Africa. This view was triggered by the various interpretation given out of anger by most African-American. For example, in an interview with the playwright he remarks that;

He had the opportunity to watch a production in New York titled *The Slave Ship* written and directed by LeRoi Jones who is an African-American. The production got him frustrated due to the approach the playwright and director treated it. It was out of this frustration that he began research into the issue to enable him educate instead of inciting or infuriating the phenomenon. Thus, his version of the slave trade re-telling to criticize the role the African played in the whole saga. This he makes it evident in the dialogue between Priest, Man and Ayanda:

Priest

White man not guilty? How?... Who is guilty?

Man

Who took you away from your homes ... your wives and children ... your grandchildren and your people? ... And sold you to the men who brought you here? Tell me that. Answer me, all of you ... Who?

Priest

Who?

Man

Yes! Who? ... Black man! Your own brother, Black man!

Ayanda

Did I hear you right, man? What did you say?

Man

I said the white man is not guilty in the first place ...

Ayanda

...I will kill you before I let you blame our people for the slave trade ...

Man

I do not blame the slave trade upon our people, my sister. But what I speak is the truth. Trade, my warrior sister, is buying and selling! Our people are selling and the white man is buying. Our people are selling their kith and kin to the Wazungu! You know that is true, Ayanda. (Abdallah, 2011, p.22).

Similarly, history has a role to play in the cultures of every society. It is the defining point in the lives of a people of their past, present and the future. So, in determining what happened in the past and re-telling it in the present and for the future, Abdallah is in a way using the medium of theatre as a kind of living archaeology. This is because, theatre and history convey meaning which are real in a sense that transcends temporary boundaries.

4.3.2 African Oral Tradition

The art of orally passing out information about the history, myths, customs, beliefs, norms, values and morals from one generation to another is often referred to as oral tradition. It is a form of documentation which every society in the world uses in the transfer of information from the old generation to a new generation. African oral tradition involves the material spoken and the setting in which it is spoken respectively. This unique art which appears to be old is still relevant and visible through proverbs, storytelling, folktales, songs, dances, customs, religious and ancestral utterances. Oral art is not necessarily simplistic in nature but a carefully crafted performance. In the West African traditional settings, these artists are known as griots. They are professional orators of the history, myths, legends of the society. Nandwa & Bukenya (1992) defines African Oral literature as;

those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic character of the accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression (p.1).

The above statement, implies that oral utterances are not simple but requires a great skill in the composition of what is to be sung, or recited with artistic ornaments such as stylistic devices to embellish the language to give an eidetic imagery of the characters presented to the audience. Therefore, in Abdallah's pursuit for an authentic African aesthetic in the theatre borrowed from the barrage of indigenous knowledge such as storytelling, music, dance, and role play in the African culture.

4.3.3 Storytelling Tradition

This ancient art is one unique media through which creative writers (playwrights) use in advancing their stories to the audience. It is an interactive art of using utterances be it spoken, recited or sung and actions to reveal the elements and images of an event with the view of illuminating the imagination of the audience or listeners. The art is utilized through the creative prowess of the narrator (s) to actively engage and create succinct or clear multi-sensory images, actions, characters and the events that seem real of the story on the audience. In the traditional African setting, griots are the storytellers. Therefore, Abdallah traces part of his creation of the storytelling approaches from the griots. However, he draws much of it from Sutherland's *Anansegoro* tradition. *Anansegoro* is a concept of African theatre that was developed by the Ghanaian playwright Efua Sutherland. The term *Anansegoro* is derived from the Akan language of Ghana and refers to a type of traditional storytelling that centred around the character of *Ananse*, the spider who is a popular mythical figure in the Ghanaian setting.

The uniqueness of Abdallah's presentation of the storytelling technique is the doubling or the quadrupling of the storytellers unlike his predecessor Sutherland and other playwrights in the Ghanaian theatre space. Mensah (2016) acknowledges this technique where the playwright structures the story projected by four strong storytellers in grandeur. This determinants of more than one storyteller is a deviation from the traditional one where one person tells the story to an audience. In his particular interest and to achieve aesthetical value for the theatre he borrows the idea of the griots who are believed to perform in unison and in turns to their audiences especially in the courts of kings and other patrons of their achievements. By this, the storytellers in as much as they are recounting history and other important events in the lives of its patrons, Abdallah deviates the approach and makes his storytellers present the events as it is without influencing it. Evidence of this can be seen in *The fall of Kumbi* and *Song of the Pharaoh* as follows;

Fourth Storyteller

Stop it! Stop it! Cut! Cut! Freeze! All freeze!

Second Storyteller

What is wrong with the woman! Is she mad! Has she also gone insane like her daughter?

First Storyteller

No! ... What is wrong with you?

Second Storyteller

What is wrong with me?

Fourth Storyteller

What is wrong with us? Did you hear the woman? Did you hear her? ...

Second Storyteller

How can the Queen mother of Kumbi ...? How can Astimalinke insult and disrespect the gods ...

First Storyteller

How can you interfere with the story? Are you in the story? Remember we are just storytellers! We cannot change history ... (Abdallah, 2010, pp 64-65).

The same approach of the storytellers as presenters of the story is evident in the *Song of the Pharaoh*.

Amuzu

And what does the great scribe, Amonhotep son of Hapu, what does he think of that Amonhotep!...

Adowahemaa

He cannot hear you, Amuzu. As Kumo-ji, he is part of the present, and can express his opinion on history, but as Amonhotep the scribe, he is part of the story, part of history and so he cannot comment on it. (Abdallah, 2022, p.52).

Additionally, he employs the same technique in *The Slaves* where the seven voices as symbols for the storytellers. These leaders of the search parties from different parts of Africa as remarked by Abdallah is metaphorical in a sense. That is, the seven voices are the narrators recounting the incidences that perhaps led to the missing and demise of the souls of their people. The storytellers in the theatre of Abdallah are usually employed to give expositions to the plot and present the issues as they are without interfering it and for aesthetics purposes. For instance, in *The Slaves* the voices give the background of the story as they recount the history of the people and figuratively chastise the castles on the coast of the people as monsters eating up its people in the dialogue below;

First Voice

Big, white stone monster by the sea!

Why do you eat up my children?

...Give me back my children now!

I say give me back my future today!

Second Voice

We are very ancient people.
We are the oldest humans on this planet.
You sprang out of the loins of our ancestors...

Fifth Voice

Big, white, stone monster by the sea!
What do you need our women and children for?
You have taken the strongest of our men
And now you swallowed up
The healthiest of our children and the best of our women! (Abdallah, 2011, pp.3-5).

From the extract above, it could be inferred that the voice are the storytellers giving the exposition to the plot and thus ushering the audience into the world of the play. What is intriguing about Abdallah's storytellers is the language. It is so dramatic and parallels how the Greek chorus are used in the presentation of their stories. The reason being that in as much as they are uniquely different, they all comment or narrate similar thoughts that places them as the chorus of the play. Again, his utilization alienates the storytellers from the event as intimated earlier but they are greatly central to the success or otherwise of the plot. In effect the creation of the many storytellers is a unique code of the playwright in his creative industry.

4.3.4 Music and Dance

In traditional African societies, there are a mine of diverse music ensembles that are identifiable with the numerous ethnicities and tribes. In Ghana for instance, there are various ensembles like *Adzewa*, *Ɔmpɛ*, *Asafo*, *Adenkum*, *Nwomkoro*, *Bɔsoɛ* and *Sikyii* which are identified with the Akan while *Kpalongo*, *Kolomashi*, *Kpatsa* and *Sunu* to the Gas and Damgbes. *Agbadza*, *Bɔbɔbɔ* are identified with the Ewes while *Bamaya*, *Damba*, *Tɔra* are identified with Dagombas and some tribes in the northern part of Ghana (Mensah & Arko-Mensah, 2022). These ensembles and their musical productions usually go with dances as an avenue for the expression of feelings and emotions. In a sense, music and dance are the expressive nodes that carry the ethos and values of a people which are tools for communicating to the gods and the people and vice versa. Mensah (2016) and Deandrea (2001) acknowledge the functionality of music and dance in the drama of Abdallah. In their views they assert that choice of music and

dance must be in context to the ritual or ceremony at hand. The music as well as the dance must invoke as it were the spirits of the ceremony. By this, the real intent would be achieved and further reminiscence the illumination of the story to the audience. Again, the functionality of the music and dance are not for only aesthetical effect but part of the plot. This is because, the music and dance convey a certain appreciable level in furthering the story to the understanding of the audience. One cannot take out the codes that music and the dance communicate to the audience. For example, in *The fall of Kumbi*, Abdallah carefully include the libation song as;

Agya ee! Yerugu nsa oo, nsaoo
Oh, Father of Gods we bear libation
 Agya Nyame yerugu nsa, oo! Nsa oo
Father of Gods we bring you wine
 Agya ee, Yerugu nsa oo! Nsa oo!
Father, here is your drink!
 Nana ee! Yerugu nsa oo! Nsa oo!
Oh, mother of all we bear libation.
 Asaase Yaa, Yerugu nsa oo, nsa oo!
Mother Earth, we bring you wine
 Nana ee! Yerugu nsa oo, aye!
Oh, mother, here is your drink (Abdallah, 2010, pp. 29-30).

A prayer song performed during moments of need at the shrines. It is normally led by the High Priest or the attendants. At ceremonies such as festivals, initiation, or serious ritual rites, this song is raised. Its message is evidently clear in the text as reverence and request for directions as well as the message contribute to the beauty of the story.

Similarly, the *Momome* ritual as described in *The fall of Kumbi* is uniquely important in the advancement of the plot. *Momome* is a female ritual cleansing performance aimed at cleansing or purging the community in times of impending crisis or the crisis itself. The literature of the study affirms the uniqueness of this ritual as a very important cleansing and warfare activity as Akyeampong and Obeng (1995) asserts as “distinctly a female form of spiritual warfare” (p.492). Therefore, in the play *The fall of Kumbi* Khunata intonates;

You must lead the initiation of Khunata
 Your daughter and the daughter of the gods!
 You will lead us in the Sacred Dance of Mumumme!

To cleanse our people of all Musuo!
And demand the justice of the gods on their behalf!... (Abdallah, 2010, pp.73-74).

The import of this ritual is basically a purification exercise and pleading with the gods to lead them through their journeys. Khunata the lead character in this ritual is a dual personality that connects with the spirits and at the same time a woman seeking for the blessings and favour from the gods. Nevertheless, she retorts that the *Msuu* (curse) is done with the intent of seeking for justice for the mishap on the people of Kumbi especially the women by slave raiders – Ibn Yacin and his men. This assertion is further given credence by Boni (2003) as they perform this sacred rite to ward off and spiritually fortify the warriors as they engage in warfare on the battlefields (Boni, 2003). By implication, the justice as intimated in the extract is significant in the sense that it is for the future even though they are in chains now. This is evident in the lines of Khunata as “dance for the gods and demand justice for our people!” (p.74).

Considering the cycle for this ritual activity, Abdallah in the voice of Khunata orates that;

Rid yourselves of your garment!
And naked as on the day you were born
Dance for Khunata and give the gods what belongs to them
Dance for the gods and demand justice for our people!
Women of Kumbi!
Remember your mission!
Remember what we do here today and let it be
A part of you throughout your long and terrible journey! (Abdallah, 2010, p.74).

The above extract is an affirmation of what the ritual is and the processes involved. The ritual demands the females to appear naked and proceed with as led by the leader. But for the purposes of dramatic effect Abdallah prescribes that during the ritual dance “all elements of lighting, costume, make-up and movement are designed to invoke an ambiance of nudity, sacred sexuality, pain and anger” (p.74).

It must also be noted that the *momome* in essence is utilised by Abdallah to raise the awareness of its efficacy, aesthetic values and preservation.

Furthermore, songs, a subset of music is predominantly used in Abdallah's theatre. In the presentations of his theatre songs are not alienated. The songs serve as soothing balms used to usher in the play as shown at the opening scene of *The fall of Kumbi*. The whole cast and crew in costumes are lighted and perform Ephraim Amu's *Akwaaba Dwom*. This song indicates as the theme song for the play since it chronicles the struggle our forebears went through in establishing the new nation, Ghana, for us. The onus then is with us to keep it and build on it for posterity to also enjoy not otherwise to continue the chain. Also, it serves as mmoguo. An intermission for relaxation, reflections and a moment of interacting among each other in the course of the storytelling session.

4.3.5 Ritual

Rituals are performative activity recreated and represented in a mythic temporal level through artistic techniques with the use of songs, chants, recitations, masks and dance. This element is quite conspicuous in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. He remarked to Jane Wilkinson in an interview why he places emphasis on rituals as;

I can't think of a single play that I have written that doesn't have heavy ritual aspect. Maybe because for me the ritual – the mask and the dance which are all part of the ritual anyway – provides a very important medium for the regeneration of society. I don't believe in theatre purely for entertainment. (p36).

Apart from the interview, Abdallah demonstrates his interest in ritual in an essay he titled *Bobikyiky's lament* (1999) as;

All my playwriting so far has been a series of different steps towards the realisation of the African theatre I envisage. This search has taken me so far into the domains of history, myth, festival, religious ritual and the tale as a literary form (p.13).

In light of the aforementioned claim, it would seem that Abdallah's obsession with ritual stems from his personal encounters with ritual performances at traditional events like festivals and his role as Minister of Education and culture, which may have contributed to its reliance in all his plays. Nketsia (2014) gives credence to ritual drama as 'ceremonial drama' since it conveys the ethos of the society thus, a traditional form of theatre. A critical look at his theatre, it appears

that great reverence is attached to rituals. He virtually projects them at the face value without trying to undermine or modernize it received significance.

The analysis of the study has revealed the dramatic or theatrical vision of Mohammed ben- Abdallah in the diagram below. In this diagram it gives the variables, ritual, faction (history), education, culture and theatrical or dramatic techniques. The diagram further indicates the flow of events into one another for the illumination and vision of Abdallah’s theatre. Thus, in determining the theatre of Abdallah the figure below explains it.

