



**Epitome : International Journal
of Multidisciplinary Research**

ISSN : 2395-6968

**FESTIVAL IN THE THEATRE OF WOLE SOYINKA :
“THE OCCASION FOR SPEAKING” IN THE POSTCOLONIAL STATE**



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ABSTRACT

Wole Soyinka is probably one of the most imaginative playwrights in Africa. His work is a mélange of European theatrical traditions and his Yoruba cultural heritage. The objective of this paper is to examine Soyinka’s imaginative and innovative perception of some African festivals in his plays as problematic traits of postcoloniality. The issue at stake is whether a nation is created before a state or a state is created before a nation. Consequently, in Soyinka’s plays African festivals that are generally marked by ritual and celebration turn out to be unpleasant occasions for either castigating the ills that Black Africa has inherited from European colonialism or undermining the unimaginative, coercive and parochial decisions of those entrusted with the power to lead people after independence. Read largely from George

Lanning's illuminating essay, "The Occasion for Speaking" the paper argues that Soyinka manipulates festivals in *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Roadas* a decisive platform for the examination of the postcolonial state in Africa and by so doing elevates African festivals to giant screens for critical retrospection and prospection as vital ingredients for building the postcolonial nation.

KEYWORDS : African Festivals, postcoloniality, "occasion for speaking", state, nation.

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

George Lamming's essay "The Occasion for Speaking" essentially translates the West Indian's dilemma as an exile in terms of his subject matter and in terms of the technique he has to employ in his work. The puzzle is to determine the kind of subject matter and style that would be acceptable, first of all, to the Metropolis (his host community) and secondly to his native community back home. In essence, Lamming's essay problematizes the literary trajectory of the West Indian writer in particular and the postcolonial writer in general. Lamming's essay for the most part takes the direction described by Ngugiwa Thiong'o as the need to decolonize the mind for it would appear that the first step in any direction for all postcolonials is to begin to see things from their own perspective, not perspectives defined by the West as natural order.

Wole Soyinka in his works appears to move towards this direction when he uses some African festivals in his plays as an occasion for speaking in the postcolonial state. I use the expression "the occasion for speaking" to mean a call for collective consciousness to an ethical path. This path is one void of the crippling legacies of colonialism in domains of politics, economics and culture. This paper therefore attempts to look at some African festivals as used by Soyinka in *Kongi's Harvest*, *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* as an opportunity to address some burning issues in the postcolonial state to guarantee peace, stability, unity and progress which are ingredients of nationhood.

African Festivals in Wole Soyinka's Drama: Texts and Contexts

Africa is a festival continent. Throughout the whole continent colorful and vibrant festivals are celebrated. There are too many festivals in Africa from the north to the south and from the east to the west designed for different events and situations. The Yoruba alone where Soyinka hails celebrate different kinds of festivals throughout the year. This is also true of many other communities across the continent. Even though there are so many festivals in Africa they can be broadly classified into three categories: harvest festivals, religious festivals and national or commemorative festivals. Significantly, the festivals in Soyinka's dramas fall into these three categories. The festival in *Kongi's Harvest* is a harvest festival; that in *The Road* is a religious festival while *A Dance of the Forests* grapples with a commemorative festival.

Kongi's Harvest is set around the New Yam Festival. The New Yam festival is a popular annual cultural festival in many parts of Africa. In Nigeria, the festival is held at the end of every farming season, usually in August, to mark the beginning of the harvest. Symbolically,

the festival presents the people with the opportunity to make sacrifices and thank their gods for granting them a beautiful harvest. The festival also celebrates the abundance of food and replaces the scarcity experienced between planting season and harvest time. This festival is therefore a popular celebration in many communities especially those that are predominantly farmers or whose staple food is yam. However, in some communities the predominant crop would not be yam in which case the festival would be dedicated to that crop that is popular or constitutes the staple food in the community.

On the eve of the Yam festival in Nigeria, all old yams from the previous year's harvest are either discarded or eaten to give way for new ones. Then on the day of the festival, only yam dishes are served in the homes. Some renown farmers use the occasion to invite friends and relations, especially the less privileged, to celebrate with them. Making presentations of special offerings, the traditional ruler or the oldest man in each community is required to offer yam (cooked or roasted), usually mixed with palm oil, to the recognized deities of the land and to the ancestors. After the sacrifice with its rituals members of the community are free to start eating their already prepared dishes of yam.

