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THE AFRICAN INTELLECTUAL AND THE MAKING OF SELFHOOD IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN*

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, the autobiography is fast becoming a form of literary expression through which writers address various issues concerning their identity as well as socio-political realities in society. For African intellectuals, the urgency of the post-independence realities confronting different countries on the continent makes it imperative for them to deploy their life narratives beyond the traditional ends which autobiographical works are generally expected to address. It is in light of this that this study probes into Wole Soyinka's making of selfhood in his recent autobiographical work *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006). While trying to investigate how the writer creates a new identity for himself through his life narrative, the study argues that the prevailing circumstances around the individual intellectual in the postcolonial environment should be seen as major determining factors in the representation of the life of the public intellectual in Africa. It identifies the pains of colonialism, the failure of post-independence leadership as well as the lack of promise in contemporary administrations in most African states as exemplified by Nigeria in Soyinka's narrative as the key factors mediating the composition of life narratives by public intellectuals in Africa.

In this research report, Soyinka's approach to history, memory, exile and nationalism are closely examined towards a better appreciation of his personality as well as his stance on various issues which continue to crop up in view of the dislocations which have constituted hindrances to the progress of Nigeria. The thesis also examines how Soyinka produces individual and communal agency as an African intellectual whose activism often translates to commitment in his literary works. The work draws the conclusion that the composition of the lives of individuals, and by extension public intellectuals especially in Africa, is often a product of both internal and external factors which combine to determine the personality of the subjects of life narratives.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Jendele Hungbo

15th February, 2008

To all the minds that see value in the search for knowledge
and act to disable inhibiting variables in this noble endeavour.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE i

ABSTRACT ii

DECLARATION iii

DEDICATION iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT v

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1-26

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY, MEMORY AND THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL IN *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN* 27-53

CHAPTER THREE: UPROOTING AND RE-ROOTING: EXILE AND RETURN IN *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN* 54-75

CHAPTER FOUR: FROM NATIONALISM TO SOLIDARITY: AGENCY AND THE POLITCS OF COMMITMENT IN *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN* 76-94

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION 95- 99

BIBLIOGRAPHY 100- 108

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The world of public intellectuals appears to be a unique one in the sense that they have to grapple with a lot of challenges imposed on them by their roles in society and at the same time maintain a public image which complements their personality as individuals interested in the progress of society. This research report seeks to examine Wole Soyinka's making of the self in his autobiographical writing as exemplified in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006). In other words, examines how Soyinka portrays himself against the backdrop of his role as not just a writer but also a public intellectual dealing with the complexities of a typical postcolonial African state exemplified by the author's home country, Nigeria. While attempting to examine how Wole Soyinka provides justification for his actions and reactions to major issues in the fractured historical and socio-political development of his country, the work also deals with the way Soyinka tries to create his own identity as a radical iconoclast in his latest autobiographical work in view of the centrality of identity formation to the field of life writing. In addition, the work, in the process, seeks to reveal Soyinka's production of individual and communal agency in the way and manner he appropriates historical, cultural, political and social events in the text. This is done through a close examination of the way the writer engages with history, exile and commitment as well as an exploration of the literary and cultural peculiarities of his autobiographical writings. Through a close reading of the text, the work also attempts an interrogation of the basic assumptions concerning self-representation and the character of Wole Soyinka as a foremost public intellectual. By these means, the research report shows how Soyinka's personality is not merely a product of the writer's whims, but rather a creation of the 'disabling paradoxes of postcolonial politics' (Karlstrom 2003: 57) to which the writer has had to respond both in the literal as well as literary sense. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn,* this response or reaction takes the form of a narrative that dwells more on verisimilitude as it concerns the life of Soyinka and other people rather than fiction. The prevailing socio-political milieu in Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria after gaining independence from colonial

rule, therefore, has not just offered a creative platform upon which fictional narratives have been and would continue to be woven by writers, it has also lent itself to being evoked as partly responsible for the emergence of radical personalities who may appear to be in a hurry to see the emergence of a different continent arising from positive changes in individual nation-states.

With the peculiar situation in postcolonial Africa the role of the intellectual becomes more crucial as 'the modern intellectual is born of a crisis of categories and an assault on the exclusionary and proprietary' (Posnock, 1998: 2). This crisis of categories which Posnock invokes here has its roots in the historical antecedents of intellectuals as a group as well as the constant deployment of state power in varying forms in order to render them impotent in society. The challenge of being an intellectual in a society where power dominates, therefore, becomes more daunting resulting in certain kinds of actions, on the part of intellectuals, which may appear even excessive when viewed without the necessary appreciation of the informing context. As Soyinka observes early in the narrative:

> *T'agba ban de, a a ye ogun ja*—thus goes the Yoruba wisdom—"As one approaches an elder's status, one ceases to indulge in battles." Some hope! When that piece of wisdom was first voiced, a certain entity called Nigeria had not yet been thought of. (Soyinka, 2006: 5-6)

Soyinka then uses the urgency of the situation at hand, made evident by the lack of improvement in the political conditions of his country, as justification for his radical position even at an age when he is expected to have possibly retired from activism. Using the example of historical events in his home country Nigeria, Soyinka draws attention to this crisis and the kind of reactions it engenders from him as an active participant. The author's role in the Nigerian civil war, his refusal to be conscripted into the British army during the 1956 Suez War, his exploits in holding up a radio station in the aftermath of rigged federal elections are some of the instances which the writer uses to explain his role

in history in order to create the image of a public figure whose role in society transcends the artistic.

In tackling the question of agency, therefore, Soyinka seems to present in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* an idea of redemptive visionary agency for himself thereby bringing to the fore one more time 'the question of the character of radical political agency' (Msiska, 2006: 190). It is this kind of radicalism that often reverberates in the display of commitment by writers who find it difficult to accept the status quo in the polity. In a way, Soyinka's political agency tends to perform a dual role—a repositioning of the author for a better understanding of his behaviour and a kind of commitment to the community or in another sense the people, that have been a telling influence on the evolution of the Soyinka character. In so doing the author incorporates into this particular narrative the collaborative roles of other individuals, organizations as well as people of the various communities in the struggle against the injustices foisted on the nation by the various dictatorships that confront the reader in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn.* The active participation of the youth, musicians and artisans like the brave and committed driver who ferries Soyinka from Seme to Ipaja, for instance, point to his admittance of the communal nature of the struggle in the text. In his description of Fela Anikulapo Kuti as 'this most vocal and unrelenting dissident being' (29), Soyinka acknowledges the importance of the role of the musician like he does that of numerous other activists like Ojetunji Aboyade, Beko, Bola Ige, Moshood Abiola and his bosom friend Femi Johnson, among others, in the homage section with which he opens the narrative.

Soyinka's literary corpus, as Msiska concurs, 'offers us a radical and transformative concept of selfhood that insists on a rigorous critique of subjectivity, but which nevertheless retains the idea of an essential humanity as a condition for selfhood and subjectivity' (Msiska, 2006: 190). As the autobiographer takes on agency for the self, therefore, he also invariably stands to be an agent for the community detailing its experience and trajectory through history and memory which are often considered major factors in the overall well being of society. It is then important to note Bjorklund's (1998: 17) observation that 'the definition of self in autobiography is shaped not only by

historical changes in the available vocabularies of the self …, but also by the constraints, complexities, and opportunities of the social situation of presenting an autobiography' most especially when man is considered as a social being. This is why this thesis will conclude by attempting to interrogate claims of eccentricity laid against Wole Soyinka and similar public intellectuals who hold views which in most cases tend to differ from those of the majority in society. By so doing it may be possible to further establish the underlying motivation and justification for Wole Soyinka's radical political agency as a public intellectual whose actions are greatly influenced by the circumstances and situations of his location. Here, the work intends to rely on the work of David Weeks and Jamie James in trying to put the issue in perspective. The two authors view eccentricity as 'every conceivable deviation from normal behaviour' (Weeks and James, 1995: 4). They are, however, quick to point out that 'exactly how much deviation from the norm it takes to qualify as a true eccentric is a vexed issue…. For eccentricity is a trait that everyone partakes of to a lesser or greater extent' (ibid: 6). Indeed, it would also be pertinent to ask what makes people in society see themselves as more conformist than the so-called eccentric or what would make them assume that an individual nonconformist character is not more reasonable. Eccentricity can then be said to be a socially constructed label which may even be used at times by the establishment to dissuade people from listening to or following the line of thought and aberrant behaviour of certain intellectuals who stand up to the excesses of state power. In this instance the media, broadly defined, becomes one of the contributing factors to this kind of perception. In the light of all these intricacies it is pertinent to set in perspective the justification for embarking on this kind of study which seeks to further provide a greater level of understanding for the nature, character and disposition of intellectuals especially in the post-colonial African setting.

A major question that often arises in an enterprise of this nature has to do with the motivation for embarking on a study in this particular area and on a particular writer. Though writers have for a very long time written biographical and autobiographical works, not many people thought these were worth much critical consideration. This is in spite of the recognition of the importance of this genre of writing which occupies 'a

central place as *the* key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and every shape and essence of human culture itself' (Olney 1980: 8). Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* is a striking autobiographical work in many ways. Apart from being a work through which the author attempts to do a kind of self-packaging or repackaging, it offers us an opportunity to take a trip into the life of the author as a public intellectual who has had to contend with the conspiracies of power on different fronts. To a large extent, Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* is not merely descriptive. It is also productive as the performativity of the text makes it an agent for self-formation in line with the observation by Tobias Doring: 'Through telling his or her own life the autobiographer therefore turns into the author of his or her own self' (Doring, 2006: 71).

In offering an explanation for Soyinka's outspokenness, the book provides for us a platform on which to appreciate further the contention of Amina Mama as regards intellectuals in Africa. In her words:

> Africa's post-colonial intellectuals may generally have complicated identities… given a critical consciousness borne out of the contradictions between decades of politically correct constitutional and policy reforms, and the lived reality of persisting inequalities and injustices. (Mama, 2004)

In Nigeria, for instance, these inequalities are further reinforced by the adventurism of the military establishment which constantly instills fear into the civil populace. Soyinka admits this fear in his narration of the experience of his fellow dramatist Ola Rotimi who was humiliated and horsewhipped by soldiers at a roadblock. As Soyinka often advocates, it would require the kind of courage exhibited by a character like the lady radiographer Dupe Oke, who refuses to accept her fate with acquiescence after she is slapped by a soldier:

> Dupe flew at him and sank her teeth into his face. It took nearly the entire crowd of motorists awaiting their turn to be searched to pry open her teeth and release

> the soldier…. One of the travelers raced to the nearest cantonment in Ibadan and returned with a superior officer and some military police in tow. The soldier, raw flesh dangling from his cheek was arrested and taken away. (147)

The violent reaction of Dupe reminds us of the cliché of violence begetting violence. At the same time it seems to illustrate the conviction that it will take intellectuals who not only speak up but act even at the risk of their lives to reverse the trend of injustice in any society.

There have been studies and publications dealing with life writing in general. In a similar vein, some critical work has also been done on Wole Soyinka's writings including his autobiographies. However, his fictional works seem to engage more of the attention of critics than his autobiographical works. In addition to this is the fact that some of the critical work dealing with Soyinka's autobiographical writing tend to either lump it together with another writer's work in similar or varying thematic, artistic, or generic categories, or take it on alongside Soyinka's fictional work(s)[1]. This kind of approach, though effective in making comparative analysis and judgments on the works of different authors or even different works of the same author, tends to leave little room for an in-depth study and appreciation of some of his autobiographies which have much relevance to the critical enterprise. At the moment there are five works which deal with the life experiences of Wole Soyinka. In *The Man Died* (1972) we encounter Soyinka's narration of his prison experience after the political crisis of the 1960s. *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981) deals with the first eleven years of the author growing up in a parsonage and learning the basics of life in an environment full of inspiring events and paradoxes imposed by a blend of tradition and modernity. In a way, therefore, *Ake* deals with the ambivalence of modernity in an African setting 'captured by the predicament of African Christian converts' (Macamo, 2005: 1). *Isara: A Voyage Around Essay* (1989) is the author's fictionalization of his father's generation while *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1994) portrays the young Soyinka as an artist and political activist especially in

[1] See Hodges (2007), for example, where *Ake* and *Isara* are examined alongside *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*

his internalization of the political complexities of the Western region of his home country. *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006), on its part, represents an account of 'the political events, including Soyinka's own imprisonment and exile, which modified (and cemented) his early attachment to the ritual archetype of Ogun' (Hodges 2007: 6). Though the latest work shares some similarities with *The Man Died* and *Ibadan* in this regard, it offers more comprehensive material for the discussion of Soyinka's personality, the making of selfhood and the trajectory of the author as a public intellectual in a postcolonial environment. The work is, therefore, of value in so many ways. In the first instance, it will help us reflect on the life of the African intellectual as exemplified by Soyinka. Again it will explain how the formation of the African intellectual's personality goes beyond the individual character to the natural sociality of the person as a product of 'necessary social relationships' (Gyekye 1997: 42). It is in this direction that Judith Coullie et al argue that there is 'the involvement of a host of people in the making of auto/biographical accounts, thus challenging the monological notions of authorship and the subject that are associated with European Modernity' (Coullie et al, 2006: 45).

This invariably introduces us to a particular understanding of personhood in African thought which abhors any form of egoistic individualism. The way in which history and nationalism are reconstructed in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* not only differs from the way they are done in the previous works but also offers a varied interpretation of the writer's experience in the resolve 'never to call deeply to anything as mine' (20). The choice of *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006), therefore, is to open discourse in this area and instigates further exploration of several other issues concerning this genre of writing in Africa and the entire postcolony. Also, as a kind of late life autobiography of Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* is also likely to offer us rich material with which to further understand the character of the writer. The text which was published the same year the author turned seventy fits into the category of age autobiography or late life writing. As a late-life piece, the text deals with the author's middle and late life, two stages which are very crucial, though no less than childhood, to the understanding of the individual character and the recasting of image. It is these two stages that embody what Cronje (1982: 1) conceives as 'the construing activity of each individual, rooted in his personal

individuality or self and underlying all his behaviour by way of volitional decisions shaped by this construing individuality.' In this case, the memory-laden individual is in most cases equipped with great capacity to capture the experience of moving ages in any given era.

However, it is pertinent at this stage to define the scope and limitations of this thesis as it is not feasible to take on every dimension that can be imagined as far as the issues at stake are concerned. This study examines the way Wole Soyinka deals with history, memory, exile as well as nationalism in an attempt to redefine himself as a public intellectual and create a new personality through his autobiographical writing. It tries to find out what major factors are responsible for Soyinka's character, behaviour and evolution as exemplified by the chosen text. This will also involve an attempt to understand how the peculiarity of a writer's historical experiences such as is the case in postcolonial societies may lead to the construction of stereotypes by society aided at times by the veiled influence of the state. In other words, the work deals with the influence of the postcolony on the formation of the personality of public intellectuals. Put in another form, it seeks to establish how the overwhelming failure of post-independence leadership and social institutions continue to define the attitude of writers and public intellectuals who see commitment as a matter of necessity in the face of prevailing socio-political situations around them. The engagement with the above motifs would involve trying to interrogate Soyinka's deployment of history and how the writer goes beyond fashioning 'a personal narrative of the Nigerian crises' (Soyinka, 1996) to the 'exploration of exigencies by which the ex-colonized nation comes into existence, takes root, survives or self-destructs' (Chanda 2004: 124). It will also involve an examination of how Soyinka makes a critique of himself as a way of reconciliation with the responsibility placed on the writer by the peculiar nature of history surrounding him. As Soyinka himself puts it, this creative endeavour may well be a process of 'baring truth of one's history in order to exorcise the past and secure a collective peace of mind' (Soyinka 1999: 23). It also requires a mention that Soyinka's latest autobiography is not possibly the only material which can illustrate the thematic as well as artistic concerns raised in this project. As such, the limiting of the choice of primary text to *You Must Set Forth at*

Dawn is just a highlighting attempt which does not seek to detract in any way from the contributions of other autobiographical works of Wole Soyinka to the crystallization of his selfhood or the emergence of his personality as construed by his readers. This does not also seek to, in any way, privilege the text over any other in its category though its newness naturally attracts some kind of attention and desire to pry into it just as it was with Soyinka's earlier works at the point of their emergence.

A major concern is however likely to arise from the use of the experience of a Nigerian intellectual or even, in a larger sense, the socio-political realities of Nigeria as a barometer for determining the situation with intellectuals in the whole of the African continent. Much as this fear may be founded, experience over the years has shown striking similarities in the way and manner the state relates with intellectuals and the way intellectuals themselves react to prevailing circumstances in their countries. One finds, for instance, a great deal of correlation between the experiences and reactions of the Kenyan writer and intellectual Ngugi wa Thiong'o and those of Wole Soyinka. These similarities, which may occur to varying degrees between different countries, point to the fact that the intellectual in one African country may not be completely different from his or her counterpart in another country on the continent. As they face similar challenges on different fronts, we find a lot of shared characteristics across different boundaries. These shared characteristics must have been the informing principle behind the argument of Adewale Maja-Pearce concerning the socio-political situation in Nigeria and the rest of Africa: 'And what is true of Nigeria is equally true of the continent as a whole' (Maja-Pearce, 1991: xii).

