

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**AN ANALYSIS OF FORM AND THEMATIC PRE-OCCUPATIONS OF  
MOHAMMED ben-ABDALLAH'S DRAMA**



**SAMUEL ARKO MENSAH**

**2016**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**AN ANALYSIS OF FORM AND THEMATIC PRE-OCCUPATIONS OF  
MOHAMMED ben-ABDALLAH'S DRAMA**

**SAMUEL ARKO MENSAH**

**8141750016**

**A Thesis in the Department of Music Education, School of Creative Arts,  
submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University of Education, Winneba,  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy  
(Arts and Culture) degree**

**August, 2016**

## 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 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:.....



### SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I 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.

NAME: Prof. Mary P. Dzansi-McPalm

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE:.....

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been written without the grace of God Almighty. The support and encouragement of my wife is much appreciated. There have been many encounters along the way – some delightfully pleasant, many enriching and a few downright diversionary; but all provided a worthwhile experience.

To my supervisor Professor Mary P. Dzansi-McPalm I doff my cup to you for your motherly patience, support and resources, gentle nudging and affable reprimands helped this thesis immensely. *Akpe* Mama! Indeed you have sown a seed and you would live to see it grow.

I thank Professor Kolawole Raheem of SACOST, Mr. Ebenezer Henry Brew-Riverson, and Mr. Ernest Kwasi Amponsah of the Department of Theatre Arts U. E. W for their inputs. I am indeed a fortunate man to have drunk out of the generosity of your knowledge.

To you Matilda Arko Mensah, Gifty and Auntie Christie of School of Graduate Studies Secretariat I am grateful for all that you have done for me.

Thanks to all.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Ewura Esi Gyasiwa my daughter, my loving wife Elizabeth (EMADE) and Anna Amos the sweetest mum ever.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents	v
Abstract	vii

### CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 The Purpose of the Study	5
1.4 Research Objectives	6
1.5 Research Questions	6
1.6 Significance of the Study	7
1.7 Theoretical Framework	8
1.8 Organisation of the Study	10

### CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Overview of African Theatre and Development	12
2.3 Theatre in Colonial Africa	17
2.4 Adaptation of Western Plays into African Theatre	24
2.5 Thematic Considerations of Early Literary Drama	29
2.6 Forms of Theatre in Ghana	32
2.7 The Beginning of Contemporary Ghanaian Theatre	41

### CHAPTER THREE

Methodology	45
-------------	----

### CHAPTER FOUR: Discussion

4.1 About the Playwright	50
4.2 Synopsis of <i>The Fall of Kumbi</i>	53
4.3 Synopsis of <i>The Trial of Mallam Ilya</i>	54

4.4 The Form of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama: <i>The Fall of Kumbi and The Trial of Mallam Ilya</i>	55
4.5 Language Usage in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama: <i>The Fall of Kumbi and The Trial of Mallam Ilya</i>	69
4.6 Thematic Pre-occupation of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama: <i>The Fall of Kumbi and The Trial of Mallam Ilya</i>	72
4.7 The Impact of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama in the Development of Ghanaian Theatre	83
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	
5.1 Summary	88
5.2 Conclusions	91
5.3 Recommendations	93
References	94



## ABSTRACT

Drama is artistic when it depicts life. It deals with man's experience which is the raw material for the playwright who is above all else a member of his particular society. He absorbs the culture of his society, takes in the language, observes the environment, discovers its idiosyncrasies and tries to reproduce them in his writings, especially in a format that connects with the aesthetic and social values of his audience. Mohammed ben-Abdallah is one Ghanaian dramatist who has developed a unique theatrical technique that easily addresses both the aesthetic and social yearnings and hiccups of society by re-inventing the history and indigenous knowledge of his society. This thesis examines the form and thematic pre-occupations of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama and its impact towards theatre development in Ghana. *The Fall of Kumbi* and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* were used to explore his dramatic form and how he radically exploits history and indigenous cultural practices by reading meanings into them and re-inventing history to comment on social, religious and political issues. Textual analysis and overlapping methodologies were used in ascertaining the uniqueness of his drama.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

A critical look at the theatrical scene in Africa and especially Ghana, one cannot but be struck by its varied complex form and pristine didactic concerns it carry to its audience. Considering the African traditional rituals, festivals, ceremonies and the likes are all theatrical in nature. These performances as it were tell the story and experiences of the people with costumes that are aesthetically artistic. Therefore, theatre is predominantly one essential part of human expression in almost all cultures (Arnold, 2004). However, many scholars have speculated as to whether theatre did or did not exist in pre-colonial Africa. Some schools of thought posit that terminologies as 'drama', 'theatre' and 'rituals' are embodied in the vocabulary of the European and has its meanings and interpretations different from that of the African. Kerr (1995) argues that for the African to be able to appreciate and make a strong case for their theatre, it would be imperative for them to couch their own concepts or models in describing theatre in the pre-colonial era by making use of indigenous aesthetic terminologies. This position emerged because the European critics distinguished theatre from performance.

Therefore, in the discourse of Edward Said's Publication on *Orientalism* in 1978 he argues that Europe has managed to construct the culture of their colonies to as it were towards theirs with the aim of strengthening their imperial domination. What is shocking about Said's analysis of Europe's construction of the 'other' has to do more than the physical. The alarming effects of imperialism were the textual invasion and suppression by which the coloniser employed in creating discursive hegemony over

their colonised spaces. It thus affected the different cultural expressions in the colonised spaces. In Said's attempt of unmasking the actions of the imperialist agenda on the Orient, it saw many artists and writers in Africa and beyond who were under the control of Europe consciously or unconsciously challenging the status quo about how the European has dominated and discursively hegemonies their very culture.

Consequently, the wake up call for nationalistic forms of theatre across the African continent at independence or post-colonial era required of the African to take a critical stance to investigate and come out with the creation and development of a theatre that is relevant to his society. Hitherto, the African perception of theatre in general was evident at the mission schools where simple Christian religious stories were dramatised and European nursery rhymes and folksongs recited. Again, at the secondary and colleges, set books for literature studies were put up under the direction of the teacher. Therefore, the African child knew nothing of the theatre apart from his imitation of medieval and Elizabethan theatres.

Inevitably, the vibrant search and creation of an African theatre began. This quest was as it were to probe into finding out how an African drama and theatre could be made from the imported colonial theatre that was intended first of all to entertain colonial agents resident in Africa and to alienate the trained African to run his country on behalf of the colonialists. Mullel (2007) opines that many African scholars have the view that African cultural and artistic traditions are the fundamental key that holds the answer to the above pressing question. In a move towards the search and creation of an authentic African theatre, Agovi (1991), defines authentic African theatre as “the form of creating in the theatre which is rooted in the composite tenor of African experience, embodying a relationship of relevance between the past and present, and which in effect reflects principles of African performance aesthetics” (p. 67). It is

therefore clear that the fundamental framework of an authentic theatre of any sort should be based on the numerous beliefs, rituals and other cultural and artistic traditions such as dance, music, ceremonies, storytelling, dramatic enactments among many others that is geared towards social cohesion and cultural relevance.

In this light, the doyenne of Ghanaian theatre Efua Sutherland exemplified this in her creation of *Anansegoro*, which has largely influenced many contemporary writers such as Yaw Asare, Martin Owusu, Kodjo Mawugbe, among many others. They have asserted themselves in creating an identity in the theatre for Ghana. Apart from the contributions of these personalities and their works, there is the deliberate attempt in the creation of a theatrical form in the direction of reflecting perhaps their existence and being.

Notwithstanding this Abdallah (2008) contends that it is time for African playwrights to set their own standards richly drawing from their own cultural heritage, our history and the totality of the African experience to create the criteria for judging our own work. Abdallah agrees to the fact that the African in a quest to fashion a theatre that is peculiar to the society from which he hails must largely draw from the mine of indigenous knowledge as source material.

Therefore one would not be far from right by inferring that for the African to have any form of theatre, that theatre should predominantly be based on the rich culture and traditions, history and total experiences of the people. This will include folklore, music, dance, rituals, ceremonies, proverbs and any other thing that is part of their existence.

In view of this, many attempts have been made and are still being made by some sons and daughters of the land through the plays they write to help in the creation and

development of a dramatic form of theatre that can be classified as truly African. Thus, there have been different tangents to form and pre-occupations of African playwrights in the development of drama of which Mohammed ben-Abdallah is not an exception. Mohammed ben-Abdallah in his particular contribution to form in the theatre saw the creation of a theatre called *Abibigoro*. The development of this dramatic form and its content is from the mine of indigenous knowledge.

Mohammed ben-Abdallah is a Ghanaian who writes about issues affecting Ghanaians. Therefore, an understanding of the social, cultural and political changes in Ghana is important to appreciate the structure of Abdallah's drama. In addition, his works critically examines the heritage of Ghana, Africa and the changes that need to be preserved and structured for the good of the African. This thesis considers the impulse to look into the form of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama with regard to its structure and main themathologic preoccupations.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Considering the landscape in the development of theatre across the African continent, you cannot but be struck by different forms or styles of presentation in the theatre. Whereas some are still in bed with the colonial styles of writing and sees it as sacrosanct, others too have the notion that it does not give the African the edge to tell the story of it society well. The question that arises is to what standard are we judging our work? The challenge has been that most African playwrights and practitioners pattern after the western style of presentation therefore what we truly seek to portray becomes an elusive venture. This is evident among the African intellectual who will candidly assert that 'we must maintain standards'. What standards too you will not be told but obviously, it is the colonisers measurement of what we do.

Again, in the African look-up to alien conventions and trends they become conformists instead of critically developing something that could be peculiar to them. Albeit, in the wake up call to define and institute an authentic African theatre, Abdallah orates that it is time for African playwrights to set their own standards richly drawing from their own cultural heritage, our history and the totality of the African experience to create the criteria for judging our own work (2008, p.iv).

The concern is that with such an experienced dramatist and his radical ideological stand in the changing phase of drama or theatre concerning his passionate commitment to reading of the historical, cultural values and political discourse in Africa, less work has been done about him. However, some critics and individuals have tried to look at the works of Abdallah such as Ajumeze (2011), Asiedu (2011), Deandrea (2002) among many others but none has critically appraised his work in relation to postcolonial African studies and the importance of his work in the area of his drama. In addition, juxtaposing two of his plays illuminates and culminates the post-coloniality agenda. It is thus in this discussion that my research will prove original, even while eclectically relating to the earlier studies. Again, the thesis will seek to look into and articulate the form and the main pre-occupations in the selected plays of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

### **1.3 The Purpose of the Study**

In this thesis, the researcher intends to examine the dramatic form of Mohammed ben-Abdallah in a position where his vision for change in the theatre impels him to have a re-look at the reading of history and political discourses to champion a different path that tells the story of its society in a friendlier atmosphere. This Abdallah does to

manipulate the cultural, political heritages available to him to challenge and dissect the practice of the art in Africa.

In effect, the discussions that shall emerge will demonstrate the synchronicity of consistency in the form and pre-occupation that articulates the issue of identity, cultural subordination, colonialism, political obsequiousness among African leaders and many others. Therefore, the playwright's intent and ultimate goal is to see a live performance of his writing, which creates words to be spoken and stories to be told. As the African is powerful with orality, which is a characteristic of his performances will create the congenial platform for the post-colonial impulse to transmit and re-enact what mirror to us in our culture.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

- i. To examine the dramatic form of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama.
- ii. To analyse the text as a response to issues which are engaged and addressed by the playwright.
- iii. To analyse the pre-occupation of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama.
- iv. To examine the impact of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama in the development of Ghanaian theatre.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following questions

- i. What are the dramatic forms of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama?
- ii. How does the text respond to the issues raised by the playwright?
- iii. What are the main pre-occupations of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama?

- iv. How has the drama of Mohammed ben-Abdallah contributed to the development in the Ghanaian theatre?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Juxtaposing the two plays of Abdallah gives a kind of illumination to his position as a post-colonial writer. It therefore suggests how a comparative reading of these plays might enliven one another with the potential of amplifying, clarifying and drawing similarities and differences in meaning and dominant perspectives. Critics have written about Abdallah and his plays independently but none have done an in depth analysis and interpretation of his plays to draw from it the point of convergence, departure, themes, and techniques in his drama.

Abdallah is a mainstream dramatist whose work has been widely performed in Ghana and abroad. His writing has been greatly influenced by his forbears as he acknowledges the firm foundation laid by the doyenne in the creation of *Anansegoro* for the Ghanaian theatre Efua Sutherland. This he assert that his work was built on the shoulders of traditional storytelling technique of Africa's respected griot or praise singers. By this, his writing expresses a unique individual voice that champions the chattering of a new path from the past errors. The text also set ablaze the pristine import of his work that creates consciousness for change and preservation of some rare cultural heritages that are being extinct.