According to Jonathan Peters, *Kongi's Harvest* is deeply rooted in African tradition especially in the elaboration of concepts concerning the feast of the New Yam, in the extensive employment of proverbs and in the ritual of the king's dance. He goes further to say that the feast of the New Yam (or whatever the main harvest product may be) is an indispensable ritual of celebration in traditional black Africa. It is the feast of the new season and therefore celebrates the renewing cycle of nature. He states that in those areas where yam is grown as the prime crop, this king of crops, as it is called in *Things Fall Apart*, is very symbolic. It:

symbolizes the supremacy and power of the clan. As a symbol of the harvest, the yam embodies the fertility of the tribe and guarantees its continued procreation through harmonious interaction with nature. In addition, as an occasion of cleansing ...the harvest festival symbolizes the purgation of the clan's sins and the restoration of its commonweal through the medium of its spiritual head. The New Yam festival is consequently no light matter. It lies at the heart and soul of the community and imposes an onerous burden of responsibility on its divine ruler. Whoever presides over such a feast therefore has the life of the community in his hands. (201)

Jonathan Peters' comments above underline the importance of harvest festivals in Africa as they lie at the centre of people's daily life and their aspirations for the future.

The festival dramatized in *The Road* is an African religious festival. African religious festivals are held to worship deities. These gods and goddesses are held in high esteem

because they are believed to have jurisdiction over nearly every important aspect of the people's lives including health, welfare, procreation and prosperity. Each deity has its worshippers and has the duty to enrich its devotees. Soyinka's native Yoruba religion (Irunmole) is a monotheistic religion with one almighty god. It is based on reverence of several deities who are celebrated as a hierarchy of about 401 chief and minor deities. Olorun or Olodumare the only supreme deity is not worshipped directly. Irunmole is an instrumental set of rituals by which critical individuals may resolve existential dilemmas in consultation with a distant god. It does not define a specific moralizing code or have any sacred texts. Individuals can converse directly with their orisha and can effect changes in their own destiny. Irunmole is not concerned about a compiled and interpreted system of beliefs for group worship of an omnipresent God as are other world religions such as Islam, Christianity or Buddhism.

Closely related to the worship of deities is the worship of ancestral spirits during specific festivals often characterized by ritual, masking and dance. The Egungun masks for example, celebrate the distinguished dead. During ancestral festivals, the ancestors are believed to bless the living, promote physical and spiritual health, settle disputes, enforce tradition and morality, and cleanse the community of witchcraft. These ceremonies serve as means of assuring the ancestors a place among the living. It also indicates that the present generations of living do not stand entirely alone, nor is the individual ever abandoned entirely to the limits of his own powers, for the dead ancestors continue to watch over and guide their descendants. Basically, it is an attempt to reassure people about an individual's immortality and diminish the fear of death through the dramatic appearance of the ancestral spirits within the world of men. The people worship their ancestors through the egungun and with the belief that the ancestors are on earth again to greet, inspect and bless their siblings. Dogs, palm oil, roasted yam, palm wine, cold water and cola nuts are the materials used by devotees to worship the deities including Ogun.

The specific festival which Soyinka exploits in *The Road* is the Ogun Festival. Ogun is the god of smith, Iron, hunting and guardian of the road. The festival in his honour is celebrated annually in almost every town and village in Yoruba land. The celebration according to oral tradition is an annual remembrance and worship of the god of iron who was believed to be a hunter who migrated from Ile Ife to Ire-Ekiti on game search, but ended up living permanently at Ire- Ekiti and disappeared into the ground when some people of the town deceived him with an empty keg of palm wine. He beheaded all of them with his cutlass and disappeared into the ground. In Ire-Ekiti, the main festival in remembrance of the deity comes

biennially and usually during the month of August. Ogun is believed to be the god of all those using Iron in their professional work therefore the deity must be worshipped in order to receive his favour. Ogun festival is fast assuming the status of a national festival. It is characterized by display of masquerades of different designs.. In *The Road* the devotees of Ogun celebrating his festival are drivers with an enigmatic professor who intends to exploit the festivities to find an answer to a metaphysical burden he has identified as the Word. The play is also a dramatization of corruption, political rivalry, road accidents and environmental degradation.