4.3.6 The theatrical/dramatic vision of Mohammed ben-Abdallah

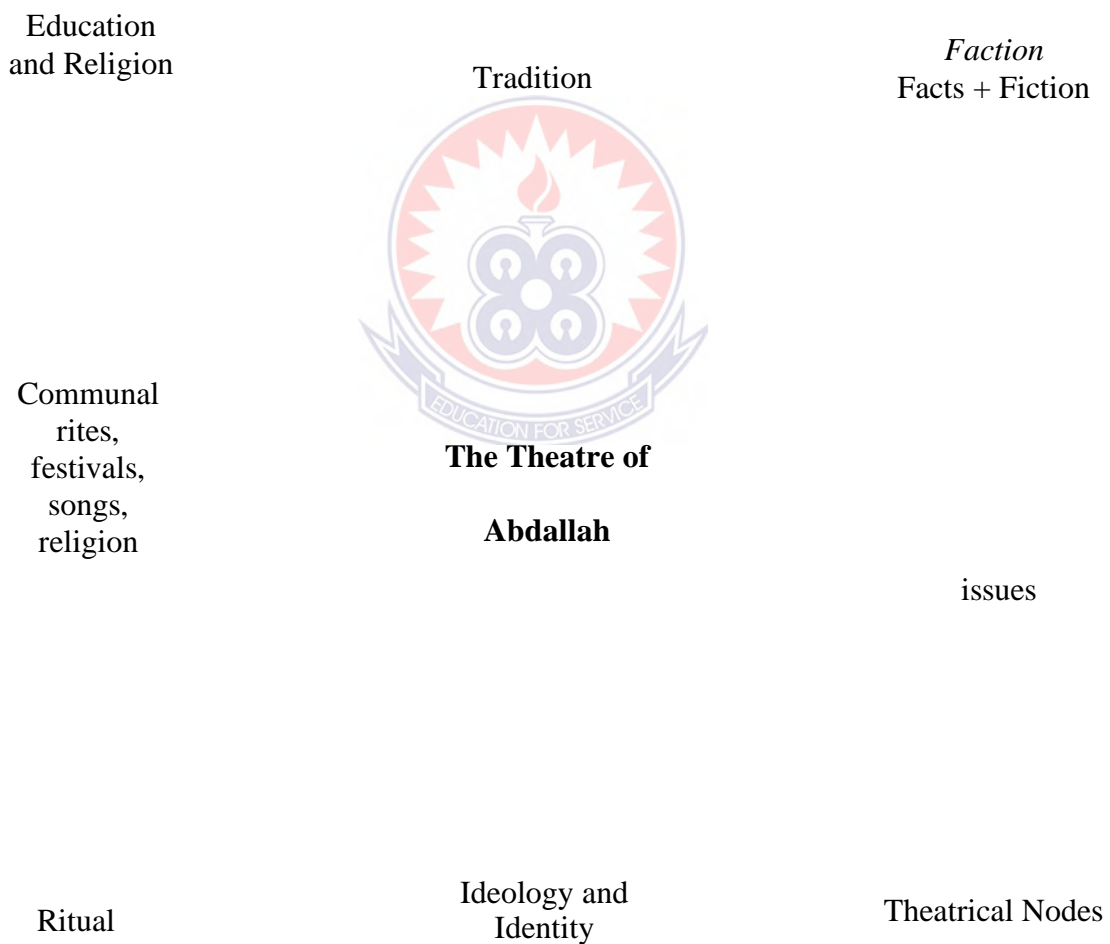


Fig. 1 Theatrical/Dramatic Vision of Mohammed ben-Abdallah by Mensah (2023)

The availability and exposure to historical materials has remained as his major resource as he studied and made sense of. His fidelity to historical materials on ancient empires and civilization are used as metaphors in commenting on contemporary happenings. This he does from his gleanings and consciousness of tweaking the audience to critically assess the impact of such scenarios or decision making and hence development of self and the nation.

Another insightful influence inferred from his plays with regards to the study is his academic experience and his encounter with works of Efua Sutherland, Bertolt Brecht and Shakespeare. Abdallah's interest started at a younger age when he played the role as Macbeth in Shakespeare's Macbeth under the directorship of Miss Urrei. The inspiration gained from that production became the launchpad for him to venture into the studying of Drama at the University of Ghana. It was during his studies he had an encounter with Sutherland the creator of *Anansegoro* – a kind of Ghanaian theatre. His experience with this concept birthed the *Abibigoro* which is Abdallah's authorial signature.

Again, Abdallah's theatre can be located in the theatre itself. His ability to work with Sutherland and other theatre persons such as James Gibbs' Legon 7 Drama Troupe and his Legon Road Theatre all enabled him to sharpen his skills and craft in the theatre. Thus, his prolificacy as a playwright and more so a dramatist.

Culturally, Abdallah has a barrage of indigenous based theatrics from his upbringing in Kumasi which is touted as the cultural hub of Ghana. His affinity with the wife who is believed to come from a royal home in Kumasi perhaps also accounted for his depth, appreciation as well as understanding of rituals and its significance in almost all of his works. These rituals serve as conflicts in driving his plots. Aside it serving as major part in the development of the plot, rituals be it songs, dance, divination, orature and any form conceivable as such are used for the preservation and aesthetic purposes.

4.4 Philosophical underpinnings of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Theatre

African theatre is a unique, rich, and diverse art form that reflects the cultural, social and historical experiences of the African people. It has developed over time and has been moulded by various philosophical, cultural and political influences. There is plethora of African philosophers in the world of literature who have distinguished themselves in the arts and its current shape. Mention can be made of Wole Soyinka, Sutherland, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Mohammed ben-Abdallah, Femi Osofisan, and many more others whose contribution especially to drama and theatre is so crucial to the development of African theatre. In view of this, I will like to examine the philosophical stance of Mohammed ben-Abdallah on some key issues emanating from his life, times and dramatic text of his plays as contours of themes which have become nearly invariably the soul that make up the composition of his theatre.

It must be noted that the African worldview is basically communal, an important identity that is collective and shares the spirit of interconnectedness of individuals and communities. The African worldview is depicted and reflected through the varied traditions of storytelling, rituals, dance and music as well as other performative elements that is passed down from one generation to the other. It is in them that the cultural heritage, morals, norms, values, and social cohesion is preserved and maintained.

Another key philosophical concepts that underpins Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre is the idea of festive rituals, ceremonies, and traditions revolving around the Akan ethnic group in which the uncertainties of social life are celebrated in eidetic imagery and metaphors. Abdallah, largely draws inspiration from the Akan society particularly, the Asante tribe. He was born and raised in Kumasi, the heartbeat of trade and commerce in the erstwhile Asante empire. Culture and its display in Kumasi are nothing to be over emphasized because, it is the very fabric of that society. A look at his plays, references are made to the *Manhyia* palace in Kumasi in *Song of the Pharaoh*.

Central to Abdallah's theatre is the philosophical concept of *Sankofa* which means "to go back and fetch it". It is one of the idioms of the adinkra symbols of the Akan ethnicity in Ghana. This idea reflects the importance of looking back into the past in order to move forward and make progress. we look back into the past for a reason. It is not just looking back. The past has some good lessons to offer hence the need to do what is termed as retrospective reflections as evidenced in *The Slaves* where the First Voice orates as;

White man from across the sea!
You may consume the fire of our tomorrow
And shit generations of our future
Onto the dung heap of history
For scavengers to feed upon.
We shall arise again!
Out of the dung heap of history
We shall stir and sprout!... (Abdallah, 2011, p.46)

Abdallah's theatre is historical based. He presents history to explore contemporary social, cultural and political issues in his society.

Additional significant philosophical concept that underpins Abdallah's theatre is his Islamic upbringing and faith. It is in this religious background that he draws heroes and anti-heroes in his theatre. The Islamic education appears to be the conduit through which he traces his ancestry. Why would a man consistently write in a like fashion without any cause? It is his deliberate attempt to discover his roots and hence his identity. Aside the Islamic education, he had Western education too which also contributed to the deepening of his pre-occupation in the complex intermixed media and styles his theatre is fashioned.

The experience of colonialism and postcolonialism is also a key philosophical concept of the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. This experience appears as the basis upon which his particular interest in writing on themes and subjects that are in tandem with cultural forms of post modernity.

His political ideology, like many African playwrights, Abdallah rose to become a politician between 1980 and 1990 as a cabinet minister for Education, Culture, Religion and Tourism.

He is a man of passion. He believed that theatre could be a tool for social and political change by making the audience aware of the oppressive social and economic systems that exist in their society. From a closer look at Abdallah's theatre it could be inferred that theatre is the way to provoke critical thinking and dialogue, rather than simply providing entertainment.

His depth of knowledge in western theoretical discourses which prominently affect theatre and culture and thus gives him the impetus to write against and justify theatre and culture whose sapience is uniquely African.

Identity is another important philosophical concept that underpins the theatre of Abdallah. A personal charisma to construct and champion or expand the frontiers of African theatre by the creation of *Abibigoro* as a typology of an African theatre. *Abibigoro* is a concept of African theatre that was developed by Mohammed Ben Abdallah, a Ghanaian playwright and director. The term *Abibigoro* is derived from the Akan language of Ghana, and refers to a type of traditional storytelling that is centered around the character of *Obibini*, a mythical figure representing the African race. Mohammed ben-Abdallah's concept of *Abibigoro* is rooted in the idea of using theatre as a means of empowering and educating audiences, particularly in rural areas where access to formal education and cultural resources may be limited. *Abibigoro* is said to be an extension of *Anansegoro*. *Abibigoro* productions often incorporate elements of traditional African performance styles, such as storytelling, music, and dance, as well as modern theatrical techniques and technologies. It involves both storytelling and narration formats.

The themes of *Abibigoro* productions often deal with issues of social and political relevance, such as poverty, corruption, and gender inequality in African context. By using theatre as a means of addressing these issues, Abdallah sought to create a space for dialogue and reflection, and to inspire audiences to be proactive to improve their own lives and communities.

Overall, *Abibigoro* represents an innovative and dynamic approach to African theatre, one that seeks to harness the power of storytelling and performance to effect positive social change. This he does through the barrage of the indigenous knowledge spread across the African continent especially Ghana. He draws from them cultural, linguistic traditions, to explore the issues of the African identity which spans from gender stereotyping, ethnicity, and nationality. For instance, the use of transliteration, proverbs, and domestication of the English language to suit the African space and its audience. Abdallah's search for a Pan-Africanist kind of theatre is hinged on the premise that in developing an identity be it national or global, culture is the key. This is because a strong understanding of history built on social, educational, religious and cultural organizations could be the base for social, political and economic freedom and power.

4.4.1 Mohammed ben-Abdallah as an Historian in Motion

Mohammed ben-Abdallah occupies a position as a repository of memory. A critical look at his plays especially the four that this study looked at make him a luminary in his craft as a historian in motion. His historical plays appear as a rewarding source of insights into the vital roles and complex significance of memory. Abdallah's selection of information from sources reflects his own particular hierarchy of significance that relates if not in total the actual happening as recorded. His plays are a combination of faithfully re-presented historical facts, facts which may be corroborated by referring to various sources and additional theatrical fictions which significantly reflects the hitherto phenomenon for the purpose of educating, informing and entertaining its audience.

Abdallah, is an historian of the vents of the period which the plays cover since pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. A critical look at his theatre is a true reflection of the state of events as happened in the periods gone by. Abdallah is thus, not just a curator but a creator of that history for his audience. By implication, his pre-occupation and an ardent student of history

is made evident in the re-writing and re-making of history position him as a historian. For instance, in the *Song of the Pharaoh*, Abdallah condenses the words and bring to life the many pages of the account of Akhnaten the heretic. History has it that Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhnaten and defied tradition by establishing a new religion – Aten that is alien to the people. It was this new-found religion that brought about his downfall irrespective of the developmental project and commerce that enriched the people.

Abdallah takes on the role of a historian but through the utilization of different voices. He engages in a dialogue that allows them to tell the tales of the erstwhile period. This engagement is presented not one but many versions of that history. An example is evident in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*. In this highly political allegorical play about the ousting and trial of the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, Abdallah literally picked the issues from various sources such as newsprint, memoirs, essays and voice recordings and experiences from people who had encountered Nkrumah in diverse ways. He utilizes the varied voices and present the historical narrative as it is. This role of employing diverse voices serves as a memory that recalls past events with the view of igniting a sense of lack of patriotism and an act of disrupting the development as the play addresses. Abuse of incumbency and political vindictiveness has characterised the political arena. In recent times incumbency has been lowered to vindictiveness fuelled by the spirit of vengeful bitterness. Most governments have become political vendettas pursuing ventures that are not stated in the utopia promised to the populace. In *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* this phenomenon is prominent. Those who ousted Kumrhan through revolt dispense their energies on trivial trials and wasteful political gimmicks of past event. It is not surprising to see Kouyate laments over the gratuitous trial of Ilya instead of ensuring the fulfilment of the ideals that precipitated your claim of power. Through his words he punches holes and exposes the ignorance and abuse of incumbency that has been truncated:

You coward! Your revolt is crushed, traitor. While you stood here like a common peddler in idle chatter with this museum piece the counter-insurgents launched a secret offensive under cover of darkness (p. 75).

Without a doubt, Malwal tagged as a traitor serves him right. This is because many leaders of Africa who perhaps assumed power through military revolts lacked fortitude in the administration and management of their constituencies. They then render their populace poor, hopeless and squalors as the economy is static. Generally, in Ghana today this economic stagnation seems to be pervasive. Though it appears that democracy is gradually entrenched in our part of the world, similar or same happenings of vindictiveness and scape-goatism from the past is recurrent. The playwright as brute as he is appeals to the conscience of both the people in the helms of affairs to be astute and ensure that the utopia promised to the people is fulfilled. Because when the people in government sit idling and abusing the power, in time not the gun but the power of the thumb will usurp the power.

Furthermore, analysing his play text as against the histories as chronicled, it gives the impression that Abdallah finds some striking dramatic elements that perhaps inspires him to venture into this kind of writing. Perhaps, he finds history to be a potent force to be transformed into a profitable commodity for the theatre. Again, in as much as it appears as an advantageous venture, I argue that Abdallah's interest in this regard is to ensure history is made easier to comprehend and appreciated by all as intimated by Deandrea (2002). After all, in my attempt to position Abdallah as a historian is viewed that one does not need the historian for actions to present themselves through the characters, dialogue, and actions. Therefore, Abdallah is a historian in motion who set the 'dead' text in chroniclers alive for audience to understand and appreciate the historical narratives dumped in cold libraries.

4.5 Mohammed ben-Abdallah's use of *faction* as a symbol in interpreting social reality in his theatre

Exploring or investigating how *faction* is deployed as a symbol of interpreting social reality appears to be one unique portraiture of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. This is because historical drama has been his major anchor in commenting on social realities to his varied audience. In his particular interest he prefers to call his “historical drama or dramatic history” as opined by Rokem (2000) to be “truth fiction” or simply “faction”, which is interpreted as fact and fiction. Simply, *faction* is a historical story or real happenings in the past that are supplemented with certain amount of fiction. It is a hybrid genre that combines elements of fact and fiction. It is a mode of writing that is used to convey a message through the blending of historical events with imagined scenarios. Faction is different from historical fiction, which is a literary genre that invents characters and events within a historical context. In faction however, the historical events and characters are real but the narrative is constructed in a way that adds fictional elements to the story. It is this mixture that makes Abdallah's theatre distinct. I wish to reiterate that it is not only Abdallah that has used this kind of approach in his plays. There have been proponents such as Efua Sutherland, F. K Fiawo, Martin Owusu, Asiedu Yirenkyi and others. But my concern is his consistency and use of historical accounts in almost all his plays is what I seek to unravel in the study.

Generally, in an attempt to do the recording of any historical account, the narrator selects and condenses the information. The narrator then ensures that the key highlights of the event is developed and projected in a manner that its interpretation become possible in a larger frame of reference. A theatre of historical antecedents is largely the interpretation of the historian or narrator with regards to his or her narrations as opposed to re-presenting it. This is because the sources of information collected must follow a certain pattern of narration, description and fluidity of events. By this the narrator most often than not choose to either impose or articulate a particular posture in the presentation through the evidence of the situation in a present

phenomenon. The history now serves as the data base for the playwright and theatre becomes the vehicle for living the creative moments that the playwright chooses to present it.