Consequently, presenting an analysis of form and thematic pre-occupation of Abdallah's plays is to recapture the histories, myths, cultural heritages, politics and totality of the African experience from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. It thus, set the context to suggest that Abdallah is a revolutionary artist in the aftermath of colonialism.

## 1.7 Theoretical Framework

This thesis analyses Mohammed ben-Abdallah's dramatic form and its main thematic pre-occupations in his drama. It further discusses the effort of his creation of the concept of *Abibigoro* and its features and the impact it has on Ghanaian theatre. The discussion of the thesis would rely on the post-colonial assumption as the theoretical framework.

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 'colonisation was not only of territory but also of the mind'. By this, the African lost track of his real identity that affected the art with 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.

Therefore, Frantz Fanon's three phases of how the African has been overshadowed before and after independence asserts 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 also really made him limited and borrowed aesthetics that is foreign.



However, post-colonial theatre has forged a new paradigm that thrives on its own context and content that is relevant and related to its native culture. This is because of many playwrights who have asserted themselves by exploring their own indigenous knowledge and culture to communicate other than what the colonialist taught them. The usage of indigenous language has been creatively done in the use of proverbs, idioms and other rich oral forms of communication in making the Standard English conventions elusive. It then makes beautiful poetry enriching the work. It is therefore not surprising that Gilbert and Thompkins (1996) add their voice in agreement by stating that ‘when playwrights interfere with received discursive codes or introduce the rhetorical devices of other languages into English they diminish the power invested in the colonisers language and re-establish local or indigenous modes of expressions for theatrical representation’ (p.181).

The connotation of this assertion makes it very prudent for playwrights to as it were to minimize hitherto, the influence of the colonizer’s language by ensuring that they employ their native language well embellished in consonance with their histories to make their works- plays to give it some form of authenticity.

It must be stated however that post-colonialism has been largely discussed by various writers. Post-colonialism in itself is not evil as it appears to Mabweazara (2002) as “the collision of cultures that resulted from the influx of imperial forces did strike a blow to the face of African theatre”. In his opinion, it seems that the imperialist gravely alienated the African from his identity therefore slamming his theatre and creating the impression, that theatre never existed until the coming of the colonizer.

These notwithstanding, one cannot agree more with Mabweazara on the reverse on his earlier argument. But this time he argues that not that imperialism is evil but it

resulted in ‘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).

One interesting aspect of postcoloniality, is perhaps the heterogeneous dimensions it has taken, making its study and conformity very problematic, nevertheless, it’s diversities produce its concepts and hallmarks such as ‘hybridity’ and ‘fragmentations’.

In conclusion, I will state that the concept of post-colonialism suggest that in as much as colonialism is over, there are traces of them that aid in the writings of plays that can be termed indigenous and hinges on histories of the people. Therefore, I agree with Addo (2011) that post-colonial drama or plays are also responses to colonialism.

This thesis is in the domain of Abdallah's dramatic form and thematic pre-occupation.

### **1.8 Organisation of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of five main chapters. Chapter one incorporates the introduction of the topic and provides some background for the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions and significance of the study.

Chapter two is the review of related literature. It looks at African theatre and its development from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial with attention paid to the concept of some conventions that are extant in the development of African theatre and its identity.

Chapter three is the research methodology which looks at the set of methods employed in obtaining the data for analysis.

Chapter four considers the results, analysis and interpretation of the content, context and thematic concern of the *The Fall of Kumbi* and the *Trial of Mallam Ilya*. Here a considerable attention is given to the elements of *Abibigoro* as the unique drama of Abdallah.

Chapter five is the summary, conclusions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section will focus on related literature on African theatre right down from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial with attention given to form, early thematic concerns in the theatre, literary theatre in Africa and the development of the Ghanaian theatre with consideration given to Mohammed ben-Abdallah and his drama.

#### 2.2 Overview of African Theatre and Development

Africa as a continent has it varied distinctive cultures that define each ethnic group, tribe and states before the colonial imposition. In the distinctive entities, they are characterised by their way of life and bounded by the horizon of their own capabilities. With all these, some scholars have speculated as to whether theatre did or did not exist in pre-colonial Africa. This illusion is what Hayes Mabweazara in his paper, *Present day African theatre forms have filtered through from the past* (2002) argues that, African theatre as it exist today has its roots embedded in the empirical evidences that the past provides through anthropologists and ethnographers. Among such evidences are the enactments of hunts, re-enactments of historical events, rites of passage and others. Theatre in the African context is a performance and not in the Western classical tradition of stage performance and audience but in the more general form of representational or functional performances with symbolic images representing life through action (Graham-White, 1974, Hater, 2001, Mlama, 1983).

Hater (2001) states that: “Pre-colonial ... theatres therefore were part of and parcel of the people's way of life, and the performances were in direct response to the people's interpretation and search for artistic presentation of meaningful phenomena” (p.5).

It therefore connotes that the theatre was fundamentally functional and sought to raise, discuss and impart societal norms. It is also a medium for the passing on the values unto the new generation through the repositories of the aged. Therefore, the argument by some researchers who concluded that theatre never existed is false. However, their misgivings are because of the fact most writers and collectors of arts in Africa are aliens and sought to look into the lenses of their theatre as a measuring standard.

Kerr (1995) suggested that much of the scruples are because of the terminology that is drama, theatre and rituals because they are not in the vocabulary of the African culture rather the European. Thus, for the African to be cleared of all these misgivings then it is incumbent on the African to as it were develop or create his own model to describe pre-colonial arts by making use of indigenous aesthetic jargons. It is therefore not surprising for Ruth Finnegan to assert that theatre came to Africa with Europeans. This is because there was not enough collection of art forms to attest to the fact that theatre did exist in Africa. Additionally, drama went unrecognized due to the lack of interest of those who wrote about them. Kerr (1995) explains the reason being that “many of the scholars who write about it do so with an understandable elegiac tone of regret for the passing of richly complex artistic forms” (p. 42).

It is said that when two cultures meet the dominant one would eventually overshadow the dormant one. It is possible that Kerr's point of view on the decline or extinction of most of the African art forms such as music, dances are due to social transformation

that occur everyday since there are no documented literature of origin and significance of these performing arts. In the same light, Mabweazara (2002) affirms the postulation of Kerr as he put it that, “the collision of cultures that resulted from the influx of imperial forces did strike a blow to the face of African theatre” (p.1).

In the mist of these misconceptions comes Graham-White (1974) who strongly exposes the ignorance in Western theatre not giving due recognition to traditional theatre in Africa as he states that:

Why has most traditional drama gone unrecognized? The brief answer is that most observers of traditional performances in Africa who wrote about them have, unfortunately, had no interest in drama. The ironic result was that at the very time that Europe was freeing itself from the restrictive dramatic conventions of the well-made play on the well-made proscenium stage, Europeans in Africa were unconsciously using its standards to judge African cultures as wanting in drama. Groups of performers and spectators roaming a village did not match the European observer's conventional image of theatre (p. 14).

Perhaps, considering the lenses with which anthropologists looked into with regard to theatre forms in Africa was of less interest to them. This is because of their failure to give proper description to the theatre forms in Africa.

Bame (1991) also opines that indeed theatre did exist in traditional African societies. He provides empirical evidences to support the data and materials from different parts of Africa that point to the fact that African theatre is distinct from the western theatre. He further identifies that western theatre is restricted to a defined place and space called the theatre whereas African drama occurs in the village squares or in a courtyard of a house without elaborate and complex lighting and other instruments provided in western theatres.

Nonetheless, in the appraisal of African theatrical forms, Kerr points it out that narrative drama, funerary drama, initiation rites, spirit possession rites among many others existed in the pre-colonial era. These performing arts had cultural relevance for the whole society. It was also performed at specific times and places as it occurs.

Kaahwa (2004) on his part affirms the fact that there existed theatrical forms in the pre-colonial Africa that consist of ceremonies, festivals, and popular epic. It is very interesting to note that these forms stood the test of time to resist the imposition of the imperialist theatrical convention. They serve as the root or the mine of knowledge for the production of plays.

Hansel Ndumbe Enyoh in his particular contribution in affirming the existence of theatre before the invasion of European imperialism in *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre* (2001) indicates that:

Theatre is one of the cultural elements that best exemplifies Africa. It is at the crossroads of the sacred, the profane, oral, and the written word, of diverse forms, and it is rooted in Africa's traditions. Long before cultural contact with Europe, Africa had its very own personal forms of dramatic expression. But in order to understand them one must banish all notions of theatre as it is thought of today. Something dependant on text, on halls, on lights, sound and box office returns. In this sense, African tradition has not handed down to us a specific theatrical system, rather it has handed down a series of functions, which themselves were modified under colonial influence and which gradually moved away from their roots though they were eliminated completely (2001, p.17).

There is credibility in the explanation of Enyoh's point of view on the development of theatre in pre-colonial Africa. This owes to the fact that Africans did not have the opportunity to have a full turn of their art forms but rather had the invasion of colonialism interfering and relegating the arts into the background. He reiterates that

it is the society that expresses or dictates how the arts in the form of myth, rite and folk celebrations are put in proper perspective to as it were foster the beliefs, passions, and concepts that defines a given group.

Kaahwa (2004) notes that European imperialists and Christian missionaries perceived the traditional performances as pagan, fetish and barbaric and considered it reprehensible. The reason is that the European considered Africa as a dark world without any theatrical tradition. Therefore, the African traditions were viewed as inferior to the supposed super and rational European culture. This vilification had a grave image on the development of the culture and performing art in Africa. Kerr (1995) again is quick to add that “the most concerted and ideologically articulate attack on African indigenous performing arts came from proselytizing zeal of European Christian mission” (p.18).

Hater (2001) gives credence to this statement by affirming that in Africa the Christian missionaries frowned upon many of the traditions and customs of being paganistic. It also rendered their worship inferior trumpeting the Biblical parlance ‘jealous’ God hence all others suppressed. Hater asserts, “Festivities that often involved revelry (drinking and dancing) were seen as sinful. Dances in which people wriggled their waists were seen as pure sensualism, and many other rites and rituals were discouraged as barbaric, savage or sinful” (p.7). But with their rhetoric of the African being sensual is a pure deception and a way to cover the obscurity that is associated with their ballet and other serious profane dances even in recent time. Also, how can one give a thing a name if does not have a idea or experienced it. These assertions made by Hater serve as the basis for the degeneration of the African performing art tradition. Therefore, it saw the European theatrical traditions annex to the total life experience of the African.



Albeit, African theatrical forms such as initiation rites, ceremonies, dance, songs, legends, epic narratives, storytelling among many others saw an ambience that was characterised by relative harmony and stability. Changes that did occur must have been to foster co-existence and strong bond for a better traditional cultural value. Theatre as viewed by the African is a way of life and formed part of their daily activities as used in religion, protest, education and discovery. Comparatively, African theatre is alive and positive than the western theatre.

Having given some indications that theatre did exist in pre-colonial Africa, I shall attempt to proceed to the examination of the theatre in colonial Africa.

### **2.3 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 (2001) 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 claims 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 'foreignisation' 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 recrudescant 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 realise 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.

According to Amponsah who remarks 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 it 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.

#### **2.4 Adaptation of Western Plays into African Theatre**

Adaptation is an old practice in dramatic composition. It has its root traced from classical Greek theatre. Most African writers after independence resorted to adaptation and transposition of Western plays especially those from ancient Greek into African theatre. The multimillion-dollar question to be posed is could be that the African is seeking for some international recognition of drawing some cultural identity in some of these plays. Does it mean that the African lacks the creative ability in taking an existing legend, story and create a drama out of it? It is very unfortunate that Greek plays became models for African playwrights. These assertions however appear that the African is very much conversant and identify with Greek plays due to it universality of themes. The reason is that just as the Greeks are religious and uphold these rituals as sacred are similar to that African of culture. The African writer and its audience especially are not bothered about the play and its source however, as far as the play is able to raise concerns that they can identify and relate to it. Banham e tal (1994) lends credence to it as he clearly articulate that African audiences neither know nor care about the original plays that were adapted.



What they seek to appreciate is the fact that they can relate and identify with thematic concerns raised as stated by Wetmore (2002) in *Athenian Sun in an African Sky* that the audience must not in essence know or understand the original tragedy but must comprehend what concerns, themes and points that the adapted version has engaged and its relevance.

In addition, African playwrights are fond of Greek plays because there is a correlation that point to colonial resistance. They choose to rework or adapt these plays because it highlight some political presents that is relevant and recurrent in their respective countries. For instance, plays such as *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *The Bacchae*, *The Oresteia*, and *Trojan Women* are adapted because the texts, in their re-readings, have social and political relevance in the contexts of colonial and post-colonial Africa. In this self-explorative assumption of the African about Greek plays as a resistance to colonialism is what Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) states that it:

Generate meaning by rejecting Eurocentric interpretation and indigenous explanation and rather explore the modern African experience through a hybrid of classical Europe and contemporary Africa. Such plays are not only cross-cultural, but also cross-temporal, using material two and a half millennia old to comment on contemporary political and social situations in an entirely different culture from the source culture and an entirely different historical period from the original (introduction).