National or commemorative festivals are festivals that celebrate events that have to do with the life of the entire nation unlike harvest and religious festivals that may concern people only at the local level. National festivals may celebrate events such as independence, referenda, (re) unification, revolution or some kind of victory or liberation in warfare. These kinds of festivals are celebrated once annually. Here values like unity, military prowess, national symbols and other achievements are displayed to the national and international community. It is also a moment of retrospection and prospection for the nation in diverse domains. The festival in *A Dance of the Forests* is one of such festivals. It is about Independence Day celebration for the nation Nigeria. In fact *A Dance of the Forests* was commissioned to be staged as part of Nigeria's independence celebrations. Soyinka's countrymen therefore expected a play celebrating Nigeria's glory and past exploits but they got one which held up the past and future as tainted with corruption and evil. Soyinka felt that the euphoria and utopic expectations that usually characterize national festivals were uncalled for. He rather considered the occasion a moment for deep reflection on the future of the new state. The purpose of the play which was sadly missed was to call his people to a collective self-searching and penitent commitment to an ethical path.

A Dance of the Forests is about an event called the "The Gathering of the Tribes" which is a metaphor for Nigerian independence celebrations as earlier stated. This festival in the world of the play is celebrated at three levels: the enactment of the ancient scenes, the questioning of the Dead Pair and the dance of the Half Child. The presentation of the festival is primarily satirical and so Soyinka does not attempt to present a balanced portrait of past empires or present national interest. The splendour of ancient civilisations had so often been vaunted in the decade of the 1950s as Black African states stood on the threshold of independence that Soyinka must have felt the need to correct such nostalgic euphoria. Accordingly, the festivities and spectacles of the new state's celebrations are reduced to other reports by the characters and to the sound of rejoicing in the background of this independence play. The

council also asks Demoke, the artist to carve a totem as a symbol of independence celebrations. It is a monument erected as tribute to the new state with a motor road right up to it but this edifice also becomes the object of much controversy. Evidently, rather than focus on the activities that characterize each festival Soyinka uses these festivals to address the crippling legacies of colonialism plaguing the postcolonial state in Africa.

The Postcolonial Twist of African Festivals in Wole Soyinka's Drama

As earlier stated, Soyinka uses festivals in his plays as an occasion for speaking in the postcolonial state in Africa. The festivals in *A Dance of the Forests* and *Kongi's Harvest* pose a fundamental question which is answered in the third festival in *The Road*. The fundamental question is whether a nation is created before a state or it is the state that is created before the nation. The right process should be the nation before the state and not vice versa. Unfortunately what obtains in *Kongi's Harvest* is the creation of the Nigerian state whose independence is celebrated in *A Dance of the Forests* and the consequences of such a venture are dramatized in *The Road* evidenced by the new leaders' abortive efforts to instil the spirit of nationhood in the citizens after independence.

Kongi's Harvest is a classic demonstration of the colonial systematic, indiscriminate creation and drawing up of different state boundaries in Africa without any well-defined regional criteria in full cognizance of the ethno-cultural, historical, geographical or ecological realities. Problematic too is the fact that the constitutions developed for the new states were not only different from the old traditional system but even dissimilar to the political systems in the imperial mother countries. This is apposite in *Kongi's Harvest* as can be seen in the confusion of the new leaders in implementing new policies. The slogans they use do not indicate that they know what they doing. *Kongi's Harvest* therefore translates the transition from the traditional monarchical system of governance to the modern European system of state and the difficulties encountered.

Before colonialism Africa was made up of empires and kingdoms that covered large stretches of territory and ruled by powerful kings and monarchs. Examples include the empires of Western Sudan and others north and south of the Sahara. During colonialism these empires were shattered in favour of states ruled by Heads of State. As seen in *Kongi's Harvest*, the king in Africa was regarded as God's Deputy on earth and so he combined both political and spiritual authority. As a political and spiritual leader the king was the ideal figure around whom the life of the community was woven. The king therefore was the symbol of nationhood as his political and spiritual authority united all his subjects around him. According to Ernest Renan, a nation is a "spiritual family" (18); the state is necessarily not.

That is why the aftermath of the partition of Africa and the creation of new states plunged most of the continent into chaos and instability as the different peoples forcefully brought together under the umbrella of state hardly found common ground in many respects.