One major limitation of the study will stem from the fact that no single text can completely capture the life of a writer like Wole Soyinka who has had a very eventful life both as a writer and as a public intellectual. Considering the fact that this is Soyinka's fifth autobiographical work, picking only one of them can hardly be adequate in working towards the formation of his personality. The limit of time and space available for this research however makes it inexpedient to adopt a holistic stance in the choice of primary texts. The selectivity of experience when it comes to life writing is also a major limiting

factor in a study of this nature. Every autobiographer merely selects what he or she considers important in the course of the narrative. It is not even possible for the reader to determine what the author deliberately leaves out or what he has failed to include since there is never an agreement as to what an autobiographer must include in his or her work. Again, the capacity of the memory of the individual as the major archive on which we have to rely for 'predicting the past' (Garuba 2004: 201) and drawing conclusions on the present is often a major challenge in an enterprise of this nature. The fictionality of memory and also the tension between fact and fiction as far as literary works especially of the life narrative mode are concerned create a great challenge for this kind of study. Autobiographies rely largely on the memory of the author and as such certain facts may have been genuinely forgotten or mis-stored, while others may even be repressed or deliberately foregrounded to achieve specific aims which the writer considers crucial to his own interest or that of a particular group he intends to privilege.

A clear teleological vision runs through *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* as Soyinka leads us to understand the causes of most of his actions and the need for commitment to the cause of justice as a public intellectual. The main purpose appears to be a bid to set the records straight especially about Soyinka's personality. The author gives an early hint as he devotes a section of the book to 'Early Intimations':

> The suggestion that I was possessed quite early in life by the creative-combative deity Ogun is a familiar commentary of some literary critics who stretch my creative fascination with that deity, undeniable in my works, beyond its literary purlieu. If I were persuaded of that, I would have headed long ago for the nearest babalawo for the rites of exorcism! I am, contrary to all legitimately cited evidence—and none more evident than the accused's own history—actually a closet glutton of tranquility. (35)

So from early in the narrative the reader begins to see the evidence of an attempt by the author to define himself against certain prejudicial views and assumptions which may not

be too palatable to him. The above passage becomes necessary in Soyinka's narrative as he is later to intimate us with the propaganda mounted against him by the military regime of Sani Abacha:

> When the dictator's specially created smear brigade began its offensive through the publication of an obscenely libelous journal under the cynical name of Conscience International, circulated worldwide, with a special complementary copy to Emory's president, he promptly raised the level of protection. (398-9)

Similar campaigns which attempted to portray Soyinka as a violent individual who was also willing to perpetrate violent acts against his country and its government featured on government controlled electronic and print media during the days of the military regimes confronted by the author.

Engagement with socio-political events is not a new feature in Wole Soyinka's writing. As an acclaimed literary figure he has, through his literature and activism, carved a niche for himself as an intellectual of no mean distinction. As Onookome Okome observes:

> He will remain an important figure among conscientious writers and political analysts of the African continent for as long as the world of literature shapes our sense of things, of history and culture, politics and street life, gender and issues about women, hope and despondency, life and death. (Okome, 2004: 1)

In admitting the relevance of Soyinka as both writer and activist based on an unusual radical humanism, Biodun Jeyifo speaks of 'his stupendous literary productivity…and a career in the theatre, popular culture and political activism matching his literary corpus in scope, originality and propensity for generating controversy' (Jeyifo, 2004: 1). This kind of acclaim, achieved through a combination of literary prowess and political activism, makes Soyinka to fit into the description of an intellectual. In the light of this, the idea of the public intellectual will be closely examined in the following section.

The word 'intellectual' is a relatively new expression in political and literary discourses. Ross Posnock traces its emergence to a period around 1898 when what is commonly known as the Dreyfus Affair attracted heated debates among writers and social commentators in France and even beyond.[2] The supporters of Dreyfus were scornfully branded *Les Intellectuels* by those who initially saw no logic in their position. But as Posnock argues:

> Apart from their ultimate success in winning Dreyfus's freedom, the Dreyfusards' most valuable legacy was their challenge to a dichotomized social configuration that kept mind and power, culture and politics, static and separate realms…. The emergence of the modern intellectual depends on, and is simultaneous with, the making of a political public sphere. (Posnock, 1998: 2)

The implication of Posnock's argument is that to be an intellectual is to believe in a particular cause and at the same time be willing to engage in public debate or elicit commitment to such a cause in the open.

Italian writer and political theorist, Antonio Gramsci, remains perhaps the most cited authority on the core debates surrounding the idea of the intellectual. This is often done in relation to Gramsci's postulations in his *Prison Notebooks* (1992) where he dwells extensively on the roles of intellectuals in society. The hallmark of Gramsci's work can, however, be located in his distinction between two main types of intellectuals: 'traditional intellectuals' and 'organic intellectuals.' While traditional intellectuals are usually designated as performing specific intellectual roles in society and often work in cohort with the state and more recently the market to provide justification for the status quo, their organic counterparts, Gramsci argues, stand outside the power structures and offer a critique of the existing reality thereby eliciting a kind of bottom-up ontology in the interpretation of reality. Though interesting at the surface level, a critical look at the historical experiences of mankind and intellectual practice points in the direction of the

[2] The eventual victors in the Dreyfus Affair were those who were later to be known as the Dreyfusards whose intellectual challenge to the position of the anti-Semitist French nationalists resulted in the prevalence of justice in an incident that has become a major reference point in global intellectual discourse.

absence of a clear-cut demarcation between the two major categories identified by Gramsci as both cannot be said to be mutually exclusive. The point that comes out clearly here, though, is to the effect that the mere appellation of 'writer' is not enough qualification into the class of intellectuals. Though writing may provide a veritable background or launching pad for the public intellectual the business of intellection goes far beyond just putting pen to paper.

To qualify as an intellectual, therefore, a writer needs to satisfy certain criteria which extend beyond creativity. Relying on Tzvetan Todorov, John McGowan identifies these criteria thus:

> "The first is that the individual in question is engaged in an activity of the mind resulting in the production of a work…. The second is that the individual is not content simply to produce a work but is also concerned about the state of society and participates in public debate. A poet shut off in an ivory tower or a scientist in a laboratory is not an intellectual." (McGowan, 2002: 1)

Writing and intellectualism thus become different sites and different appellations (though each might need the other's collaboration) as Todorov in tracing the genealogy of the intellectual concludes that 'the intellectual cannot be replaced by the expert: the latter knows facts; the former discusses values. It is in their interest not to ignore each other, but there is a difference in their positions' (McGowan, 2002: 2). Edward Said puts the argument more succinctly:

> The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. [He is also] someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'etre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (Said 1996: 11)

The various generic categories in literature offer in one way or the other, an opportunity for the writer or the intellectual as the case may be to express himself or herself on different issues. The nonfiction form, however, provides a platform for a more direct representation of reality having to do with events unfolding around the writer. In this case, the autobiography seems a very attractive genre for the individual writer or intellectual who seeks to lay bare before the reader a representation of his personality and his role in shaping public life.

In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006) Wole Soyinka explores a personal narrative of his own personal experiences of harassment, incarceration, betrayal, and exile within a framework of literary and historical references as tropes for the exposition of the injustice prevalent in Nigeria under various political dispensations. In the text, Soyinka defines himself in a hard terrain made more dangerous by the ascension to power of nine military dictatorships separated by brief intervals of precarious civilian epochs. The chronology of political events in Nigeria since independence which appears to replace the preface to the text with acknowledgements coming only at the end immediately signals the urgency of the situation the writer is about to unveil. In a sense, therefore, the work sets out to show the dangers constituted by individuals and institutions who indulge in what Soyinka himself labels 'deep contempt for those virtues that constitute the goals of other lovers of freedom' (Soyinka 2004: 28). The author's imagining of power, or the unbridled display of it, then becomes a main feature of this text. His sympathy for his country, and by extension the average post-colonial nation state which suddenly finds itself in the hands of a political elite bereft of progressive ideas that can benefit the state and its people runs through the narrative. In trying to justify this kind of representation which some critics are likely to see as excessively pessimistic Soyinka states:

> I was not pessimistic about the future but extremely cautious, having once come into contact with the first generation of leaders in my student days in England. The enemy, as I identified it, was power and its pitfalls, a cautionary motif that dominated my would-be independence play, *A Dance of the Forests*. (53)

These ‘disabling paradoxes of postcolonial politics’ (Karlstrom 2003: 57) which Mbembe also worries about and labels ‘aesthetics and stylistics of power’ (Mbembe 1992: 9) has continued to be a source of concern to scholars, writers and other intellectuals desirous of witnessing a change in this mode of behaviour, especially of leaders whose abuse and misapplication of power continues to dwarf the brutal manipulations perpetrated by the colonial establishment on the continent. Mbembe and Karlstrom both see the predicament of the postcolonial African state and thus express the same passion in different ways. *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* covers Soyinka’s young and adult life, appears as a follow-up to *Ake: The Years of Childhood* and also overlaps with *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (1994). In demonstrating the import of being an intellectual through the representation of a life of literary and political activism spanning a period of about forty years, Soyinka places before the reader a very personal chronicle of political events full of sketches of his comrades and detractors as well as ferocious rejoinders to his critics. In the course of doing all this, the author attempts to reposition himself, explaining why he took certain decisions and acted in particular ways on certain occasions in his life. The tales of international politicking and the eventual Nobel victory with which Soyinka spices his narrative are additional image-building devices which present him as an internationally recognized individual.

At another level, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* provides an alternative to the hegemonic narratives which exist in relation to Nigeria’s socio-political development. The Nigerian civil war, for instance, is one major aspect of Nigerian history on which a lot has been written. Attempts have also been made to privilege certain narratives of that aspect of the nation’s experience over others. In the present text Soyinka imagines the war in multiple dimensions hence, his delineation of it as ‘uncivil wars.’ For the writer there can be nothing civil about the mindlessness with which the war was prosecuted. A major counter-narrative evolves, for instance, in Soyinka’s presentation of his dealings with Olusegun Obasanjo during the war. Obasanjo himself had earlier written about his encounter with Soyinka in his memoir titled *My Command.* A counter to Obasanjo’s story emerges at a time when he is presiding over the country as an elected president:

> I had crammed my lines so efficiently that I still remember them years afterward, when Obasanjo published his account of the war in *My Command*. There, among other lies, he claimed that I had asked him to name his price for letting Banjo's troops through the West! (132).

For Soyinka there can be nothing as painful as allowing the impression created of him and his meeting with Obasanjo during the war to remain in the public domain unchallenged or become part of Nigeria's history in the final analysis. It is in this regard that the writer provides a counternarrative:

> What I found impossible to stomach, however, were his constant attempts to rewrite—and tendentiously to boot!—a history of which I had been a part, in no matter how minor a role. And so, both privately and publicly, I was drawn into the repetitive, excruciatingly boring and frustrating imposition of setting him right. (133)

This passage clearly illustrates how counter-narratives become a significant tool in the hands of the autobiography whose intent of the making of the self is prone to jeopardy from hegemonic narratives when such are left unchallenged.

Two major preoccupations then stand out in this autobiography: the writer's desire to prove a point that he is not always a lone ranger in society or the attempt to justify this deviation in cases where it occurred, and the exposure of anarchy and political insincerity as the major culprits in the predicament of postcolonial Africa. In reacting to a common critique of his personality as a man highly disposed to violence, for instance, Soyinka attempts to convince the reader of his obsession with peace. Beyond the accusations of dissidence and non-conformity leveled against public intellectuals like Soyinka the state goes further to invoke violence as an attribute in order to discredit radical elements in society. In the accusation of the disposition to violence is implied a kind of eccentricism which people often attribute to the writer. While there are often debates centred on his roles individually and in different organizations, ranging from his line-crossing trip to

Biafran territory during the civil war, his holding up of a radio station to his founding of the Pirates Confraternity, Soyinka maintains that these are actions intended at upholding the sanctity of justice without which no society can be at peace. In a sense, therefore, the writer gets a rare opportunity to write back to different kinds of insinuations concerning his identity and personality. It is for this reason that the following section of this chapter will attempt to briefly evaluate the autobiography as a literary category in itself.

The challenges of postcolonial African literature are enormous. In the different genres of poetry, drama and prose fiction scholars have laboured to situate African literature within the context of a distinct category of art and, at the same time, as a part of the global literary tradition. One literary mode that is fast becoming a phenomenon which the entire literary world would continue to grapple with is the autobiography. In fact, this form of writing 'has also been recognized as a distinct literary genre and, as such, an important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction' (Anderson, 2004:1). It is indeed necessary to begin to take more interest in the study of autobiographical writing by African authors as well as seek to identify certain features which may set the African autobiography apart especially in the face of the diversity of literary forms. In addition to this is the need to begin to explore the latent possibilities inherent in studies of life writing by African writers as a means of forging a better understanding of cultural as well as socio-political principles and expressions which may be found in their actions and literary works. It is important to note here that life writing, an expression described by Christopher Thurman as a 'necessary tautology', in view of the fact that 'all writing comes from tangible or imagined life experiences' (Thurman, 2006: 109), would encompass diverse forms of narratives dealing with the personal experience of the subjects of such works either as relayed by other people or by the protagonists themselves. Such narratives could come across as memoirs, diaries, or even letters. When life writing appears as a memoir, it can be further categorized into two sub-genres of biography and autobiography where the former represents an account of an individual's life, or a part of it, written by another person and the latter an account of the life of a person written by the protagonist himself. In a sense, therefore, a memoir and by

implication an autobiography does not pretend to represent a complete history but rather 'the testimony of a writer who has had personal knowledge of the events, the era, or the people that are its subjects' (Buss, 2006: 2). It should be acknowledged at this point that writers of memoirs, be they of the biographical or autobiographical variant, often fashion their narratives in specific ways to show how memory and imagination can interact to reconstruct and recreate historical settings, events and characters.

In trying to arrive at a concise definition of autobiography as a distinct form of life writing, Shaun Viljoen contends that autobiography 'as conventionally defined, or even [auto]biography as fictional transformation in the form of creative non-fiction or disguised as a novel, can be constructed or interpreted as reification of the individual' (Viljoen, 2005: 68). Beyond this reification of the individual, however, autobiographies become more significant in providing interpretation for events far beyond the lives of their subjects. As observed by Peter Titlestad:

> One knows too well enough that autobiographers are vehicles for more than a mere life….Cardinal John Henry Newman called his autobiography *Apologia pro vita sua*. *Apologia* means not apology but justification, defence—it is not a statement of regret; it is a polemical work….It is an attempt to preserve what might otherwise be lost—the author's perceptions of the events in which he had played a part. (Titlestad , 2006: 16)

This argument presupposes an interplay of internal and external factors in the composition of life narratives which allows us to forge a better understanding of the individual, his or her life as well as events affecting or affected by such life. This invariably leads us to the question of the making of selfhood which is a central purpose in autobiographical writing. The idea of the intellectual has been dealt with earlier in. But it is also pertinent to mention that the question of selfhood becomes a major concern for the public intellectual perhaps more than anyone else in the society.

The self, thus, becomes a brand which must be carefully managed to achieve a certain end. The writer of the autobiography can then be said to be an agent for the self in the process of creating a unique brand personality which suits the mission and purpose of the individual. The self, being a major determinant of an individual's identity and personality, can be said to be the main focus of the auto/biographer whose preoccupation is 'to chart illuminating connections between past and present, life and work- that is the biographer's aesthetic, that is his or her recreative process' (Holroyd 2002: 19). The self can then be taken as 'a dynamic, reflexive, symbolic, mediating agent and an object or container, composed of other parts of the person such as personality and identity' (Rubistein and Madeiros 2005: 48). Part of autobiography's purpose therefore, is to 'fix the self for all time, to put forth the idea that the autobiographer matters and that his life is significant in the supposed order of things' (Alexander 1997). With the centrality of the self to autobiographical writing it will then become clear that this kind of writing in the first person narrative mode offers a wide range of opportunities for the writer to reposition himself or herself while at the same time making statements, either subjective or objective, about himself and events which have shaped his being and which have also informed his actions and reactions at certain times in life. In addition to this is the potential of life narratives to, like other forms of writing, perform a purgatory role for both individual and society and by extension assume the effect of assuaging ill feelings to a certain degree. As Kanneh (1998: 89) puts it, 'It is a cathartic remoulding and strengthening activity, the creation of new identity, on an individual and a collective level.' But the bid to attain a certain kind of selfhood usually comes with its own implications as 'such a freedom to be "one's own person"… is not without its costs' (Wikan 1995: 274). While the consequences may be palatable for the individual at times, they may turn quite unfavourable at other times. For some writers, like Bertolt Bretcht, Antonin Artaud, Milan Kundera, Dambudzo Marechera and Wole Soyinka among others, a unique kind of radicalism constitutes self-defining moments both in their writing careers and public life. This kind of writers then become serious challengers to orthodoxies and conventions in varied ways' (Iji 1991: 1) Their radicalism, mostly viewed as a kind of eccentric behaviour in both the artistic and public sense, continues to generate debates around these writers, their artistic stance as well as public image.