Therefore, the historical account becomes the content of the play which the playwright condenses it using characters, dialogue, conflicts, costumes, properties and actions which may be regarded as central to the historical moments and presented on stage to an audience. This phenomenon that is the action presented on stage closely resembles the historical evidence and can be interpreted as such then becomes a fiction drama. Indeed, the playwright is a historian but very much above the real historian. This assertion is corroborated by Rokem (2000) as he quoted Anton Buchner as:

The dramatist is in my view nothing other than a historian, but is *superior* to the latter in that he re-creates history: instead of offering us a bare narrative, he transports us directly into the life of an age, he gives us characters instead of character portrayals; full-bodied figures instead of mere descriptions (p.135).

Exactly the vision of Abdallah. He asserts that history is the premise of his plays. Nonetheless, after the play is written it turns out as an illumination of the history. This is suggestive that history and plays share some intimacy in the theatre.

Furthermore, the playwright has the artistic license to choose which ever form the play must conform to either tragedy or comedy driven by conflicts, circumstances, actions, and events which may appear not to discuss the real persons but creating dramatis personae to challenge, criticize, comment or deal with a social phenomenon in the society.

The consideration of fiction as mechanism to appeal to conscience and emotions of audience is encapsulated with the realities of the social fabric of the society. Thus, the social reality are shared meanings, practices and experiences of groups such as culture or society. It is a kind of culture that is embraced or accepted as existing and part of the collective decision of a people. For instance, the institution of marriage, rites of passage, family system and inheritance, festivals, values, traditions and morals become the shared or the collective mind of the people. These shared mind serves as the force that binds them as a unique people. In effect, social

reality is the culture of the people. And since culture is a shared practice and experiences, it is largely drawn from patterns lived from generation to another. This transferred social reality say in the area of belief systems, is celebrated annually in a festival which reminds of their past, present and future aspirations as a people. To be able to appropriate these social realities, the playwright with his ethical nuances in his craft uses history as a conduit to give impetus to them in his creative piece. Hence, the rigours of these realities are seen through the revalorization of history which is enveloped in fiction as the medium.

So, Abdallah's selection of information from the sources reflects his own position of the significance of the history in the framework of his society. This he does when he employs the ethics of drama in diverging from the sources then, the creative work becomes *faction*.

4.5.1 Eliciting social reality in Abdallah's theatre

Faction as used by Abdallah creates a symbolic narrative that represents the identity crisis of the African. He does this by blending historical events with fictional elements to create a story that is both authentic and imaginative. Practically, his plays are not for retelling of historical events; it is a symbolic presentation of the real identity of the African. It is to remind the African of his or her roots, tradition, values, morals and even the purpose of their existence. For instance, at the preface of *Song of the Pharaoh* (2022) Abdallah writes:

Our history tells us
 That we are not here by accident.
 Nor are we here alone.
 Our life is a gift ... not for us ...
 We hold it in trust for our generation
 For generations yet unborn ...
 And especially for our ancestors ...
 Who are always around
 watching, listening and guiding
 Silently, sometimes,
 And sometimes in whispers ...But ...
 Always there.
 Our ancestors who are also ...Perhaps ...
 Our descendants! (Abdallah, 2022, p.2)

The above expression connotes that history is the bedrock that gives meaning, purpose and identity to a group of people. It is in history that the philosophy, norms, values, traditions, and the entire embodiment of a society could be found for reference in modelling present and future cultural experiences of human existence. Inferring from the quotation above, it gives the impression that the existence of the African is not by chance but a gift to make future generations know and build on it for their existence. This is because the history provides a sense of context, and understanding of the events, cultures and traditions that have shaped an individual or group's identity. When individuals, groups, community or society is faced with identity crisis, they may feel disconnected from their past, culture, or heritage which can lead to feelings of confusion, anxiety or loss of identity entirely. By exploring and understanding their history they can gain a greater sense of self-awareness, re-awakening and a deeper understanding of their values, beliefs and traditions. The beauty of history is its ability to serve as inspiration to a people or an individual to model after the virtues of courage, resilience, and perseverance of the characters as influencers. Again, a look at the past can also enable them to learn from the struggles and triumphs of their ancestors and use this knowledge to navigate their own challenges and find meaning in their lives. Consequently, a redirection to the past, enable a people to understand their present and chart a course for their future. For example, in *The Slaves* the playwright remarks that the advent of slave trade did a great harm to the identity of the people who transited through the middle passage of the ocean in the lines intimated by Third Voice;

Segou! Segou!! Segou!!!
Please bring my Segou back to me.
Segou is not an ordinary man!
Segou is a carrier of the wisdom of our ways!
When you snatched my Segou from me
You snatched away a teacher of generations of our future.
Segou! The young initiates await you! (Abdallah, 2011, p.4).

In these lines lie the missing link of the young generations carried away into slavery overseas. This is because these young abled men could not be initiated as customs demand for their transition and responsibility to their adulthood and the burden of caring for others. All this is as a result of the snatching away of their teacher, who serves as the light to the next generations. As remarked by the Third Voice; *Segou is not an ordinary man! Segou is a carrier of the wisdom of our ways!* (p.4). Segou the repository of the culture and traditions of the people is lost. Thus, his absence created a vacuum. A vacuum which all the principles, beliefs, morals, values and or the very spirit of the people is lost for good. This lacuna would not have showed up if the African had had a proper transition plan of documentation of its culture and traditions. This is not to downgrade the oral transmission of the African culture to the next generation but it appears that the over reliance on one individual or a family responsible for the preservation and presentation of these accounts as ritual practices orally over a long while might have contributed to the identity limbo that the African is faced with. For how long can one wait for the carrier of wisdom to come and teach the young people? It is evidently clear that such a wait is vain and therefore anything that seem appealing will be embraced as a new way of life. Inasmuch as the colonizer is to be blamed for the identity crisis of the African, the African on their part lost it since they kept on wishing and hoping the return of the repository of knowledge and history to return and assume responsibility. This is where the battle was lost. The African should have been proactive to instil the spirit of self believe and patriotism to protect their lots. However, wishful thinking and waiting as the Third Voice again screams and laments saying;

Old Segou!
It is time again for the new breed of boys and girls
To become men and women;
To be led and guided by you
On to the right path of adulthood! ... (Abdallah, 2011, p.37)

Moreover, the colonizer kept on subjecting the African to cruel ordeals which eventually they took over to rule and further indoctrinated them to be like them.

Another symbolic narrative that faction expresses in the theatre of Abdallah is the colonizer as an actor in religious conflicts in Africa. The invasion of the colonizer on the shores of Africa positioned them as the ultimate authority and perhaps the arbiters of religious issues. They promoted their religion be it Christianity or Islam and demoted gods in the pantheon and other cultural and religious practices and worship as barbaric, fetish in the communities they colonized. Due to the constant state control and interference in the activities of the communities, the religious structures were weakened. Mention can be made in *The fall of Kumbi* as Ibn Yacin the leader of the Almoravid army took hostage of the people of Kumbi and attempted to forcibly indoctrinate Khunata into the worship of Islam other than her believe in the gods and the ancestors. This he did by renaming her as Kahdeeja in the lines below:

Ibn Yacin: And you take this woman away. Put her in a separate room and see that she is well treated. Woman of Kumbi, go with him. There are busy days ahead. Later, when all is quiet, we will talk some more. What is that around your neck?

Khunata

Why is the holy man afraid of pagan witchcraft? It is only a gourd ... a container ...

Ibn Yacin

And what does it contain?

Khunata

Protection, holy man ... it contains a charm to protect Khunnata from evil men like you. ...holy man!

Ibn Yacin

Khunata! ... In the name of Allah, the merciful and the compassionate, I hereby rename you Khadeeja! From now on your name is Khadeeja!

Khunata

Khadeeja! ... interesting name ...I like it. (Abdallah, 2010, p.54)

Interestingly, Khunnata ironically made Ibn Yacin to believe that she likes the new name. This appears as one of the weapons that the colonizer used in creating religious conflicts. They did not have any time to ascertain the reasons behind what the colonized does but hastily condemns it and with force pushes them to follow their religious precepts. Eventually under the power of the whip and other enticing things, the mind of the colonized is smeared with iron to kotow to the tenets of the colonizer. The colonized through religious hegemony embraced the worship

of the whiteman other than his belief in the gods. In reality the African is in a state of quagmire as what really defines the African in the context of the belief in the Supreme Being. No wonder there appears to be charlatans in religious circles predominantly Islam and Christianity extorting money and properties from its followers. Again, this conflict has also made a lot of people hide under the guise of these faith and perpetuate evil against one another by consulting other mediums.

4.5.2 Death and dishonour: A ritual motivated act of suicide in *The fall of Kumbi*

Death is one of the crucial stages of the rite of passage in the life of African cultures. It is believed to be the end of one's cycle on earth and a beginning of new role as an ancestor. By this death is revered and given all its needed attention and commitment as well as support. In the Akan culture for instance there is this maxim that states that *owuo atwediε deε, ennye baako foε pe na εforo*. To wit; death staircase is not climbed by one person. The exclusivity attached to death among the Akans calls for support from one another since it is earmarked for everyone. It is against this backdrop that death and funeral receive such importance and reverence in the society. Since the liminality of death is the assumption of a new role as an ancestor in the African perspective, the way and manner one dies is also a major determinant of what kind of ancestor you will be. This is also crucial because as an ancestor you will be called in times of need and perhaps support as well as to give direction. There are therefore certain kinds of death that the Akan society frowns upon to qualify one to be ancestor. This include the following, death through curse, suicide (taking one's own life), abortion just to mention a few.

Contrastingly, the playwright holds a different ideology to death in the plays he presents. Mention can be made of the tragic death of the High Priest and Khunata in *The fall of Kumbi*. A look at the death of these two characters in the play is symbolic and yet open for analysis. Their cause of death was all through suicide. Could this be a manifestation of some inherent social, cultural practice? Again, why will these leaders choose suicide as the exit point from

the living? Critically looking at the scenario, it raises a lot of concern which could be their honour and legacy in their society. In the African society, the choice of suicide serves as an honourable act of propriety among leaders in the society. The society as a result of this do not interpret suicide as tragic or taboo but an honourable act. It is prestige even for the family and the entire society that a leader once disregarded the shame and dishonour of his race and opted for suicide. Consequently, suicide becomes an act reserved and utilized by elites in the traditional society as an escape for shame (Ikoye, 2017). It must be stated that this kind of death is not seen and interpreted same if committed by commoner. The association of honour attached to suicide as evident in the theatre of Abdallah appears to be an ideology among traditional African societies chief among them is Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. In traditional African societies, the title honourable is accorded to persons occupying important positions in the society. Mention can be made of chiefs, elders, priests and priestesses among many others. They are given respect and honour based on their relevance, influence, economic power and ownership of land, servants, animals (cattle, goats, etc). According to Kortewg (2012) asserts that it does not take personal evaluation to profess honour but also the observation and recognition of the impact, influence, deeds, as manifested in the lives of the people and the society as a whole. It is in effect the society that determines and accords the title to deserving people.

Khunatta the mad priestess who took the reins of the leadership of the people of Kumbi in exile avoided the shame of dishonouring what is meant for the gods and chose death. Her choice of death in the politics of the African tradition is honourable and an act that deserves commendation. This is because she convinced the people of her oath of allegiance to the gods and that of the people she serves; that under no circumstance will she dishonour the gods, her pride as a chaste woman (which of course meant for the gods exclusively) since she is dedicated

to the gods and service to the people. In a conversation between Ibn Yacin and Khunata in Yacin's chamber she made it clear of her dedication to the gods of her ancestors as:

Ibn Yacin

... What is that around your neck?

Khunata

Why is the holy man afraid of pagan witchcraft? It is only a gourd...container ...

Ibn Yacin

And what does it contain?

Khunata

Protection, holy man, ... it contains a charm to protect Khunata from evil men like you ... holy man! (Abdallah, 2010, p.54)

From the above lines, it could be inferred that Khunata's dedication to the gods is explicit and have what it takes to prevent any eventualities that might bring shame on her person, the people (society) and ultimately the gods. Therefore, she prevented the would-be marriage to the Imam by her desire to keep her virginity from being violated. This was to avoid being humiliated and forced into marrying Ibn Yacin. She realized this also in their conversation alone in the chamber of Ibn Yacin at Sijilmasa. Yacin was really longing for her considering her beauty and chaste:

Ibn Yacin

The travellers did not lie about the beauty of the mad black princess. You are beautiful. How old are you?

Khunata

Twenty-two years ... I believe

Ibn Yacin

Twenty-two years ... and still a virgin. Is that also true? (Abdallah, 2010, p.50)

In the Akan cultural setting, suicide is an abomination, curse, or an indelible evil. It is not just the doer who suffers, it affects the whole community (Gyekye, 1995). Suicide as a community abhorrence results in stigmatization of the culprit and its entire race. It reveals a flaw in the moral character as it is enshrined in the Akan moral thought and practice. On the flipside of the same Akan moral practice lie the axiom that stipulate that *animguase mfata Akani ba* which literary means disgrace does not befit a son of the Akan. I believe it is against this background that Khunatta may be justified of her action. In the same Akan context if a woman who is not

married and get raped or impregnated without the rightful procedure is tagged as irresponsible, inconsiderate and irresponsible to the family and the community. It could be realized that these traditions give credence to my arguments on the justification of Khunata's suicide.

Accordingly, Khunata's vengeful spirit and stoic belief in chastity make her detest being patronized by the Arab slaver – Ibn Yacin. She thus, as duty calls offer herself as a sacrifice.

A sacrifice seen as an act of pride and a mark of a heroine to free her people. She did this act symbolically to fulfil her destiny and as an assurance for a new generation of the black race.

This is what she has to say with regards to her act;

Khunata

... I was born for the gods
And dedicated to the shrine of the gods
I was to be properly initiated at the right time
That time has now come! Mother! (Abdallah, 2010, p.73)

Khunata's action appears ironic as she commissions her mother to aid in her preparation to join the ancestors. The ritual action done is suggestive of her sacrifice to free her people from the slaver and his cohorts. Similarly, it is also an initiation of her to becoming an ancestor. In the African view and for that matter the Akans, people do not die but they sleep. The implication of the belief of ancestral veneration is the fact that the spirits of the departed are always around them in their affairs though not seen. Adinkrah (2016) opines that:

This spiritual world of the ancestors has no determinate geographical location or concrete spatial features. However, as spiritual beings, ancestral spirits maintain close, constant, daily connections to their living relatives, although they remain invisible to them. Complementary beliefs in reincarnation suggest that newborns of the lineage come from this band of ancestral kin. (p.143).

In effect the above statement is corroborating the action by Khunata. It further strengthens it when Khunata in a trance prophesizes that the High Priest who earlier for the shame that might come upon him took his life "shall return to the new Kumbi at the right time" (Abdallah, 2010, p...). In the view of Adinkra where he stipulated that new-borns come from the ancestral world, position the ideology of the playwright as a confirmation of the society and its practices as a social reality that cannot be trivialized.

4.5.3 *Turning blood into itself: Incest as a cultural and social abuse*

Traditions and customs are viewed with reverence in the African society. These traditions are seen as the transmission of customs, beliefs or values from one generation to another. Gulliver (2013) asserts that tradition emphasizes the social, political, ethnic, religious, art, moral structures which define a group of people and handed down from a generation to another. The transmission in essence, is to ensure continuity of these established norms by the people. The traditions again, are rituals observed, performed and preserved for posterity. It practices over time serves as their codes of philosophy and beliefs that the social, cultural and political as well as economic life revolves and depends on it. It is also noteworthy to mention that customs, norms, values, traditions and its practices are laws that bind the people. Thus, anything contrary to it is deemed evil and attracts its appropriate punitive measures. There are a number of practices that traditional African societies and especially the Akan tribe frown upon. Some of these are rape, suicide incest, abortion, murder to mention a few.