It is evident that Greek plays are cross-cultural as Wetmore (2002) add his voice that the adaptations of Greek tragedy by African playwrights “contribute to a big extent the cultural struggle against colonialism and Eurocentric thought” (p. 35). These adaptations as it were became very much a commonality among the Africans because one of the major trump cards of the European in any colony was to annihilate any indigenous culture and introduce their ‘civilised’ culture. It then appears that this

resulted in making the African chart that genre of the Greeks theatre. The introduction of the Greek cultural material to Africans was part of the attempt to suppress the indigenous cultures and impose the supposedly superior culture of the Europeans (Addo, 2013, Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996).

In their quest to assert themselves through the struggle for power and freedom, these artists tried to empower the African through a redirection of the thoughts of their audience to the cultural heritage and thematic semblance in the Greek plays. Adaptation in essence is a daring act of literature. Considering Greek playwrights such as Sophocles and Aeschylus wrote their plays based on existing mythology, historical events and epic poetry as their source documents. By implication, it suggests that creativity and originality is achieved. However, Botwe-Asamoah (2001) on the other hand contends that when plays are adapted, the author is isolated from his innate roots because he has effectively rendered the African cultures subsidiary to those of Europe. Drummond (2006) claims that adaptation is not its strict adherence to the source but more to its spirits. Some researchers also posit that resorting to adaptations make the adapter inferior and the work lack authenticity.

All these notwithstanding, the assertions made by Botwe-Asamoah appear not to be well grounded. This is because, adapting an original text into another cultural setting cannot be rendered subsidiary rather a creative artistic work that set and fulfills a specific need. It is possible for an adaptation to be a successful faithful transposition such as the multiple versions of Oedipus Rex into African theatrical spaces such as Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to blame* (1971) and Kwasi Amponsah's *King Musu* (unpublished). In these adaptations, the spirit of the play is captured in the text, performances and production.

Etherton (1982) in his contribution to adaptation and transposition of plays from one medium to another observes that reworking or rewording of a play is possible when grouped under these five forms.

1. Character, places and title names may be changed ( For example, Efua Sutherlands *Edufa* is based on Euripides' *Alcestis* where Admetus becomes Edufa, Ampoma -Alcestis, also Admetus' Greek courtyard becomes Edufa's Ghanaian courtyard likewise all other names are given the Ghanaian equivalents).
2. Changes may also include the period or setting (For example, the Classical Greek Thebes in *Oedipus Rex* has been transported to Kutuje in Yoruba land in *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971).
3. Changes may also take place within the framework or context (For example, *Antigone*, the third of Sophocles' Theban trilogy has been adapted by several playwrights in different context such as Victor Yankah's *Dear Blood* (2010) and Fugard ,Kani and Ntshona's *The Island* ( 1973)- a political play).
4. Changes in the story may also take place. (For example, Sutherland makes the story about Edufa instead of Ampoma while the original is about Alcestis. In addition, Euripides play is a tragi-comedy while Sutherland's is a tragedy. Again Alcestis comes back from the dead while Ampoma remains dead when the play ends).
5. Themes in the play may also be changed. (For example, Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* is about the inescapable nature of fate while Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is about personal culpability (pp. 102- 103).

The demands of adaptation and transposition are varied as one is superficial and the other very much detailed work. In view of this, it is good to remark that adaptation as a practice that predates the evolution of theatre, provide the theatre with a new text and a model for creating a genre. In effect Balodis (2012) states that adaptations often demands highly imaginative and innovative approaches to styles of production and performances. This assertion gives credence to Ethertons's categorisation and authenticates that adaptation and transpositions are creative and innovative piece of writing.

It is therefore cogent to note that playwrights who adapted are themselves primary artists whose source materials are other primary arts. Having reviewed literature on literary theatre in colonial Africa, I shall therefore zero in the discussion on more specific review of forms of theatre in Ghana.

### **2.5 Thematic Considerations of Early Literary Drama**

The thematic concerns of African drama before independence largely fashioned after the European style. This is because the African seek after European attitudes, style, forms as a way of aspiring to belong to that class of culture. However, in the gradual assertiveness of the African towards cultural nationalism and the 'glorification' of the past, events turned around as Graham-White (1974) asserts:

That the students of Ecole William Ponty would "bring new light to a precious past". They did bring a new way of looking at their peoples' history for although Beart insists the productions were unsupervised, the image of the African leaders in the plays does not differ from that in the official histories of the French. That is, all African rulers are presented as bloodthirsty and capricious dictators (p. 78).

From the assertion of Graham-White, it could be realized that the African put up a conjecture of metaphorically viewing the impulsive nature of the European using its rulers. Thus, it served as a resistance to the Whiteman's oppression. This was exemplified by the play *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1935) by H. I. E. Dhlomo. It sent a strong signal to the European, about how the African has become conscious of his culture and seeks to rewrite the past to be glorified. In effect, theatre became an agent for liberation struggle and consciously or unconsciously, it has been carried over into post independence period. African playwrights and writers as Ola Rotimi (1991) states in a lecture on African Drama Literature that:

In the era of colonialism, for example, the passion of African literature was for the redemption of the integrity of the Black man. This fixation was quite valid in the face of sustained foreign domination. It crystallized itself on the theme of NEGRITUDE (p.8).

In addition, the problem of striking a balance between traditional cultural practices and modern lifestyle is also a significant theme that Kobina Sekyi of *The Blinkards* fame uses to satirize its society. Sekyi uses his drama to call attention to the African and for that, the Ghanaian to refrain from seeing from the spectacle of the European and the obsession for the things considered European by the people of Ghana. He calls for a need to value the distinct cultural heritage of his people (Addo, 2013, Graham-White, 1974). This theme marked the collapse of colonialism as it saw many state of flux in the lifestyles of many Africans. Rotimi (1991) adds his voice as he affirms that culture conflict provided the needed catalyst for the treatment of cultural dilemma of the African by employing satire to anesthetize the psyche of the society towards state of quagmire colonialism has placed on them.

Accordingly, the late 1950s and early 1960s was a period of cultural renaissance and national consciousness across the African continent. Most countries at the time had their independence from the colonialist and were in that mystical period of defining cultural identity to move their states forward. Though there was a country, there were no unified intentions for the country, and certainly, there was no nation. In Nigeria for instance, it took Wole Soyinka to capture the political and civil insurrection of the nation in his play *A Dance of the Forests* as the political elites were in a state of quagmire.

Adeyemi (2009) opines that the major concerns for the dramatists included developing a theatre that would pose moral problems for the citizenry and sensitize the country towards a project of cultural revival after the colonial assault of more than a century. It is in this domain, that the doyenne of Ghanaian theatre created a theatre called *Anansegoro*, which is a classic collection of repertory of Ghanaian folklores and legend and centred it on a character that every Ghanaian could easily identify thereby making the stories acceptable by all. Therefore, most plays produced centred around such themes.

However, some playwrights were absorbed by the styles of the European in their articles make mockery of those who cannot speak English with precision. This assertion motivated some dramatists in Africa to incorporate local dialects into their works. Mention can be made of Soyinka with the introduction of 'pidgin' English in his works. As Adeyemi put it, it is a radical departure from that of Henshaw and the writers of the Onitsha Market literature who depicted non-literates by making the character speak bad English. Because of the colonial heritage, the writers knew they

had to write in English but ‘an English’ locally fabricated and locally flavored’ (Osofisan, 2001, p. 178).

Similarly, Ghanaian playwrights such as Ama Atta Aidoo, Yaw Asare, Asiedu Yirenkyi among many others incorporates many jargons and phrases usually from the Akan dialects in their plays to give it that authenticity. For instance in *The Marriage of Anansewa* by Sutherland, she incorporates transliteration into her piece. Mention can be made of *cut some whisky with me* and some others.

The new dramatists also embarked on satirising the society and its traditions set up by the political dispensation, especially if the institutions were not compatible with what the writers considered a Ghanaian culture and if the practices of the society are against the fundamental human rights of the people. For instance, *Death before Dishourtesy* by Wole Soyinka satirised the new political elite whose sense of patriotism was misplaced and his *Childe Internationale* depicted a family who totally misunderstood the etiquette of the social class to which they were aspiring.

Apart from these also come the theme of anger and protest. This was because of African governments failing woefully in the social and economic upkeep of their citizens. The very treatment that gave rise to insurrection from the imperialist and thus the independence of African states is what is meted out to the people. Rotimi (1991) reinforces the assertion that “...it was clear to all that, economically and socially, African political independence had failed the people as a collective. In consequence, disillusionment gave rise to anger in the people. Anger gained head and found expression in mordant PROTEST. ANGER and PROTEST joined forces and underscored a two-pronged theme for African literary creativity of the time” (p.8).

Interestingly, in the mist of poignant situation emanated creativity that stood to challenge politicians to be good stewards in the discharge of their duties to the nation and its people. For instance, the demand for good governance in Angola, Kenya, Congo DR, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana just to mention but a few gave rise to internal strife. Consequently, some playwrights were banished and sought asylum in Europe. Mention can be made of Soyinka of Nigeria, Ngugi wa Thiongo of Kenya and Ghana's own son Ayikoi Armah were some sons of the land who suffered under such harsh conditions as they sought to challenge the vile political, social and economic treatment administered on the citizens of their respective societies.

Therefore, dramatists tried to integrate Ghana's cultural essence with the traditions of Western theatre to create a unique Ghanaian and or African theatre, with songs, dance and linguistic codes that shift as frequently as the audience change.

## **2.6 Forms of Theatre in Ghana**

The theatre as it exists today has filtered through from the past. It is an established fact that theatre did exist in pre-colonial Africa of which Ghana is no exception. It depicted one common denominator called life, which consists of the beliefs, values and culture of the people. Owusu (1988), states that drama in West Africa assumes many varied forms. He discusses that Drama in the sub region include traditional, informal and spontaneous dramatic activities that occur at the villages and may include the entire community or some sections 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.

Angmor (1996) 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.

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.

### **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. According to Owusu (1988) he 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 of 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 believes 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 acknowledge with the requisite traditional rituals. For example, performances of rituals are done to welcome a newborn 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 do 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) states, “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 their spirit of the dead” (p.54). In a sense these enactment are characterised by artistic element that make it more dramatic. It then becomes a representation and the dramatisation 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 peoples 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 take 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 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.

### **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 dramatising. It is a form of drama that borrows and exhibits some European elements and however, a purely Ghanaian. Asiedu (1999) describes 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 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 (1994) state that 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” (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 nonexistent 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.

### **Literary Theatre**

This form of drama in Ghana is by far a fledgling one than the traditional drama. According to Asiedu (1999), she 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 theater 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. However 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 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 *Anansem* (Ananse stories). Therefore, the play *The Marriage of Anansem* 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 Anansem* that Djisenu (2000) describes as “the play that sets the tone for the genre” (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.

## **2.7 The Beginning of Contemporary Ghanaian Theatre**

The wake up call for nationalistic forms of theatre across the African continent after independence required of the African to take a critical position to define its cultural heritage. Ghana a pioneer in the crusade for liberation and independence had to grapple with the enormous negative attitudes to the traditional cultural values and especially about, the performing arts that colonisers have made the African perceive it to be barbaric per their indoctrination and quest to impute their imperialistic ideals. This phenomenon was created by the colonial cultural indoctrination and disorientation especially 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 in 1989 states 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 (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 (2013) 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” (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 was the spark for African scholars, researchers and playwrights to take up the challenge in investigating and coming out with literary works that will help in fostering and forging a cultural identity that is unique. In his assertion, it seems that the role of theatre serves as the bedrock and vehicle that is viewed as the institution that can respond to the search, promotion and preservation of the African traditional cultural values. It then appears that the effectiveness and efficaciousness of the theatre

cannot be underestimated since theatre is the medium to uphold the society's highest ideals. It is the medicine for calm, change and stabilization.

Consequently, in an effort to consciously redefine and galvanise the identity of a new nation, Nkrumah saw the importance theatre and music could play as a medium of constructing a formidable image for Ghana's cultural identity. 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 his very 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 whom 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 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 form of the drama 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

Playwriting and all writing for that matter frames experiences. These frames are synonymous to the frames of houses or just as the human skeleton, that gives shape and strength to the body, the framework fashioned by the playwright is vital in defining the shape drama will take to direct moreover, intensify audience perception (Prece, 2008). The aim of this qualitative study is to analyse the form and thematic pre-occupations in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama and examine the impact of his drama in the development of Ghanaian theatre.

The study utilizes the qualitative paradigm which explores a social or human problem by building a complex holistic picture, analysing words rather than numbers, and providing detailed information on the views of the participants in their natural settings (Creswell, 1998). At a basic level, the qualitative paradigm used the play text as the participant in ascertaining the data for the analysis and interpretation of the views that are embedded in them.