There is no denying the fact that auto/biographical narratives offer us an immeasurable opportunity to have access to the kind of interpretation certain individuals give to life, their worldviews and disposition towards certain events with which they have had to relate directly or otherwise. This may well have explained the popularity of this genre of writing around the eighteenth century, especially in Europe and North America, when writers and great thinkers like Rousseau (*Confessions*, 1782), Benjamin Franklin (*Autobiography*, 1784), Casanova (*Histoire de ma fuite de prisons de Venise*, 1788) and Gibbon (*Memoirs*, 1796) came out with narratives of their personal life experiences. The new verve of the Trans Atlantic slave trade abolitionist struggle around this period may also have been responsible for the coming into reckoning of works written by African slaves on the verge of freedom.

Though it is quite possible that some Africans, either taken to the West as slaves or even back home, had written autobiographical works which never saw the light of the day, there are records of personal life narratives by slaves who later regained their freedom in the course of the abolition campaign. For instance, and as earlier observed, the first directly abolitionist publication in English by an African and which also chronicled the personal life experience of the author was written by a Ghanaian slave Ottobah Cugoano whose *Thoughts And Sentiments on The Evil And Wicked Traffic of The Commerce of The Human Specie* was published in 1787. Brycchan Carey (2002) describes Cugoano's work as 'part autobiography, part political treatise, and part Christian Exegesis'. Apart from the biography of Ignatius Sancho published by Joseph Jekyll in 1782 as *The Letters of The Late Ignatius Sancho*, the strongly abolitionist and famous autobiography of Olaudah Equano (*The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equano, or Gustavus Vassa The African),* a slave believed to have been born in Nigeria, was published in 1789.

During the colonial period in Africa some individuals used their privileged ability to read and write to create what Barber (2006: 3) refers to as 'tin-trunk texts' which 'involved a fervent regard for the capacity of reading and writing to enhance personal and social existence and create a particular kind of civilized and civic community' (p.5). These texts

which were, in the main, epistolary pieces, diaries, tracts, obituary notices and similar forms of writing provide us with another early example of life writing in various African communities. Though some of these texts were hand written and some others were available to the public only after the demise of their authors, they provide us with a body of materials which have become quite relevant in the study of African life writing. There is however a paradigm shift in post-independence autobiographical writing with various writers attempting to either show their radical commitment in the roles they play in the evolution of their societies or trying to write back to earlier publications or archival records. This is why it is important to evaluate autobiographical works written by African writers and intellectuals against the background of the postcolonial experiences and traditions which produce them. This kind of evaluation at the theoretical level especially is the main preoccupation of the following section in this chapter.

In a research of this nature, the options available for providing a theoretical footing for the work may appear to be multiple. However, certain theories work better than others in certain situations. As a result there is often the need to make a careful choice in order to approach the questions raised from perspectives that would illuminate them considerably. Developments in autobiographical writing over the years have made the field to become an area of interest in which many theories now compete. The environmental and historical scenarios determining this research are major factors to consider in giving it a theoretical direction. This work is, therefore, driven by theoretical considerations drawn mainly from postcolonialism. This is greatly informed by the fact that the role of the intellectual as a purveyor of truth[3] and also an unwitting participant in the oppression of the 'Third World' subject is a significant focus of postcolonial theory. The idea also of commitment especially in a postcolonial situation is such a central theme in the works of Wole Soyinka and many other public intellectuals on the African continent. This commitment is driven by three primary categories of analysis identified by Chidi Amuta. For him, history, the mediating subject by which he refers to the writer as well as the literary event which symbolizes the text will be the three tentative primary categories to

[3] 'Truth' is used here as a loose term considering the numerous debates around the existence of any such thing as a universal truth.

be considered in dealing with literature from Africa (Amuta, 1989). For Amuta, the writer is a product of his particular history and location as different historical experiences 'produce different formations of writers/performers who will in turn produce different kinds of literary artifacts' (Amuta, 1989: 83).

In tracing the trajectory of contemporary African literature, Neil Lazarus sees the postcolonial phase of revolutionary writing as a product of the reality which writers and the people have had to confront in various African countries after independence. As Lazarus argues, 'in casting themselves as revolutionaries, radical African intellectuals tended to follow Fanon's lead in criticizing the nationalists for conflating independence with freedom' (Lazarus, 1990: 11). Postcolonial theory incorporates the concepts of colonization, neocolonization, nationalism, transnationalism, history, exile, globalization, transculturalism, resistance, identity and agency among several other concerns. Since most of the issues mentioned here are relevant to this research, postcolonial theory seems a natural choice in placing the issues in perspective. A clear understanding of postcolonialism can also help in appreciating the personality of the dissident intellectual who often defies expectations of family, class, the establishment and, at times, the entire society.

As part of postcolonial literature, African literature has produced writers who combine writing with political activism. As observed by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 'postcolonial theory involves discussions about the experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, oppression, difference, gender, [and] place (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995: 2). The emergence of independent African states governed by indigenous Africans themselves after the experience of colonialism on the continent naturally lays the premise for new expectations and hopeful projections into the future of African nations. In most cases, like Soyinka exemplifies in Nigeria, the expectations and aspirations of the people whose euphoria and optimism at independence almost knew no bounds have still not translated into concrete development thereby resulting in a kind of literary and overt activism such as we are confronted with in the recent works of a number of African writers. This tendency, Ato Quayson cites Bart Moore-Gilbert as

observing, resonates in 'the writings and criticism of authors such as Chinua Achebe, Kamau Braithwaite, Wilson Harris, Wole Soyinka and others from the 1960s onwards' (Quayson, 2000: 2). The appearance on the scene of such intellectuals like Edward Said, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Nawal El Saadawi, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka who continually challenge the orthodoxy of the colonial empire continues to validate postcolonial theory and writing as a an area of scholarship that requires its own understanding.

As observed by Bart Moore-Gilbert:

> The last twenty-five years have witnessed an exponential growth in the literary-critical branches of both Postcolonialism and Autobiographical Studies. These sub-fields share thematic interests in issues of identity, cultural memory and agency; there are methodological convergences too, including a desire to reconsider established canons of primary texts, a commitment to inter-disciplinarity and, often, to the 'personal turn' in criticism. (Moore-Gilbert, 2006: 9)

In postcolonialism, therefore, is implicated the numerous factors having to do with history, identity formation or self representation, as well as an understanding of the background and motivating factors behind the present socio-political reality in most African states. The example of Nigeria which Soyinka narrates through the window of his own life in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, thus, provides a paradigmatic opportunity for the understanding of the intricate dimensions of colonialism and its aftermath. It is therefore significant to attempt an understanding of how contemporary African writers have 'grappled with the colonial legacy and other disillusioning realities of post-colonial politics' (Gover, Conteh-Morgan and Bryce, 2000:2). Postcolonial theory, as Couze Venn observes, opens 'critical spaces for new narratives of becoming and emancipation' (Venn, 2006: 1). It is then apparent that there is the need to better understand the character and aspirations of the individual postcolonial subject as well as those of the

community to which he belongs and in certain cases seeks to mobilize as illustrated in the writing of most African intellectuals.

The first chapter of this research report has discussed the link between identity and the autobiographical form of writing. It has equally examined the issue of intellectualism and set a conceptual and theoretical framework for the thesis with a review of literature relevant to the work. The second chapter takes a look at the way the autobiography engages with history and memory as major tools in the making of selfhood. Drawing from Soyinka's deployment of history and memory, the chapter explores the place and use of history and memory in the representation of the lives of public intellectuals especially when this is done through the genre of the autobiography. Major examples are drawn from the primary text. The example of Soyinka's response to Obasanjo's *My Command*, his explanation of what motivated him to travel to Eastern Nigeria during the civil war cited earlier, his claim that the Middle Belt region was involved in armed resistance possibly before the Igbo, the hint that Odumegwu Ojukwu meant more than secession in declaring war and the complicity of Victor Banjo are some of the illustrations that would be drawn from the text. It draws major distinctions between official and alternative history without losing sight of the implications and fault lines of each. The chapter also tries to put in perspective what Eleni Coundouriotis views as a form of 'transgression [which] addresses the continued deconstruction of ethnographic paradigms' (Coundouriotis, 1999: 116-7). The idea of history is interrogated while the concept of memory is also be viewed against the backdrop of the contention that memory and fantasy may not necessarily be inseparable (Ross, 1991).

Exile has become one of the major features of the lives of public intellectuals especially where the brutality of the state as far as home is concerned becomes unpredictably dangerous. Soyinka devotes an entire section of his book to the question of exile. 'The Road to Exile' attempts to justify the author's painful decision to relocate ostensibly for him to draw a line between inevitable exile and escapism. This is why the third chapter examines the various dimensions of exile in *You Must Set forth at Dawn*. It dwells on Soyinka's experience of exile as illustrated by the primary text and later uses this as a

platform for discussing the centrality of exile to postcolonial writing. Exile in this case is viewed from different angles including spatial and metaphoric forms of removal which invariably necessitates 'the need to overcome displacement' (Anyidoho, 1997:16) among African writers and the new army of African immigrants across the world. Again, as Isabelle de Courtivron contends, 'contemporary bilingual authors are inevitably, hybrids and exiles' (De Courtivron, 2007:32).

The fourth chapter deals with the vexed issues surrounding nationalism and commitment as a trend among African writers. It focuses on Soyinka's extra commitment beyond the arts and tries to relate this to how Soyinka himself contends that 'the revolutionary mood in society is a particularly potent tyrant' (Soyinka 1988:16) and attempt to relocate the concept of commitment which seemed not to hold much attraction for African writers especially after the attainment of independence from colonial rule by several countries on the continent in the 1960s. It also illustrates how writers seek to revalidate themselves within their communities by expressing loyalty to certain causes in order, possibly, to remain relevant as members of such communities in view of the fact that nationalism which was quite vibrant and tenable during the liberation struggle appears to no longer hold such attraction in the new postcolonial situation.

The fifth and concluding chapter summarizes the issues examined in all preceding chapters and how they reflect Soyinka's *You Must Set forth at Dawn.* Being the concluding part, the chapter explores the way and manner the writer's objective and choice of genre mediate in the making of selfhood and presenting a better image of the writer as a public intellectual. In other words, it provides a summation of the dominant trends in modern African autobiography as exemplified by Wole Soyinka's autobiographical writing. It also makes suggestions and recommendations regarding the importance of conscious self representation in fortifying identity and personality resulting from a representation of the peculiarities of postcolonial socio-political experience. The chapter concludes by laying to rest the claim of eccentricity made against public intellectuals who, like Soyinka, use their acts of refusal and artistic transgression as

vehicles for certain ideological expressions made expedient by the peculiarity of the situations in which they find themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY, MEMORY AND THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL IN *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN*

There is a great deal of connection between history and literature. In the autobiography, history always assumes a central role as the genre takes on the past of both the individual and others related to him in one way or another as well as the community. This chapter, therefore, deals with the concepts of history and memory (a product of the past) as well as their significance in Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. In looking at the different dimensions of history and memory, including the ways in which they are imagined and used depending on purpose, the chapter illustrates how Soyinka deploys alternative history or 'subaltern historiography' (Diallo, 2007) against the hegemonic narrative through the representation of his own life, the lives of others around him and notable events in Nigerian history. It then points out the tendency of the ruling elite or the state to attempt an obliteration of memory for the sake of dodging responsibility for negative roles in history and identifies a form of agency in the attitude of Soyinka in bringing some of these silences up into the public sphere as a reminder and a statement on how relevant the past should remain in the understanding of the present and even a desired future.

One major question that comes to mind in this case is what motivates Soyinka to adopt a subaltern approach to history and memory? Again, of what use is history in the autobiography and how much of the historical accounts presented by an individual can be relied upon in making judgments about things that have happened in the past. The chapter then advances the argument that amnesia or a forgetting of things which took place in the past and may also be willfully deployed by a writer especially in the autobiography where there is much concern about identity and selfhood. The implication of this is that it would be difficult to completely rely on the memory of one individual in trying to recollect the past as a means of understanding the present and estimating the future. In spite of this,

however, writers like Soyinka in their intellectual capacity tend to give voice to the margins in Nigerian history in order to bring to the fore certain issues connected with the historical trajectory of the country. The margins of Nigerian history here would be found in inhibited narratives which are suppressed most often by the state in order to manipulate memory.

The relationship between history and literature is an interesting one. While history continues to provide inspiration for the arts, literature not only draws from historical experiences but also attempts to reify such experiences in such a way that they become part of the memory of society and in the long run reform people's thinking about events. It is in the light of this that both literature and history have often been regarded as companions in the understanding of the dynamics of society. Several scholars have indeed affirmed the interrelationship between history and literature with emphasis on the symbiosis existing between the two. Averil Cameron, in observing this relationship argues that:

> But, lest anyone should be thinking otherwise, literature and history must go together. History is not *just* rhetoric, it is true, even those types of history least amenable to direct falsification by the appearance for instance of new evidence. But rhetoric in the wide sense, that is, all that is implied by textuality, is as much part of all but the most technical historical writing as it is of literature itself. (Cameron, 1989: 10)

From Plato to Nietzsche, and on to the present day, the relationship between history and literature has continued to be a site of discourse which seeks to find a more comfortable way of dealing with both concepts for a better understanding of the dynamics of human existence. The influence that both concepts naturally would have on each other can be adduced as motivation for Plato's early concern with fiction (literature) and fact (history).

In Plato's estimation, fictional writing, by which is implied literature, is non-normal, non-serious, non-primary and the use of metaphors constitute a kind of parasiticism if one

considers the mimetic character of fiction and metaphors which places them a far remove from reality. In spite of this, however, Plato is not oblivious of the interrelationship between history and literature as he admits that 'in fiction, factual and literal premises are employed as part of the fiction's argument, while fictional works, as social facts, are to be read as significant historical documents' (Macleay, 2001: 21). The debate has also continued from Aristotle to the present day. Aristotle in his *Poetics* 'distinguished between history as the study of events that had actually occurred and poetry [literature] as the imagination of possible events' (Spargo, 2000: 3). This distinction is, however, to the extent that it attempts to postulate on the values of the two concepts where Aristotle privileges poetry over history as a result of what he considers the capacity of the former to deal with 'general or universal truths and is therefore more philosophical', while the latter merely contends with particular truths (Ibid). Edward Said, like Cameron, contends that there might not be any need to want to draw clear lines between history and literature as each impacts, as a matter of course on the other while also maintaining a kind of mobility suggestive of a clearly symbiotic relationship:

> Neither history nor literature are inert bodies of experience; nor are they disciplines that exist out there to be mastered by professionals and experts. The two terms are mediated by the critical consciousness, the mind of the individual reader or critic whose work…sees history and literature somehow informing each other. So the missing middle term between literature and history is therefore the agency of criticism, or interpretation. (Said, 2001: 457)

The essence of the arguments above can be seen in the overall importance of history not just to literature but to the whole of human existence and a better understanding of the dynamics of society. As Mahamadou Diallo contends:

> History concerns us human beings and it is likely that we will always need history, if only for the simple reason that we will always remain attached to our past, while we are living in the present and looking forward to the future. Our

> very existence, in other words, is and will stay contingent upon the passage of time and the events and circumstances that are attendant upon it. (Diallo, 2007: 156)

The inference to be drawn from this is that history is too important to be ignored by society. Since literature is often a reflection and interpretation of events taking place in society over time, history, necessarily, becomes one of its major constituencies. The contention that 'literature is generally a very good barometer for determining the moral values, social conditions, spiritual trends, etc. of a nation during a given period' (Lategan and De Kock, 1978: 6), points to the significant role which literature plays in the interpretation of history in any society. This is quite evident in the way various writers engage with, and at times reconstruct, historical events which form the raw materials for their work. Though there are, admittedly, literary works which claim to hardly rely on history or events from the past, it is obvious that the greater proportion of literary works available to us today has often drawn extensively on history; which is why Patrick Chabal observes that 'historical issues [are] most fundamental to the understanding of the literature from [every part of] Africa' (Chabal, 1996: 12). Writers and public intellectuals, by virtue of their profession therefore, become interpreters of history and as Ademola Dasylva points out, 'they approach the past from their perceptions of the present' (Dasylva, 2007: 196). This perhaps explains the amount of attention that postmodern scholarship tends to devote to the question of positionality as the interpretation of history is often influenced, to a large extent, by the lenses through which different people view events around us.