Incest or incestuous affairs appear to be a global phenomenon which occurs regardless of the history, geography, race, and even the social limit of a people (Quarshie, E.N.B., e'tal 2017; Lukianowicz, 1972). From historical point of view ancient Egypt, Greece and Japan practiced incest. It was exclusive to the royal families as a means of keeping or perpetuating the royal lineage. For instance, in ancient Egypt the justification for practicing incest among the royal families is the belief that they were descendant of the gods Isis and Osiris. It was the union between the goddess Isis and her brother Osiris which produced Horus as the first god king of Egypt (Bridarolli, 2018). This myth however, appears to be opposite to the Akan ethnic group that Abdallah largely portrays in his plays.

Generally, Ghana as a country consider incest a serious, abominable, detestable prohibited act which its news is not tolerated in the society. It is classified as *musu* a curse and as much as possible not even discussed. The Akans, Ewe, Ga-Dangbe, Guan, Gurma, Grusi, Mole-Dagbon

and the Mande highly detest and eschew incest. It is a taboo and must not be discussed (Kodo, 2019; Ghana Statistical Service, 2013; Gyekye, 1996). Again, incest as a phenomenon is rated highly sinful and legally criminalized by the Criminal Code of Ghana (Act 29, 1960) as a second-degree felony punishable by a jail term between 3 and 25 years. Both the cultural or traditional view and that of the law of the country prohibit this act.

In the play *Song of a Pharaoh* the playwright raises this subject as part of his recount of history. Incestuous marriage as a social reality in the play needs to be interrogated in the milieu of Ghana presently. The reason being that in as much as it is a presentation of historical records in a fictional manner, there could be an iota of truth as a phenomenon occurring clandestinely. In the play *Song of the Pharaoh*, the saga of incest showed its ugly head at the return of the Crown Prince – Amonhotep IV who later changed his name to Akhnaten. At his long-awaited return his mother Queen Tiye in a state of joy remarks as any mother would do as:

Tiye

Oh my son! How I have missed you! Come into my arms. Forgive my tears. My milk overflows! For you were snatched away from me before you had enough of the milk from my breast. Come my son! Sit on my lap and feed from my breast. (Abdallah, 2022, p.92).

This statement resonates more with traditional Ghanaian mothers as Adowahemaa remarks as:

Don't our women do that? Especially when they have not seen their son for a very long time? Don't they say "I have missed you my son! My breast overflows with milk! Come! My son, and feed from your mother's breast!" Don't our women say that? (Abdallah, 2022, p.95).

It is a figure of speech that expresses the inner joy and love of seeing a son gone for so long. In the Akan or Ghanaian settings, mothers will even remove their cover cloths to attempt carrying a son or a daughter who might have travelled abroad for a long while. But in the scenario above, the missive expression rather went wild by literary offering a forty-year old man your breast to suck. And to the amazement of all he sucks it and they both cry. It was this act in public that the citizenry heard and the agitation started. The cause of the agitation agrees

with the social contract signed by all as an abhorrence in the society. Since it is an abomination, a taboo and must not be countenanced in the society Aanan the High Priest of Amun rebukes her elder sister Queen Tiye of her evil act in the palace with the son. He did that a meeting called by Queen Tiye on the state of affairs in the land of Kemet. It should be noted that Aanan as the High Priest is the mouth piece and custodian of the beliefs, customs and its observance and practices in the society. Again, he is responsible for prompting the King and its elders of customs, rites and values not well observed as well. This is what transpired between Aanan and Queen Tiye at the meeting.

Aanan

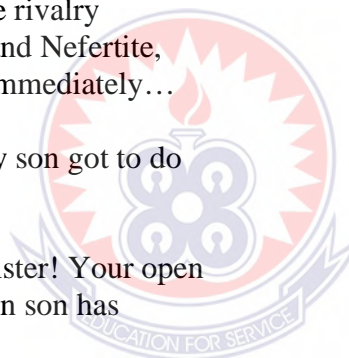
There is a lot of agitation all over
Kemet. The people are divided and angry.
You must begin restoring Amun to his
rightful position. And the rivalry
between you, our sister and Nefertite,
our daughter must stop immediately...

Tiye

What has my love for my son got to do
with anything ...

Aanan

The truth must be told, sister! Your open
fornication with your own son has
everything to do with it!
Incest has never been acceptable in
Kemet. It is an abomination in the eyes
of Amun and an abuse of the principles of
Ma;at. ... (Abdallah, 2022, pp.120-121).



The High Priest was blunt with the codes that govern them. He further quizzed that if the sister the Queen is justified with her actions based on the myth that Isis married Osiris her brother, then she is missing the point. The issue has to do with the collective idea of the people that such an act is detestable and evil. In all of this, I argue that traditional African society especially the Akan ethnic group is morally grounded in science. The traditional society believes that sexual intimacy with a brother, sister, father, mother and/or any member of the family related by blood is evil. This is because in the wisdom of the leadership and the entire society they hold the belief that *mogya mfra* as in incest has long term health repercussions on the offspring.

According to (Hollaway, 2014) an archaeological excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun the son of Akhnaten and Akhnaten's sister, affirms this assertion that the practice of incest among the royal family in ancient Egypt had a lot of health implications on the offspring. Some of the health issues discovered in recent years about Tutankhamun remains were cleft palate, a club foot, feminine hips and a severe overbite. It is therefore, cogent to note that our ancestors were wise in establishing some of these codes to help in sanitizing the blood line from any injuriousness. Furthermore, it is quite clear that incest is an unacceptable act in the Akan society and must not be tolerated at all. It does not only bring shame to immediate family but the entire society with its associated stigmatization and name calling. Clearly, incest is cancerous, unhealthy and must be eschewed by all.

4.5.4 A reading into the thematic performance of the politics of religious ideology in the plays of Mohammed ben-Abdallah

As a work of fiction, the need to explore the author's ideological commitment to the play will allow for a deeper understanding of the social reality of religious ideology pushed through to be embraced by the society. Theatre just like music has the potential of invoking emotions and inciting agitations among its audience to defy or accept a phenomenon within the shortest possible time. Politics has many different tangents and usage. In some contexts, it is understood as party politics, economic, religious, cultural and the politics of ideology. I use politics here in this study as an opinion he holds on religion. Arguably, Abdallah as a playwright and an adherent of the Islamic faith, he appears to have a strong inclination to registering and interweaving his writings on some faith matters. This he does with character names as pure reflection of Islamic names, settings, rituals, costumes and properties.

Abdallah's religious ideology serves as a philosophical influence in his theatre. Considering the dramatis personae of almost all his plays there one would find either all having Islamic name or creation of it to sound as such. For instance, in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, all the characters except few ones that do not have it. Mention can be made of *Malwal*, *Mallam*

Muhammed Ilya, Bawa Samburu, El Fasi, Abdul Karim, Halima, Dikko and even *Kumrahn* the Black (An anagram of Nkrumah) all have and sound as Islamic names. Also, in other plays such as *The fall of Kumbi*, dramatis personae such as *Ibn Yacin, Bin Talal, General Pasha, Aklilu, Astimalinke, Zainta, MaaInna, Maya, Khunatta, Alwanka, Tani, Hafsatu, Khadija, Hawa, Nura, Laila, and Maryam* appear to be names from the Islamic background. Similar phenomenon also appears in *The Slaves* and *Song of the Pharaoh*. In these plays too, character names such as *Dikko, Binta, Tunde, Margan, Zenet, Huya, Sekou-Ba, Ansir-Wossit* among many others are all Islamic names or sounds like it.

Again, considering the spaces or settings of almost all his plays there appears a line of symmetry that draws most of the actions in the plot revolves around, the desert, locales that depict an open space with mats and few wall hangings, and communities that are heavily populated with Moslems. In *The fall of Kumbi*, in the bridal chamber of Zainta and her maidens there appears to be the Henna massage application. This action is a ritual typical of the Moslem community in preparation for their marriage ceremonies. Again, at Sijilmasa Ibn Yacin is also seen in his chamber with these descriptions which is suggestive of the setting being related to how Islamic trade lords and their caravan live as stated;

It is a small dimly-lit room with a door that leads into an inner chamber with very high windows. There is a stone platform with layers of camel hair blankets spread on it; and a Moorish armour hangs in a corner. Otherwise, the room is bare. Two GUARDS enter with KHUNATA in chains. At the same time IBN YACIN enters from the inner chamber. (Abdallah, 2010, p.70)

Moreover, traces of such settings or environment are created for its aesthetics in the milieu of the Ghanaian society and at large the African theatre space.

Apart from the settings, and characters Abdallah creatively drums home the issue of one God worship scenarios in all his plays. This is quite fascinating to observe how he accord some characters as pagans, infidels and such name calling since they do not ascribe to the worship of Allah as the only true God to be revered. Evidences are spread in *The fall of Kumbi*, where

Ibn Yacin had an altercation with the High Priest of Kumbi in his shrine. In that particular scene of the play Pasha and Yacin made it clear to the High and the people of Kumbi that Allah is the only God to worshipped. Yacin even went further by quoting a portion of the Quran as stated below:

Ibn Yacin

... High Priest of Kumbi, I am of the Murabethin! Our Holy Our'an enjoins us to say:
"O you unbelievers
I worship not what you worship!
Nor do you worship what I worship!
Neither did I worship what I worship!
Nor did you worship what I worshipped!
Neither will I worship what you worship!
Nor will you worship what I worship!
To you your faith!
And to me mine!"

I am a man of God; priest of infidels and I do not believe in your idols and your witchcraft... (Abdallah, 2010, p.44)

The above quotation is direct from the Quran 106:1-6. This portion of the scripture in the view of Moslems appears to be that they have a different concept of God. That is to mean that the qualities and attributes of their God is not same and by that God is not a creation of anybody. God is all righteous, no defects, weaknesses or whatsoever, He is also above all similitude and above any incarnation. In effect, the god of the High priest as *Nyame, Twerediampong* is not the same as Allah as Abdallah projects. Abdallah in essence is using his theatre to propagate his belief to his audience and not just that but as a way to align or identify with the Islamic world and his contribution to the movement of "Islamising" the world. Furthermore, his continuous usage of the term infidel, pagan worshippers in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* is also evidential enough to buttress his point on the need to worship Allah and no other god. That notwithstanding, how will he be fusing such paganism in his works if he thinks that that is not the way forward in the life of his society. This is where it appears that there is a kind of double standard in appealing to his audience. On one breadth you are relying on the cultural and traditional rituals of your society to advance a course of change which conflicts with your

religious belief. Considering this misappropriation of fidelity makes the ideology of Islamic movement a none starter for me. Could it be that he wants to make a case for acceptance in the polytheist nature of the Ghanaian society to embrace them as a peace and loving people? This assertion could be best argued as perhaps an attempt to make known how deep rooted he is in both his culture, ancestry and education on the Islamic faith. If this could be then he adds on to the aesthetics of African theatre as his infusion of the Arab twist to the theatre in the African space is quite unique and interesting to read and watch.

4.5.6 Preservation and Promotion of Tradition and Cultural Values

In all the works of Mohammed ben-Abdallah appear the need for collecting indigenous knowledge practices that are evidential to the moral, cultural, social and economic values of the society. The Ghanaian cultural landscape is diverse in nature and practice however the uniqueness of this diversity is the proven strength and unity that identifies us one people. In the foreword to the cultural policy of Ghana by the erstwhile president John Agyekum Kufour, he remarks that there are no ambiguities of a sort in the diverse nature of the various cultures in the Ghanaian society. What is meaningful and evidential is the fact that “our culture is the strength and unity we derive from our diverse cultural background” (Cultural Policy, 2004, p. 2). Among the various cultural practices that spans from initiation, marriage, and death rites must be well espoused into instilling in the next generation the significance of its practices. By this these cultures and others will be preserved. A recall of such customs are the rituals that precede marriage among the people. He uses the plays to re-awaken the lost virtues inherent in some of these practices especially among the northern belt of Ghana presumably Moslems dominated that it is important such practices are held on to for posterity. In both *The fall of Kumbi* and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* the rituals were evidently conspicuous in the following extracts:

Nura

It is the custom, Zainata. A new bride must have the right shade and tone of skin colour. Her skin must be smooth and shiny. And there is nothing like scented henna to make her that way. So, lie down and allow us, your sisters, to do our work.

Zainata

... It is the musky scent I can't stand. Please Maya my sister...Please don't let them smear my body with it again (p.15).

It is not only the rites of passage that need to be preserved. Other cultural attributes such as music and dance must be preserved and promoted. I must admit that for the music and dance there are so much done on them and they are serving as one of the ambassadorial conduits to the global world. But these cultural values are at the same time the things that identify as a people. Therefore, its preservation is one strand to the whole debate in Abdallah's theatre and its parallels to the society. The other strand to the need to preserve the cultural values and traditions are the promotion of it. It is the promotion through the medium of theatre and all other available channels that can put out the uniqueness of our culture will be beginning of commoditizing our cultural signatures. By cultural signature I mean that access to our artefacts, folktales, and /or any other thing that gives credence to our beings as Ghanaians and by extension must be commoditized to give back value in goodwill and income to develop the creative arts industry.

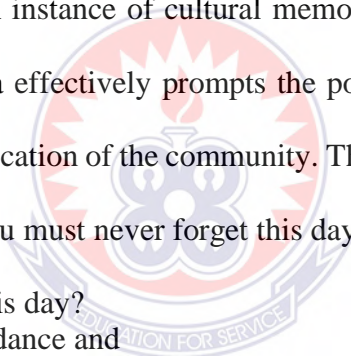
4.5.7 The Role of Abdallah's Plays in Preserving Cultural Memory

The concept of cultural memory encompasses the transmission of historical knowledge from one generation to the next through various means such as written records, oral traditions, physical structures, ceremonial practices, and symbolic representations. The dramatic works authored by Mohammed ben-Abdallah over the course of the past four decades and continuing to the present appear to have a singular thematic focus, namely the preservation and promotion of cultural memory. The contemplation of the distressing encounters endured by our ancestors throughout the harrowing Trans-Atlantic slave trade evokes recollections of suffering, distress, and marginalisation experienced by our community and humanity as a whole. The individual

in question consistently demonstrates a keen inclination towards using these challenging circumstances as opportunities for progress. Rather than adopting a confrontational or hostile stance towards the Western world, the focus lies on moving forward while acknowledging our historical experiences, with the aim of establishing a distinct and noteworthy identity. The concept of identity serves as a means to evoke, communicate, and foster a sense of resilience and endurance within those who belong to marginalised and economically disadvantaged segments of society. Similar to how a radio station serves as a public media platform for communication, the theatre of Abdallah serves as a catalyst for awakening individuals from all walks of life to actively engage in the current situation. Hence, in order to fully comprehend the substantial impact of culture on the collective memory of a society, it is imperative to consistently connect with the artefacts that serve as reminders. Memory engages in continuous interaction not only with individuals but also with external entities that possess symbolic significance. In the context of commemorations, celebrations, ceremonial practices, and representative imagery, it is important to note that icons and symbols should be understood as instances of metonymy rather than metaphors or synecdoche. This phenomenon can be attributed to the presence of items that operate as cognitive cues and mnemonic devices. Positioning theatre as an iconographic element that functions as a mnemonic device and a symbolic artefact is not incongruous. When analysing the theatre of Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, particularly the play text, it becomes evident that it serves as a significant cultural memory. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that plays lack inherent memory, yet they possess the capacity to evoke or stimulate memory. This is achieved by the incorporation of memories that we have imbued into them, including ritualistic practices, historical narratives, and the textual content. Abdallah's plays serve as a means of engendering collective awareness among their spectators by evoking a form of memory. Assmann (2008) argues that groups lacking inherent memory try to construct a collective memory through the use of tangible artefacts,

such as monuments, museums, and libraries, which serve as reminders. According to the view it can be observed that there seems to be a correlation between Assmann's perspective and the plays created by Abdallah, as both involve the concept of moving monuments. The utilisation of this particular library has the potential to exert a significant influence on a larger segment of society when encountered through a live presentation. Abdallah effectively employs ongoing engagement with historical facts, rituals, and other dramatic elements to construct a culturally-driven memory. The objective is to promote overall welfare and advocate for a trajectory that will enhance African identity.