Research design is a strategy, a plan, and a structure of conducting a research project (Carriger, 2000). This definition is consistent with Amoani (2005), who explained that research design is an arrangement of conditions for collecting and analyzing data relevant to the researcher in the most economical manner that determines the sample size, sampling techniques, the type of data and how to collect it as well as the method of data analysis.

The selection of a research design is also based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researchers' personal experiences, and the audiences for

the study (Creswell, 2008). Considering the purposes and the nature of the research problem, the research design hinged on overlapping methodologies that included literary, empirical, close reading and textual analysis. Consequently, the study utilized textual analysis of Mckee's post-structuralist view as "a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (p.1). Furthermore, textual analysis as a methodology is useful for researchers in cultural studies, which defines the scope and limitations of this thesis. Mckee therefore, defines textual analysis as the attempt to make "an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (p.1). This explains that a text cannot speak for itself because its meaning is not self-evident on the face value until it is subjected to analysis and interpretation. Therefore, the researcher used this to extract and make inferences to the text to make an educated guess to the most likely interpretation that answers the research questions and the objectives of the study.

According to Ukala (2006) he explains literary methodology as an approach that "focuses on the written and printed library and archival sources especially books, journals, theses, reports, literary works such as plays, novels and poems" (p. 13). He further asserts that this methodology is analytical and seeks to aid researchers who are engaged in works that much have been already written about and the researcher may be unable to personally get physical contact with. In effect, it is cogent to note that this methodology is very much applicable to literary works as the one pursued by this researcher.

To attain this, the study utilized textual analysis as the main approach. This is because textual analysis is a qualitative method for studying data; it does not provide results in terms of numbers or statistics that can be easily recreated. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993), qualitative research is defined primarily as an inductive process

of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories.

The study thrived on exploratory and analytical qualitative research techniques to analyse and interpret the form and thematic preoccupations of Abdallah's drama. Burns and Grove (1998) define an explorative research as a research conducted to gain new insights, discover new ideas or increase knowledge of phenomena. The researcher reckoned that the reality of the phenomenon of the form and thematic concerns of the drama of Abdallah can be explored through the researcher's own analysis or interpretation of the phenomenon that may lead to a new insight or prove the superiority of a neglected opinion over those that have held sway for long (Ukala, 2006).

The researcher therefore entered the research field with curiosity from the point of not knowing (Burns & Grove, 1998, Cresswell, 1994). The aim was to gain new insights and to discover new ideas about the form and thematic concerns of the drama of Mohammed ben-Abdallah.

As an analytical research, the approach used existing facts or information available to analyse the material to make a critical evaluation on it. In addition, the researcher's source documents are not only from secondary sources but also predominantly from the play texts, which are the primary source themselves.

In the study, focus was based on both published and unpublished works of the dramatist. Thus, data gathered from *The Fall of Kumbi* and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* where the researcher employed the lenses of content or close textual analysis to venture into a critical comparative discourse on the content, context, form, themes and characters in the play texts. It also afforded the researcher to understand the influences

of the drama of the dramatist. In employing the content or close textual analysis, it helped in the categorisation of the various subjects of interests in the study. This assertion was better enhanced as Frey, Botan and Kreps (1999) posit that content analysis as a technique usually aids in identification, enumeration and analyses of events of specific messages that are embedded in texts. To this, the researcher sought to be more interested in drawing out meanings that are associated with the message rather than the number of times the message variable occur.

Furthermore, close reading, which is also a qualitative technique in textual analysis, engages itself primarily with the text and a consideration given to form and language. It was on this premise that the text pursues a particular point of view, analysis and interpretation. This technique was carried out through observation, which entailed a thorough critical reading of the text to highlight striking features that consisted of the content and thematic considerations of the study. It also helped in making selective approaches to the text. For instance, the cultural setting and historical antecedents of a play text was gleaned through observation of the text. Secondly, interpretation of the observation becomes the most salient need of this technique. Interpretation of the observation made consisted of inductive reasoning that culminated in drawing out the meaning of the text. Therefore, the inductive reasoning requires a careful gathering of evidences to support the interpretation assigned to the observation made through the text read.

The advantages of these data, techniques and methods to a very large extent served as the appropriate vehicle in answering the research questions and hence the analysis and interpretation of the play texts.



Consequently, the researcher did not only rely on the published plays alone but also on reports, journals and other reviews of productions on the drama of Mohammed ben-Abdallah that the researcher has been an ardent student and audience.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

This chapter as stated in the objectives focuses on an in depth analysis of the two plays that is *The Fall of Kumbi* (1989) and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (2008) of Mohammed ben-Abdallah to ascertain the dramatic form, thematic pre-occupations and the impact of his drama towards the development of Ghanaian theatre.

#### 4.1 About the Playwright

The playwright Mohammed ben-Abdallah was born in 1944 in Kumasi, Ghana to Muslim parents. 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. 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. The national theatre of Ghana was built in his time.

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 is also a part time senior lecturer at the Department of Theatre Arts of the University of Education, Winneba.

To his credit, Dr. Abdallah has written several plays. Such as *The Verdict of the Cobra*, *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, *The Alien King*, *The Slaves*, *The Fall of Kumbi*, *The Witch of Mopti*, *Song of Pharoah*, *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 Synopsis of *The Fall of Kumbi***

All is set for the historical grand wedding between Aklilu the prince of Audoghast and Zainata a Tuareg princess, but the heart of the bride is with another man, the prince of Kumbi Saleh the fabled city of gold. The morning of the wedding breaks and lo, there is no bride! While Audoghast sleeps, Amu Diata, the prince of the land of wealth and power elopes with their princess.

Feeling betrayed by one of his own, prince Aklilu seeks counsel from Ibn Yacin and joins forces with the moors. This provides a fine opportunity for the Moor who hitherto has his eyes on Kumbi with the pretext for raiding Kumbi's riches. They invade Kumbi Saleh to kill, loot, enslave and give up many of their victims of war in servitude in distant land.

The unwarranted crudely gruesome incidence is visited on the people due to their reluctance to the warnings by the gods not to go into war with the peace loving merchants of Audoghast. Kumbi disregarded the advice and went to war to claim the wardrobe of an unfaithful woman. The Temple Attendant who is the matron of the temple virgins recounts this unwise decision by the leaders of Kumbi as:

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

In a state of apprehension of the Marabouts attack, the High Priest summons the seven priests and priestesses of Kumbi. After an extended heightened tiresome ceremony of rituals and trances and praise singing, the High Priest admonishes them of the continual presence and protection of the gods in their journey to the rain forest of the south. However, with regards to the Golden Stool, he assures them of it safe keeping in the womb of the heavens and it will come forth when a new High Priest shall

“...cause the skies open to burst open and the golden stool will issue forth from the womb of heaven” (p...). This reveals the thematic interest of Abdallah’s rendezvous with history and culture of its community.

At the crux of their crunch meeting, Ibn Yacin and his soldiers saunter in. The two spiritual leaders gravely hurl out abuses at each other. The High Priest not able to bear the contempt has himself killed by Khunata the mad daughter of the Queen mother of Kumbi to thrust the dagger into his chest. The women together with Astimalinke and Khunata were sent into exile as slaves in the court of Ibn Yacin in Sijilmasa. Khunata through the permission of the Moor performed their last ‘pagan’ ritual. It was at this ritual that Khunata utter prophecies to her fellow captives assuring them of the rise of Kumbi and the fulfillment of the golden stool’s re-emergence when a new High Priest is born. After these assurances of hope, she then admonishes them to be strong to endure the trials ahead. However, in the dreadful final initiation dance she follows the steps of the High Priest and commits suicide with this remark:

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).

#### **4.3 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 guerillas 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. However 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.

#### **4.4 The Form of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama: *The Fall of Kumbi and The Trial of Mallam Ilya.***

Drama as it is known to be the enactment of a story is composed within specific parameters that define, shape and distinguish its approach to the genre explored. Drama forms are often constituted on a design. It could be tragedy, comedy and/or a blend of the two to achieve the set objectives canonized for the form. On the other hand, with the pursuit of a unique search into indigenous performing arts, Abdallah has been able to build on the concept of *Anansegoro* into *Abibigoro* a genre that pursue a broader scope of authenticating African theatre rather than the former which looks into Ghanaian society predominantly. The consequence has been largely influenced by his quest to reconstruct ritual and tradition which emulates re-interpretation and revalorization of the old and new respectively. This is not to really 'glorify' the past but to use it as a premise in the present to have a better future

tomorrow. Thus, in the pursuit of this expedition the researcher has come to realize that Abdallah's dramatic form is undoubtedly patterned after the elements that constitute the design of his drama. To this end the analysis of his dramatic form is examined with reference to the text.

One of the fundamental attributes of Abdallah's dramatic form is the storytelling tradition. It is the oral tradition which is a unique incorporation of his drama that narrates historical events as his source material. He creatively weaves them to carry the play along by either being alienated or conspicuously seen presenting it. In *The Fall of Kumbi*, the story is founded on a storytelling structure projected by four storytellers in grandeur. At the beginning one storyteller appears on stage and tries to cut the chorus which is a unique phenomenon among Africans. It is to ensure that the attention of its audience is sort before the convener put forward his or her message. A classic example is the griots. Naturally, they are old and have gained much experience in their art of praise singing and recounting history of either kings or some societal feats chalked during an ethnic war, droughts or perhaps an event they were involved. In effect, they are the repository of the customs and traditions of their communities.

These storytellers are believed to have an in depth knowledge about their culture and history. In any case that is who they are. The Storytellers begin by recounting and telling the audience what the story is about and recounts the origin, background and achievements of Kumbi Saleh. In addition, the storytellers are actively involved in the narrative unlike in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, it appears to be abnormal as one has to take pains before recognizing the storytellers.

Abdallah furthermore, have a twist or divergent approach to the treatment of the characters. Unlike the Ghanaian traditional storytelling session, where the storyteller



is the custodian of the story in Abdallah's case the storyteller is a presenter. He or she presents the story as it is without any influence unlike the case of Anansegoro convention. He plays this part out cleverly in 'The Fall of Kumbi' as he ensures that no sentiments or anything otherwise is suggested by the storytellers.

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 Queenmother 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 ... (pp 64-65).

Moreover, the presentational frame is made to flow with intrusions by storytellers to make both the narrative and dramatic action flow to a crescendo of aesthetic appreciation.

In *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* there is no proper defined storyteller. This appears to be alienating the naturalistic effect of this long tradition. However, this goes to show how creative the playwright is by ensuring that in the different levels of the narration on acting; Ilya recounts the story of his life therefore, alternating as an actor and narrator corresponding with other characters. The approach of this form sometimes requires several critical observations in order to deduce at what point for example is the narrator. A classic realisation of this is whenever, Malwal and his men do not agree with proceedings they interrupt. For example;

MALWAL: (from his seat in the darkness of the auditorium). Cut! Cut!! Cut!!! All freeze as the court of Kumrahn fades into a tableau of silhouettes. Lights fade in on the chained Ilya and his guards on the auditorium. There is a general commotion and murmuring (p. 18).

Consequently, storytelling as a unique technique employed by Abdallah is a convention that has received a lot of attempts by other contemporary writers in exploring how best they can unmask its purest form in new forms of drama. Abdallah in exploring this approach of narration, in his drama, doubles or quadruples the number from one to create a dramatic effect of building suspense, conflicts among others to make the fluidity of the plot as a unique whole.

In other words the fusion of the narrative and dramatic action make the fluidity of Abdallah's plot a unique beauty (Agovi, 1989).

Similarly, he ensures the story tellers appear to round off the narration with signal words for example in *The Fall of Kumbi*

First Storyteller: And so it was that Kumbi Saleh, City of Gold, Jewel of the land of the Sudan fell! (p. )

Angmor (2010) put it, "Besides he emphasizes the type of story a legend in the tradition of the 'old griots'. In their conclusion, words of caution or the morals inherent in the story is passed out to its audience. That is the fundamental feature in the storytelling approach of Anansegoro where the playwright borrows the idea.

Abdallah's search of a new form of theatre sought to integrate music and dance. To him music and dance is central and there is the spirit of the African and for that matter the Ghanaian. This component is undoubtedly; his effort to achieve a total theatre experience. Abdallah practically uses varied artistic forms that are creatively combined to make it as a functional part of the story.

As Agovi, (1989) writes ‘traditional African society recognizes the importance of integrating all the senses in the communication process’. This Abdallah strives to make the very best out of bodily and vocal expression. For instance, he integrates Ephraim Amu’s *Akwaaba Dwom* to usher in the performance.