Wole Soyinka, in *You Must set Forth at Dawn*, draws extensively on the history of Nigeria and in a way uses most of the historical events like the 1966 elections, the civil war, military coups and the June 1993 elections among others, to draw attention to certain ambiguities in relationships among the different categories of people as well as between the people and the state. The text is replete with historical details of the lives of individuals whose roles, both positive and negative, have impacted on the developmental objectives of the Nigerian nation as well as national historical events which define the

overall level of development in the country. At the individual level, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* leads us into the roles played by individuals who at one time or the other had the responsibility of leadership of the nation. Such leaders who are brought into the court of the public sphere in the work include the nationalists who had the immediate responsibility of charting a course for the nation after the supposed demise of colonial domination, military rulers like Olusegun Obasanjo, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdusalami Abubakar as well as individuals who, belonging to civil society, played significant roles which have since become reference points in national discourse. For the nationalists who constitute the first generation of leaders to take the country on its developmental journey, Soyinka informs the reader of their monumental failure which can be credited with laying the foundation for further decay and lack of vision on the part of subsequent leadership in the country. In capturing the magnitude of this failure Soyinka writes:

> Their conduct on home territory, from the news that reached us, appeared to be of the same nature. The pan-African project was becoming farcical. The alienation of many of the first-generation leaders was total, and, for the first time, we began to wonder if the power relation between the political elite and their people was not paralleled by that between the Boers and the black South African majority—a master-servant relationship, the monopoly of privilege by a minority, with its compliment, the denial of rights or human respect to the people. We read in this a double betrayal, an act of treachery from within. (Soyinka, 2006: 43)

The eliticization of leadership and power, which Soyinka points to in this case, can be seen as a major factor in the subsequent alienation of the people and the resultant national malaise which constantly draws back the hand of the developmental clock. In addition to this, Soyinka tends to demystify the nationalists to the effect that their actions were not all the way positive especially after the demise of colonial rule and the attainment of independence.

Each of the individual military rulers that Soyinka deals with in his text is given a representation that attempts to deconstruct official history about him. History, as construed by historian James McAuley, is 'a matter of interpretation'[4] which also brings to mind the relationship between historiography and the historical artist. Soyinka clearly deviates from what elitist historiography has often put in the public sphere about the leaders and their roles in the development of their country and instead opts for what Mahamadou Diallo terms 'subaltern historiography' (Diallo, 2007: 156). Diallo concurs that historiography is indeed an ideological activity in which case the background of the historian or the writer in this case wields a great influence on the way and manner in which he inscribes historical events. He argues that subaltern historiography relates to historical events from the point of view of the deprived people in society. This is in contrast with elitist historiography which adopts an upper class interpretation of the past.

Elitist historiography, which is a reflection of history from above, then becomes inadequate in the hands of the literary artist whose intention is to side with the masses and recount history which in a way attempts to also privilege the roles played by the common man in national development. In the case of Africa, there are a lot of silences as far as history is concerned. The practice of history on the continent as observed by Jacques Depelchin has been 'mostly shaped by the forces which have emerged victorious from open, hidden and/or muted confrontations of all kinds' (Depelchin, 2005: 1). These historical conquerors range from the hegemonic colonialists to the present day leadership of the state who make spirited attempts to ensure that their interpretation of history retains a kind of dominion over every other possible version. Subaltern historiography, therefore, unlike its elitist counterpart, seeks to write history from the point of view of the less privileged members of society who ordinarily may not possess the power to tell their stories or bring such into the public sphere. In this way, public intellectuals also seek to deploy their own interpretation of history to the task of pulling down 'the hegemonizing silences' (Sarkar, 1997: 21) imposed on society by state-centred historians who seek to interpret past events in their own particular way.

[4] Cited in Mahamadou Diallo (2007: 155)

In narrating the various roles played by his friend Femi Johnson, in his entire struggle life for instance, Soyinka reminds us of the importance to history of the contributions of certain individuals who may not necessarily be recognized by official history[5] but who all the same continue to make remarkable contributions to national development. In reflecting over the great loss which his untimely death constitutes, Soyinka expresses sadness at the absence of Femi Johnson to welcome him back from exile after the passing away of the dictator, General Sani Abacha: 'Femi should be alive at this moment. If any single being deserved and could contain in himself the entirety of the emotions that belong to this return, it is none other than OBJ, and he is gone' (p4). We are later to read about the contributions of Soyinka's friend to the struggle, at times at great risk and in spite of attempts by the author to dissuade him from getting involved. Femi is then presented to the reader as a willing and voluntary participant in the struggle against oppression. Thus, his role hitherto unacknowledged by hegemonic narratives is now inscribed as a crucial contribution to the success of the revolutionary activities taking place at the time. As Soyinka explains in the text:

> All I knew of Femi's politics was his outrage at the electoral fraud. He was not a member of CWIL; I had never subjected him to any test of solidarity or asked him to participate, even marginally, in our activities. Yet Femi had taken extra pains to frustrate the police every way. (p87)

This description of Femi's commitment makes him quite significant in the struggle over and above what 'the potential depths of human friendship' (p91), which made him visit Soyinka in detention every day, could have conferred on him. Femi's subalternity, it needs pointing out here, does not arise from his status in society, since he is portrayed as a comfortable businessman, but rather from the fact of his exclusion by official history as an individual whose role is worthy of mention. Subalternity is, therefore, not always

[5] Official history in Nigeria initiates itself through the media which is largely controlled by the state and is later appropriated into the national archives as the authentic account of events in the country. In the course of doing this some individuals are favoured over others who are often excluded irrespective of the noble roles they might have played in advancing the cause of their country.

determined by economic or social status as a person may be silenced even when he is notable in society.

The death of the professor of Economics and former vice chancellor of the University of Ife, Ojetunji Aboyade, is also narrated by Soyinka as a historical account which tends to acknowledge the service and sacrifice which the activist professor made towards the development of the Nigerian nation. In this narrative, Soyinka describes the professor as 'a first-generation nationalist of Yoruba stock who never lost his political fire until his death in 1984' (p9). In this manner, Soyinka attempts to separate the intellectual professor from the group of first-generation nationalists whom he had earlier condemned in the text for their lack of vision. Oje, as Soyinka refers to the professor, does not belong to this category as:

> He was one of that breed of tireless intellectual sparring partners, cunning at fashioning theoretical propositions that were guaranteed to provoke you and keep you in animated debate until lunch dissolved into dinner and then into late supper. (p9)

Although official history seems not to have said much about the contributions of Aboyade to national development Soyinka tries to elevate him to his deserved status by writing for instance that he was in fact the brain behind what is today known in Nigeria as the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS):

> Aboyade had been deeply immersed in a project in Ibadan, the Development Policy Centre, long before I fled into exile. The seed of the idea had been sown as far back as 1978, under the military regime headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo….That original idea of a civilian think tank had ended up as yet another military appropriation, becoming the Centre for Strategic Studies located in the far north, in Kuru. (p12)

In bringing to the fore the prominent role played by Aboyade in fashioning out a development policy centre to address the needs of the nation, Soyinka at the same time points out the subversive role played by the military in appropriating civilian programmes and projects which are meant to serve developmental purposes and in the course of time turning such projects, programmes or policies into the opposite of what they were originally designed to be by civil society. Interestingly, Kuru later became known as a place reserved for the top brass of the military in Nigeria, a training ground for secret agents and administrators who worked, in the main, for successive military regimes, and more crucially, a rallying point or base for adventurous military officers who later terminated democracy or other military regimes through the staging of coups.

The story of another individual whom Soyinka brings into his narrative as an attempt to review official hegemonic or elitist history is that of Bashorun Moshood Kashimawo Abiola. Abiola's story as a philanthropist and international businessman is quite known across Nigeria and beyond. With his entry into partisan politics and his eventual death however, various versions began to emerge about the lives and times of the politician. The most volatile of these contentions is the cause of the death of the man who was elected Nigerian president at the June 1993 general elections in Nigeria.[6] As Soyinka puts it, 'Abiola was the elected president of a nation who never did preside over more than his home, his vast network of businesses, and finally his place of detention' (p15). Since the death of Abiola in detention the Nigerian state has continued to attempt to convince the world that he died of 'natural causes.' However, there are those who insist that Abiola was murdered by a section of the military with the acquiescence of some civilian power brokers in the country and the conspiracy of the international community especially the Western powers who were vehemently opposed to an Abiola presidency. As far as Soyinka is concerned, Abiola was simply 'wasted!' by the powerful oligarchy who probably would not have succeeded without the conspiracy of the West:

[6] The results of the elections were annulled by the military. While some people argue that the elections were inconclusive others, mainly activists and progressives saw the polls as having been complete with Abiola as winner since results were declared at each polling unit.

> No one of any note still denied that he had won the 1993 elections for president. Then, one month after the death of Sani Abacha, in the presence of a delegation of US officials—Thomas Pickering, a former ambassador to Nigeria; Susan Rice, President Bill Clinton's Assistant secretary of state for African Affairs; and others—Abiola was served the cup of tea that has now attained legendary status in the nation, for he suffered a seizure minutes after that cup, collapsed, and died. (p15)

This account by Soyinka clearly negates that of official documentation on the cause of the death of the politician. The writer is also hopeful of a validation of his version of the Abiola story as he insists that 'the truth, I know, will come out some day' (p15).

With the story of the June 12 election Soyinka also details the roles played by other Nigerian activists like Anthony Enahoro, Beko, Gani Fawehinmi, Femi Falana, Olisa Agbakoba, Bola Tinubu, Commodore Dan Suleiman, General Alani Akinrinade, Kudirat Abiola and Bagauda Kaltho[7] in the struggle against military dictatorship in the country. He is also able to tell of the contributions of the common man on the street including artisans and the generality of the people who constitute the mass and whose anger the state usually finds difficult to overcome. A good example of this is the crucial role played by the taxi-driver who took Soyinka to Lagos from the Benin border during the civil disturbances that paralyzed the Nigerian nation.

Soyinka also finds space for the role played by the Nigerian Afrobeat star Fela Anikulapo Kuti:

> Fela loved to buck the system. His music, to many, was both salvation from an echo of their anguish, frustrations, and suppressed aggression. The black race was the beginning and end of knowledge and wisdom, his life mission to effect a mental and physical liberation of the race. (p27)

[7] Both Kudirat Abiola and Bagalda Kaltho died during the struggle. While Kudirat was assassinated by suspected agents of the state on the streets of Lagos Bagauda was killed by a bomb in Kaduna.

Beyond the quest to engrave the name and role of 'the irrepressible maverick Fela Anikulapo Kuti' (p28) in the historical consciousness of the nation Soyinka also draws attention to the important place of popular culture in the liberation of society. There is the tendency of negative representation of Fela's image in hegemonic historical documentation as a result of his numerous confrontations with the state in the course of his musical career which was heavily laced with activism and a rare courage. This rarity of character prompts Soyinka to query: 'How would one summarize Fela? Merely as a populist would be inadequate. Radical he certainly was, and often simplistically so' (p28). The fascination with Fela's character and thinking seeks therefore to position him as a heroic figure whose commitment to the masses and the black race should be seen as a thing of pride not just to his extended family, to which Soyinka himself belongs, but to the entire Nigerian landscape.

The dedication of an entire section, the first section, of *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (Iba—For Those who Went Before)[8] to the historical roles played by prominent figures in the developmental struggle of the country is an indication of the opportunity available to writers to employ alternative history as a counterpoise to hegemonic or official history which is usually selective in the choice of individuals who are given prominence in the archives. In most cases those who stand against the oppressive tendencies of the state or those who offer alternative views about the way forward in the management of the affairs of the state are consigned to the silent corners of history as a deliberate ploy to muzzle them and their views. In countering this ploy, however, the author also tends to position himself as one belonging to the class of the activists who always stood on the side of the masses with a commitment and resolve to challenge the authority of the state represented by military dictatorships whenever the interest of the people or even the nation is under the threat of compromise. In 'Iba' Soyinka creates and reinvents the history of a radical class of individuals who though have all passed on, played more than ordinary roles in developing their fatherland either through intellectual and material contribution as in the case of Aboyade and Johnson, or through the mobilization of the masses to reject state

[8] 'Iba' is the Yoruba word for 'homage'. This section represents homage to the departed colleagues of Soyinka in the liberation struggle

oppression as evidenced by the political bravery of Abiola and the avant-gardist musical career of Fela. There is, therefore, an important value even for the writer's image in the course of inscribing the positive roles played by his colleagues who whether dead or living. This reminds us again of the possibility of history being deployed to different ends. As an intellectual production, history, in most cases, tends to give away the background of the writer and to a large extent his ideological convictions. As Diallo reminds us: 'What is clear about history is the variety of purposes for which it is used: for instance, historiography is seen by many historians as an "ideological activity". It can be used for political activities and for propaganda' (Diallo, 2007: 157). It is important to note here, however, that the multiplicity of uses to which history can be put holds true for official history as much as it does for alternative history.

Beyond his concern with events in the lives of individuals, Soyinka takes on national history in the course of representing the trajectory of the Nigerian state. One important event that comes to mind here is the Nigerian civil war which raged in the country between 1967 and 1970. Several accounts have been written about the Nigerian civil war in which the Eastern Region of the country led by Odumegwu Ojukwu attempted to secede from the rest of the country. In some of the literature about the Biafran civil war we read about the different roles of certain individuals including Wole Soyinka. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, however, Soyinka uses the opportunity offered by the autobiography to present his own account of the war especially the aspect of his own role in the war which culminated in his twenty-two month incarceration in solitary confinement. Soyinka's inscription of the motivation for the civil war includes what had been said about the discovery of oil in the East which might have emboldened the region to contemplate self determination but also goes on to lay out the propelling impact of the unjust treatment and 'progressive pogrom of the Igbo' under the Yakubu Gowon regime that succeeded that of Aguyi-Ironsi. As Soyinka recounts:

> The discovery of oil in huge reserves in the East, largely in the Niger estuary, played a role, unquestionably, in the propulsion of the Biafran leaders toward secession, but it would be a distortion of history to and an attempt to trivialize the

> trauma that the Igbo had undergone to suggest—as some commentators have tried to—that it was the lure of the oil wealth that drove them to seek a separate existence. When a people have been subjected to a degree of inhuman violation for which there is no other word but genocide, they have the right to seek a separate existence. (p101)

The humiliation which people of Igbo extraction suffered shortly before the outbreak of the war is captured in Soyinka's description of the insecurity they experienced in other parts of the country and the ignominous modes of escape they had to seek when fleeing back to their region:

> Even within Lagos, the hunt for the Igbo continued unabated, in their homes and at roadblocks. The depletion of my wife's wardrobe during the months of October and November was only one of the private testimonies to the desperation of one's Igbo male acquaintances—not all of them soldiers—who resorted to female disguise to escape detection as they flew eastward. (p101)

With the use of words as strong as ' pogrom' and 'genocide', Soyinka seeks to hold the Nigerian state accountable through a form of social agency premised on historiography for the massive deaths recorded especially in the Biafran enclave during the civil war. Records of official history not only attempt to avoid the use of such strong words as Soyinka chooses, but also try to create the impression of a balance in terms of casualties of the war. This is a display of responsibility which helps, as Soyinka himself observes, to give voice to 'the marginalized orphans of history' (Soyinka, 2006a). This kind of responsibility in Soyinka's estimation is an imperative for writers who can help to reorder the direction of narratives in the society because 'as writers, we cannot cease to recognize and embrace our mission of testifying and laying ambush for escapist minds' (Ibid).

Soyinka's combines different narrative techniques which all add up to reinforce his desire to bring attention to the margins of history and break the silence imposed on certain aspects of Nigerian history. In addition to being highly descriptive in the narrative the

author uses series attributions and anecdotes to drive home his point. Soyinka's narration of his intervention along with, J. P. Clark and Chinua Achebe in the plight of officers convicted for what is popularly known in Nigerian history as the Mamman Vatsa coup, for instance, provides an anecdote of that incident with the intention, possibly, of pointing out the intricacies and high powered politicking involved in the taking of the decision to eventually execute the coup plotters including General Babangida's bosom friend Mamman Vatsa. Again, we find in the text a certain level of interpretation and analysis of historical events which give away the preferences of the author. A good example of this can be found in the attempt to absolve Babangida of culpability in the execution of his friend and other officers involved in the putsch by relating the excuse of Babangida through his secretary who is said to have also lost a brother to the decision of the military council. In all, we find in the combination of these techniques the construction of a complex representation of relationships and actions which invariably reminds us of 'the complexities of finding truth amid the limitations of memory' (Craig, 2006: 53).

In countering the hegemonizing silences of master narratives, Soyinka reminds the reader of the fact that the stage for such deliberate plotting of history has its roots back in the colonial days as the British authorities would stop at nothing to cover up their roles in setting the stage for the volatility of the Nigerian state and by implication its underdevelopment. This is evident in the author's account of the pre-independence 1959 federal elections and the population census conducted by the British colonial authorities:

> Recent memoirs by former colonial officers have revealed how crooked that beginning was. The elections that placed a government in power at the center were rigged—by the British! John Bull was not about to leave an independent Nigeria under the control of any uppity radicals, as the southern nationalists—the East and the West—were perceived. Thus, on instructions from the British Home

> Office, even the Nigerian census was falsified, giving an artificial majority to the North, which was largely feudalist and conservative in political outlook. (p54)[9]

This clear indictment of the imperial colonizer goes to show the belief in the lack of sincerity and outright mischief which characterized colonial regimes in most parts of Africa where civil strife erupted shortly after independence. Before their reluctant departure, the colonialists had put in place political landmines which produced ethnic suspicion and eventual eruptions in the former colonies like we see in the three year civil war in Nigeria.