In the pursuit of cultural memory, Abdallah utilises theatre as a means to highlight the importance for Africans to avoid forgetting and wishful thinking in order to express their presence in the global arena. An instance of cultural memory involvement is evident in *The Fall of Kumbi*, wherein Khunata effectively prompts the populace to remember through the performance of a ritualistic purification of the community. This is exemplified by his emphatic use of the imperative phrase "You must never forget this day."



You must never forget this day?
Abandon yourself to the dance and
Let the gods fill your loins with the souls of tomorrow!
Go my sisters!
Go and pass on the souls of tomorrow
From generation to generation!
Remember! You hear me!
Remember! (Abdallah, 2010, p.75).

Abdallah's allegation, as conveyed by Khunata, is based on his consistent involvement in rituals of purification and the prophetic abilities possessed by the prophetess Khunata. The object in question serves as a symbolic representation of the act of disseminating seeds at the designated moment inside their recently acquired habitat. Indeed, it can be considered a form of cultural memory. The subject in question has a significant and enduring presence, as it is deeply rooted in the cultural and traditional practices of the individuals, hence commanding great respect and admiration. Abdallah employs the theatrical medium as a metonymic device

to stimulate the collective awareness of individuals, urging them to transcend their state of passivity and become more actively engaged. This phenomenon is well demonstrated in the literary work titled *The Slaves*. The author employs metaphorical language by utilising images of the “Big, white stone monster by the sea,” referring to the castles that serve as a reminder of the historical legacies of slavery and colonisation. This imagery is employed to emphasise the urgency for individuals of African descent to become aware of the evolving manifestations of slavery in modern-day Africa. In the prelude to the play, the author concisely acknowledges the contemporary resurgence of slave trafficking as a very profitable industry, generating millions of dollars in revenue. This is what he intimates;

Today, Slave Trafficking has re-emerged as a lucrative multi-million dollar “business”. Modern slavery continues the process of brutalizing and dehumanizing large numbers of the poor of developing nations of Africa, Asia and Southern America (Abdallah, 2011, p.iv).

In summary, Abdallah is promoting, both in the written text of the play and its live performances, the idea of a collective reawakening. This reawakening entails taking control of our own destinies, striving for personal growth and liberation, and ultimately contributing to the progress and prestige of our respective nations. The individual achieves this by means of cultural memory, which involves a continuous and enduring involvement with theatrical expressions rooted in indigenous traditions throughout the course of history.

4.6 Dramaturgical functions of ritual in Mohammed ben-Abdallah’s theatre

In determining the place and significance of ritual in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah, there is the need to appreciate the complexities and reflexivity of the relationship that existed in the pre-colonial era on ritual as against its contemporary usage. In today’s world, rituals are loosely used to apply to almost any repetitive action. Mention can be made of shopping, political rallies, and elections are some of the everyday usage of the term. However, in this study, the focus is on the relationship that exists between tradition, divine power, and the sacred

world. Defining ritual has had a lot of protracted views. In one breadth, it is seen as sacred, social and vice versa. Rhem (2012) asserts that ritual is a culturally designed system of communication which is occasioned by repeated or regular interval observation and practices, usually at some specific time, such as marriage ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies. So, focusing on what ritual does would allow for a better appreciation rather than what it is. It is because the focus must be on the ritual and its success, not anything else. In the view of the Africans, ritual is a potent force that is an effective, expressive and communicative experience between humans and the spirit world. The role of ritual in the lives of traditional Africans is a religion and culture. It is a religious act that seeks protection, divine assistance, and an understanding of the past, present and future. Many inductive divinations are sought for interpretation in areas such as thunder and lightning, drought, famine, and epidemic, as well as other phenomena tagged as bad omens to society.

In observing the dramaturgical function of ritual in the theatre of Abdallah, there will be the need to identify the various ritual elements utilised in the play text, especially for critical analysis and then venture into how the text illuminates the sacred space, of its dramatic actions.

4.6.1 The Ritual Space

The ritual space and place in the ritual performance are very important. It is the place designated for the honour of the specific deities to be offered sacrifices, offerings, and worship or reverence. The sacred space usually has an altar decorated with the god's visage at an elevated area. In depicting ritual spaces in his theatre, Abdallah appears to be sometimes imaginary; however, he ensures that the space is created by focusing on the characters and their physical relationship with either the imaginary sacred space or otherwise. In *The Fall of Kumbi* specifically, the plot did not allow the characters to be in the shrine as expected, but they were able to create the sacred space to carry out the ritual rites led by Khunata.

Khunata

Mother of Kumbi! Astimalinke, my mother!

Astimalinke

Yes, my daughter!

Khunata

It is the will of the gods

That you should preside over

An important ceremony for me, for you, and for all our people ...

To proceed with the ceremony!

Come women of Kumbi!

Join us and let us perform our last duty to our gods

For the survival of our people! (Abdallah, 2010, pp.70-77).

The implication is that spiritual or sacred spaces can be created anywhere, anytime, when needed. It indicates that sacred space is usually the character and circumstances present. Again, in *The Slaves*, the priest and the other slaves in the dungeon were able to call on their ancestors and the gods for help as intimated by the priest as "...Tomorrow night we shall call upon the gods and our ancestors to help us; and I shall prepare you, my children, for your great mission..." (Abdallah, 2011, p.31). The extract above affirms the assertion that sacred spaces can be created anywhere anytime. What is needed is the unity of purpose in mind and heart. The unity of purpose which is key is given credence by Alhajiri (2019) as "how the personal, communal and spiritual intentions and purposes and the sacred connection are reaffirmed" (p.4). It is an indication that the ritual space as exhibited in the text by Abdallah is the sacred knowledge that the people have thus performing it virtually seem not a problem since the experience of the ritual connects them and seen as a family of believers in that setting and sometimes after. Nevertheless, it does not also disregard the power of the designated sanctuary of the gods. It is also evident in the play text some stage descriptions that give the audience vivid views of the ritual space. Mention can be made from *Song of the Pharaoh* as expressed by the playwright the visages of the gods serenated with soothing music and undulating movements and gestures as seen below;

On a slightly lower level and very dimly lit, is a Vodun shrine with seven female priestesses arranged in the shape of a horseshoe. At the top of the horseshoe, sitting on a large stool facing the priestesses is a man who is the mirror image of AMUNHOTEP, SON OF HAPU!

He is flanked on the right and left by carved wooden images of Ogun, the Yoruba god of Iron and Thoth, the Kemetic god of artists and writers. A vodun high priestess supervises the ceremony. Standing beside him is the mirror of IYA LAYE. An ensemble is playing a very slow and very soft rhythm. The undulating movements of the priestesses is barely noticeable ... (Abdallah, 2022, p.53).

The description above gives us the indication that the African is highly religious. They being religious is exhibited in the visages of the gods showcased in their court or perhaps homes. The reverence given to the gods as well as the priests or priestesses also gives the impression of the significant role they play in the physical and spiritual lives of the society. Thus, to honour these deities they are placed at vantage positions visible enough for humans to honour and offer offerings either at the house or temple. Such was gracefully and vividly described in *The fall of Kumbi* below:

The Shrine of the Father of Gods is a horseshoe of thick bush. Amu's AKWAABA DWOM can be heard quietly in the background. The only entrance to the shrine is guarded by two-pronged poles rooted to the ground on either side of the entrance each bearing a black plot. Directly opposite the entrance on a mud platform is a black altar above the altar, hangs a large gold Gye Nyame, the symbol of the omnipotence of Twirediampon, Father of gods (Abdallah, 2010, p.28).

There are some elements of drama that are highlighted in the ritual space in Abdallah's theatre which needs critical analysis. The ritual space which is the sacred setting of the temple is dotted with some properties and characters that facilitate the performance of the ritual action in honour of the gods. One of such properties is the stool. The stool in the African and for that matter the Ghanaian cultural setting is a symbol of authority. The society reveres who sits on the stool or what is placed on it. The stool as a symbol of authority in effect embodies the ethos of the society as the one who sits on must be able to ensure the sanctity of the shrine and the entire community. The person becomes the voice of the gods and the leader of the people in chattering a path that pleases the deity in the development of the society. Evidence can be seen from *The Fall of Kumbi* where Khunata having created the ritual space for the cleansing ritual,

Astimalinke sits on a stool placed by one of the women. It signifies her authority as the leader of the people of Kumbi as shown below:

Four women hold Khunata by her arms and legs and lift her off the floor. In the meantime, the woman carrying the stool walks up to ASTIMALINKE, places the stool at her feet and kneels beside it. The woman holding the calabash kneels on the other side of the stool.

ASTIMALINKE sits on the stool and the four women sit Khunata on her lap... (Abdallah, 2010, p.75).

In the pursuit of establishing the ritual space Abdallah albeit presenting it to its audience ensures that focus on the physical relationship between his characters and the holy ground as well as the properties used in honouring the deity is defined. Khunata in *The fall of Kumbi* for instance describes the relationships she has with the gods, her mother and gives insight of the woes faced by the people as a result of their unwarranted attitude of forgetfulness.

Again, Abdallah establishes hierarchical order at the ritual spaces. He makes his audience to know who leads the ritual action at any point in time. At the ritual space created by the priest in *The Slaves*, it is the priest who leads the entire ritual action of edification and supported by the other characters. Similarly, in the performance of libation in *The fall of Kumbi*, the Temple Attendant leads and the entire priesthood acts accordingly. Below is an extract depicting the place of leadership in the ritual space created in the theatre of Abdallah:

As the dim lights fade in, the quiet singing fades out to be replaced immediately by the libation song of the seven clans. It is sung by the Temple Attendant, a very old woman with an incredibly young voice. She sings as she enters followed by Khunata, the mad princess... They approach the High Priest singing:

Khunata kneels before the High Priest who picks up the largest calabash, raises it to the Gye Nyame symbol touches the ground with it and finally places it on the altar. The old woman continues her song, moving from priest to priestess as she calls the clan gods to receive libation and stops for each priest or priestess to pick up a calabash and place it on the stool of his or her clan god (The fall of Kumbi, 2010, pp.29-30).

The above extract shows the order of roles in the ritual space. It shows orderliness, reverence and respect to authority. The High Priest is served followed by the rest of the priests and priestesses present at the shrine. The issue of leadership is well exploited by Abdallah as a sign that there should be somebody issuing out instructions regarding every phenomenon as

exhibited by the Temple Attendant for example regarding the libation. By implication it establishes the communalism and the sense of purpose among the people as the ritual theory of the study sought to do. Furthermore, both literature and the theory affirm that ritual is religious and the socio-cultural constructs of the society as intimated by Ilori (2014) and Frazer (1996).

Apart from the characters and their relationship with each other, at the ritual space and place whether created, imagined or otherwise are other properties and symbols worth interrogating. In his particular interest, Abdallah demonstrates his depth of knowledge in the indigenous-based theatrics with attention on the setting of the ritual action. For instance, in *Al-Ghaba*, spiritual heart of Kumbi Saleh, Abdallah draws the attention of its audience to the signifiers of the clan system of the Akan people and their totems. These ritual properties are unique edifices that identify the African of their rich culture and tradition. I must be quick to add that these are not necessarily for aesthetics in the cultural setting of the Akan people. They are the souls of the people. According to oral narratives the totems are believed to be the umbilical cord that links the souls of every member both dead or alive to it. The clan staff and its totems as described in the extract below indicates the name of the clans, its totem and the priests as representatives of them. These clans are what the Asante people use in their cultural milieu.

Abdallah narrates them as:

...a Toad riding a Dog (totem of **Aduana** clan); the Hawk (totem of Oyoko clan); the Asona Snake (totem of the **Asona** clan); the Leopard (totem of the **Bretuo** clan); the Vulture (totem of the **Asakyiri** clan); the Buffalo (totem of the **Ekoona** clan); and the Parrot (totem of the **Anona** clan) ... (*The fall of Kumbi*, 2010, p. 29).

The Asante clan systems use ancestor symbols known as totems (Sarpong, 2000, p.52). Numerous creatures, especially animals, serve as these totems' symbols, and it is thought that the spirit and everlasting protection of the bearer come from the power of the totemic animal. Vegetables or animals that are treasured by people, especially a group of people, as sacred are referred to as totems. A totem can be an animal, a plant, or any other natural thing that is

thought to be tied to a clan or family in the past and serves as a guardian spirit. It is difficult to distinguish between respect for nature as a storehouse or home of invisible spirits who are venerated as deities in Asante communities (Appiah-Adjei, 2014). When a deity or spirit is linked to a certain natural phenomena or thing, that phenomenon or object is handled with care and attention. It is not to be used in any way, but rather by following some established rites and procedures. Accordingly, totemites regard each other as a sibling. They act together at occasions with the bond they share in the belief of the clan totem.

Drawing inferences from the signifiers as espoused above, gives the inclination that ritual is a spiritual activity as the theory lends credence to in the voice of Nwanaju (2013) as ritual being associated with religious beliefs and practices and in some sense deemed to be sacred. In the same vein, ritual in the theatre of Abdallah is symbolic in nature. It serves as a metaphor in articulating and representing the communal beliefs of the particular society in question.

Additionally, at the ritual space are costumes worn by the characters depicting the nature of the setting as either serious or not. It also registers the appropriateness of the characters stature and the occasion of the ritual action. Considering the efficacious nature of costume as a dramatic element in the ritual space, Abdallah's fidelity to the appropriateness of the characters and their costumes comes handy and on point. With a critical consideration to *The fall of Kumbi*, inside the shrine of Al-Ghaba the playwright gives the vivid description of each of the characters and their costumes. It must be noted that even though it is a work of fiction, the correctness or appropriateness of the costumes of the characters must be believable in aiding the understanding of the audience. For instance, the playwright spends time to outline the costume worn by Astimalinke, Queen mother of Kumbi, "dressed in a mourning cloth, is standing with hands clasped on her stomach, sobbing and swaying ..." (Abdallah, 2010, p.28) at the shrine. In the same vein;

... (the High Priest) wears a white raffia skirts, a cross belt of white stringed cowries across his shoulders and a white head band. ... Before each stool kneels a priest or priestess dressed in black raffia skirt, strings of cowries across the shoulders and carrying a staff bearing an image corresponding to that on the stool before which he or she kneels; in the other hand each holds a whisk smaller than that of the HIGH PRIEST (Abdallah, 2010, pp.28-29).