Besides, analyzing the content of the lyrics it appears more functional than just a background or a curtain raiser. The *Akwaaba Dwom* though a welcome song, it has the inherent message that suggests that our forebears did great to ensure and secured our future. Therefore, the needed respect and acknowledgement must be duly given to them. Deanderea (2002) gives credence to the functionality of music in Abdallah’s drama as he states that “The musical element for instance is employed continuously by the author, not as a mere background but as a functional part of the story” (p. 226).

In addition to ensuring that other art forms are utilized in his drama, comes pantomime. Pantomime can be considered as a background or functional to the plot of the story. For instance in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, almost all the actors’ bodies were used to create and form the palace of Kumhrah. The silhouettes created in the plot of the story were done using actors’ bodies.

The functionality of music in *The Fall of Kumbi* becomes clearer after the demise of the High Priest of Kumbi and their struggle of moving from the north to the south. Abdallah also depicts a typical Ghanaian shrine with the music that accompanies the ritual of showing reverence to the gods. This is made evident in the libation song sung by the Temple Attendant 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* (pp. 29-30)

This is the libation ritual song observed during ceremonies at the shrine. The music here is very essential because, its value, message and meaning contribute largely to the aesthetic of the Ghanaian culture. It involves serenity, order and above all reverence to one's object of worship. Therefore, the playwright conscious of his culture and its value, incorporates it in his creative piece.

Another significant form of Abdallah's drama is the active involvement of audience. Abdallah has full route to the fusion of borrowed art forms especially from popular theatre which makes his drama unique. Considering the legacy bequeathed to him by his literary predecessors and other experiences gained from his Legon Road Theatre expeditions, it is realized that his ultimate aim is to deviate from conventional style that makes audiences passive recipients of the action. The audience participation is a feature of the Ghanaian traditional drama. It is largely evident during storytelling sessions, festivals and the popular concert party events. Thus 'any member of the audience could spontaneously jump into the circle and take up role of the character in the story' (Asiedu, 1999, p.5). Role playing is achieved in his form of audience involvements. It is an integral part of the Ghanaian traditional drama- The Ananse stories.

Accordingly, the main objective of *Abibigoro* is to employ artistic and communicative mediums that can effectively appeal to the consciousness of the society. Hitherto, indigenous theatrical forms such as festivals, dance, and ritual ceremonies among others have capacity or the tendency to appeal for the relevance of its culture and the need to partake and cherish its performance (aesthetic truth) which is by them and for them. Thus, a democratic consensus is realized.

Abdallah as a playwright is conscious about the culture of its society and he would not renege on not satisfying them. This is because a playwright is supposed to mirror his society. The audiences are naturally the motivational factor for the enactment of the story. Therefore, having approved of the use of a narrator, the typical African or Ghanaian audience co-performs with him or her by getting along with questions and even with songs that either contributes to the story or to arouse their interest. Intrinsically, the traditional Ghanaian audience makes comments to somehow remove the vagueness of the playing roles to as it were ensure that the enactment of the story is carried to the expected end. The playwright makes the conscious effort to carry the enactment of the story through the shared experience between the actors and the audience. This he achieves by planting characters among the audience in the auditorium to ascertain a level of empathy and conviction. When Mallam Ilya in a state of quagmire and insisting on his right to defend himself by raising witnesses from the dead coupled with what he has heard and has come to him intuitively, Malwal in the auditorium calls for a hand count to determine whether Ilya has the right. He orders in his place in the audience:

What do you say, Brothers? Show your fists if you think Mallam Ilya should be allowed to raise the dead in his defence. (*“Brothers” in the audience, raise clenched fists*) (p. 20).

Though, it is a fantasy many audience members would raise their hands as they empathize with the accused. Also it is to create the mood for anxiousness of the audience to follow to ascertain the verdict of the trial. Therefore, by this approach the playwright is able to touch the collective conscience of his audience critically analyse the issues raised in the performance.

Ritual is a unique form that constitutes the drama of Abdallah. In the pursuit of his total art, attention is given to ritual performances in his drama. Nketsia 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 drama, 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. Abdallah, with regards to rituals as an integral part of his drama declared to Jane Wilkinson in an interview that:

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).

The rituals are a dramatic expression which is often associated with dancing scenes. It sometimes comes with little or no dialogue. In *The Fall of Kumbi* there is mimed or danced reproduction of libation. A ritual that uses drink offering to honour and please the Creator, the lesser gods, ancestors, humans present and not present as well as the environment. In the presentation of this act, the playwright sought to promote the cosmic order of oneness and draw a balance between beings and things in the universe.

Similarly, Abdallah depicts the sacred time and space. By implication it set the specific setting, atmosphere, mood and perhaps the seriousness of the assembly. This is summed up in the lines of Asakyiri one of the seven priests of Kumbi:

Kumbi is burning!  
The city of Gold is burning!  
It has been burning for three days and three nights.  
And for three days and three nights we have knelt at your feet!  
... We stayed behind on your orders!  
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 (p. 36).

This statement above depicts the gravity of their summons to the shrine. This is evident by the description of their outlook or appearance. 'Before each stool kneels a priest or priestess dressed in black raffia skirt, strings of cowries across the shoulder ... (p 29).

In effect their costumes set the mood and atmosphere as very much serious. It must be noted that in all the ritual ceremonies, dance and drumming is an integral part that propels it to its crescendo and aesthetic effect.

The scene then integrates into another Ghanaian traditional drama called 'dance drama'. Dancing in the view of Abdallah is very central to almost all his plays. In a lecture in one of his classes at University of Education, Winneba (UEW), he explicitly said that to be recruited into *Abibigromma* the resident drama company at the National Theatre of Ghana, one must be an actor, a singer and dancer. Inadequacy in one or two disqualifies you to be a member. In effect, dance carries a lot of significance in the presentation of his dramas.

Khunata dances with all the women in a ceremony that she makes her mother Astimalinke to preside over.

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!

ASTIMALINKE: Yes, child of the Gods!

KHUNATA: Mother of Kumbi!

ASTIMALINKE: Speak my daughter! I hear you!

KHUNATA: You must lead the initiation of Khunata  
Your daughter and daughter of the gods!  
You will lead us in the sacred Dance of Mumummey!  
To cleanse our people of all Msuo!  
... Dance for Khunata and give to the gods what belongs to  
them! (pp. 73-74).

However, the dance of Khunnata's initiation which perhaps is a forboding to her suicide is described in a detailed stage direction:

Khunnata joins the dancers and soon becomes the centre of the dance. The first part is slow, sacred and funeral, interspersed with sudden movements and gestures of pain, anger and defiance. The second part is lighter, faster and sexually charged. At the climax of the dance Khunnata is completely possessed. She is rooted in one spot, her movement violent and uncontrollable, mostly centered in her torso, waist and hips (75-76).

In a similar situation when Mallam Ilya and Kouyate the priest of Angah meet again in the latter's village, it is



The sacred background music swells gradually and above Ilya and Kouyate. During this exchange, Ilya and Kouyate move in circles in some sort of 'Combat Dance' and the priestess dances between them and prevent them from touching (p. 59).

Abdallah in his particular interest in building a genre that encapsulate all the dramatic forms of theatre in Ghana and perhaps Africa seems to make his drama heavy and difficult to venture. This is because of the challenges that surround his dramatic form which perhaps was bequeathed to him by his predecessors. In addition, it appears that what can be in a dialogue is better enhanced and carried out through dancing and dance drama. The reason being that the fusion of the textual and sub textual forms has great impact in the presentation of the messages as unique unlike the western drama that relies heavily on dialogue.

The choice of his dramatis personae is another feature worth noting. Almost all his plays, there is something about them. It centres on the creation of Islamic names and an anagram of some to read and sound as such. The question is that, is it because of his religious background or the quest to recount history? It seems obvious that the awareness of history of cultural encounters and sympathy with Islam might have influenced in his choice of dramatis personae. The dramatis personae might appear to be trivial, however, in his attempt to popularize and blend indigenous tradition with element from western tradition seems to be the fulcrum. Accordingly, the characters created have the tendency of creating the setting of the drama. For instance the dramatis personae such as Amu Diata, Astimalinke, Aklilu, Ibn Yacin among many others in 'The Fall of Kumbi' transport one's mind to old Ghana. This is because of cross-cultural trade relationship between the people of Kumbi Saleh and the Tuaregs. In addition, the polytheist nature of the community might have contributed largely to

this phenomenon. In effect their tolerance and perhaps marriage might have been the major denominator.

Action is of a paramount importance in Abdallah's drama. Its plot seems not to be difficult. However, its main subject matter has been an effort to articulate an insurgent voice which questions Ghana's political direction and the need for religious tolerance in the society. By this, Abdallah dwells on past historic documents and commentaries of occurrences and creatively situate them to the case of his audience. The multi dollar question is that can a dramatic retelling of a real event, actually make us understand what happened and the participant involved?

The drama of Abdallah conspicuously pattern after this approach. Drama deals with people. Thus, documentaries by their nature intend to be dispassionate. It presents what the happenings were. Moreover, drama seeks to deal with relationships, strengths and frailties of human. In the reality of atrocities that were meted out by some politically motivated personnel in Nkrumah's regime and the harsh treatment women received. It pokes the element of empathy rather than just history narrated. Therefore, this evidence of new resurgence of Ghanaian theatre is what Abdallah's drama ventures. He is particularly interested in the role drama and theatre can play in the chronicling of history. Accordingly, the playwright in the pursuit of his kind of drama *Abibigoro*: has attested to this phenomenon that:

*The Trial of Mallam Ilya* is based on an actual trial involving real people and real places but in the pursuit of aesthetic truth as opposed to actual fact, I have distorted events and fused characters so as to arrive at what I choose to call 'truth fiction' or 'faction' for short (2008, p. iv).

Similarly, his form of drama dwells largely on documentary, history and indigenous knowledge of his society. Indigenous knowledge to a very large extent incorporates the total experiences of the people – beliefs, ideologies, practices and traditions that reveals them as a peculiar group. Thus, in both *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* and *The Fall of Kumbi*, it charts the course of his drama. The creativity of Abdallah, dwells on indigenous knowledge, particularly an identity for him. This is because drama or theatre is a slice of life put on stage. In effect, Abdallah as a playwright in his attempt to mirror his society based on historical facts earns this trait.

Furthermore, through his creative works, the dramatic telling of a true story appears to introduce the audience to the spirit of personality of the people involved and this is capable of uplifting the sentiments of its audience by the tale of courage or otherwise the woes of the personalities involved. Therefore, in the spirit of writing, the form of Abdallah's drama, seeks to reflect both his era and past experiences of his society. This is why I would like to agree with Charles Darwin in his theory of evolution, propounds that people are largely controlled not only by heredity but most importantly, environment. Consequently, the environment suggests the conditions that are peculiar to a specific society. It is worthy to note that realism as a form of drama hinges around this theory. It is therefore, the consequence of realist drama that has informed the form of Abdallah's drama.

Furthermore, the playwright gives importance to staging. By insistence, thorough descriptions of stage instructions are given. It is to give a picturesque chronological breakdown of vivid stage directions of cultural and ritualistic action, choreography, props and characters. These stage directions are detailed that it overshadows the volume of dialogue in the plays. Therefore, in the creation of stage instructions, he has ensured that the play can be staged. It is also succinct on the general mood,

atmosphere and the kind of conflict that the specific scenes can evoke to the empathy of the audience. This makes the audience or the readership have imageries of the stage without seeing it. Abdallah for instance expend more time and energy on instructional material describing scenes, movements, settings ritual and cultural processes and choreography of dances in both texts which include:

1. The description of the shrine of Al-Ghaba in Kumbi Saleh. He gives a detailed description of the shrine, symbols and their positions in the place, position of characters, properties, costuming, mood, atmosphere, costumes and music among many others.
2. The Royal setting of the Princess of Nil. The description is detailed and appears complete.
3. The 'divination' ritual of Ilya.
4. Khunata's initiation and ritual dances that led to her suicide at Sijilmasa.
5. The hunt dance and the application of henna on Zainata by Alwanka.
6. The 'Dance of Tying of the Wedding Knot'. This takes a lot of pages at least three pages of detailed description of the choreographed dances, symbolic acts, ritual processes, costuming, lyrics, and properties among many others.

All these staging directions are instances of immense audience appreciation and fascination in the plays. It then creates the sense of cultural genuineness of both the playwright and the audience.

#### **4.5 Language Usage in Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama: *The Fall of Kumbi* and *The Trial of Mallam of Ilya*.**

The dramatic form of Abdallah's drama would be incomplete without a look into the tool with which he communicates his idea. There would be no drama without language. The language of choice for his craft is the English Language. This is because language is the main medium through which every playwright is obliged to use to integrate vivid descriptions of the characters, setting, mood, atmosphere, tone and the general presentation of the story. Abdallah admits that there is a kind of restraint with the use of English language as his medium of communication. But as he seeks for globalization of his works, he asserts that discarding the use of the European's language would not be appropriate. Therefore as Achebe (1975) states that

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out English, which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience (pp. 55-56).