Another way of understanding Soyinka's handling of history in this text is to view it against the background of the production of a counter-narrative. As Molly Andrews puts it, counter-narratives are 'the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives' (Andrews, 2004: 1). This provides, to a large extent, a different angle to the kind of normative experience that the dominant history or master narratives often seek to impose on society. Quite often, especially in the postcolonial environment, history is constantly manipulated, first by the colonial establishment which seeks to cover its tracks against the background of the political and structural landmines it often leaves behind in the course of administering territories, and then by the post-independence leadership which constantly seeks to justify its manipulation and misuse of power. The variations that occur between events as they happened or events as they are perceived by others often result in the dichotomy between official history and alternative history or counter-narratives. As Molly Andrews further observes:

> When, for whatever reason, our own experiences do not match the master narratives with which we are familiar, or we come to question the foundations of those dominant tales, we are confronted with a challenge. How can we make sense of ourselves, and our lives, if the shape of our life story looks deviant

[9] To make his claim more convincing Soyinka adds a footnote here to the effect that the British government in 1992 suppressed the publication of Harold Smith's memoirs, a copy of which the author had sent to him, in an attempt to cover up the historical verity.

> compared to the regular lines of dominant stories? The challenge then becomes one of finding meaning outside of the emplotments which are ordinarily available. (Andrews, 2004: 1)

It is in realization of the disadvantaged position of the people, perhaps, that some public intellectuals, especially the organic ones in Gramsci's classification, seek to re-write history and oppose the dominant narratives sustained by the state. In other words, they attempt to 'reject the grand narratives as the means by which the dominant classes and groups legitimize their positions of power' (Gohrisch, 2006: 232). As far as such intellectuals are concerned, narratives such as we find in autobiographical works may be experienced individually, they, nonetheless, embody common meanings which speak to the experience of the community. In addition to this, intellectuals also hope that in the course of doing this, such narratives as provided by them become a source of power of a sort as they are able to inscribe who they are and how they become such types of personalities. The example of Soyinka's response to Obasanjo's *My Command*,[10] his explanation of what motivated him to travel to Eastern Nigeria during the civil war cited earlier, his claim that the Middle Belt region was involved in armed resistance possibly before the Igbo, the hint that Ojukwu meant more than secession in declaring war and the complicity of Victor Banjo are some of the illustrations in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* which point to the issue of redefinition of identity through the forging of alternative narratives. In a whole section titled 'A moment of Truth—and the Lies of History' Soyinka debunks Obasanjo's claims seeking to appropriate a kind of heroism as a result of his role in the Nigerian civil war. The other significance of this aspect of the narrative is also for Soyinka to bring to the public sphere of history what he was up to in the course of his controversial visit to the Biafran enclave during the war. The kernel of this section of the text is obviously to put right what he calls 'the minor but instructive theme of revisionism in purported historical narratives' (p131). In recalling the circumstances in which he wrote his book, Soyinka does not mince words concerning the rejoinder agenda which forms part of *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*:

[10] Obasanjo's memoir published in 1980 after he left office as military ruler in 1979

> I have always said that one should not write about one's life after the age of innocence, which I put at eleven…. But there are certain moments when you are not sure you are going to make it. And you want to set straight one or two things, not for any other reason. That, perhaps, is because you read so many false accounts. You are amused and contemptuous of such individuals and then said: "Are these people going to have the last word"? (Soyinka, 2006a)

By implication there is a kind of justification process and a negotiation of identity inherent in the telling of not just one's story but the story of the community which comes through the narrative of an individual life. The language of resistance often noticed in the telling of this kind of stories is a pointer to the fact that the narrator of the autobiography expects the reader to perceive of the subject in a particular way which is often in variance with the kind of representation we find in dominant narratives.

In trying to look at the way alternative history evolves, Catherine Gallagher, Mark Maslam and Paul Saint-Amour attempt to situate this form of history within the context of what is referred to as counterfactual narratives. For them therefore:

> Alternative or counterfactual narratives imagine a world whose history diverged at some point from the course of events as we know them…, recent explorations of the counterfactual are correlated with nationalist, ethical, political, and realist narratives in several nineteenth-century works of fiction and in recent works of biography, film, and medical memoir. (Gallagher, Maslam and Saint-Amour, 2007: 51)

It is important to note however, that alternative history referenced by whatever name, cannot be taken to symbolize an incontrovertible kind of truth beyond which no other facts exist. It is just, for the sake of argument, another version of the numerous contentions that often continue to attend the enterprise of historical reconstruction of events in the society. As Gallagher contends:

> By tracing alternatives, counterfactual history may at first seem to deny the inevitability implied in the search for such Truths, but on closer inspection we can see that these hypothetical exercises, too, are often inspired by the search for underlying processes. Even when they set out to disprove of a settled consensus… the exploration of alternative factors and suppositional proceedings helps the historian whittle down the actual operative causes. (Gallagher, 2007: 55)

Gallagher's argument tends to disapprove of the existence of any such thing as a constant or unobliterable truth with a capital 'T' which signals universal veracity. In the field of literature, both fictional and non-fictional writings strive to arrive at an interpretative truth which is often negotiated between the author and the reader. The background, against which a work is read, therefore, becomes a crucial element in determining the attitude of the reader to the angle of history presented to him. Autobiographies, like any other document of history, are subjective narratives and in understanding them we need to relate to them having at the back of our minds the import of such subjectiveness to the making of meaning especially in relation to the choices made by the author.

It is then clear that the narratives presented to the reader in an autobiographical work represent various types of microhistory which in the final analysis offer some form of explanation about broader categories or larger events which have been archived as the historical documents of a particular community. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Soyinka brings back to life various stories which official history pretended to have laid to rest and on its own terms. The resurrection of such historical events serve the purpose of an invocation of memory which becomes crucial in the way society is reminded of the positive and negative roles of individuals, groups and institutions in the developmental travails of society. In his narration of the nasty and nightmare-invoking experience of his fellow playwright Ola Rotimi in the hands of rampaging soldiers for instance, Soyinka attempts to remind us of the evil that military dictatorships constitute as well as the lack of regard for human dignity which is often associated with the rascality of the military. The seriousness of the situation is embedded in Soyinka's choice of words and his

evocation of emotional feelings in the reader which gives the story a kind of horrific essence that represents the terror associated with the military:

> Not so fortunate was Ola Rotimi, playwright and director, the recollection of whose ordeal, which he himself narrated to me on my return from prison, would sometimes jerk me awake covered in sweat in the middle of the night. In vain I admonished myself: Why do you give yourself this vicarious agony? But it was a scene that persisted in my head for a long while, and at all hours. I would recall it in the middle of my work and stop. A long time would pass before I would realize that I had been staring at the wall, my heart beating rapidly as I put myself irrationally through a bout of anxiety, one that would sometimes trigger a slight trembling in my hands. (147)

Soyinka's colleague had been administered twelve lashes of horsewhip at gunpoint by a soldier at a checkpoint right in the presence of his wife and children for what the soldier considered an offence of jumping the queue of vehicles waiting to be checked. For Soyinka, the brutality often visited on the populace by military regimes should be enough reason for the rejection of that institution's foray into the African political space and the seizure of leadership for which they have got neither training nor temperament. Soyinka's advocacy of resistance is seen in his presentation of the experience of Dupe Oke which precedes that of Ola Rotimi in the text. Dupe is presented as one of the 'hundreds of unknowns who simply refused to accept any act of humiliation by a soldier, even fought them physically at the risk, sometimes the cost, of their lives' (147). While not suggesting cowardice in the reaction of Rotimi to his ordeal in the hands of the incensed soldier, Soyinka uses the resistance of the lady radiographer as a form of recommendation to the populace. By so doing, he rejects acquiescence and tries to recommend action by the people in order to affirm their humanity in the face of brutal oppression. This also points out Soyinka's understanding of resistance as a necessary tool in confronting the excesses of power. For him, the human imagination is always a potent tool, if well fortified and appropriately deployed, in the struggle against domination.

In any case, it is important to point out that the clear demarcation of history as official and alternative, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic can in itself be problematic. The appropriation of the role of the alternative historian may not just be enough for us to understand the intricacies involved in the way history plays out in any society. The question of subjectivity or the partiality of all narratives which has continued to generate a great debate in the field makes it difficult for anyone to draw a clear line between the binaries presented above. It is not impossible therefore to, at times, find an overlap or an altering of roles between official history and alternative history as what we view as the official at a certain time may actually be a response to a certain narrative which some historians see as not being fair in the representation of events. The one important thing to often be mindful of in understanding history is the background of the writer or the historian who may have a specific purpose for which he chooses to record events for posterity. The discussion above, therefore, points to the fact that the call to agency can be said to be a major reason why Soyinka adopts the kind of approach to history we encounter in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*.

For the autobiography, the relationship with history should, ordinarily, not be far-fetched. However, the privacy of the genre becomes a major consideration in the understanding of the connection between any form of life writing and history. In other words, how do we relate the experience of an individual character as presented in the autobiography to the public nature of history which is expected to be of public knowledge and at the same time encompass the experience of the larger community? In tackling this dilemma, Jochen Hellbeck lays to rest the controversy surrounding the value of life writing as a window into the world of history. For Hellbeck, the private testimony which autobiographical writing offers the reader notwithstanding, such writing 'at closer sight reveals manifold connections to conventions governing the public world' (Hellbeck, 2004: 621). In any case, the moment an individual decides to commit his private experience to writing or even oral narrative in the public sphere it becomes clear that such narratives by virtue of their accessibility to the public become public documents which can be considered as part of the history of the community. In appropriating, with their personal live narratives, the experience of the community, therefore, public intellectuals tend to turn history into a

discourse which is a key concept which Foucault deploys in making us understand the import of historical narratives. This discourse, in Foucault's estimation, is 'a historically specific material practice that produces knowledge and establishes particular power relations between different subjects who occupy specific positions' (Spargo, 2000: 10). It is in trying to deal with this kind of power relations that Soyinka delves into history both personal and national to bring into the arena of public discourse certain vexed issues in the Nigerian state.

There has always been a very close link between history and memory as the former inevitably produces the latter. One of the most difficult tasks of recent literary criticism and perhaps scholarship in general is to arrive at a concise or generally acceptable definition of memory. This difficulty can be said to stem largely from the diversity of applications which the term engenders and the tendency of equally diverse disciplines to employ the terminology. The heterogeneity of reference which results from this scenario is noticeable in the way philosophers like Russell, John Locke and Hume had dealt with memory. Bertrand Russell's lamentation that "this analysis of memory is probably extremely faulty, but I do not know how to improve it" (Russell, 1921: 187) underscores the extent of the complexity of the concept which makes a unified definition of it almost impossible. In attempting to grapple with the term, Ian Hunter contends that 'memory' is an abstraction' (Hunter, 1964: 13). In spite of this abstract nature which makes memory invisible, Hunter still suggests that 'memory is an object, a thing which we possess in the same way we possess a head or a big toe' (Ibid). In a similar vein, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2004)[11] defines memory as a form of capacity with which humans are endowed:

> 'Memory' is a label for a diverse set of cognitive capacities by which humans and perhaps other animals retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes. Our particular abilities to conjure up long-gone episodes of our lives are both familiar and puzzling. We remember experiences and events which are not happening now, so memory seems to differ from perception. We

[11] Online http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entrie/memory

> remember events which really happened, so memory is unlike pure imagination. Memory seems to be a source of knowledge, or perhaps just is retained knowledge.

What is clear from this kind of definition is that memory will always be useful to us in the understanding of past, present and future events. Neither also is memory limited to what the personal individual recollects. It is a combination of individual recollection and the recollections of others. As Mark Freeman argues, 'memory now emerges as a fusion of our own past experience and texts of our own past experience supplied by others' (Freeman, 1993: 46).

The combination of the recollections of and individual and those of others brings to mind the broad categorization of memory into individual memory and collective memory.[12] While the former implies a personal form of memory, the latter appropriates a social and communal form of recollection which defines the identity of a group based on the historical events implicated in the evolution or composition of the collective. Memory can then be said to derive from history as argued further by Ian Hunter:

> what the person does or experiences here and now is influenced by what he did and experienced at some time in his past. When we talk of a person's memory we are almost drawing attention to relationships between his past and his present activities. (Hunter, 1964: 14-15)

The concern with the here and now which is a general underlying purpose of literature aims at using history and memory to point at the direction towards a better future. Beyond the self-examination which we find in autobiographical writing therefore, there is the bigger project of 'an opening up of the collective memory for interrogation, to determine what may be jettisoned and what to re-invigorate as a … contribution to the quest for the universal' (Soyinka, 2006b).

[12] The taxonomies of memory which scholars and philosophers have identified are too wide ranging to be considered in any single study.

In achieving this, Soyinka's deployment of memory in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* goes beyond an ordinary mention or exhumation of the past to involve a deployment of aesthetic forms which make the recollected events bear new meaning and significance for the community. Beginning with the representation of his own activism through that of his fellow activists to the grim memory of the Nigerian civil war, we encounter a powerful style which seeks to inform on the larger significance of the events in understanding individual characters and the difficulties in nation building which may have been responsible for the disappointing performance of the national entity. The whole idea of his narration of the events of the civil war is, no doubt, an invocation of memory. In doing this for example Soyinka's description of the fleeing Igbo population from Northern Nigeria before the outbreak of the war suggests the power of memory in leading people to take action on certain issues:

> The trainloads of refugees from the North bore pitiable cargoes: some survivors with physical mutilations, some women in such a state of shock that they clung to the severed heads of their spouses or sons, cradling them on their laps…. Images of death and mutilation in Eastern journals and the television coverage of a savage humanity erased the final sense of belonging in a people who saw themselves isolated within the nation and catalyzed their resolve to secede. (p101)

The scars of injustice which 'physical mutilations' imply as well as the refusal of the women to discard the 'severed' heads of their men and children constitute elements of memory as a significant factor in the behaviour of individuals or a group of people. The scars and the heads can only constantly remind the bearers of the injustice which they have been made to suffer and exile the possibility of forgetting and forgiveness which are believed to provide a kind of tranquilizing effect in fractured societies. This explains why in most cases the state makes spirited efforts to suppress certain aspects of history and memory. More often than not, the state does this 'in order to obfuscate its own role in the failures of the past' (Pitcher, 2006: 98). The kind of social amnesia which the state or the ruling elite often seeks to impose is described by Shari Cohen as 'organized forgetting' in

order to have control of history and memory especially in forging power relations. As Cohen puts it, 'organized forgetting does not simply expunge historical events and information. Instead, it works by constructing a new history that leaves out and distorts and, moreover, shifts in what is left out and distorted' (Cohen, 1999: 39). The plan of the Nigerian elite as can be deduced from hegemonic references to the civil war and the slogan of 'no victor, no vanquished', smacks of an attempt to create an impression of a balance of power and an equal equilibrium in the casualty rates between the federal and Biafran forces. But Soyinka's account gives away this decoy as one of the ploys of the guilty elite to mitigate the kind of impunity that attended the actions of the authorities against the dissident East and its population.

Other examples of a serious engagement of memory in the text can be seen in the way Soyinka presents the stories of the murder of Nigerian author Ken Saro-Wiwa and frontline journalist, Dele Giwa. Although a series of controversies has surrounded the role of the MOSOP leader in the history of Nigeria, especially in relation to the civil war, his environmentalist campaign for his Ogoni nation which he succeeded in taking as far as the United Nations remains an issue that is hard for his detractors including the military elite that eventually eliminated him to wish away. In spite of the urgency of the situation in the Niger Delta region the elite had always wished the struggle from the memory of the nation by constructing the struggle as a dangerous ethnic agenda by an individual whose rapacious ambition could only bring scorn against the entire Nigerian nation. This kind of interpretation of Saro-Wiwa's role in history has been sustained by the state before and after his execution. The position of Soyinka on the issue of Saro-Wiwa becomes clear from the onset as he reminds us of his status as an 'ecowarrior.' The fact that his travail is included in Soyinka's autobiography in the first instance seems an attempt to speak to the memory of the nation and remind everyone of another of the injustices of the past. Therefore, there can be only one reason for the execution of the death penalty imposed on Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow Ogoni activists by the military tribunal: 'Power had mounted the head of the dictator; it needed its periodic nourishment in blood' (p420).

The power of memory can be better understood against the background of the difficulty involved in getting people to forget the past especially when it involves painful experiences or atrocious violence. An apt demonstration of this is seen in the encounter between the leaders of the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party when Soyinka takes on the diplomatic mission to mediate between factional leaders in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. The reaction of Thabo Mbeki, whom Soyinka describes as a hard-liner, to the mention of the name of Buthelezi by Nelson Mandela even without the presence of the Inkatha leader is quite instructive in this regard: 'His atrocities against our members are unforgivable. We cannot sit down and talk to such a man. There is nothing to be gained by it. For a dialogue to take place, there has to be a talking point. With Buthelezi there is none' (p264). This kind of reaction, as can be clearly seen, is a product of memories of the past. Just as Thomas Butler observes:

> Memory is not only what we personally experience, refine and retain (our 'core'), but also what we inherit from preceding generations, and pass on to the next. A truly global concept of Memory might include everything that ever happened—was ever seen, heard, said, felt, touched, smelled by every human being who ever lived, as well as by all sensate beings, since animals also have memory. (Butler, 1989: 13)

The reality of the past experience of rivalry between Inkatha and the ANC obviously invokes memory as can be seen in Mbeki's reaction to the mention of Buthelezi and his reluctance to forgive. Memory, in this case become a cultural attribute which the individual or community may find extremely difficult to part with. Soyinka's recollection of these events in his narrative, therefore, illustrates the capacity of personal testimony to reveal the various ways in which communities react to and reconstruct the horrors of history or the past. The revival of memories of the past then becomes a factor in dealing with the present at both individual and collective levels. This further calls our attention to the notion of collective memory and demands a better appreciation of memory as a unifying force between the individual and society as well as between what is private and what is public.