It could be deduced from the extract that there seem to be hierarchical order at the shrine from the costumes worn by the priests. This connotes that by their costumes the head is noticed from the rest. As intimated earlier, this order is so respected and obeyed so as to not attract any unwarranted consequences from the deities. In another breath, the costumes are depictions of the seriousness of the call as remarked by Oyoko as “we have risked death by fire, spear and sword to be here in answer to your call” (Abdallah, 2010, p.34). By this statement the costume worn by Astimalinke as mourning cloth though the colour was not given, in the Akan tradition normally black and red or crimson (*koben*) depicts mourning indicating the seriousness of the event. Thus, the costumes as described in the script gives that impression coupled with the intensity of the lighting as dim and music that also seem sorrowful and soft in nature put together clearly shows the intensity of the matter.

To add up to the costumes as signifiers at the ritual space are properties (props) either used by characters or as part of the setting. Mention can be made of the horse tail whisks, calabash, Gye Nyame symbol, black stools, wooden phallus, and henna all found in *The fall of Kumbi*. The rosary, the Quran, red shroud, oil and spices are also found in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* and *Song of the Pharaoh*. These signifiers are crucial to the development of the characters’ characterization in the development of the play. Again, they are symbolic in nature. For instance, in the henna is a ritual herb that aids in ensuring the would-be bride’s skin is smooth, clean and appealing to the groom during their nuptial ceremony.

Having espoused the ritual space with its various dramatic elements, I now venture into an analysis of some notable rituals as staged in the text.

4.6.2 Ritual Divination in the Theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah

Divination is as old as the earth came into being. It is a sort after ritual activity that all faith-based religions engage in. The practice seeks to gain insight into the future, seek answers to life's questions, and connect with the divine. Guinan (2002) explains that divination is more often than not a revelation or prophecy when a deity communicates through a mediator by intercepting his cognitive faculties. This however, has been the practice of seeking knowledge or guidance from a supernatural being through methods applicable to the request. What is interesting about this practice is the idea that a deity communicates through a mediator. It is so fascinating yet a serious activity that may have its own repercussions if not handled well. The mediator may enter into a trance or altered state of consciousness to interpret the messages or signs of the deity.

Divination as a ritual may take different forms in different culture and belief systems. For instance, in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* it features elements of divination, prophecies and fate. This practice as exhibited in the play was an attempt to unravel the concept of destiny through divination. Abdallah in staging divination in his plays employs two forms from the traditional religious setting and the Islamic faith.

In analysing divination practice in Abdallah's text, he uses it as a dramatic device to explore cultural, spiritual and moral themes. For instance, in his play *The fall of Kumbi*, inside Al-Ghaba shrine is an evidence of divination as a practice by the people of Kumbi. At that shrine there is the High Priest who summons the priest and priestesses of Kumbi as representatives of the land as well as the Queen Mother Astimalinke. The diviner who is the High Priest becomes the intermediary between the deity and the people. He begins his divination through muttering shivering and gibberish sounds and gestures interlaced with sounds of bells and sometimes heated dance to be able to interpret the message of the deity to the people. Below is an extract from the play:

Asakyiri

... We have waited for the All Powerful Father Twerediampon
Husband of Asaase Yaa and Patriach of the Gods
To speak to us through his servant.
And at last the golden bell rings to signify that the Father has broken the silence!
Speak, voice of the Father, speak!
What does the owner of men and gods say?

High Priest

(In a trance, muttering to himself, shivering and ringing the golden bell)
Yes, my father. I hear and I understand. I shall transmit! Yes, Oh! Great One!
Powerful One! Yes! It shall be done! It shall not be said that the servants of the Powerful
One failed to perform their duty. Oh! No!... Priest of Kumbi! (Abdallah 2010, pp.36-
37).

It could be inferred from the play text that the priest and priestesses needed answers to the destruction has befallen them. they needed the way out and the way forward to be out of the anguish and pain and what the future holds for them as well. This scenario in my view set the rising action for the play. The divination practice in the world of the play dramatically position the plot to rise having established the conflict that resulted in their search for answers at Al-Ghaba. By implication, they needed the reason behind the fire that is burning as intimated by Asakyiri and Oyoko in the play. The High Priest finally spoke. He gives them the cause of the fallen city of Kumbi as the will of the gods. However, he gives them hope that they will rise again and a new nation will be formed where he will guide them. The High Priest intimates as;

It was the wish of the gods that Kumbi should fall to the Marabouts.
But it is also the wish of the gods
That the people of Kumbi
Shall not be wiped off the surface of the earth!
... Go! Lead your people!
They are the fragments of the Seven Clans of Kumbi Saleh.
Lead them through suffering, pain and death!
Lead them through desert, savannah and the forest to a better land.
You will know when you have come to the proper place.
There you will stay and build up a strong and a better nation! (Abdallah, 2010, pp.38-
39).

The act of divination always gives a certain directive to the seekers. In this extract for example a certain charge is given to the priest who are to lead the people by the gods. It is up to them to

believe and act on it. This is because the dice is cast. It is either you believe it and live or doubt it and die. In effect, Abdallah is appealing to the conscious of the African to seek for directions in situations one is in quandary.

Correspondingly, the act of divination is also evident in this highly political play *The trial of Mallam Ilya* where Dikko sought to know the prospects or otherwise of her daughter Halima and her relationship with Khumran. She runs to Ilya clandestinely at dawn.

Ilya

Mother! Is anything wrong?

Dikko

Shhh! (She crosses and sits on her heels opposite him) My son, I have to talk with you. It is about your sister, my daughter Halima ... I want you to look into her future for me. (Abdallah, 2008, pp.10-11)

Ilya

And the child is that of "The Black One."

Dikko

That too, she does not deny.

(Long pause; Ilya deliberately lowers his rosary on the open Quran. With his eyes closed, he stretches out his hand and spreads the sand before him. He writes in the sand. He opens his eyes and reads what he has written, shakes his head and wipes it. He closes his eyes and repeats the procedure twice more. On the third, he does not wipe off the writing; he looks into the distance and speaks to Dikko). (Abdallah, 2008, p.12).

From the above, the Islamic faith in exhibiting the act of divination uses a different approach.

In the traditional setting where the use of bells as sounds to inspire in getting into trance and communicates with the gods and then gives the interpretation, this particular appears to be calm but intense meditation that translates into writing in sand as the message from the deity. He then reads and interpret the inscription written to the seeker. It is interesting to note that both religions are spiritually inclined. Its adherents seek for answers and directions to make life better for them. It is therefore, not out of place to seek for some answers to questions in life by this the individual is equipped to face life and its challenges. Dikko's quest to know what the future hold for her daughter in the play also serves as the foreboding in the play. It is suggestive that Halima who appears oblivion to this may try all she could but to no avail. The reason being

that Khumran will eventually not marry her. Thus, it dramatically prepares and holds the audience quest to know how the story unfolds to its logical conclusion.

In conclusion the staging of divination in Abdallah's theatre is conspicuously evident that it is his dramatic technique in telling his story to its audience. Moreover, in maintaining and preserving the Ghanaian culture, he explores these indigenous-based theatrics to enhance the dramatic plot in creating conflict that add depth and authenticity to his theatre as an African.

4.6.3 Marriage Rite in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Theatre

Marriage is one unique and respected institution dear to the culture of traditional African societies. It is the union between a man and a woman or women as society deems fit. It is in tandem with their deeply rooted appreciation for the important notion of procreation and family. Numerous taboos and customs hedge around this holy estate. The institution of marriage is acknowledged by almost all the major religious sects in the world notably; Christianity, Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhism, African traditional religions among many others. All these religious sects observe the significance of the ritual of marriage. Abdallah being a liberalist in my view, acknowledges the ritual of marriage in both the traditional and his Islamic faith. He uses the Islamic religion's approach to marriage in commenting on the essence of this unique institution in relation to his cultural setting. One key element of the ritual process of marriage is the seclusion of the bride, especially, and the groom for a period. Then the outdoor of the bride for the knot to be tied. Accordingly, with the playwright's preoccupation and possibly his adherence to the Islamic faith, marriage rites and his associated observations are basically from the Islamic religious liturgical background. This is shown in the choice of songs the bridal team sings such as this in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*;

Bissimi Lahi	In the name of Allah
Arahami Mumfara	The merciful we begin
Da Sunan Allah	The name of Allah
Sunan Allah Bawasaba	Is not to be played with
Idan Kunce	If you say
Abin Wasane	It is a play thing

Mu Bamuce Abinwasaba We don't say it is a play thing (Abdallah, 2008, p.47)

Through the songs and the various ritual actions such as grinding girls' songs, pounders and the Bridal Washers together become the source of inspiration and what it is to be expected in the marriage. For instance, the pounders song is metaphorical. It is so because, the pounders seem represent the man and his marital and mutual responsibility towards the bride whiles the Bride washers as the voice of the bride to act accordingly for a what I choose to call an ecstatic sexual pleasure. Besides these, Abdallah incorporates the traditional religion of his society into the ritual action of marriage. I cannot but agree to some extent that he might have realised that irrespective of the type of faith one is an adherent to, the individual's culture and traditional practices is crucial. The reason before Islam or Christianity came to Africa, the African had its religion. The justification for this assertion, is evident in the extract that reads as; "...one of the girls jumps into the centre and begins to undress Halima... By this time Halima has been undressed except for her loin cloth, waist beads, bead necklaces and earrings" (Abdallah, 2008, p.49). A careful look at the description is suggestive of the *Dipo* rite as espoused in the literature. Hence, borrowing from the mine of indigenous knowledge enables him to firmly establish his dramatic plot, and giving meaning and significance to symbolism as seen in the play to understanding the whole play.

Drawing the curtain on the various staging of ritual in Abdallah's theatre the following are deduced as the major gleanings from the scripts as the dramaturgical function of ritual. One of the functions of ritual as used by the playwright Abdallah is the establishment of cultural identity and authenticity. He uses the ritual as a conduit to convey a sense of cultural authenticity and identity of his region in the world of theatre. Abdallah particularly does that through the incorporation of traditional rites such as puberty and marriage rites, divination, and other indigenous dramatic acts which seek to accurately represent the customs and practices of

the respective society or culture. This authenticity helps to connect with the audience with their cultural heritage.

Additionally, rituals as used by Abdallah develops and transforms the characters in the world of the play. A character's participation in or reaction to a ritual can reveal their personal beliefs conflicts, or growth throughout the play. For instance, in *The fall of Kumbi* the character Khunata grew and showed how her belief as the vessel through which the gods commune with her people, defied the advances of Ibn Yacin to have a carnal knowledge of her by committing suicide. Also, in the *Song of the Pharaoh* Aanan the High Priest of Amun grew to ensure that the worship of Amun is restored, a conflict that Akhnaten brought about in relegating the worship of the former for a new god they knew nothing about.

Another dramaturgical function that the plays of Abdallah reveals is catharsis and emotional impact on its audience. His plays are potent enough to evoke powerful emotions on the audience allowing them to experience what connects them to the prevalent social issues in the society as well as their personal wellbeing.

Furthermore, rituals as utilised by Abdallah dramaturgically provides visually, and aurally striking and aesthetically engaging refreshing moments in the world of his plays. The aesthetic nuances as vividly described in his plays particularly involves elaborate costumes, dances, music, gestures and movements, dialogue contribute to the overall sensory experience of his theatre.

4.7 Postcolonial agenda as contextualised in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah

Exploring the contextualisation of post colonialism in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah is quite eminent and appropriate. The quest for the search of an African aesthetics in the space of African theatre has been his major outlook. But to be able to ascertain this issue of post-colonialism and its varied consequences in the African theatre being achieved is something worth investigating. Post colonialism over the years has been one significant approach that has

received various thoughts of its use and how the 'other' contextualises that in other discourses on the effect of imperialism and colonialism. Post colonialism is basically the refusal of the notion that the coloniser had not interrupted the progress of the colonised. Its focus is rather on the perspective of the colonised as the ingredient in challenging the colonising West of the atrocities meted out to the 'other'. In defining post colonialism, it refers to the study of the peoples and the nations which degenerated into the colony once but independent now. In other words, the introspections and critique toward Western world's cultural colonisation.

The issue of contextualising post coloniality in the works of Abdallah comes against the backdrop of the African artist to be bold in setting their own standards in hedging what is best for the African in the pursuit of scholarship in the arts. The reason being that borrowing or relying on foreign standards that do not address the needs of a people is inappropriate which may seem as fitting round pegs into square holes.

Another background to the rising of African intellectuals especially theatre practitioners is the quest for reclamation of their identity and culture. The imperialist in diverse ways made the colonised feel inferior and even hated its own language, culture and embraced that which is foreign. In effect, the love for one's nation and identity led to the search of history, and colonialism and its relationship among nations. This cultural nationalism resulted in the other realising the grave effect done by the imperialist on their culture, and their social being. Thus, the need to assert themselves by championing the path of identity search and recognition as a unified people, able and intelligent enough to make decisions for themselves. It is also cogent to state that in all of the discourse about post colonialism lies the strong voice that the Western world see themselves as the sole body of determining how the world should be governed. This is because the only source of meaning is them and no other. All other meanings are barbaric, backward and underdeveloped, evil, wicked appear as the notion of the west (Zhang, 2015).

Due to their dominance and power, the western culture seems to have national advantage. They capitalize on the refinement of their culture and use it as a standard to make norms and basically force the other to accept and follow. A typical example is change of name of their slaves. Thus, they become glorified and others are doomed. This is made evident in *The fall of Kumbi* where the Storyteller remarks as;

First Storyteller

The slaver is not content to be the owner of just the physical body of his captive. He needs to own the entire slave ... mind, body and soul! (Abdallah, 2010, p.57).

It is conspicuously obvious that the coloniser is not in for just the territory dominance but to really possess the colonised in totality for their own interests.

In the pursuit of Abdallah's agenda to challenge the West of their intrusion to the culture of Africa, he uses characters as metaphors largely in hitting back what the coloniser did in the contextualisation of the postcolonial agenda.

The imperialist in his course of controlling the colonists, rendered all their activities as fetish, barbaric, archaic, and evil. This subjugation of the coloniser's influence on Africans and their culture reduced them to nothing. These horrendous acts were done by baring all cultural practices (of course some were weird) because they see themselves as Lords. Evidence of this act is seen again in *The fall of Kumbi* where Ibn Yacin the Marabouts leader and his men invade the shrine or temple of the High Priest of Kumbi in Al-Ghaba and refers to their act of worship as barbaric and fetish. Interestingly, Bin Talal one of Ibn Yacin's men intimates that the shrine has remained a mystery to many scholars to describe it.

Bin Talal

My Lord, this is the famous AL-Ghaba that our scholars and writers have tried so hard to describe. This is the very heart of the cluster of shrines dedicated to the strange images and idols worshipped by these savages. This is where their filthy fetish priests and priestesses live and practice the lusty, ecstatic and gruesome rites that you, my Lord have heard so much about (Abdallah, 2010, p.42).