Abdallah tries to domesticate the English language by attempting to weave the richness of the indigenous wise sayings, proverbs, popular lyrics and popular linguistic components in a manner to catch the attention of his audience. By implication the usage of the above is with the view that the audiences are familiar with it. For instance with the use of familiar popular linguistic component in his drama is evident in the chants made by the Court Crier as:

He approaches! The Great Elephant of the Grassland is coming! Turn away, evil eyes! Go set fire to the sea, envious one! He is coming! The Panther of the Trees is coming! ... A fart may be a gush of wind but it can never feed a fire, it only smells (p.18).

In this expression as evident among the griots of the Ashanti Kingdom is a vivid indigenous oral performance that is exhibited. The intriguing aspect of this poetic flexing is it irresistible doses of native humour it exhibit in its original native rendition in the local dialect and context.

In similar manner the playwright uses proverbs to spice up the traditional uniqueness of the text. For example in the report given by the Temple Attendant in *The Fall of Kumbi*, she uses a lot of proverbs as a mark of her long in years and service at the shrine of Al-Ghaba. In one instance she remarks that;

The elder who watches unconcerned  
While children kill and eat the sacred python  
When the time comes for the head count of python eaters  
He is counted among them (p. 33).

The above expression is basically a familiar proverbial quote among the Akan communities. It expresses the irresponsible attitude of some elders who are lackadaisical and seems not to bother or speak against the ills in and around their environment. But in the event of any mishap definitely he or she would be part. It is a similar situation that the King of Kumbi did not reprimand Amu Diata for his conduct towards the Tuaregs. Eventually Tunka Manin died including many sons and daughters of Kumbi and the remnants served as slaves in distant lands. In the same vein hardheartedness is a recipe for doom. It is the act of foolishness and insubordination that destroyed the beautiful city of Kumbi. Therefore the maxim prides goes before a fall is synonymous to what the Temple Attendant stated as “it is

the sore which will kill the dog that grows in the centre of his head” (p. 34). By extension this proverb culminate that the deviant child or the extent to which an action has reached, it will suffer the consequences thereof. That is destruction as the people of Kumbi Saleh experienced.

Another popular proverbial language used by the playwright is that which expresses similar or same attribute and perhaps behaviour of a lineage. In an argument between Tani and her daughter Zainata on the choice of suitor for her life, she remarks that her choice of Amu Diata is not appropriate. This is because there is a bad omen of madness found in their lineage and that “the crab does not father a bird” (p. 9). The maxim is proven to be true therefore proper assessment is required especially in the area of marriage. It is a serious consideration among the Ghanaian traditional society.

He further employs transliteration to create aesthetic effect in advancing the plot of his dramatic form. For instance, the expression:

Kumbi slapped Audoghost in the face  
And demanded that they should not weep!  
We went to shit in their courtyard  
And we turned round and asked them  
To wipe our arse for us! (p. 33).

The above expresses a typical example of Abdallah’s domestication of the English language. It is a direct translation of literally slapping somebody and again defecates in and around ones compound and mocks at him. It is a bequeathed from his fore runners. Sutherland employs that in her writings. It was to give her writing a wider audience. In *The Marriage of Anansewa* the expression below is a typical example;

Ekuwa : didn’t I say so? Did I not turn prophet and prophesy that as soon as the people of Nanka see a little improvement in our circumstances ‘skin- pain’ will seize them? (p. 53)

The expression is a direct translation of envy in the local Akan language for non readers of the language to appreciate the work of art.

There is the sprinkling of lyrics rendered in the indigenous (Hausa) language as can be observed in the terse performance by Zainata's and Halima's peers during their preparation and wedding ceremony respectively. Abdallah intentionally ensure that the text and its content, images as well as the tunes are popular to induce or stimulate the audience in participating in the songs. This is evident in both plays. Similarly in *The Fall of Kumbi*, the libation song is a typical example as the lyrics are rendered in the Akan (Twi) dialect to invoke the gods for their help and protection. In the performance of *The Fall of Kumbi* at the Amu Theatre of the University of Education, Winneba in April 12, 2013, the audience participated in the singing of the libation song and other Hausa marriage rites song that were incorporated in the work. Therefore, the playwright uses language to achieve the effect that his drama seeks.

#### **4.6 Thematic Pre-occupation of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama: *The Fall of Kumbi* and *The Trial of Mallam of Ilya*.**

The major fulcrum around which drama revolves is life. A work of creative art cannot exist in vacuum but must draw its concerns from the social, moral, spiritual, political or cultural background of the society. The creative writer now has the motivation to recount the ills, gains and virtues of its society as he consciously appeal to the conscience of its audience for a shot of the society. In effect I cannot but to agree with Loren Kruger who opines that modern drama is not merely an emotional platform for entertainment. This is not to mean that entertainment is bad. It is one sure way that drama can use to influence the psychological frame work of its readership. It is a



source of ideas, cultural and educational factor, and an agency for the propaganda and above all, it is literature. The implication of the above quote brings to light the importance of drama as it seeks to provoke its audience into critical thinking. Also, Banham (2005) adds his voice saying: 'Drama as a performing art provides an imaginative expression through which society learns to adapt to its changing historical circumstances' (p. 217). Abdallah created his dramas predominantly on the context of historical, political, religious, cultural and social structures of the society. The beginnings of the social and political setting back in history. At a glance at the nature of theatre in Africa today, it can be realized that understanding of plays in context is achieved in the context of its historical antecedents. Thus, Abdallah's dramas centre on the history of Ghana and this serves as the motivation and a source document for the background.

Therefore, Abdallah is largely pre-occupied with issues of socio-economic upheavals and exploitations, abuse of power, religious intolerance and hypocrisy and a nostalgic recall to the extinction of customs and traditional values of its people. He is unique in his directness of messages. He is so much concerned about the history, social and political uprightness of its society. Considering the social and political insurrections coupled with its challenges is of national and international importance. They are a rich blend of powerful experiences of what has happened to the people and bring to the consciousness of the challenges of the masses.

In addition, religious intolerance or hypocrisy expressed in his plays serve as an effort to make the community or society realise the unnecessary tension and anarchy that it brings. Thus, it addresses the need for the community to eschew all differences to foster a peaceful environment for co-existence.

In his attempt to be artistic, he addresses the themes in context as a means of culturally creating the consciousness of his society to be assertive and rise against the ills meted to the populace by government or societal values. Consequently, the need for change is demonstrated in almost all his plays.

The thematic pre-occupation of Abdallah focuses on are numerous but all sprout from one fundamental phenomenon, the history and total experience of the African from pre-independence, independence and post-independence that hinges on the social and political aberrations of the people. Therefore, the researcher will be limited to some significant themes that would encapsulate the intent of the thesis.

In *The Fall of Kumbi*, the central issue is essentially political where Abdallah works out the tragic theme of presumptuous pride that saw the destruction of the great city of Kumbi Saleh. It fulfills the maxim that pride goes before a fall in that, the play reveals the pride and arrogance the people of Kumbi Saleh brandishes itself with. They pride themselves in the fact that wealth, riches, and power are all theirs and thus do not respect others. This is what Aklilu has to say, “The people of Ghana have become too arrogant...” Consequently, their arrogance, which they see in the wealth of gold and the corresponding power, and control they have grown to be in their own eyes caused them to show gross disrespect to the people of Audoghost. Taking away the betrothed wife of Aklilu, still have the impudence to kill their warriors and demand for the bride’s wardrobe and maidens as well. The wealth and power of Kumbi has gone viral across the neighbouring communities that it has attracted the covetousness of the Marabout. In effect, they are in anticipation to have an opportunity to ransack Kumbi at the slightest lead. Therefore, Ibn Yacin tells Aklilu:

If I send my men to war, it will not be merely to recapture your kidnapped woman. The Sultan of Morocco has had his eyes on Ghana for sometime now. It is only a matter of time, Kumbi Saleh, the so called City of Gold has grown too big, too rich and too powerful for its own good (p. 24).

The flaw in Amu Diata's elopement with Princess Zainata of Audoghast, detonated like a time bomb that saw the ruin of this great city of Kumbi Saleh.

Similarly, in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* the people feared the image of power of Kumrhan, in the spirit of implacable animosity descend heavily on him, and squash all his stated ideals at his infamous adjudication of justice. They oust Kumrhan due to his arrogance and pride. In his eyes, he sees himself as the messiah or perhaps the saviour of the people. Thus, with the advantage of power, wealth and fame he tramples on the rights of its constituents. It is the arrogance of such leaders and perhaps that which attract unnecessary enemies to them. This is prevalent among many African nations, especially the political heads. The wanton political unrest in Africa is as a result of these pride and arrogance.

The abuse of power to satisfy ones selfish gains is a theme of observation, which seeks to reveal the ills of power entrusted into the hands of people in the society. This is prevalently evident in our society today, since many people placed at positions of trust, either blindly or intentionally use their offices to molest their subjects and the likes to satisfy their own parochial interests. It is not surprising that these abuses of power by most leaders, from the basest levels to the highest of most institutions suffer upheavals that result in revolt by the masses, as it is evident in the lines of Khunata as she says:

It is important that we remember the great revolt that almost wiped out the entire Royal Family...to wash and clean their land with the blood of its corrupt rulers... (70)

Another theme is nostalgic recall of customs and traditions. This is an important theme, which Mohammed ben-Abdallah addresses in the *The Fall of Kumbi*. It is the religious custom that a betrothed wife be confined and groomed in all aspect of marriage and also massaging them with *lalle* an herb believed to serve as a skin tone and protection. In such confinement, it is the tradition that the bride spends her last days having fun with her age mates, before the transition into her new status as a wife. It must be noted that in this practice of tradition, it is not for the fun of it but a process of inculcating in the betrothed wife virtues in her new home such as patience, tolerance, resilience among many others. That is why the maidens tease and play all kinds of games to prepare the mind and soul of the bride.

Therefore, the playwright is echoing the need to observe these customs and traditions which have been cherished and maintained to this time and not to be aborted or referred to as barbaric as many of the youth today groan and moan about. This is seen in the dialogue between Nura and Zainata in movement I;

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).

Furthermore, from his historical rendezvous, Abdallah weaves out the religious cross-current that lies in the difference in perception between Kumbi and its surrounding Islamic neighbours. It is the intolerance of the latter who perceives the polytheist

community of Kumbi as pagans and infidels. Thus, the dynamics of religious controversy intensified and fueled the political and economic hostility between the two groups. The opposition is heightened when the High Priest of Kumbi and Ibn Yacin the leader of the Almorabithen had a collision of dogma. The two religious leaders show utter contempt for each other. For instance, the adherents of Islam presume that their religion is superior to the former. In effect, Ibn Yacin hurl out insults and derogatory words such as ‘infidels’, ‘pagans’, ‘savages’ ‘idol worshippers’ among many others at the people of Kumbi. The seriousness of the matter is that religion and politics are inseparable in any society. It is the basis upon which socio-political development revolves around. The two are indeed the opium of the masses. Therefore, where the spirit of tolerance is short lived, hostility and revolt is sure to be the meal on our dining tables.

Though, the playwright is an ardent follower of the Islamic faith, it appears that he sounds contradictory and sublime in his presentation. The reason being that at one breadth you are advocating for religious tolerance yet your ‘faith’ contradicts with your cultural disposition. For instance, he quotes directly from the Holy Qur’an where Ibn Yacin pronounced death on the High Priest of Kumbi as he faithfully orates:

High Priest of Kumbi, I am of the Murabethin! Our Holy Qur’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 you worshipped!

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 witchcraft... (p.44).

To a very large extent, the above quote should not have resulted in the death of the High Priest. This is because not believing in ones faith does not necessarily mean to use derogatory words on the former. Ibn Yacin invariably, uses doctrinal differences to commit crime. Consequently, the High priest remarks that “... I see you are what they said you are. You destroy in the name of your god” (p.44).

Likewise in *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*, the dynamics of religious intolerance is epitomized through the subtle but fiery clash of faith and belief systems. The leaders of the two religious divide show gross contempt for each other. This is evident when Abbass a representation of the Islamic faith hurls at Kouyate as the ‘Priest of Pagans’ and he also rebut and ironically calls Abbass a scorpion at the heels of the Black one. In all of these castigations and tensions among religious differences served as the basis for the decline and destruction of societies in the past and even in the present. Therefore, the playwright seems to pay a particular attention to religious fanaticism in his drama to consciously appeal to the minds of especially religious leaders to be conscious of the sort of interpretation they give to their beliefs. It is important to note that most African nation’s revolutions have some undercurrent of intolerance for religious dogmas. As a prophet and perhaps a street journalist, Abdallah is cautioning us to be tolerant irrespective of the religion one is akin to and practice. Imposing a faith on one will definitely result in rejection of which the consequence might be irreparable.