The constant resemblance between what happened in the past and what is going on at the moment may be a motivation for invoking memory in the autobiography. As Anne Pitcher points out 'examining the 'past in the present' undermines the social amnesia produced by organized forgetting' (Pitcher, 2006: 108). This undermining is for the intellectual a form of success in the process of resistance against the hegemonizing influences of the elite in dealing with the questions of history and collective memory. In Africa, generally, the elite often feel reluctant to think of or refer to the past in appropriate terms especially when the events of such historical experience do not ornament the hegemony of the class. Yet, the past is very crucial as 'the examination of the past-in-the-present together with the turning point at which history failed to turn is an original contribution that contemporary history can bring to the literature concerning our world today' (Ellis, 2002: 4). In other words, societies require positive change to move away from a state of inertia and this change can be induced by trying to see what wrong of the past is repeating itself and what right is missing in the present. The streamlining of these two appears to be a major occupation of intellectuals like Wole Soyinka who use their autobiographies to draw attention to history and also deploy memory in the process of opening up discourse about the direction in which they wish to see their society. In doing this, the works of such intellectuals offer great value in the preservation of memory as events illustrate that 'memory decreases as time passes' (Thompson et al, 1996: 44), and this decrease is likely to be instrumental to dragging society along perilous parts repeatedly.

It then becomes clear that the importance of history and memory, which this chapter sets out to investigate, cannot be over-emphasized in literature and least of all the autobiography. Since this exploration has also brought out different aspects of both history and memory and the way and manner in which they are deployed by different categories of people, we can draw the conclusion that the way history and memory are handled is what matters most in the writing and study of literary works. Also there are no clear-cut demarcations in the categorization of history as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. This is because in transgressing the space of official or dominant narratives

the alternative also struggles to gain a kind of prominence and in the process, if possible, overthrow or replace what is considered dominant. This process, clearly, has the potential of creating a new hegemony albeit one tilted towards a narrative that gives more consideration to the less privileged rather than the elite. Soyinka's approach to history and memory in his text, therefore, like most counternarratives are wont to do, gives voice to the subaltern and in so doing widens the scope of public discourse beyond what the elite would ordinarily fancy. The implication of this for the understanding of both the past and the present of society as well as in the forging of power relations in preparation for the future is where the beauty of subaltern historiography lies.

CHAPTER THREE

UPROOTING AND RE-ROOTING: EXILE AND RETURN IN *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN*

This chapter discusses exile and return in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. It examines Soyinka's handling of physical and metaphoric exile in the course of his making of selfhood. The central argument is premised upon the dire conditions existing in many post-independence African countries which make exile a necessary option for most public intellectuals. In doing this, the chapter also tries to trace the link between exile and escapism and concludes that public intellectuals like Soyinka who opt for exile do not often do so in order to avoid confronting the challenges at home but rather as a necessary self-preservation device in the face of threats to their lives. This is clearly illustrated in the way Soyinka justifies his decision to embark on exile against his wish, leading to homecoming each time he finds the occasion right to do so, as well as the numerous difficulties which exile poses for him in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn.*

The question of exile is a very prominent one in postcolonial literature. African literature, being a major aspect of this literature, therefore, engages with the issue of exile to a very large extent. Though exile has been part of the intellectual and literary traditions of different parts of the world from time immemorial, 'few centuries have experienced displacements of writers, artists, professors, and professionals as dramatic as those which accompanied the political upheavals of the twentieth century' (Pavel, 1998: 25). In like manner, the postcolonial world, and specifically Africa, continues to take the front seat as far as the ostracism of intellectuals is concerned even into the present century. It is then possible to argue that the history as well as the socio-political reality of various countries in Africa, including Wole Soyinka's Nigeria makes an exploration of the trope of exile inevitable in the works of writers who cannot help sparing a thought for the condition of their homeland. This is even more so if one considers the fact that most of the writers themselves often fall victim to dislocation from home. It then explains, to a large extent, why exile often constitutes a major trope in autobiographical works which capture the life

experiences of their authors. The internal and external frames of being implicated in the autobiography make exile a crucial component of the numerous discourses in this genre.[13] To be sure, the term exile cannot be said to have any monolithic meaning in literature as it is open to a multiplicity of interpretations. As Susan Suleiman argues:

> …few subjects elicit as much intellectual ambivalence—but especially of late, as much intellectual fascination—as the subject of exile. In its narrow sense a political banishment, exile in its broad sense designates every kind of estrangement or displacement from the physical and geographical to the spiritual. (Suleiman, 1998: 2)

In a similar vein, Sara Forsdyke in her conceptualization of exile contends that:

> Exile in the broadest terms can denote any separation from a community to which an individual or group formerly belonged. Exile in the strictest sense involves a physical separation from the place where one previously lived. In the modern era, however, we know of many cases of what is called "internal exile," in which case an individual or group is removed from the immediate surroundings but not expelled from the country altogether. (Forsdyke, 2005: 7)

As convoluted as this understanding of exile may appear, the term taken in its broadest or strictest terms, signals the numerous possibilities of alienation which an individual or group is prone to in society. The idea of alienation that is implied in almost every definition of exile is not limited to the physical level alone. In other words, exile, whether in the life of an individual or that of a community, occurs at different levels. These levels, which obviously may not be exhaustively listed here, can be classified into physical, creative, cultural and psychological levels. While physical exile suggests a physical movement of the individual or group, creative exile which is relevant especially to writers occurs when prevailing circumstances detract from the writer the ability to practice the

[13]Exile has a multigeneric application in postcolonial literature as almost all aspects of this literature deals with the concept one way or the other.

vocation of creativity either for a particular period of time or even the way he would have loved to do so.

To begin with, exile can be viewed from both the denotative and connotative angles. At the basic denotative level, it would imply a physical relocation from a particular geographic space to another by an individual or group of people. This kind of exile arises for different reasons ranging from the personal to the impersonal. At the connotative level, on the other hand exile occurs without any form of physical relocation. This form of metaphoric exile my be cultural or even literary as the individual is not able to be at one with a particular thing which he or she needs to identify with in order to attain personal fulfillment. The first noticeable point of exile in Soyinka's text can be discussed from a cultural perspective. Beyond the idea of physical exile is the predicament of African writers or writers generally in the postcolony who have to conduct literary expression in a language alien to their indigenous culture. As Rowland Smith points out, there is a 'sense of alienation which has so frequently resulted from the imposition of western codes on the formerly organic cultures' (Smith, 1976: ix) of such writers. Susan Suleiman also argues that the impact of the use of a foreign language cannot be wished away simply in words of 'fine distinctions' as 'these words all designate a state of being "not home" (or of being "everywhere at home," the flip side of the same coin), which means, in most cases, at a distance from one's native tongue' (Suleiman, 1998:1).[14] This alienation from tradition also extends to the question of what Smith describes as 'exiled consciousness' which appropriates both the linguistic dilemma as well as the qualification of the physically exiled writer to adequately represent the experiences of his people back home. In other words, beyond the issue of language the question of vision arises and the exiled writer is often called to account on his ability to partake in what Kofi Awoonor once termed 'the festival of the senses',[15] which defines the experience of the people on the continent and what strategies may be expedient in fostering a renewal or a reversal of the negativities which obstruct the wheel of national or continental

[14] The language debate, a very complex and expansive issue in African literature, has been tackled by numerous scholars like Achebe(1975), Ricard (2004) and Soyinka (1988). It will be limited to a mention here in view of the scope of this study.
[15] Cited in Rowland Smith (1976)

progress. Though Soyinka writes in English, he compensates for the alienating implications of this linguistic choice by deviating from the stringency of western standards as far as the genre of the autobiography is concerned, thereby creating a distinct African narrative with unique aesthetic oeuvres.

The peculiar historical context of African literature makes it one of the major domains of exilic incidence arising from the constant tensions between the state and writers who seek to bring to the fore the failings of the state and its agents. As Chabal observes, 'a revolutionary agenda could not but influence both the debate about the role of literature in society and the course of its development' (Chabal, 1996: 23). In Nigeria, as in other parts of the African continent, this revolutionary agenda results in reprisals against writers who subsequently relocate, especially when such reprisals become fatally threatening. Wole Soyinka details in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* the difficulties of exile and the pains it brings especially to writers who feel a great sense of commitment to their homeland. This painful nature of exile is depicted by the oriental intellectual and critic, Edward Said, who argues that exile is 'strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience' before defining the term as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home' (Said, 2001: 173). Describing the experience of exile is, therefore, a laborious enterprise because of its involvement with distance, separation, displacement and detachment as realities confronting the intellectual especially in autocratic societies where the danger of rootedness becomes too daunting to be ignored. Chinua Achebe on his own part estimates an unquestionable injustice in what the exile is made to go through. For Achebe, 'what is both unfortunate and unjust is the pain the person dispossessed is forced to bear in the act of dispossession itself and subsequently in the trauma of a diminished existence (Achebe, 2000: 70). Though the kind of dispossession that Achebe invokes here is mainly cultural, the idea itself is applicable to all forms of exile and especially to that which seeks to deny the individual his homeland and all the apparatus of home which the possession would have conferred on such an individual.

The experience of 'anguish and predicament' embedded in exile, be it voluntary, forced, secular or spiritual, tends to make it a less attractive or less-wished condition among humans. It is for this reason that Said argues further that any attempt in literature, or outside it, to imagine exile as a placid phenomenon would be unfair to those individuals, especially public intellectuals who bear the brunt of alienation. As Said questions:

> Is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irredeemably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography? (Said, 2001:174)

The loss which the exile encounters is indeed great as Soyinka shows in his experience of exile in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. He devotes two parts out of the eight-part text to the issue of exile as it affects him as an individual as well as a member of a society held under the excruciating impact of successive dictatorships. The two sections, 'Nation and exile' and 'Homecoming' detail the kind of horrendous dangers which often motivate intellectuals like the author to opt for flight as well as how much desirous of return such intellectuals could be even in the face of potential danger. Though Soyinka has experienced exile in varying forms and at different times of his life, his latest experience of relocation during the regime of Sani Abacha engages his attention in this text. In order not to hold Abacha entirely responsible for his four-year exile, Soyinka attempts to trace the events that culminated in his escape from the country in this particular instance back to the days of the Babangida regime during which the people were deceived with political machinations they expected would lead to a democratic dispensation but which eventually resulted in an interim civilian administration. The interim government was easily pushed aside by Abacha whose assumption of power spelt greater doom for the country and made intellection a more dangerous enterprise for the country's intellectuals, opinion leaders and leaders of civil society organizations.

The significance of language in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn,* therefore, consists in its contribution to the making of selfhood towards a better appreciation of the character of the author-protagonist. This kind of linguistic choice, as Anne Hoffman argues, 'calls our attention not only to narration as an ordering activity aimed at producing coherence, but also to self as a construction out of disparate impulses' (Hoffman, 1991: 10). Soyinka's occasional and sparing resort to his native Yoruba in inscribing certain expressions in an attempt to create a special aesthetic effect in the narrative is a constant reminder of the writer's background which is a very crucial element in his construction of identity. Apart from drawing extensively on elements of Yoruba culture and mythology Soyinka engages in a kind of code-mixing that reminds the reader of his native Yoruba culture and the influence this wields on the author. This is evident in the use of animal names like '*egbin*', '*etu*', '*igala*', '*aparo*' as well as the injection of native expressions like '*olori-kunkun*', '*Ogun re e*!', '*Mi o ri iku l'oju e*' which the writer goes ahead to footnote in the course of the narrative. In mirroring the subjectivity of the writer's self, this attitude to language is also indicative of the cosmopolitan nature of the identity of writers or individuals generally in the postcolony. Again, as Isabelle de Courtivron contends, 'contemporary bilingual authors are inevitably, hybrids and exiles. And through their experience of linguistic fragmentation, they express a more universal quest: the search for home, the hunger for return' (De Courtivron, 2007:32). The impact of experience which includes education and other forms of knowledge embedded in the civilization to which people in the postcolony are exposed tends to lend justification to this idea of a linguistic tradition that defines the identity of the writer in a particular way. This identity is also not limited to language as it often constitutes a factor as well in generic determination of works of art produced in different places and under varying circumstances.

In a way, therefore, Soyinka goes beyond the understanding of the autobiography as what James Olney describes as 'a fascination with the self and its profound, [and] its endless mysteries' (Olney, 1980: 23) to create a postcolonial narrative in which the individual's story in not complete without that of others in the community to which he belongs. In any case, Olney himself appreciates the peculiarity of the autobiographical imagination in African writing, a distinction which prompts him to regard Achebe's fiction, for instance,

as 'supra-personal, multi-generational autobiography of the Ibo people' and Ououlogem's novel *Le Devoir de Violence* as 'a symbolic autobiography of the entire continent and community of Africa' (cited in Maduakor, 1987: 160)[16]. In addition to this is the kind of agency that Soyinka assumes in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* which keys into the argument by Ibe Nwoga that:

> People have only to know what is right for them and their society and they will struggle to achieve those aims. The African writer is operating within this context, varying in intensity of facts in different parts of Africa, but still demanding that he use his art in pursuit of public ends. (Nwoga, 1976: 13)

Nwoga's view, as far as this agency implied by 'the pursuit of public ends' is concerned, finds companionship in the contention of another African literary critic, Adewale Maja-Pearce. As he puts it:

> Always in Africa, it is the individual who must risk everything for an idea of what their societies could be, but this is inescapable in societies where the institutions of the modern democratic state are deliberately subverted by reactionaries who, lacking a larger idea of human relations, wish only to perpetuate themselves and their kind in power. (Maja-Pearce, 1991: xii-xiii)

This kind of responsibility which Maja-Pearce talks about is clearly outlined by Wole Soyinka himself in a bid to give a kind of nationalistic definition to the concepts of patriotism and nationhood:

> If one accepts Nigeria as a space that must move beyond what a politician once described as a "mere geographical expression" to what my vision dictates as a humanized space of organic development, then I may be moved to stop quibbling over mere nomenclatures. Until then, that unfulfilled promise, Nigeria, must

[16] Olney's argument can be found in his *Tell Me Africa: An Introduction to African Literature* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p17)

> remain only a duty that we on our part, must continue to urge upon those same "Governments of African countries" challenging them to realize their own pronouncements, denouncing them before the entire world when they fail to do so, and insisting in that case that they be treated as pariahs, as the real traitors to their own kind and to humanity in general. (Soyinka, 1996: 132-134)

Although Soyinka realizes that the battle for liberation of 'that space, Nigeria, cannot be the duty and the burden of the writer and intellectual alone' (Ibid: 134), his approach to the question of exile in *You Must set Forth at Dawn* is one that goes a long way at suggesting the expediency of agency even when it bears its attendant costs including exile for the writer or the intellectual. The tension that results from the taking on of agency by writers in most African countries or even the developing world in general becomes one of the major precursors to nomadism on the part of writers and intellectuals with its attendant consequences on both the society as well as the individuals who become so alienated.

It is pertinent to note here that the act of writing itself is a form of defiance and subversion which the state views as a serious transgression against its authority. For the writer and intellectual, there is always a desire to be able to perform this act which for him is also a profession without any iota of hindrance. Soyinka makes this point in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* as he writes about the informing principle behind his independence play *A Dance of the Forests* in which 'the enemy, as I had identified it, was power and its pitfalls' (p53). The reaction of the establishment to such creative brazenness is always to read a kind of insurrection into the work of writers:

> The view was not shared by cultural bureaucrats, quick to smell out subversion. They cautioned that the play contained a subversive message. It had won the contest for the official theatre presentation for the occasion but was now deemed a damper, unsuitable for a festive occasion. (p53)

The fact that Soyinka had to stage his independence play at an alternative venue goes to show the beginning of conflict between the intellectual tradition and the postcolonial state right from the onset. The passion for creativity and the theatre as agents of Soyinka's activism can be seen in the way he combined his private theatrical activities with research at the University of Ibadan. But the establishment often has its own way of dealing with such transgression as Soyinka's relocation to the new University of Ife even fails to provide an anticipated shield from professional alienation. The banning of works of writers, their prohibition from teaching and the introduction of grand regulations which tend to interdict intellectuals in the academy has often been a major strategy in controlling dissidence. This is evident in Soyinka's resignation from Ife, along with five other colleagues, after the pronouncement of 'a new university credo' by the authorities of the institution urging support for 'the government of the day' (p61). His exile from the university community, as executed through the response of the institution to resignation notices served by the six lecturers, is even more instructive in the understanding of the power relations which often result in professional alienation and physical exile of intellectuals from the academic space:

> We gave the university the required three months' notice. Obedient to instructions from the Ministry of Education, however, the university responded by accepting the resignations—but with immediate effect. All resigning lecturers would be paid three months' salary in lieu of notice, and we were ordered to vacate our university residences within forty-eight hours! (p62)

The violence which attends the eviction of intellectuals from the academic community, which ordinarily should be their habitat, is exemplified by the manner in which the ministry handled the implementation of the forty-eight hour notice:

> To leave no doubt whatever in the minds of the anticredo group that the government's intent was understood, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education filled his white Mercedes-Benz with thugs, invaded Sam Aluko's house, terrorized his wife and children, flung their furniture and luggage all over

> and out of windows, and smashed a few household items. They left, warning that they would return after twenty-four hours. They tried also to find the residences of the other lecturers but failed—in any case, they were not eager to remain too long on campus, and two of us actually lived off campus. (p62)

The kind of scenario presented by Soyinka above validates the claim made by Micere Mugo that:

> in some of the most repressive regimes a writer does not have to be engaged in any serious revolutionary activity to be targeted for harassment. The simple act of speaking out and breaking the terror of silence imposed by such states is enough of a "crime." Indeed, most writers under neocolonial dictatorships find their creativity censored, stifled, and targeted for vicious attack by the system. Through the use of terror, the offending systems go all out to impose silence in yet another effort to close another channel for raising the consciousness of the people. This is particularly so when the artistic works reach their primary audience. (Mugo, 1997: 84)

Since most writers, especially in Soyinka's generation, were based in academic institutions, such institutions as the author hints at in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, became targets for the unleashing of the power of the state which contributed to the alienation of creative writers and intellectuals from the ivory tower. This kind of exiling influence is more visible today in the form of an unabating brain drain which sees the best intellectual resources of the African continent relocating mainly to the West from where they live relatively comfortable lives devoid of the kind of intimidating terror they have to contend with at home.