Due to their ignorance of the peoples' culture and perhaps worship, they quickly conclude that it is evil and for that matter tagged. Inferring from the extract is the truth that the colonizers

appeared to be naïve about the African and ritual practices. They then hastily demonized them and abused them as infidels. The issue of demonizing the culture of the colonized comes against the backdrop where Graham-White (1974), posit that ‘colonization was not only of territory but also of the mind’. Their attempt was basically to take full control over the colonizer to literally become their property that serves them as Lords and Queens. Thus, they render everything about the colonized as witchcraft just as expressed by Ibn Yacin “I am a man of God, priest of infidels and I do not believe in your idols and your witchcraft” (Abdallah, 2010, p.44).

In effect, the demonization of the culture of the African by the colonizer comes handy with the introduction of their religion. In this study is the Islamic faith. The slaver as it were imposed its faith or religion regardless of the existence of the colonised way of worship. It is again not surprising that Abdallah states in the voice of the of the First Storyteller that “Did you hear that old fool? He changed Khunata’s name to Khadeeja! Such arrogance!” (p.56). The agenda has been to possess the colonized any means possible. To do this the colonizer touches the very soul of the people - the culture of the African.

Correspondingly, Abdallah uses Khunata as a symbol to reject the imperialist dominance, possessiveness and culture in contextualising the postcolonial agenda. The albatross however, on the neck of the African is its inability to refuse the colonizers culture and oppression. In Abdallah’s particular interest with regards to the postcolonial issues, he appears to have the opinion that refusal and rejection is paramount to have our identity back. The reason being that once the identity is burned out of the slaver’s tormented soul and replaced with a new name, language, religion and any other thing attractive, then enslavement is completed. In a sense, he used the character to awaken the consciousness of the African to rise to the occasion by being firm in the identity we bear. Ibn Yacin in an attempt to marry Khunata wraps his cloak around her to cover her supposedly nakedness. He later renamed Khunata to Khadeeja to seem that he

has her to himself. But after their conversation and the favour Khunata requested from Ibn Yacin granted, she drops the cloak and walks away. This is obviously a symbolic act which is suggestive of the intent of the coloniser and the colonised bravery and grit to reject the oppressor's demands that seem to appear as harmless. This is substantiated with an extract from *The fall of Kumbi* as seen below:

KHUNATA and IBN YACIN stare at each other briefly. She turns away from him and begins to walk towards the exit but stops halfway. She unties the cloak that IBN YACIN put around her shoulders and lets it fall on the ground at her feet and resumes her slow walk towards the exit. She changes her mind and stops again. She turns around slowly and walks back to the cloak and picks it up. Then she walks up to IBN YACIN, all the time looking him in the eye. She puts the cloak around his shoulders and ties it in front of his chest, still staring him in the eye. She backs away from him slowly and suddenly turns around and walks swiftly out of the room followed by the GUARD (Abdallah, 2010, p.55).

It is once again symbolic and speaks volumes of what is required of the African to be courageous, defensive and protect his identity and heritage. However, on the flipside of the argument is where Naa in *The slaves* could not refuse the pleasures she was enjoying and naively discloses the secret pact of the slaves to Tomas. She eventually regrets her actions but the issue is, will the souls lost, the identity and the freedom we seek be restored and achieved if we continue to engage in the slaver's court? Again, that has been the challenge of the African to wean itself from overly depending on the European for the niceties of life. Thus, Abdallah is against wantonly seeking favours from the whiteman.

Furthermore, Abdallah contextualises postcolonialism on the background of coloniser's abuse on the colonised using either their own or an African. To substantiate this point I argue that Abdallah's depth of knowledge on the subject of slavery and the ordeals meted out to the African on the trans-Atlantic passage to the new worlds is very deep and grave. The plot of the coloniser as intimated by Abdallah is that "The slaver is not content to be the owner of just the physical body of his captive. He needs to own the entire slave ... mind, body and soul! He intoxicates his captive with the wine of forgetfulness ..." (Abdallah, 2010, p.57). By

implication, the slave having been intoxicated with forgetfulness is a consequent of his soul body and mind owned by the colonizer, he dances to its music. Accordingly, there appears to be no surprises to see Tomas who is a black man abuse his fellow black man. Even though he is a mulato, his identity is mixed up and has been brainwashed to subject a fellow human being into such pain and abuse of their rights. So, the picture is painted that the black man is his own enemy to his fellow black man. In any case once a captive of the slaver you have no sense of reasoning even as Said (1978) affirms from the theory that the African was denied of his own identity and way of living. By extension the African had no reasoning abilities as perceived by the imperialist. Additionally, Tomas the mulato has identity issue. He is at the cross roads and seems not to know where he actually belongs. This character as projected by Abdallah represent the African brothers in the diaspora who seem not to know their roots. They are in limbo and cannot really determine whether they are Africans or otherwise. In effect, the clarion call is for them to wake up from their slumber and eschew the abuses they are meting out to themselves out there and see the African brother or sister as a family.

The politics of religious ideology and dominance is also duly projected in Abdallah's attempt to contextualise the agenda of postcolonialism. The issue of religious supremacy among the West and the colonies they occupied was characterized by their attempts to rubbish everything African pagan and fetish. Evidently in the *Song of the Pharaoh* Akhnaten returns from Nubia and rubbishes the power and supremacy of Amun to his new-found faith and the Aten god. He refers to himself as the "survivor! ...Son of the Sun!" (Abdallah, 2022, p.88). The religious power play is evidently conspicuous in the fabric of the African society. The African to a large extent seem to be oblivious to the realities of their identity and culture. In a sense, Abdallah appears to be of the notion that there is the power play of whose religious ideology on the shores of the African is supreme and dominant. Inferring from his plays this ideology is well projected. He uses characters such as Ibn Yacin and High Priest in *The fall of Kumbi*, Kouyate

and Abbass in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* as well as Aanan and Ahknaten in *Song of the Pharaoh* to comment on the ideology of religious supremacy. The argument as evident in his plays are all geared towards the new religion brought by the colonizer as against the religion practiced by the indigenes as the most powerful, dominant and proactive religion. In effect the coloniser and his religion are given impetus in the views of the playwright which then seem to be a worthless venture in pursuing the African culture and its wholesomeness. Therefore, postcoloniality theory has the potential to provide a careful grounding of the specificities of the local and to embed phenomena in a variety of social, cultural, historical and political contexts through which, a transfigured and better future might be brought into view (Quayson and Goldberg, 2002).



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Preamble

This chapter is the concluding section of the study. It includes the summary of the major findings of the work and draws conclusions emerging out of it. It also contains recommendations based on the conclusions drawn and suggest some areas for further research.

5.1 Summary

The rationale for the study was to engage in an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the adaptations of ritual, and *faction*, which pave way for a discourse in postcoloniality as composed by Abdallah through his theatre. Four plays were selected in this analytical exploration of the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah. The chord that connects the plays are historical facts interlaced with rituals that served as the catalyst that develops and advances the plot in creating conflicts and aesthetical experiences. The study was premised on five specific research objectives. The first was to examine the structure employed by Mohammed ben-Abdallah to give meaning to his theatre while the second attempted to ascertain the philosophical underpinning of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre. The third objective further examines how *faction* (facts + fiction) is deployed as a symbol interpreting social reality in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's theatre followed by the fourth objective which analyses the dramaturgical functions of ritual in Abdallah's theatre. It then ends with the fifth objective engaging in an exploration of the postcoloniality agenda created in the context of African identity in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

The study through the first objective which was to examine the structure employed by Mohammed ben-Abdallah to give meaning to his theatre revealed a theatrical or dramatic vision in this framework. The framework was deduced from both literature and the analysis of

the text. This framework gives a kind of lens when analysing his works and by extension staging of his plays.

Education
and Religion

Identity

Faction
Facts + Fiction

Communal
rites,
festivals,
fables,
Religion



issues

Ritual

Culture and
Tradition

Theatrical Nodes

Theatrical/Dramatic Vision of Abdallah by Samuel Arko Mensah (2023)

The study through the second research objective found out that African theatre comprises of an extensive array of artistic manifestations that function as a mirror or an image of the historical, cultural, and social conditions endured by the African people. A variety of philosophical, cultural, and political influences have moulded the development of African literature. This procedure has been substantially advanced by notable African philosophers such as Wole Soyinka, Sutherland, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, and Mohammed ben-Abdallah. It was

revealed that Abdallah's theatrical productions are deeply ingrained in the African worldview, which is symbolised by a strong sense of community and is communicated via traditional songs, rituals, dance, and narratives. The dramatist draws inspiration from the Asante tribe, an Akan ethnic group, and implements the philosophical concept of Sankofa, which signifies the process of retrieving and integrating elements from the past into the present. By employing this methodology, he investigates prominent social, cultural, and political issues that are present in his locality. Abdallah's theatrical productions are grounded in historical contexts, employing history as a vehicle to explore prevalent political, social, and cultural issues in his locality. The author's religious convictions and Islamic upbringing have had a profound impact on his writing, as evidenced by the moral ambiguity and heroic nature of the characters he depicts in his plays. The themes and subjects that the playwright delves into are shaped by his experiences with colonialism and postcolonialism; these experiences, in turn, correspond with the cultural manifestations of postmodernism. Mohammed ben-Abdallah, a Ghanaian playwright and director, argues that by raising audience awareness of repressive social and economic structures, theatre has the capacity to act as a catalyst for societal and political change. His theatrical productions aim to cultivate substantive dialogue and encourage critical examination, as opposed to merely providing entertainment. Abdallah's profound knowledge of Western theoretical discourses empowers him to undertake a discerning examination and advocacy for African theatre and culture, emphasising their unique attributes. The aforementioned person developed the *Abibigoro* theoretical framework, which functions as a system of classification for African theatre. Traditional African performance styles are incorporated into modern theatrical technologies and techniques within this framework. *Abibigoro* productions consistently address socio-political issues, including but not limited to poverty, corruption, and gender inequality, in an effort to provide a forum for critical dialogue and self-reflection. Abdallah's pursuit of a pan-Africanist form of theatre is founded upon the belief that achieving

social, political, and economic emancipation and influence requires the development of a sense of identity rooted in cultural heritage. His historical plays provide significant contributions to the understanding of the complex implications and vital functions of memory, functioning as a vehicle for information dissemination, audience engagement, and education. Abdallah, a historian, constructs historical narratives through the use of a variety of dialogues and perspectives. The playwright's body of work spans three distinct time periods: before colonialism, during the colonial era, and in the post-colonial age. Through this lens, he illuminates the prevailing conditions of the time and the impact that historical events had on the audience's perception. Within the *Song of the Pharaoh*, Abdallah offers a succinct depiction of Akhnaten, an individual who contravened established rituals through the implementation of an innovative religious framework called Aten. An illustration of Abdallah's ability to integrate diverse viewpoints into his theatrical productions is his play, *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*. This specific production endeavours to accurately depict the historical account in order to evoke a sense of patriotism and question established beliefs regarding advancement. The dramatic production delves into the matter of incumbency abuse and political vengeance in the realm of politics, underscoring the critical nature of addressing the lack of awareness and improper utilisation of incumbency. The play text penned by Abdallah further suggests his proclivity for integrating dramatic elements that function as wellsprings of inspiration for his historical compositions, thereby transforming history into a profitable resource within the domain of theatre.

Consequently, the study revealed that the principal aim of Abdallah is to foster a broader comprehension and admiration for history among a diverse group of people.

In essence, Abdallah's dramatic creations serve a purpose beyond mere recreations of historical occurrences; instead, they construct historical narratives through the utilisation of characters,

dialogue, and behaviours. The aim is to augment the level of understanding and admiration for historical matters among the target audience.

Accordingly, the third objective also sums up that Mohammed ben-Abdallah's use of *faction* as a symbol in interpreting social reality in his theatre is unique, as his historical drama has been his major anchor in commenting on social realities to his varied audience. He prefers to call his "historical drama or dramatic history" as "truth fiction" or simply "faction", which is interpreted as fact and fiction. *Faction* is a hybrid genre that combines elements of fact and fiction, using historical events and characters with imagined scenarios to convey a message.

The study revealed that Abdallah the playwright uses the historical account as the content of the play, condensing it using characters, dialogue, conflicts, costumes, properties, and actions that may be central to the historical moments and presented on stage to an audience. This phenomenon closely resembles the historical evidence and can be interpreted as such, becoming a faction drama. The playwright is a historian but very much above the real historian, as he re-creates history by transporting audiences directly into the life of an age and giving them characters instead of character portrayals.

The consideration of *faction* as a mechanism to appeal to the conscience and emotions of the audience is encapsulated with the realities of the social fabric of society. Social reality are shared meanings, practices, and experiences of groups such as culture or society, which are embraced or accepted as existing and part of the collective decision of a people. The playwright uses history as a conduit to give impetus to these social realities in his creative piece, revalorizing history enveloped in faction as the medium.

Abdallah's theatre uses faction to create a symbolic narrative that represents the identity crisis of Africans. By blending historical events with fictional elements, Abdallah presents the real identity of the African people, reminding them of their roots, traditions, values, morals, and purpose of existence. History is the bedrock that gives meaning, purpose, and identity to a

group of people, providing context and understanding of the events, cultures, and traditions that have shaped their identity.

When individuals, groups, communities, or society are faced with identity crisis, they may feel disconnected from their past, culture, or heritage, leading to feelings of confusion, anxiety, or loss of identity. Exploring and understanding their history can lead to greater self-awareness, re-awakening, and a deeper understanding of their values, beliefs, and traditions. The beauty of history is its ability to serve as inspiration to a people or an individual to model after the virtues of courage, resilience, and perseverance.

In *The Slaves*, the playwright discusses the impact of the slave trade on the identity of the people who transited through the middle passage of the ocean. The loss of the repository of culture and traditions created a vacuum, losing the principles, beliefs, morals, values, and spirit of the people. The African should have been proactive in instilling self-belief and patriotism to protect their land, rather than waiting for the return of the repository of knowledge and history. The colonizers in the theatre of Abdallah subjected Africans to cruel ordeals, eventually taking over and indoctrinating them to be like them. They promoted their religion, Christianity or Islam, and demoted gods in the pantheon and other cultural and religious practices as barbaric. This constant state control and interference in the activities of the communities weakened religious structures.

Again, it was found out that in *The fall of Kumbi*, Ibn Yacin, the leader of the Almoravid army, took hostage of the people of Kumbi and attempted to forcibly indoctrinate Khunatta into the worship of Islam, instead of her belief in the gods and ancestors. Khunnata ironically made Ibn Yacin believe she liked the new name, which appears as one of the weapons used by the colonizers to create religious conflicts.

Death is a crucial stage in African cultures, believed to be the end of one's cycle on earth and a beginning of a new role as an ancestor. In the Akan culture, death is revered and given all its

needed attention and commitment. The way and manner one dies is also a major determinant of what kind of ancestor one will be.

The playwright holds a different ideology to death in his plays, such as the tragic death of the High Priest and Khunatta in *The fall of Kumbi*. Their cause of death was all through suicide, raising concerns about their honour and legacy in their society. In traditional African societies, the title honourable is accorded to persons occupying important positions, such as chiefs, elders, priests, and priestesses. It does not take personal evaluation to profess honour but rather the observation and recognition of the impact, influence, and deeds manifested in the lives of the people and society as a whole.