In addition, there appears an important and insightful paradox between the spiritual leaders especially in *The Fall of Kumbi*. When Ibn Yacin pronounced death on the

High Priest, reverently kneels before the *Gye Nyame* symbol and prays. The revelation that comes with the symbol and the prayer highlights the root of believe in the one Supreme Being that all religions acknowledge. Similarly, it took the mediatory role of Dikko to recognize the latent commonalities that exist between the two religions. There is no denying the fact that they are to protect and propagate the truth about their religion and devotees. However, there is the need to acknowledge and respect one another for a peaceful co-existence.

Abuse of power is one major pre-occupation of Abdallah's drama. In recent times incumbency has been lowered to vindictiveness fueled 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 fulfillment 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 sets 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 brut as he is appeals to the conscience of both the people in the helms of affairs 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.

The cancer of bribery and corruption in national politics is like a wild fire. It widespread and destruction in both high and low places is unimaginable. With the siege of leadership by impervious brands of sycophants, praise singers, seers and prophets enrich themselves at the expense of the tax payers' money. These prophets, 'sycophants' just to mention a few insulate and ensure that their masters are presented with façade that do not reflect the true state of affairs. Many governments in Africa are wantonly intoxicated in this pool of 'palm greasing' and corruption in high places. They employ these acts to intimidate and influence the path of justice, contracts and any other social, political or economic agenda. Mallam Ilya a clear headed country man strongly rebukes his father Mallam Abbass of putting on a façade. Simply because his conscience has been bought to force Ilya to openly confess an act he had not committed.

ILYA: And I looked at your face and remembered it. You are not wearing your face, Baba. This is a mask, my father what happened to the holy face?

... I have looked at it all my life and not for a single moment did I ever see a speck of fear on it. Where is your face Baba? I say what happened to your face?

ABBASS: I sold it, my son. I sold it. (pp. 30-31).



Interestingly a role model, a spiritual leader who is supposed to stand for justice and truth for the marginalized is corrupt. The seductive power of corruption is very contagious. It has resulted in manipulating both the bourgeoisies and the mundane people of our society to make choices that threatens and weakens the moral fibre of society. How can a whole spiritual head be an accomplice? This shows how rotten the society has become. Conversely, anyone who tries not to be in agreement with them, the 'Secret Ears of State' whose conscience are bought, sort to nose round and report on any statement made against them.

Beyond these one cannot overlook the abuse of women and manipulation of them as pawns of political power. Generally, women are pawn off and used as decorators in the courts of political leaders. Considering the exploitation of many African women, it seems that having they willingly given their full support to their men; especially political leaders they are rather rejected when it matters most. Halima becomes pregnant for Kumrahn who abandons her for parochial political reasons. In the pursuit for power in both his homestead and beyond, abuse the right and hopes of Halima. Elsewhere in revolt that ruined Kumbi Saleh, its remnants- women were abused. Not to talk about the rape and other inhumane treatment meted out to the women. Ansaḥ recounting the incidence of that led to the demise of Astimalike's daughter Ma'Inna's she orates:

It all happened after the dust of battle had settled; during the pillage and looting of the city of gold. First they stripped her every stitch of clothing... in the open, they whipped her until he back was red with blood. After whipping her ... they raped and raped the poor defenseless Ma'Inna until she died (pp. 60- 61).

It is a gory sight indeed. That is one level of abuse women under go as remnants of either religious or political unrest. That notwithstanding, a royal from one land becomes a commoner in another. Astimalinke the queen mother of Kumbi is reduced to a nanny as a special favour done her. General Pasha said that with the reports received from travelers to the land of the blacks all point to attest that Astimalinke has motherly qualities that the Sultan wishes to exploit. “You are to become Special Nurse to the Sultan’s children” (p.63). Such arrogance. But that is the consequence of revolution.

In his pre-occupation as a playwright, Abdallah becomes the voice of the voiceless African women. It appears that the ease with which women are manipulated is quite disturbing. For instance, Halima agrees to all the questions posed at her at the trial of Ilya. This is as result of her life and that of the family threatened. On the flipside of the action appears the voice of the Princess of Nil. In her frustration at the ruthless exploitation of women tells, Halima and the emissaries from Angah in their visit to her palace for the request and the repatriation of Kumrhan’s corpse:

Today you and I have the power to move ourselves and change the direction of the game. I intend to move Halima and when I move you move with me (p. 68).

The Princess of Nil who according to her had her marriage to Kumrhan pre-arranged in a bid to entrench political expediency which she might not have consented propels her to be an advocate for women who are abused. The Princess of Nil is a representation of the enlightened women to champion the cartel the stereotypical status of male dominance in the abuse against women. These abuses as it is linked with politics in Africa must be abrogated with immediacy.

By extension there have been a growing number of formidable female advocacy groups spread across the continent. These advocacy groups are gaining grounds and force capable of enlightened females who have the capacity to facilitate the social, political and economic dynamic in their communities. Another insightful revelation worth noting is the approach with which Princess of Nil hitherto wanted Halima to openly confess that Ilya raped to protect her image, somehow resolved their differences with ease.

#### **4.7 The Impact of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's Drama in the Development of Ghanaian Theatre**

There is no denying the fact that ben-Abdallah relied heavily on the canons and codification of Sutherland's creation of *Anansegoro* in his creation of *Abibigoro*. Therefore, in the constitution of *Abibigoro* he plainly places his work within the structural context of the aesthetics established by Sutherland. That notwithstanding, in the pursuit of his Pan-Africanist agenda of a theatre that can be considered as an authentic African theatre, he explicitly places his *Abibigoro* politics in the theatre in historical settings. This is because the contemporary Ghanaian audiences have commonalities with stories and people that centuries of colonialism have interrupted but not removed.

Therefore, to a very large extent the drama of Abdallah has had a swipe to the narrative and dramatic paradigm in the Ghanaian theatre. Abdallah the carrier of the promise is indeed a prominent figure when it comes to the development of the Ghanaian theatre. Its contribution towards the National Theatre Movement is phenomenal. In the era of political insurgents in Ghana, it took Abdallah's theatre company The Legon Road Theatre to embark on a strategic move to capture

audiences who hitherto, had been the quarry of the populist concert party in a bid to ensure that theatre is positioned at its rightful place. It was during these perilous times in the early 1970's that *The Alien King*, *The Slaves* and *The Verdict of the Cobra* were produced. Gibbs (2009) gives commendations to Abdallah's productions that he has shown 'a particular knack of communicating to popular audiences' and consequently the company would have been lost in the never-never land of Nkrumah's pretentious theatre, but in the harsh realities of Ghanaian theatrical life, they have earned a place in the national theatre movement. Thus, the Legon Road Theatre served as the catalyst for the continuation of Ghana's theatrical course with Abdallah. It is a very much a part of the cultural expediency. He was instrumental in the drafting of Ghana's first cultural policy when a Minister of Culture and Education.

One of the significant landmarks that have had a great impact on the theatre of Ghana is the redefinition of the theatre as a means of diplomacy and an expression of cultural identity. This then led to the renaissance of the defunct debate of The National Theatre Movement and the reemergence of institutions as icons of culture. The National Theatre Movement which Sutherland had strongly and constantly promoted was waned in the mid-1970. However, through Abdallah's political affinity to the Rawlings regime, he demonstrated in ensuring the worth of theatre as a diplomatic commodity is done by the establishment of the National Commission on Culture as Green (1998) notes:

Rawlings supported the founding of The National Commission on Culture, an agency that was designed, in part, to seek foreign donations to revive the arts. Money was obtained from China to build the National Theatre.

In 1992 the National Theatre was built. Abdallah was instrumental in the process and gave contribution to a creation of an amphitheatre imagining that it would serve as an experimental theatre for new dramatists. He also single handedly sought to ensure that a replica of the demolished Drama Studio is put up at the University of Ghana campus and named Efua T. Sutherland Drama Studio.

As the carrier of the promise as Agovi orates, the inception of his creation of *Abibigoro* theatrical convention, it breaks the silence in our theatre. This is with regards to cultures of Islamic influence. The incorporation seems to be a medium of ensuring and fostering peaceful and the enabling environment for co-existence as a people. This need appears to be one of his trump cards in almost all his dramas. It is because most revolt and civil wars across Africa has had an element of religious under current against that of traditional practices. To this end his drama has been an advocate for religious tolerance. Though, he is an ardent adherent of the Islamic faith, culture and his identity as an African enjoins him to balance the two in his drama. Having a critical look at his works it appears that ritual which is an essential part of culture is given much prominence. These give credence to the fact that before the advent of this alien faith, the African and for that the Ghanaian has a dogma and an identity.

Furthermore, the art of collaboration is prominent in his works. Its impact has shifted the ideologies of the other branches of the performing arts and even the fine art. An examination of Abdallah's drama is considered mammoth since it will need the resources of the other arts which include music, dance and visual arts to achieve the intended results. He believes that in carrying the African to the world of theatre, the total theatre experience must be appropriated to its desired heights. By so doing the other forms are not just embellishment but an integral and functional part of the

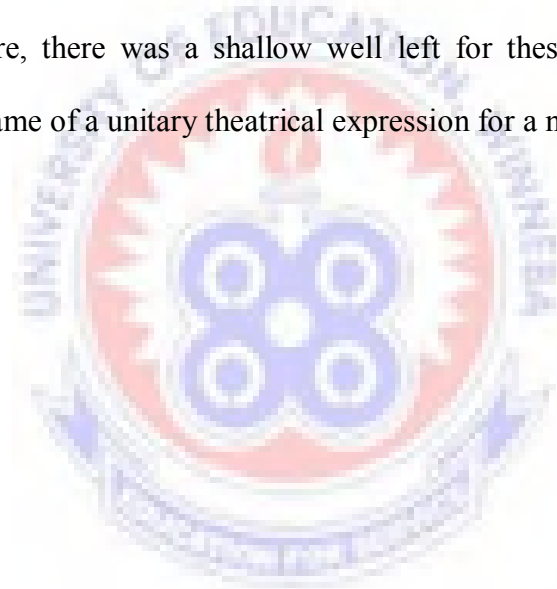
theatre experience. Hence, should the peasant, the elites and all and sundry watch any of its plays they should be able to relate and understand it. For instance, Abdallah's play productions evokes and create the sense of belonging as the music, dance, ritual scenery, among many others catapult the audience to the real world of life.

From the reality of historical events as a major source document of his drama, political and social issues are typically robust. It has inspired and hit hard on governments to be proactive in the discharge of the utopia promised to the people. The social and political inconsistencies in the society are not just raised but he ensures that ideas, strategies for development are suggested for appraisal and perhaps onward implementation for the good of the society.

Abdallah apart from being a playwright, he was among many that saw to the formation of *Abibigromma* as the one of the foremost professional theatre company in Ghana. The establishment of this professional theatre company as one of their responsibilities is to perpetuate the creative process of the Ghanaian theatre traditions. They are to put up productieaons of plays and other theatrical performances to its varied audience. Therefore, the Director of *Abibigromma* at both the School of Performing Arts and the National Theatre predominantly becomes its main playwright. By default this made Abdallah to produce most of his plays that had influence on many young enthusiastic playwrights. Mention can be made of Yaw Asare who used his position as one of the Directors of *Abibigromma* to test the boundaries of both *Anansegoro* and *Abibigoro* as the codified theatrical convention in Ghana.

Abdallah in the pursuit of his dramatic prowess, he capitalize on the political regime of Rawlings to create a model of a Ghanaian theatre on the premise of Pan-African

political views and a re-emergent of post colonial urgency to communicate a mono-theatrical genre as a national identity. This he excelled in putting Ghana on the diplomatic map. However, with the passage of law placing the stewardship of folklore into the custody of the government created a disconnection between the new artist and folklore heritage. Considering the intent of the law on copyright would have created an avenue for the commercialization of the arts rather than just a repository of folk culture. But with the restrictions by Abdallah legitimating the parameters of the Ghanaian theatre since these new artists cannot adopt and create the established codes of both the *Anansegoro* and *Abibigoro* saw a major downturn in the production of theatre. Therefore, there was a shallow well left for these artist to draw from all because in the name of a unitary theatrical expression for a national identity.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Summary

This study set out to examine the form and thematic pre-occupation of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama. It also seeks to discuss the impact of Abdallah's drama towards the development of the Ghanaian theatre. The discussion starts with an overview of the state of theatre in Africa. There are evidences given as to the existence of pre- colonial theatre in Africa. Literary theatre is undoubtedly brought about as a result of colonialism is discussed. There is also the discussion of adaptation and transposition of Western plays into African theatre. This trend is given prominence in that the attraction of adaptation of plays especially Greek plays is due to the fact that Greek plays and themes are universal and cut across other cultures. Its relevance however, to the African culture and society is maintained since they have bearing on it. Considerable attention is given to the challenges akin to the adaptation from one medium to the other or one culture to the other is well discussed. Also, there is discussion on the various studies on the nature of adaptation and the different modes of its classification.