Soyinka's engagement with creative exile comes to the fore in various parts of the book. But it is more clearly outlined in the section titled 'Three Lost Years'. This section tells of the impact of the writer's commitment to activism on various other fronts, including

his winning of the Nobel Prize, which tends to make it difficult for him to concentrate on his primary vocation of writing:

> I handed over 1987 to the Swedish deity of dynamite and fulfilled my duties, swearing silently that the moment the next beauty queen was crowned had better be recognized as my hour of liberation. I had been stretched to the limit. My constituency was always wide—in the creative industry, in home politics and those of the continent, in issues of human rights—which, for me, includes the right to life, a commitment that led to my creation of a national Road Safety Corps and the unglamorous labor of hounding homicidal maniacs off the Nigerian highways and educating them the hard way. (p335)

The need to engage in different forms of activities other than that of creativity, which can be regarded as the primary enterprise that defines Soyinka as a person, suggests a kind of exile which for every writer is one to be viewed with seriousness. In other words, exile would extend beyond a geographical change of location and the greater pain of it would reside in the denial of the individual involved the opportunity of freedom to engage in activities which tend to offer him much fulfillment. As Olu Oguibe observes:

> exile is not so much about movement, relocation or departure as it is about loss; loss of the freedom to remain or return to things familiar. Exile is a rupture, the cessation of things previously taken for granted, the collapse of a world of relative certainties, and therein lies its sting. (Oguibe, 2006: 22)

This kind of rupture which Oguibe points out can be seen in several events narrated by Soyinka in the text. Perhaps the most poignant of these is the death of Femi which signals a kind of terminal exile embarked upon by the deceased and also represents a cessation of life engendering a painful moment in the life of family members and acquaintances chief among whom is Soyinka himself. Soyinka's choice of words in narrating what he considers the final moments of the life of his friend is indicative of an evocation of exile, particularly the form that leaves no room for return except in the symbolic form:

> Femi's eyes appeared to dissolve and sink into a deep, endless tunnel, fathomless. I stood above these opaque windows and stared into their roiling recesses, encountering nothing but space, just space, infinite space into which I was violently pulled, so that I felt weightless. I came to and found that I had leaned over and encased his free hand in both of mine. I withdrew slowly, chilled to the bone, acknowledging that he had withdrawn himself from the world, even as my hands left his. (p340)

The palpable fear which this description engenders as well as the presence of withdrawal both in lexical terms as well as in the ambience and mood generated by the author are all indicative of a form of exile with its attendant pains and disorientation. The pain of exile which Femi's death imposes on Soyinka is made greater by his burial in exile which is what is implied in the question: 'Why did his family choose to abandon his body in an obscure German village called Wiesbaden?" (p336). This question clearly demarcates between burial and abandonment. For Soyinka, drawing on African philosophical thought about the ideal place of final rest for the human soul, no burial could take place in a foreign land as the spirit of the dead is deemed to be in proper tranquility only when the body is interred in its 'home' land. This belief is reinforced by the contention of Oseloka Obazie that 'in the Yoruba and Igbo custom, regardless of costs, loved ones who die overseas are brought home to rest' (Obazie, 2006). The insistence by Soyinka, therefore, on bringing the body of his dead friend back home is indicative of a return after a period of exile as well as the desirability of return after a period of absence no matter in whatever form or how long the period of absence. The spirit of Femi is therefore brought to rest because of Soyinka's commitment to 'bringing him home in defiance of the unfathomable conspiracy to leave him in that foreign land like a stray without ties of family and friends' (p3). As Soyinka clearly shows in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* the fragmentary capacity of exile is often appreciated best in the concept of death. This is evident in the way the author feels about the departure of close associates like Femi Johnson, Ojetunji Aboyade, Dele Giwa and Ken Saro-Wiwa among others.

A similar incident which signals the imperative of return for the exile is that of the attempt by Soyinka and his culturally conscious colleagues to retrieve *Ori Olokun*, a bronze head which is a mythical embodiment of memory, culture and genealogy for the Yoruba nation. The search for the original head, believed to have been excavated by a German explorer in Ife and taken to Britain during the colonial period, signals the importance attached to history, memory and the cultural being of a people whose roots cannot be allowed to remain in a foreign land. The whole idea of rootedness, therefore, dictates that the exile must return even against all odds in order to reclaim home which is his original habitat and a place where his impact is especially felt and his being appreciated. Although some critics, like Maja-Pearce (2007) have expressed disquiet for the kind of illicitness attending efforts to bring back the bronze head the point needs to be made that exile is often a very provocative issue especially when it involves matters that border on people's individual or collective identity. In order to understand further the urgency of this cultural object and its mythical quality, for the culturally inclined Yoruba especially, we may wish to turn our mind to the annual ritual of the washing of the head preceding its expatriation which Soyinka vividly describes in the text:

> Together with some companion figures, Ori Olokun—the head of Olokun—was traditionally buried in the courtyard of Ife palace by the priesthood, brought out only at his annual festival, when it is ritualistically washed, honored, and then returned to its resting place until the next outing. (p191)

This annual ritual which features a great deal of celebration symbolizes return for Ori Olokun and the blessings which the adherents of the deity believe accompany this return signifies the spiritual and material capital which the return of the exile often translates to for his community.

The activities which distract the writer from creativity are usually not always a result of victimization from the state. What this calls our attention to is the fact that exile is not always a political phenomenon. In fact, there are as many factors responsible for it as the variety of forms of exile which can be identified especially when we talk of the term in

relation to artists or writers who combine activism or intellection with the creative vocation. This point is by no means intended to undermine the power of politics in the vexed issue of exile as one cannot agree more with Sara Forsdyke in her contention that 'decisions about who is included or excluded from a community are always bound up with political power and that, in some sense, political power is the power to determine who shall and who shall not be a member of a community' (Forsdyke, 2005: 8)[17]. As rewarding as the Nobel is, for instance, the attention it brings to the writer as Soyinka narrates in the text is enough to impact negatively on his creativity. This perhaps explains the contention that 'The Nobel appears to be a bug whose bite is craved, sometimes without any sense of inhibition' (p331). The pressure on the recipient of this craved 'bug' becomes great considering the numerous sponsorship engagements which subsequently take the writer away from his primary business of writing. The impression that Soyinka creates of himself in form of his reaction to this kind of dilemma is that of someone who finds the distraction unpalatable. But there is the need to understand the fact that intellectuals also like Soyinka command a great deal of power which their achievements like winning the Nobel and other prizes confer on them and which also help them to become individuals that the state is unable to deal with at will as it would have if they were not in the class where such awards thrust them. Beyond the level of the state the kind of international recognition which such a prize offers can be said to be part of what the writer needs in the course of his emergence into an intellectual of note within and outside his home country. A good example of this is the kind of 'generosity' Soyinka receives from the Erico Matei Foundation after the conferment of the award:

> I found myself at the receiving end of further generosity from the Erico Matei Foundation, the ENI (AGIP) people. I was set up in a luxurious hotel where if I chanced to sneeze, the management came running. I was not allowed to pay for anything. I was provided with an escort who was extremely pleasant and charming but talked my head into a coma. She was entrusted with a budget for shopping—outfitting me for the cold of Stockholm. (p324)

[17] Forsdyke's typology of exile includes political, religious, judicial and economic exile.

This description of his experience clearly shows Soyinka as a powerful individual who, though in most instances would want to be identified with the subaltern populace, assumes a kind of power which cannot be taken for granted and as a result gets the kind of treatment that an ordinary individual would not have got. The major question that this raises for us is that of the culpability of the state in all experiences of exile that the intellectual suffers. It is possible to argue that there are certain forms of exile, physical, creative or otherwise that the public intellectual goes through as part of the price he has to pay for his own being and not necessarily a condition arising from the alienating and imperialist tendencies of the state or the ruling elite.

It then becomes clear that the alienation which the intellectual or artist is likely to suffer in terms of his or her inability to be creatively engaged is a product of two potential dilemmas—the intolerance from the state as well as the responsibility which the intellectual's public acclaim confers on him as a powerful individual. This is the kind of orientation we find in Soyinka's engagement with exile prompting Norman Rush to conclude that 'Soyinka's unceasing political activism has been carried out within Nigeria when that was possible and overseas when it wasn't, utilizing the connections and institutional support his growing academic stardom and literary eminence afforded him' (Rush, 2006). Stardom itself, it must be noted, is a form of power which gives privilege to intellectuals all over the world and which by implication makes them different from the ordinary citizen or the subaltern character that they may seek to be identified as. The power conferred on intellectuals by their stardom notwithstanding, they remain vulnerable to the crushing influence of state power especially when such power resides in the hands of individuals or regimes with dictatorial tendencies. As Pavel puts it:

> By emphasizing universal education … states gave intellectuals a key role; at the same time, the nation-building process promoted them to a central symbolic role in the legitimation of national unity. The power and prestige they henceforth carried by virtue of what Paul Benichou (1973) called "the coronation of the writer" also made them more vulnerable to fears and whims of the potentates,

> especially those who ruled with an iron hand at the apex of an illiberal system. (Pavel, 1998: 28)

This kind of scenario has made several other critics to suggest that exile, in whatever form, is not a desirable thing which the writer willingly opts for. In one of such instances Oguibe observes that 'the sojourn of exile is particularly tragic because it is inevitable, inescapably bracketed by the fact of loss, not of things willingly forsaken but of things forcibly left behind, things from which separation is a violent act that leaves a wound for which there is no healing even to the grave' (Oguibe, 2006: 22).

However, the stardom, prominence and eminence which most intellectuals draw on especially in taking on agency for the community requires a kind of globality which makes rootedness less attractive. This is the point at which global citizenship and nationalism combine to produce a serious dilemma for the intellectual. Soyinka's desire to remain in Nigeria notwithstanding, he opts for flight when it becomes obvious to him that the Abacha regime would not be any considerate in dealing with activists who do not see issues with the same political lenses of the authorities. The fear that is generated in this development is captured by Soyinka in his reaction to the confirmatory encounter between him and Ibrahim Alfa who is the air force chief of the regime: 'Inwardly, I shook like a leaf and began to give serious though to relocation' (p372). Exile becomes obviously tragic and undesirable when it involves physical relocation as a result of threats to the lives of intellectuals. What is to follow the takeover of the country by Abacha, as Soyinka describes it, would leave no one in doubt about the palpable danger that intellectual activity under the regime would imply:

> Emboldened, he began to toy with the captive populace. Inauguration of yet another constitution-writing body, one third of which would be his own nominees. A new timetable for civilian restoration, then another. Arrests. Detentions. Constitutional Assembly sent on forced vacation, returned sober and compliant. Mysterious assassinations generally attributed to armed robbers. Abrupt retirement of more professional soldiers. Deployment of suspect military units to

> the civil war front in Liberia. Flights of targeted individuals, including the dictator's earlier collaborators. (p373)

In Soyinka's estimation the tactics employed by the regime of Abacha to deal with dissent are too crude for anyone to want to dare the dictator when the option of exile appears to be available. Soyinka, therefore, shows here that he is not among the first category of people to opt for exile and that it becomes an inevitable choice only at a point when 'the ascendancy of raw, naked power was rapid' (p374).

Also linking his final decision to relocate to a series of entreaties coming from different quarters including state security agents who ostensibly have information about plans to eliminate him in order to prevent a one million man march on the Abuja seat of government, Soyinka treats exile as the opposite of escape making it a means to an end in the taking on of agency for the community. Yet this does not prevent him from expressing the pain and the feeling of a sense of loss in the whole game:

> I dawdled, not because I underestimated the complex despot but because of a deep resentment that, at sixty years of age, I was again about to be dislodged from my home—and by a being I truly despised. I knew his record from the civil war; so did the army. Abacha had been a prime player on the killing fields of the Midwest region—men, women, even children—after the Biafran forces had been routed. The future Maximum Ruler did not discriminate. (p383)

Even when Soyinka eventually crosses the border into exile after a harrowing journey through the grooves and the swamps the bitter experience of exile is still invoked in his feeling: 'For one who had sworn to himself that no tyrant would ever again chase him beyond the bounds of his nation, it was a moment of bitter defeat. Even when the choice is willingly made, exile sinks into one as a palpable space of bereavement. At that moment, I believe I died a little' (p387).

Anger, the kind expressed here by Soyinka at his forced departure, has often been one of the major products of exile literature. For the intellectual such anger becomes productive. It produces or reinvigorates agency as a response to the hegemony of the power that produces the exilic condition in the first place. Hence, Soyinka converts his exile experience into an opportunity to mount a campaign against the Abacha regime from the international arena. This is seen in his co-ordination of the activities of the clandestine Radio Kudirat as well as his formation of a pro-democracy group comprising mainly exiles outside the country at the time:

> I had not left Nigeria by the hazardous route just to imbibe the air of foreign climes, and I soon set about gathering a number of exiles—students and workers—together to create the National Liberation Coalition (NALICON). There was already an opposition movement, the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), in existence. It had been formed within Nigeria by a combination of former military officers and political veterans who had finally resolved to challenge Sani Abacha's dictatorship. (p398)

Apart from serving as a resistance movement with a motive similar to that of NADECO, Soyinka's NALICON also came into being as a result of his loss of faith in the strategies adopted by the latter in dealing with the military dictatorship. For him nothing short of an armed struggle, other than the mild resistance which NADECO appeared to provide could solve the problem at hand. Soyinka's contempt for NADECO'S modus operandi is seen in his narration of the character of the conduct of its activities and its members:

> The first "getting-to-know-you" meetings with NADECO made it clear that this was a ponderous organization, top-heavy and with competitive egos. Singly, its membership boasted experience and dedication; collectively, however, they tended to indulge in peripheral contests that consumed time and eroded their political credibility. (p398)

It is possible to argue that the urgency which accompanies Soyinka's agency makes it difficult for him to proceed at the kind of pace described by him especially when consideration is given to the lethargy implied in the leadership of the movement by Anthony Enahoro:

> There was a civil service approach to the making of tactical decisions for the overthrow of a tyranny. NADECO became an even more difficult working partner with the arrival of my favorite political maverick, Chief Tony Enahoro, who, paradoxically, thrived on endless meetings, copious minutes, points of order, standing orders, and the moving and seconding of motions, counter motions and amendments to motions. (p399)

It needs pointing out here that the urgency with which Soyinka acts notwithstanding, his carpeting of NADECO and its prime actors especially Enahoro is indicative of the fact that the camp of activists itself is not an impeccable community devoid of politics. The disagreements which later surface even within NALICON and the UDFN to which Soyinka laments that 'the affliction I sought to escape in NADECO traveled with the luggage of a handful' (p405) is indicative of this lack of immunity to crisis in any organization. This kind of situation also produces a kind of nomadism which afflicts activists who find it difficult to remain rooted within one organization while organizations themselves acquire a kind of mobility in character which detract from their ability to make the desired impact on society.