In *Kongi's Harvest* when the Republic of Isma is created and the king is stripped off his political functions in favour of President Kongi, chaos sets in as the people refuse to recognize him as their leader. Consequently, Kongi decides to use the harvest festival to force the king to pay allegiance to him so that the people may recognize him as their new leader. This doesn't work and unable to rally the people around him as the old king did, Kongi resorts to frustration, brute force and terror. He clearly demonstrates his repugnance towards creating a harmonious future for his people but rather creates an illusion of personal as well as national well-being to the outside world. He creates an attractive coat to hide his monstrous form inside. He poses a wide range of postures for the foreign correspondents to paint a glowing portrait of him abroad. An image of a pensive and devoted leader is thus sold out. But no one at home is fooled. Even in granting reprieve he resorts to propaganda. For much emphasis is on the timing and pacing: "we must make it a last-minute reprieve. It will look better that way. Don't you think?" (117). Kongi's act of clemency remains a confidential decision until a quarter of an hour before the hanging of dissidents. The propaganda machine works as efficiently and consistently as the network of coercion to keep everyone in line. His henchmen execute their job with reckless abandon. The Carpenter's Brigade as they are called, spits fire on all opponents. For they have sworn to die in spreading "the creed of Kongism" (118). For those who are slow to accept Kongi and his government, they have their heads crushed with the heavy mallets of the Carpenter's Brigade.

That Kongi's machinery of suppression goes little deeper than the flesh is shown by the occasional bomb-throwing which rocks his regime. This is the only kind of harvest over which Kongi is qualified to preside - a harvest of death. The bomb-throwers of course have to be hanged, while the Reformed Aweri (Kongi's parliament) on Kongi's orders are commissioned to counter the effects of the bomb-throwing by organizing a slogan around the key word "Harmony". It seems unlikely that even Kongi really places much faith in the effects of those words. Regimes like this are doomed to go on multiplying villainies. The Reformed Aweri, no less than the lower orders of the society, are pathetic victims of this reckless regime. Their reaction as the Organizing Secretary announces the sentence on the bomb-throwers dramatizes their plight. The word 'hanged' in the passage stuns even these hardened cynics into silence but only momentarily until one of them can translate the brutality of "hanged" into the meaningless jargon of the new politics - "An exercise in scientific

exorcism”. Thus translated, the horror is covered with a façade of words and they can approve the action. Thus, men in a trapped situation, to keep their sanctity - at least for a time - play tricks with words and lives.

Furthermore, we see Kongi operating from his cell in a mountain retreat on the eve of the festival. He is supposed to be fasting and meditating as Isma stands on the threshold of its Five Year Development Plan. But he is pretending to be setting up an image of total harmony for the state in spite of the recent bomb-throwing attempt on his life. The fabrication of images that are to be forcibly projected into the minds of the people reveals the regime’s lack of creative ideas and the chaos that has set in. Like Professor of *The Road*, who tries unsuccessfully to achieve godhead through a ritual of possession and the unlocking of the secret of the Word; Kongi assumes the mantle of divinity without the ritual of investiture and proclaims himself the Spirit of the Harvest. He is so far gone in self-conceit and in delusions of immortality that he is ready to change the course of the world.

In his pitiless satire of the man Soyinka exposes Kongi’s approval of a new calendar that will date from the current harvest. Kongi’s rejection of his Secretary’s nomenclatures which omit Kongi’s name in favour of the unambiguous “Kongi’s Harvest” (KH) and “Before Kongi’s Harvest” (BKH) “No need why we should conform to the habit of initials only” is typical of a self-love that seeks self-proliferation. Jonathan Peters has stated that Kongi parodies modern megalomaniacs who having been addicted to the irresistible taste of power and its accompanying stature and prestige start monopolizing all its symbols and roles and that this attains such heights bordering on deification (203). At a Reformed Aweri session, members propose that they be recognized as the Magi as that would lead to Kongi’s apotheosis. Then likening himself to Christ, Kongi wants his name along with the forthcoming harvest festival to mark the beginning of the new calendar, in the same way Christ does the Christian calendar. State bodies work hard towards elevating their leader to godhead.

The events that unfold in the play leave no hope in us for the purging of such societies. The struggle by Daodu and others to overcome Kongi’s destruction is doomed. This futility of action is first hinted in the proverbs from the ‘Hemlock’ section of the play. Even Daodu and Segi who are the only ones courageous enough to openly condemn Kongi’s rule, are in the end victims of predicted general clampdown indicated by the iron grating that clamps on the ground at the end of the play. They had not been able to mobilize the necessary support to counter Kongi’s regimented and well-established instruments of power. This acquiescence and inaction are pictured in the timid withdrawal and uncommitted apathy of the various inmates of the night-club when the Organizing Secretary enters. Here Soyinka subtly

subscribes to the fact that solidarity and concerted action are required to succeed in any revolution.