Focus is then shifted to the theatre in Ghana. Ample attention is given to the various aspects of the Ghanaian theatre. These phases are enumerated with the critical analysis of the contribution given by the pacesetters of the Ghanaian theatre. Mention is made of Kobina Sekyi, J. B. Danquah, F.K. Fiawoo in their distinctive contribution towards the growth and development of the Ghanaian theatre. There is the need to ascertain the thematic interest of the fore- runners towards the development of the



African theatre and that of Ghana. It is evidenced that their thematic interest is basically liberation from the colonizer.

It further discusses the tireless efforts of these sons and daughters of the land to research and experiment and creates a theatre that is rooted in the history and culture of its people. Therefore, mention is made of Sutherland who by dint of hard work, experimented with indigenous story telling tradition of the Ghanaian in folklore to create a kind of theatre called *Anansegoro*. It is couched from *Ananse* tales of the Ghanaian in the creation of the genre.

The various forms of theatre in Ghana are discussed with evidence of its existence in ritualistic traditions, festivals, dances, storytelling or oral traditions, literary theatre and the populist theatre-concert party. The incorporation of these elements and the western styles that form the literary and a blend of both the traditional drama and the western in the concert party are discussed respectively.

Moreover, with the intent of this thesis, the beginning of the contemporary theatre in Ghana under the post independence era is examined. There is the discussion on the damage caused by colonialism on the political, cultural, social, economic structures has to be recouped. Thus, with the movement of cultural identity and nationalism revival of theatre in the post colonial period also saw Ghana's image in the world theatre.

In effect the new Ghana deals with the conscious effort of some Ghanaian writers towards the creation of a drama that is deeply rooted in the Ghanaian heritage. Some of these writers were inspired by Sutherland's codification of *Anansegoro*. These personalities adapted the canons and modified *Anansegoro* in a unique enhancement of their own version of *Anansegoro*. Among these writers is Mohammed ben-

Abdallah who explicitly attests the creation of its *Abibigoro* convention to the principles of *Anansegoro*. However, he substitutes the *Ananse* (spider) to *Abibi* (black man theatre). He felt that the convention of *Anansegoro* will perhaps stifle the growth of the Ghanaian theatre.

Having established the premise for the study, focus and attention is given to the methods to be used in furthering the analysis of the work. The researcher employs textual analysis and other overlapping methods in making the analysis interesting and educative. The research design and methods were predominantly that which relates to the kind of research findings set to be investigated.

Therefore two plays out of the seven of the playwright is chosen and subjected to examination on its dramatic form and thematic interest as well as the impact of his drama in the development of the Ghanaian theatre.

At this juncture the major concern of the research is to analyse the forms and thematic pre-occupations of the drama of Abdallah. It is succinct that the dramatic form of Abdallah is heavily relied on the canons of music, rituals, oral narrative of history, dance, pantomime, incorporation of audience involvement in the narrative among many others. The discussion on the form therefore informs the pre-occupation of the playwright as it is made clear in the analysis. The significant motivation for the drama of Abdallah is rooted in his rendezvous with history as its primary material from the society. The analysis also proves that the intimation of Abdallah on the need to tolerate one another with reference to divergent religious creed and dogma is very prominent. Therefore, his thematic interest informs his kind of theatre genre called *Abibigoro*. This is evident in the manner he handles politics, social and cultural

idiosyncrasies to its varied audience. He seeks to evoke and provoke his audience to rise to the occasion when the society is at the point of toppling over into turmoil.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

The study sought to analyse the dramatic form and pre-occupation of Mohammed ben-Abdallah's drama. It was to define his drama as a playwright. Abdallah highlights the challenge of African playwrights' look-up to alien conventions and trends instead of critically developing a theatre that is peculiar to them. Therefore, Abdallah asserted himself with the creation of drama that purports to draw from the mine of indigenous knowledge and a blend of the good examples of the Western theatre. In effect, Abdallah's dramatic form pivots around the incorporation of storytelling tradition, music, dance, rituals, history, drumming among many others which are recognizable to his audience.

This notwithstanding, his adaptation of real incidences into 'faction' makes him a genius. This is because turning facts into fiction demands a high creative ability to ascertain and projects the idiosyncrasy to bear. Also, his rendezvous with history and thus the adaptation addresses concern common to humanity in particular the quest for social justice, religious tolerance, and freedom in the post colonial global market place. As mentioned his dramatic form employs universal formats like storytelling.

Furthermore, the adaptation of history is given a treatment which results in meanings other than the original to a large extent. By implication, Abdallah borrows material frequently from Ghanaian history and myth. He re-interprets the material to fit the purpose of the message he wants to present. He fundamentally modifies and transforms familiar history in light of contemporary realities to provide his audience

with drama that have a global appeal even as they emphasise his indigenous cultural heritage. Conclusively, Abdallah's dramatic form and pre-occupations seek to re-invent history and Ghanaian rituals in the light of contemporary realities spiced and catalyst with dance, music, oral narrative, and language that creates imageries potent enough to consciously stimulate his audience to question the status quo of society. The belief is that man must make that move to transcend the ills of society in order to formulate a better future for posterity. Thus, Abdallah daringly gives us snippets and glimpses of his vision through his drama.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In the pursuit of this research, I came to the realization that there is more to Abdallah's drama than the dramatic form and thematic pre-occupations. Abdallah as a dramatist is deeply rooted in the re-invention of history to suit contemporary issues. It is also interesting to note the dexterity with which he creates his drama is quite fascinating. This is because he extends the former heritage and weaves his concept into it to make it an integral part that would be difficult to untie since all the elements do not appear to be independent. However, this research could not examine all of Abdallah's dramatic form and thematic interest based on some limitations.

There is therefore, the need for documentation of its other works and a look at the issue of 'faction' as one major premise of his drama. This came out so strong that in the two plays that I analysed. In other words, his heavy reliance on facts or history is a trade mark for him. It was realized that he re-enact history to confirm present occurrences, appraise issues that are prevalent in the socio-political environment of the society and foretell likely phenomenon if the appropriate measures are not in place.

Furthermore, in the course of this expedition, the researcher realized that there has not been playwrights' venturing into writing in this kind of Ghanaian drama. I suggest that the budding playwrights in our institutions of higher learning are encouraged writing in this genre to consolidate the codes of the genre.



## REFERENCES

- Abdallah, M. B. (2000). *On Plays and Playwrighting-Interview by Anastasia Agbenyega and James Gibbs. Kofi Anyidoho and James Gibbs (eds)*. Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Rodopi.
- Abdallah, M. B. (1989). *The Fall of Kumbi*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Serv.
- Abdallah, M. (2008). *The Trial of Mallam Ilya*. Accra: Sedco.
- Achebe, C. (1975). *The African Writer and the English Language*. London: Heinemann.
- Addo, A. A. (2011). *Ananse as a Folkloric Chracter in New Ghana Drama*. Unpublished.
- Adeyemi, A. O. (2009). *The Dramaturgy of Femi Osofisan. PhD Thesis*. Leeds: The University of Leeds.
- Adeyemi, T. (2010). Cultural Nationalism: The 'Nollywoodization' of Nigerian Cinema. *Journal of Performing Arts* 4.1 , 63-74.
- Agovi, K. E. (1988). *The Origin of Literary Theatre in Colonial Ghana: 1920-1957. Insititute of African Studies, Legon, (unpublished paper)*.
- Agovi, K. (1991). Towards an Authentic African Theatre. *Journal of African Studies* .
- Amankulor, J. (1993). *English Language Drama and Theatre. A History of Twentieth Century Literatures (ed) Oyomoyela Oyekan*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Amoani, F. (2005). *Research Methodology: An Overview*. Accra: Pentecost Press Ltd.
- Amponsah, E. (2008). *Expanding the Frontiers of Anansegoro: Yaw Asare's Contribution to the Search for an Authentic Ghanaian Theatre* . Legon: Unpublished.
- Amponsah, E. K. (2013). Indigenous Knowledge: Towards the Search for an Authentic Ghanaian Theatre. *Journal of African Arts and Culture* , 45-51.

- Angmor, C. (1996). *Contemporary Literature in Ghana, 1911-1978. A Critical Evaluation*. Accra: Woeli.
- Angmor, C. (2010). *Literature Life and Present-Day Ghana*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Arnold, S. (2004). *The Creative Spirit: An Introduction to Theatre Third Edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Arsdale, K. V. (2009, May). Retrieved September 4, 2015, from Proposal for Senoir Honours Thesis: <http://www.andrews.edu/services/honour/.../vanarsdale-proposal.pdf>
- Asiedu, A. (1999). Drama in Ghana: A Historical Perspective. *Journal of Performing Arts* 3.1 , 1-7.
- Balodis, J. (2012). *The Practice of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Theatre. Phd Thesis*. Queensland University of Technology.
- Bame, K. N. (1991). *Drama and Theatre in Traditional African Societies*. London: Fontomfrom.
- Banham, Martin, Hill, E. and Woodyard, G. (eds). (1994). *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffins. (2003). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Taylor & Francis e-library.
- Botwe-Asamoah, K. (2001). African Adaptations. *Journal of Black Studies* 31.6 , 740-746.
- Collins, S. (2011). *Playwriting and postcolonisation: identifying the key factors in the development and diminution of playwriting in Ghana 1916-2007. M.Phil Thesis*. UK: Glasgow Theses Service.
- Collins, S. (2015). *The Commoditisation of Culture, Folklore, Playwriting and Copyright in Ghana. PhD Thesis*. University of Glassgow.

- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Deandrea, P. (2002). *Fertile Crossings. Metamorphoses of Genre*. Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi.
- Djisenu, J. K. (1999). Some Political Lessons from Abdallah's The Trial of Mallam Ilya. *Journal of Performing Arts* 3.1, , 18-22.
- Djisenu, J. K. (2000). *The Art of Narrative Drama in Ghana. Kofi Anyidoho and James Gibbs (eds)*,. Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Rodopi.
- Emeryonu, E. (1971). African Literature: What does it take to be its critic? Eldred Dunsimi Jones (ed). In *African Literature Today*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Etherton, M. (1982). *The Development of African Drama*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.
- Frey, Botan & Kreps. (1999). *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods ( 2nd. Ed)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gibbs, J. (2008). Essays on the Ghanaian Theatre (unpublished paper). *Nkyinkyin*.
- Gilbert, H. & Tompkins, J. (1996). *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Graham-White, A. (1974). *The Drama of Black Africa*. New York: Samuel French, Inc.
- Hatar, A. (2001). *The State of Theatre Education in Tanzania*. Unesco.
- Ilo, I. (2006). Language in Modern African Drama. *Comparative Literature and Culture*. 8.4, Vol. 8 , 1-10.
- Kemevor, A. K. & Duku, F. K. (2013). Art: The Pivot of Ghanaian Festivals. *Journal of African Arts and Culture* , 53-62.



- Kerr, D. (1995). *African Popular Theatre*. London: James Currey.
- Kruger, L. (1999). *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge.
- Mabweazara, H. (2002, April 12). *Present day African theatre forms have filtered through from the past*. Retrieved June 1, 2015, from African Postcolonial Literature in English in the Postcolonial Web: <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/africa/mabweazara1.html>
- Mckee, A. (2003). *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide 1st Edition*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Mlama, P. (1991). *Culture and Development: The Popular Theatre Approach in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Mlama, P. (1995). *Oral Art and contemporary Cultural Nationalism*. Furnish and Gunner (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mullel, T. M. (2007). *African Theatre And The Colonial Legacy: Review Of The East African Scene*. Retrieved June 19, 2015, from The African e-Journals Project: <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>
- Osofisan, F. (2001). *Insidious Treasons: Drama in Post Colonial States*. Ibadan: Opon Ifa.
- Owusu, M. (1988). *Drama of the Gods*. Massachusetts: Omenana Press.
- Prece, P. (2008). *Writing Home: The Post Colonial Dialogue of Athol Fugard and August Wilson*. PhD Thesis. Kansas: University of Kansas.
- Rotimi, O. (1991). *African Drama Literature: To Be or To Become*. Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Smit Van Der, S. (2007). *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Kenyan Theatre in Focus*. M.A in Performing Arts Thesis University of Namibia (Unpublished).
- Ukala, S. (2011). *Manual of Research-and-of- Thesis Writing in Theatre Arts. Second Edition*. Ibadan: Krafts Books Limited.

Wetmore, K. J. (2002). *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky: Modern Adaptation of Classical Greek Tragedy*. North Carolina: Macfarland.

Wilson, E. & Goldfarb, A. (2000). *Living Theater: A History. 3rd Editon*. U.S.A: McGraw Hill.

Yirekyi, S.M. and Amponsah, E.K. (2014). Theatre and Social Change: Reasserting Traditional Values Through Theatre: The Role of Kobina Sekyi. *American Journal of Social Sciences, Arts and Literature. Vol.1, No.4* , 1-8.