Khunatta, a mad priestess who took over the leadership of the people of Kumbi in exile, chose death as an honourable act in the African tradition. She believed in her oath of allegiance to the gods and that of the people she served, and her pride as a chaste woman meant for the gods exclusively. In a conversation with Ibn Yacin, Khunata expressed her dedication to the gods and her desire to keep her virginity from being violated.

In the Akan cultural setting, suicide is an abomination, curse, or indelible evil, and it affects the whole community. Khunata's vengeful spirit and stoic belief in chastity make her detest being patronized by the Arab slaver, Ibn Yacin. She offers herself as a sacrifice, symbolically fulfilling her destiny and as an assurance for a new generation of the black race.

In the African view, people do not die but sleep, with ancestral spirits maintaining close connections to their living relatives. Khunata's actions are corroborated by her prophecies that the High Priest who took his life will return to the new Kumbi at the right time. Traditions and customs are viewed with reverence in African society, as they serve as codes of philosophy and beliefs that revolve around social, cultural, political, and economic life.

Traditions, norms, values, traditions, and practices are laws that bind the people, and anything contrary to them is deemed evil and attracts appropriate punitive measures. Some of the

practices that traditional African societies, especially the Akan tribe, frown upon include rape, suicide incest, abortion, and murder.

Incest is a global phenomenon that occurs regardless of history, geography, race, and social limit. In ancient Egypt, Greece, and Japan, incest was exclusive to royal families as a means of keeping or perpetuating the royal lineage. The belief that they were descendant of the gods Isis and Osiris led to the practice of incest among the royal families. However, this myth appears opposite to the Akan ethnic group that Abdallah portrays in his plays.

In Ghana, incest is considered a serious, abominable, and detestable prohibited act, classified as *musu* a curse and not even discussed. The Akans, Ewe, Ga-Dangbe, Guan, Gurma, Grusi, Mole-Dagbon, and the Mande highly detest and eschew the act of incest. In the play *Song of a Pharaoh*, the saga of incest shows its ugly head at the return of the Crown Prince, Amonhotep IV, who later changed his name to Akhnaten. At the meeting called by Queen Tiye on the state of affairs in the land of Kemet, Aanan the High Priest of Amun rebukes her elder sister Queen Tiye of her evil act in the palace with the son.

The traditional African society, especially the Akan ethnic group, is morally grounded in science. They believe that sexual intimacy with a brother, sister, father, mother, and/or any member of the family related by blood is evil, as it has long-term health repercussions on the offspring. An archaeological evacuation of the tomb of Tutankhamun, the son of Akhnaten and Akhnaten's sister, affirms this assertion.

In conclusion, incest is an unacceptable act in the Akan society and must not be tolerated. It brings shame to immediate family and the entire society with its associated stigmatization and name calling.

The study explores the political and ideological aspects of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's plays, focusing on his religious beliefs. As a playwright and adherent of the Islamic faith. Abdallah's writings often reflect Islamic names, settings, rituals, costumes, and properties. His characters,

such as Malwal, Mallam Muhammed Ilya, Bawa Samburu, El Fasi, Abdul Karim, Halima, Dikko, and Kumrahn the Black, all have and sound as Islamic names or creations.

The settings in Abdallah's plays are symmetrical, with most actions revolving around deserts, open spaces, and Moslem-populated communities. The Henna massage application in Zainta's bridal chamber and the Sijilmasa in Ibn Yacin's chamber are examples of Islamic trade lords and their caravan. These settings are created for aesthetics in Ghanaian society and African theatre space.

Abdallah also creatively addresses one God worship scenarios in his plays, affiliating some characters as pagans or infidels, as they do not ascribe to the worship of Allah as the only true God to be revered. In *The Fall of Kumbi*, Ibn Yacin and Pasha discuss the differences in God's qualities and attributes among Moslems, implying that God is all righteous and above all similitude.

Abdallah uses his theatre to propagate his belief and align with the Islamic world, contributing to the movement of "Islamising" the world.

The dramaturgical function of ritual in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah is crucial in understanding the relationship between tradition, divine power, and the sacred world. Ritual is a culturally designed system of communication that is occasioned by repeated or regular interval observation and practices, such as marriage ceremonies, funerals, and naming ceremonies. In the theatre of Abdallah, the ritual space is important, designated for the honour of specific deities to be offered sacrifices, offerings, and worship. The sacred space is usually an altar decorated with the god's visage at an elevated area. The ritual space is the sacred knowledge that the people have, connecting them and seeing them as a family of believers. The play text also highlights the power of the designated sanctuary of the gods.

Africans are highly religious, with gods and priests playing significant roles in their society. The ritual space in Abdallah's theatre is characterized by properties and characters that

facilitate the performance of ritual actions in honour of the gods. The stool, a symbol of authority, embodies the ethos of the society, as the person who sits on it must ensure the sanctity of the shrine and the entire community. The ritual space is hierarchical, with the High Priest leading the action and the rest of the priests acting accordingly. This orderliness, reverence, and respect to authority are evident in the ritual space, establishing communalism and a sense of purpose among the people. In essence, ritual is religious and a reflection of socio-cultural constructs.

In Abdallah's work, the setting of rituals is explored, focusing on the signifiers of the clan system of the Akan people and their totems. These totems are believed to be the umbilical cord that links the souls of every member, both dead and alive. The Akan people use various creatures, including animals, plants, and animals, as guardian spirits. Ritual is considered a spiritual activity, as it is associated with religious beliefs and practices. Costumes worn by characters at the ritual space reflect the nature of the setting and the appropriateness of their stature. The costumes, such as the mourning cloth worn by Astimalinke and the rosary, are symbolic in nature. Other properties used in the ritual space include horse tail whisks, calabash, *Gye Nyame* symbol, black stools, wooden phallus, and henna. These signifiers are crucial to the development of characters' characterization and the symbolic nature of the rituals.

The study further revealed that divination is a ritual activity in all faith-based religions, seeking insight into the future, answering life's questions, and connecting with the divine. It is often a revelation or prophecy when a deity communicates through a mediator, entering into a trance or altered state of consciousness to interpret the messages. In Abdallah's plays, divination is used as a dramatic device to explore cultural, spiritual, and moral themes. In *The fall of Kumbi*, the High Priest summons the priest and priestesses of Kumbi as representatives of the land and Queen Mother Astimalinke. The divination practice gives a directive to the seekers, and it is up to them to believe and act on it. Similar scenario is evident in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*,

Dikko seeks to know the prospects of her daughter Halima and her relationship with Khumran. The act of divination is evident in both plays, appealing to the conscious African to seek directions in situations in quandary.

In Abdallah's theatre, divination is a dramatic technique used to tell the story to the audience, preserving Ghanaian culture and incorporating indigenous-based theatrics to enhance the dramatic plot. Marriage is a unique and respected institution in traditional African societies, and Abdallah acknowledges its importance in his cultural setting. Marriage rites, such as seclusion and outdoorings, are based on Islamic religious liturgical background. Abdallah incorporates the traditional religion of his society into the ritual action of marriage, giving meaning and significance to symbolism.

The dramaturgical function of ritual in Abdallah's theatre is to establish cultural identity and authenticity. He uses traditional rites such as puberty, marriage rites, divination, and other indigenous dramatic acts to accurately represent the customs and practices of his region. Rituals also develop and transform characters, revealing their personal beliefs, conflicts, and growth throughout the play.

The plays of Abdallah evoke powerful emotions and connect the audience to prevalent social issues and personal wellbeing. The aesthetic nuances of his plays, including elaborate costumes, dances, music, gestures, and movements, contribute to the overall sensory experience of the theatre.

The final objective which was to explore the post coloniality agenda created in the context of African identity in the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah revealed that Mohammed Ben-Abdallah's theatre explores post colonialism, focusing on the colonized perspective and challenging the Western world's cultural colonization. This approach challenges the colonized sense of inferiority and cultural nationalism, leading to a desire for identity and recognition as a unified people. The Western world's dominant view of the world as governed is evident in

the discourse surrounding post colonialism, emphasizing its role in shaping the world's meaning.

Again, western culture has a national advantage due to its dominance and power. It capitalizes on the refinement of its culture and uses it as a standard to make norms and force others to accept and follow. This is evident in *The fall of Kumbi*, where the slaver is not content to be the owner of just the physical body of his captive. The colonizers have demonized the culture of the Africans and their ritual practices, rendering everything about them as witchcraft. The colonizers have also introduced their religion, the Islamic faith, to the Africans. Abdallah uses Khunata as a symbol to reject the imperialist dominance, possessiveness, and culture in contextualizing the postcolonial agenda. He believes that refusal and rejection are paramount to have the African's identity back. The Africans must be courageous, defensive, and protect their identity and heritage. However, the issue is whether the souls lost, identity, and freedom can be restored if they continue to engage in the slaver's court.

Abdallah's plays contextualise postcolonialism by examining the abuse of Africans by colonizers. He highlights the deep knowledge of slavery and the intoxication of slaves with forgetfulness, resulting in the slave's own identity being manipulated. Abdallah also addresses the politics of religious ideology and dominance in African society, highlighting the colonizer's attempts to destroy African pagan and fetish beliefs. His plays highlight the colonizer's ideology as the dominant force, highlighting the colonizer's disregard for African culture. This perspective suggests that post coloniality theory can help understand local contexts and promote a better future for Africans.

It was also revealed from the analysis that for the African to have its identity then there is the need for hybridity. That is borrowing norms, ideas and concepts that can help make the indigenous-based theatrics have its proper place and aesthetic experience in the world of literature and theatre practice.

5.2 Conclusions

It is important to state that the study, with reference to the structure that gives the theatrical or dramatic vision of Abdallah, is a unique model. It adds to the paucity of literature on dramatic theories and criticisms in African theatre. The creation of this theatrical or dramatic vision of Abdallah establishes him as a dramatist. It will further get scholars engaged in reflecting on his theatre through this model of analysing and critiquing his works through this lens.

The study also concludes that Mohammed ben-Abdallah is a prominent historian in motion, utilising his plays to provide insights into the roles and significance of memory. His plays cover pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras, rewriting and remaking history for the audience. Abdallah uses various voices and narratives to present historical events, as evident in all the plays analysed. Abdallah's interest in making history easier to comprehend and appreciate is evident in his use of dramatic elements and the portrayal of historical events through characters, dialogue, and actions. His goal is to make history understandable in a more entertaining manner to an audience ranging from market women, artisans, students, and university professors.

Similarly, it is worth concluding that Abdallah's preoccupation with the use of historical accounts is symbolic in commenting on social, political, religious, and cultural issues in his theatre. The use of faction, a coinage of the playwright, is the mechanism that appeals to the conscience and emotions of the audience, encapsulated in the realities of the social fabric of society. In summary, the social thoughts of Abdallah are made evident through the use of the historical account and the authorial signature he possesses.

In my view, overt engagement with the worldview of Abdallah's plays involves cultural identities, communalism and a sense of religiosity and pride inherent in them. This view is further pressed on to imply that Abdallah's theatre is imaginatively built on the aesthetics of rituals and depends for its success on the artful co-mingling placed on a multiple-layer storyline to create suspense, conflicts intermissions, forebodings and multi-layered imagery.

Abdallah uses the rituals as allusions and metaphors to consciously make its audience aware of the significance and purposes of these activities for the preservation, presentation, and promotion of these dramatic acts, but they are also an important aspect of the identity of the African and, for that matter, the Ghanaian in the world of theatre and global self.

Furthermore, Abdallah's theatre uses traditional rituals to establish cultural identity and authenticity, revealing personal beliefs and growth. His plays evoke powerful emotions and connect audiences to social issues, with elaborate costumes, dances, music, and gestures contributing to the sensory experience.

Finally, the study concludes that the theatre of Mohammed ben-Abdallah delves into the realm of postcolonialism, offering a critical examination of the cultural invasion of African identity by the Western world. The theatrical production presents a critique of the psychological effects of colonisation, including the development of feelings of inferiority and the subsequent emergence of cultural nationalism. This exploration ultimately fosters a collective yearning for a distinct identity and acknowledgment as a cohesive community. In his work, Abdallah use the symbol of Khunata as a means to challenge and resist the hegemony of colonial powers and their cultural influence. This symbolic representation underscores the significance of acts of denial and rejection in the process of reclaiming and revitalising African identity. The plays also explore the mistreatment of Africans by colonisers, shedding insight on the intersection between religious doctrine and the colonisers' indifference towards African cultural values. The research posits that the use of post coloniality theory might facilitate comprehension of local settings and foster a more promising trajectory for African societies. The incorporation of hybridity is deemed essential in the construction of African identity, since it enables the assimilation of diverse cultural norms and ideas, hence facilitating the development of a distinctive aesthetic encounter within the realms of literature and drama.

5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends that this theatrical or dramatic vision of Mohammed ben-Abdallah be explored in diverse ways with his other works to appreciate the meaning derived from the structure. Again, this postulated model can receive more debate and be adapted for analysing similar African plays among scholars of dramatic theories and criticisms.

Also, this study recommends that there are a lot of plays that are historically motivated but have not received the needed scholarship. Therefore, a critical look at some of these other African playwrights and their works will help fill the gap in historical plays. This will eventually aid in having a lot of literature on African plays as reference materials in other analyses and perhaps comparative studies. Additionally, budding playwrights in our institutions of higher learning should be encouraged to explore the possibilities of creating stories from historical accounts. Again, the introduction of theatre arts as a subject in the new curriculum at the senior high schools will also serve as a fruitful footing for students to engage in creating from a barrage of history that is relevant to the socio-cultural development of society. Another recommendation that this study suggests is a critical discourse on thematic concerns that these historical plays raise. This can be done by engaging in a comparative study of Abdallah's plays against other playwrights in such a craft for elucidations that challenge the status quo of society. Also, parallels of characters as drawn from the historical data to the social and cultural significance of the society could be studied.

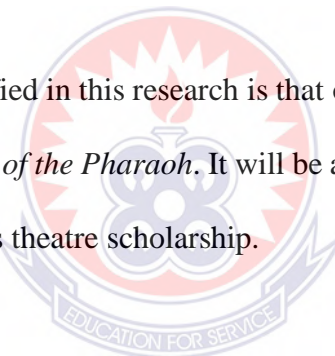
The analysis of the study revealed an important role for rituals and their usage in drama or theatre plays. It showed that rituals are, after all, not fetish but one of the indigenous-based theatrics that facilitate the plot of Abdallah's theatre. Therefore, the study recommends that a look into rituals performed in the society by playwrights and other theatre practitioners should be used as allusions for the development of the plots to strengthen cultural identity and originality of plays.

Furthermore, the study recommends that critics of African plays to expand the use of the postcolonial theory in the criticisms and examinations of the themes, rituals and the history in African theatre.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Moreover, the four plays that I have examined in this context, along with the themes that I have discussed, serve as an ample testament to the intricate fabric of Abdallah's theatrical universe. They assisted me in exploring those obscure, difficult, or relatively unfamiliar corners of *faction* and ritual in his theatre. Nevertheless, a comprehensive examination of gender issues in Abdallah's theatre remains elusive due to the scarcity of feminist discourse, particularly in critical scholarship pertaining to Abdallah. An area that I intend to investigate further at a later time.

Another area of deficiency identified in this research is that of decoloniality. Its predominance is particularly evident in the *Song of the Pharaoh*. It will be a fascinating subject for additional research in the field of Abdallah's theatre scholarship.



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