One issue on which the New Aweriseem to reach a consensus is that Kongi's rule is "part of the normal historic pattern" (205). Nations and empires rise and fall, cultures reach their apogee and decline, and the strong overpower the weak. Consequently, the foiling of the plot against Kongi demonstrates that, contrary to Daodu's assurance, it is not such an easy matter to depose an established ruler, especially one, like Kongi, who runs a police state. For the present, Kongi is entrenched in power but the promise of greater repression after the aborted Bacchanal will not wipe out opposition to his oppressive regime. The doctrine of Inevitable History dictates that Oba Danlola cannot hold on to power indefinitely. No more can Kongi, as long as there are those who have the will and courage to oppose him and eventually to expose him to the people for what he really is. His discomfiture when Segi serves up the head of her father in a platter as the orgiastic harvest feast becomes a signpost that brings home to him the stark reality of his diabolic regime. Many leaders like Kongi, unable to unite their peoples and without a mastery of the tools of modern leadership resulted to using brute force and dictatorship creating rebellion, civil war and instability in post-colonial African states.

Kongi's regime therefore is a logical conclusion to Soyinka's prophesy in *A Dance of the Forests* where the masked three leading human characters proclaim a bleak future for the new African states. Impending division and bloodshed are predicted and this is to be confirmed ten years later with the Nigerian civil war of 1970 dramatized in *Mad Men and Specialists*. *A Dance of the Forests* is also a play about bribery, corruption, treachery, betrayal and hypocrisy in the new state. Adenebi for example, is a vacillating individual whom Soyinka caricatures for the deadly sins of hypocrisy, corruption, inauthenticity and misplaced values. He is the most contemptible of the three human protagonists because he is a hypocrite. He tries to paint a noble picture of himself whereas he is in fact the opposite.

Asked about the identity of the councilor who took the bribe for increasing the official passenger capacity of a lorry from forty to seventy people, his guilt is evident in his sensitive responses that are tainted with anger. He conceals his crime in a smokescreen of words. He is reluctant to disclose the name of the guilty councilor because he is that councilor. The role Soyinka gives him is very significant. Adenebi represents the corrupt minister, Member of Parliament, Director or Manager in the new state who privileges personal gain to collective welfare. Adenebi is very conscious of his social position and is reluctant to be seen in the wrong company yet underneath this respectable exterior is concealed an involvement with municipal corruption that is murderous. Adenebi also represents the insensitive, obtuse,

pompous, philistine trimmer who is always loud in support of power and of doctrines conducive to his own convenience. He is a clearly delineated person and is at the same time a manifestation of a type.

Another character Soyinka treats with contempt is Rola the prostitute. She is a woman with a fatal attractiveness whose path is beleaguered with dead lovers whom she has heartlessly sent to their death. Paradoxically Demoke's inspiration for sculpting the totem for Independence Day celebrations came from the image of this prostitute. The question one can ask is why a whore should be the informing impulse behind the totem of the new state. This is probably one of the play's ironies. Soyinka's use of a whore is ambivalent because woman's natural function is primarily that of procreation, but the aberrance of man in society diverts this into a recreational process. Apart from the ultimate barrenness that this aberration suggests, violence is linked with the predatory Rola's exploitation of men and she is in fact typical of the *femme fatale* who fascinates Soyinka like Simi of *The Interpreters*, Segi of *Kongi's Harvest* and Iriyise of *Season of Anomy*. By using the image of a prostitute as an impulse of inspiration, Soyinka seems to be looking at the future of the new African states within the context of prostitution in many domains. He foresees leaders who would sell both the image of their countries and the natural resources therein at will just as a prostitute sells her body to men. This reminds us of neo-colonialism and this picture paints the precariousness of the future of new African states at independence.

In *The Road*, Soyinka as in the previous plays, uses a religious festival to castigate the ills of the postcolonial state in Africa. The focal character in *The Road* is an absurdly enigmatic professor who is on a quest for the Word which he describes in various occasions as "companion not to life, but death" (159), "a golden nugget on the tongue" (186), that elusive kernel...the key", the moment of my rehabilitation" (202), and "a terrible fire"(192). From these conflicting metaphorical definitions, Bernth Linfors concludes that the Word is some form of cabalistic wisdom which is precious, powerful and associated with death and redemption (203). If Linfors' definition is anything to go by, Professor's search may be viewed as a quest for the meaning of existence; or since it is the quest for the essence of death, it may be considered as an attempt to seek immortality through the conquest of death itself. Professor believes that if can understand the secret of death he will not only fulfill his intellectual yearning for knowledge but he will also have access to the meaning of life itself. Professor first seeks this knowledge in the Christian church but gets involved in unorthodox preaching of the word and mismanagement of church funds. He gets excommunicated without getting the true essence of the' Word he is looking for. After failing to get his quest through

Christian religion Professor hopes to use the Ogun festival to get an answer to his puzzle. But he fails to recognize the fact that Western and African traditional religions are fundamentally different. African traditional religion defies the logic of the Western world through the interconnectedness of the African cosmology of cyclical time. The unborn, the living, the ancestors and gods exist simultaneously without definite boundaries. Professor's ignorance of this brings him in confrontation with Ogun during the festival. This leads to Professor's death. Professor represents western knowledge which in some respects conflicts with the African world view. Soyinka in this play subtly calls attention to the kind of legacy that the new African states were inheriting from colonial powers in the domains of education, politics, economics and culture especially as African realities were not taken into consideration. That is why African states have remained dependent on western forms of education, financial institutions and western instruments of governance. The results in some of these states are what may be termed political gangsterism, economic indebtedness and cultural hybridity – issues that impair the spirit of nationhood. *The Road* is also a play about corruption, political hooliganism, wanton exploitation of resources and environmental degradation which are posing problems of nationhood till today.

Conclusion

This study has examined Soyinka's manipulation of some African festivals in his plays to address the problem of nationhood in Africa. The festivals in question include the harvest festival dramatized in *Kongi's Harvest*, Ogun festival in *The Road* and the national celebration of independence in *A Dance of the Forests*. The study in the first part has presented each festival the way it is normally celebrated in Africa. In the second part the paper demonstrates that rather than dwell on the festivals, Soyinka is concerned with the partition of Africa, the creation of states and the difficulties of building nationhood. That is why the normal activities that characterize the festivals in the three plays are reduced to scanty reports from a few characters. Soyinka's point is that the creation of African states without any consideration of factors that foster nationhood was a fundamental mistake. This is what is responsible for most of the instability in the continent today. In other words, the nation lays a good foundation for the state and not vice versa.

In political science, nation is often used synonymously with state or country to refer both to the territory, government and the holder of sovereignty which shapes the fundamental norms governing a particular people. Ernest Renan in 'What Is a Nation?' in *Nation and Narration* refers to a nation as "a spiritual family, the outcome of the profound complications of history;

a spiritual family, not a group determined by the shape of the earth” (18-19) while Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* argues that a nation is:

... an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow - members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (15)

Similarly, Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd in *Understanding Political Ideas and Movements* define nation as “a group of people, who believe themselves to constitute a nation, have things in common with each other and share a sense of nationhood” (5). To John Franklin in “Ethnicity in American Life: A Historical Perspective”:

[...] ethnicity like nation refers to an affiliation of people who share similar cultural characteristics. Members of ethnic groups share common languages, religious beliefs, cultural traditions and customs, value systems and nominative orientations. They also share a similar worldview, an ethnic consciousness – a peoplehood. (154)

In the above definitions, no mention of territorial demarcations is made, meaning that nations may cut across territorial boundaries of state or country. People who share a common history or ethnic origin, memory, language, culture, belief systems, dreams, aspirations and more especially, people who wish to live together may be thought of as constituting a nation.

Evidently, what we have in most of Africa today are random and chaotic political states with political and geographical boundaries grouping heterogeneous peoples who may have nothing in common and who are ruled by principles of Western democracy and capitalism. Definitely misunderstanding, antagonism and conflict become characteristics of these jumbled states. However the message Soyinka is driving home is that since African festivals are very popular events these should be used as occasions for critical examination and planning for the future and not for complacent rejoicing and merry making. National and commemorative festivals in particular should be used as a platform for critiquing the postcolonial state so as to foster peace, harmony and development for it is only through such conditions that a nation is built.

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