The desire for return is of great significance as one of the ways to show that the exile is not in any way an escapist who seeks an avenue to avoid the reality at home. In ruling out exile as route of escape for intellectuals, Said observes that the emotional fragmentation which comes with it is usually borne solely by the individual who finds himself in such a condition. For him, therefore, 'in a very acute sense exile is a solitude experience: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation' (Said, 2000: 177). In order to return to this communal habitation, the exiled individual continues to seek return both in the physical and metaphoric forms. This kind of attitude is evidenced by

Soyinka's fascination with his discovery in Jamaica of 'a slave settlement called Bekuta, a name that immediately resonated in my head as none other than the name of my hometown, Abeokuta' (p21). It is a natural relief, therefore, that the exiled Soyinka finds the new space suitable enough for his interment should he die in exile:

> As I set out on one mission after another, in pursuit of what surely, simply had to be the repossession of one's real space, my mind took refuge in Bekuta. It was not a morbid condition, just a matter-of-fact possibility that stared me in the face. Agitated by the thought that some misguided friends or family would take my remains to Nigeria, I announced openly that, if the worst happened, I did not want Abacha's triumphant feet galumphing over my body and would settle for the surrogate earth of Jamaica. And I began to make preparations to buy a patch of land in Bekuta. (p23)

In this approach to the issue of return can be found a validation of the self through historical association, which results in solidarity with the new space which becomes home in a sense or is able to offer the value of home. The essence of Soyinka's fascination is seen in the kind of celebration associated with return. The reunification of the individual with his home is a very important moment that calls for celebration and the kind of rapturous welcome that Soyinka receives at the end of his four year exile which makes him to end the narrative thus: 'I am back in the place I never should have left' (p499).

In the discussion of exile there is a particular form of alienation which appears not to often attract the attention of critics. This is the alienation that dictators themselves go through as a result of the sense of insecurity they imagine especially after they have created an atmosphere in their territories which makes rootedness unattractive to writers and intellectuals. In presenting Babangida's reactions to the political situations in Nigeria during his reign, for instance, Soyinka seems to suggest a particular kind of exile which afflicts the ruling class. This form of exile is discernible in the alienation from the people—and this is at times physical—which rulers suffer when they fail to reason with

the people and also become suspicious of everyone or in extreme cases everything around them such that moving freely within the geographical entity over which they claim to preside becomes increasingly unattractive. In narrating Babangida's response to critical comments on his handling of his own transition programme, for instance, Soyinka writes:

> His response to the avalanche of cautionary articles, satirical cartoons, public rumblings, threats, reasoned advice even from within the military, and passionate denunciations that inundated private and public spaces and the media was to remain holed up in his fortress, silent. (Soyinka, 2006: 347-348)

This attempt to remain immune to the feelings of the society and hence the reality of the moment can be read as a kind of exile which holds serious danger even for members of the ruling class who, unfortunately, see their withdrawal from society as a kind of fortification which may guarantee them further control over the people and offer them security from the querying public. This further draws our attention to the connection between exile and political power. The politics of exile that plays out in most African countries like we see in the case of leaders who inadvertently ostracize themselves from society often has its telling effects on the whole of society in the long run. More poignant than Babangida's withdrawal from society is the schizoid nature of Sani Abacha who hardly left the fortified precincts of Aso Rock[18]. As David Weeks and Jamie James argue, 'a person with a schizoid personality prefers to be on his own, showing an extreme aversion to groups, a tendency which usually results in a remarkable concentration on strange, obsessive hobbies' (Weeks and James, 1995: 9). The significance of this kind of argument is to bring to the fore the fact that members of the ruling elite, who are often responsible for the exile experience of most intellectuals in the postcolony and elsewhere, at times subject themselves, albeit unknowingly, to conditions which can be interpreted as exilic when they withdraw from the rest of society as a means to self preservation.

Above all, the thematic device of exile becomes, therefore, the discursive space of the struggle for and the attainment of agency in Soyinka's autobiographical writing. In other

[18] Aso Rock is the name for Nigeria's presidential villa located in the country's capital, Abuja

words exile and agency go hand-in-hand with the process of self definition which is one of the major projects if not the central concern of the work. *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* clearly becomes a text in the region of what Ruth Obee citing Bernth Lindfors describes as 'the literature of self definition, the theme of which is the search for the lost and alienated self within the framework of his own community—where the alien and the exile find meaning and affirmation' (Obee, 1999: 113). This search and affirmation involves in Soyinka's case a self reflexivity as well as a kind of reaching out to the immediate and remote communities of the writer in an attempt to forge a better appreciation of his character, being and actions. Exile and return represent for African intellectuals like Soyinka, a kind of nomadism that they find not just unpalatable but one that imposes negative consequences on their creative ability as well as their desire to remain at home where there is the freedom of a cultural consummation that they find nourishing to their body, soul and intellect. So, we can see in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* a careful attempt by the author to present exile as the opposite of wanderlust. Exile at this point also becomes a form of resistance. As Sara Upstone notes, 'it is a strategy of resistance as empowering as any conventional assertion of belonging' (Upstone, 2006: 34). This resistance is crafted as one of the different forms of commitment which the writer uses to provide a visionary interpretation of the reality around him. The adoption of this kind of artistic approach whic is a known feature of Soyinka's poetic and dramatic writings in a life narrative cannot be without a purpose. As Biodun Jeyifo observes, 'Soyinka has increasingly turned to other prose forms like fictionalized biography and the autobiographical memoir to engage closely related aesthetic and moral challenges and dilemmas that he had engaged in his dramas, poetry and novels' (Jeyifo, 2004: 170). This then explains the intertextual link between the title of this text and an earlier poem by Soyinka titled 'The Road'. Soyinka's odyssey which implies the exilic experience of constantly going and coming is given expression in the idea of 'setting forth' onto the road. The road here holds both physical and transcendental meanings which seek to explain the restlessness of the odyssean space that the road symbolizes. In doing this, therefore, Soyinka explores exile to two different ends—self fashioning and commitment to a vision of liberating society through intellectual activism which extends beyond mere

literary engagement. This raises another critical issue in the life of public intellectuals; that of nationalism which will be dealt with in the next chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM NATIONALISM TO SOLIDARITY: AGENCY AND THE POLITICS OF COMMITMENT IN *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN*

The question of commitment has often resonated in not just African writing but in the literature of the entire postcolony. At the initial stage, commitment seemed to tally with nationalism to a large extent. Things appear to have taken different dimensions, however, with new social and historical developments across the postcolonial world. This chapter, therefore, explores the transformation of the concept of nationalism as can be seen in Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. It addresses the question of the making of selfhood through the adoption of different strands of nationalism especially solidarity and populist nationalism in order to enhance the perception and public rating of the writer who is also a public intellectual. While drawing examples from the narrative the chapter delves into different exploits of Wole Soyinka which seek to portray him as a character whose concern for his community, nation and self all add up in determining the self and by extension the public image of the writer as a public intellectual.

The previous chapter of this thesis dwelt on the question of exile and return in the lives of public intellectuals especially in Africa where prevailing circumstances make rootedness a hazardous choice. Nonetheless, some writers, especially those who have chosen the option of being public intellectuals take on the gauntlet as a result of a nationalist fervour which makes them give greater consideration to the interest of the nation and by implication the subaltern population who may not be privileged to relocate in the face of excruciating conditions. In different kinds of ways, therefore, Wole Soyinka deploys his autobiographical narrative in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* to bring to the fore the question of nationalism which plays a great role in the determination of the personality of popular figures including public intellectuals. It is pertinent at this point to take a closer look at the concept of nationalism especially as it applies to the portrayal of characters in literature and in public life. In getting to the root of nationalism as a concept it will be

helpful to use its root word 'nation' as a starting point. Anthony Smith defines the nation as 'a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (Smith, 1999: 11). The love for as well as the quest for the progress of this kind of entity produces a kind of feeling which is often identified as nationalism. As Edward Said puts it:

> Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and by so doing it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages…. All nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement. (Said, 2000: 176)

The debate around the idea of the nation and nationalism has, however, assumed deeper dimensions since Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as 'an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson, 1983: 15). For Anderson the nation is merely imagined 'because the members of even the smallest nation never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them. Yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Ibid). This argument clearly approaches the idea of the nation from the angle of a physical identifiable geographical space. But other scholars like Iliana Pardes and Emmanuel Yewah tend to view the nation beyond the physical realm. Yewah quotes Pardes as seeing the nation as 'an imagined construct' or an 'inscape rather than a landscape of national identity' (Yewah, 2001: 48). In this instance, the nation is conceived more as 'a construct of the mind, a mental structure in the process of mapping and re-mapping itself' (Ibid). Nationalism in a sense then becomes a phenomenon by which an individual feels and asserts a sense of belonging to a particular group, whether real or imagined, in order to create an identity or satisfy an inner craving[19]. This assertion of belonging as portrayed by Soyinka in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* paints a picture of a love for the nation which approximates a confrontation with all kinds of forces which the writers deems to be

[19] It will be useful to observe here that there can be no single or unified understanding of the idea of the nation and nationalism considering the diverse nature of approaches to the notion of nation.

detrimental to the progress of the geographical entity and the population which inhabits it. The unity of the nation as an entity however remains questionable especially in postcolonial societies where different ethnic categories are conscripted into a geographical whole by colonizing forces.

Beyond the love for the nation which intellectuals exhibit is to be seen a kind affection identified by Ben Xu as 'populist nationalism' (Xu, 2001: 120). This kind of nationalism which can otherwise be regarded as solidarity identifies the subaltern group with which the writer invests his sympathy as a way of expressing affection for a larger geographical entity[20]. While patriotism can be said to stand for official nationalism, populist nationalism emphasizes 'the incarnation of the democratic process that allows the common people to join with others in forming ideals of equality and dignity in the national environment' (Xu, 2001: 120). As illustrated by Soyinka in the galvanization of popular movements against the excesses of the state and military dictatorship in *You Must set Forth at Dawn*, public intellectuals provide the complementary force and in most cases the leadership needed to nudge the populace into taking action against the tyrannical tendencies of the state and its agencies. In other words, the interest of individuals and smaller groups within the nation is seen as capable of producing an aggregate which can catalyze growth and comfort for the entire polity. In the postcolonial setting, writers of the autobiographical genre attempt to engage with issues in ways and manners reflective of the peculiarity of their situation. African writers for instance have had to grapple with the idea of commitment both during the days of the struggle for decolonization as well as in the immediate post-independence era. The disappointment attending self rule in most African states has however implied a paradigm shift by writers resulting in a kind of denunciation of the idea of a direct nationalist orientation, where nationalism connotes an unambiguous devotion to nationalist ideals, to a pitching of their tents with various other categories, groups and units defined by characteristics other than those outlined by nationalism. This shift is the central concern of this chapter.

[20] Solidarity is not in all cases with the subaltern.

Beyond the concern with the individual personality, the autobiographical works of African writers carry with them an appropriation of the totality of the experience of their communities. In other words, no African writer, especially of the autobiographical genre, sees himself in isolation of his community. For most of them, writing auto/biographies is just another way of sustaining what Iji (1991: 101) describes as an 'aggressive pursuit of their commitment to present an alternative to the present mode of thought'. This commitment is in itself indicative of a unique kind of nationalism which binds most African writers to their communities and one of the ways of expressing such nationalism is through the adoption of a stance of solidarity with the community and its traditions.

It is pertinent to state at this point that the idea of nationalism often receives a kind of re-evaluation in the works of post-colonial writers as the urgency created by the colonial system of oppression largely drawn along racial lines often disappears giving birth to a new form of subjugation defined by class, ethnicity and gender. This propels the writer to take a second look at his stance. Nationalism itself is such a polymorphic phenomenon that it has to be considered with a sense of analysis. In other words, the idea of loyalty which is implicated in the concept of solidarity raises many questions for the writer and the society. To what direction, for instance, does a writer or even an individual channel his loyalty to be regarded as a nationalist? Nigerian nationalism, for example, was at a time like Indian nationalism and other similar forms of nationalism, a struggle against the British Empire for independent statehood. In a similar vein some francophone African countries battled the domination of their territories by French imperialism. With colonialism out of the way, however, some writers instead of allowing nationalism to 'cease to signify the struggle for popular sovereignty, [and] equal citizenship' (Baum, 2001: 6) are beginning to find new ways of expressing the idea of loyalty to their communities. One of such alternatives is to be found in the concept of solidarity. The idea of the nation then becomes 'a product of strictly modern social conditions' (Smith, 1988: 6). By implication, therefore, each individual or group is most likely to construct the idea of the nation along social lines and in consonance with the purpose for which they intend to deploy the concept. In any case, the questioning of older assumptions of

nationalism throws up a new and different perspective for the understanding of the idea of nations and nationalism as further buttressed by Smith:

> Briefly, this perspective holds that far from being a natural or necessary element in the fabric of society and history, the nation is a purely modern phenomenon, a product of strictly modern developments like capitalism, bureaucracy and secular utilitarianism. It is really a quite contingent phenomenon, with roots in neither human nature nor history, even if today it has become ubiquitous because its nationalism accords so well with contemporary conditions. (Smith, 1988: 8)

In addition to this are the continuous revolts of peripheral geographical units within different nations which can be said to be an attempt by those forced to the margin by contemporary social conditions to reaffirm and reassert their identities in the face of economic as well as socio-cultural exclusion. The above condition, therefore, signals the preponderance of nationalism in contemporary literary discourse thereby paving the way for new modes of expression arising from the diversity of approaches to understanding the concept itself.

The idea of solidarity, here, suggests an emotional investment, which is one of the defining factors of postcolonial writing, on the part of the author. Even from the days of the slave narratives the tendency has been to explore themes which reflect group concerns as is the case with the condemnation of the traffic in humans and the call for the abolition of slavery. The numerous paradoxes of the modern African society and individual African states have, however, implied a kind of shift in the way in which writers, including Wole Soyinka, try to imagine the questions of nationalism and commitment. In postmodernist writing, therefore, there emerges a relativization of ideas of the nation as well as the idea of loyalty to its cause. In any case, the nation at this point no longer remains the entity it was in the days of Pan-Africanist nationalism and the liberation struggle. The preponderance of events which seem to ‘cast doubt on the possibility of democratic consolidation in Africa’ (Monga, 1996: 62) under self rule tends to validate this new position by many of the continents writers. This disenchantment with

the emerging leadership in Africa is voiced by Soyinka quite early in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn:*

> The nationalists, the first-generation elected leaders and legislators of our semi-independent nation had begun to visit Great Britain in droves. We watched their preening, their ostentatious spending, and their cultivated condescension, even disdain, toward the people they were supposed to represent. (p.42)

Situating the problem within the ambience of corruption in public office, Gyekye observes that 'it cannot be denied that the most outstanding and resilient problem that has beset and blighted the politics of the new nations (or, nation-states) of post-colonial Africa is political corruption' (Gyekye, 1997: 192).

In pointing out the profligacy of post-independence leadership Soyinka breaks away from the rank of retrospective African writers, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, who often blame colonialism for the myriad dislocations standing in the way of development in several African states. As George Nyamndi observes, 'the uncritical glossing over by successive African writers, of their society's cultural weaknesses has done a great deal to quagmire the continent in the paradoxes and ambiguities that today make take-off almost impossible' (Nyamndi, 2006: 570). Although Soyinka blames colonial adventurers for fragmenting the African continent with attendant devastating consequences, he does not see this as a problem that cannot be surmounted if a new generation of leaders were really determined to create a new reality:

> The future spread itself before us: the reassemblage of a much-abused, much violated people on whose heads the ultimate insult had been heaped—broken into pieces and then glued back together like the shell of the tortoise in folk mythology. (p.39)

In specifically referring to the complicity of the colonial authorities in the manipulation of the preparatory federal elections in 1959, Soyinka clearly apportions to the colonizers

their own share of culpability in the ensuing national crisis: 'The elections that placed a government in power at the centre were rigged—by the British! John Bull was not about to leave an independent Nigeria under the control of any uppity radicals, as the southern nationalists—the East and the West were perceived' (p.54). In the prevailing circumstances, the immediate post-independence leadership and successive regimes in Africa continue to deploy the weapons of colonial hybridity which empowers educated nationalists with both Western and indigenous knowledge to, ludicrously, oppress their own people.

The nationalists, some of whom emerged as leaders in their various countries, therefore, became people who in Soyinka's estimation embarked on 'a crusade that is based on moral rights [but] obviously undermined by the impurity of the conduct of its proponents' (Soyinka, 1999: 45). With the new states carrying over more than old traces from the colonial era, the post-liberation African society faces new challenges of nation building and for the African writer representation of reality and artistic concern. The crisis of representation which emerges from this situation makes the old imaginary less enriching. As a way out, writers in contemporary African literature seem to have found consolation in the adoption of fantasy and the deployment of magical realism which tends to represent the unimaginable and the fantastic as reality appears to be surpassing fiction in the ordering of socio-political behaviour on the African continent. Magical realism, therefore, in the estimation of Brenda Cooper, 'strives, with greater or lesser success, to capture the paradox, the unity of opposites; it contests polarities such as history versus magic, the post-colonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death' (Cooper, 1998: 1). Another art form which seems to have become a ready tool for the expression of contemporary reality in post-colonial Africa is the autobiography. The major distinguishing feature here is that while magical realist fiction dwells mainly on fictional representation, the autobiography attempts to lay claim to factual representation. In a sense, therefore, writers are beginning to find a shift from what we can call nationalist writing since, as Bozzoli (2004: 229) puts it, 'the power of nationalism lies in the nature of its symbolic repertoire' and that repertoire appears to have been depleted to a large extent by realities on the continent. This shift, however, is not to suggest any form

of incompatibility between the other artistic forms and the expression of nationalism and its tropes.

As society and social formations become too complex to comprehend, therefore, writers also begin to fashion out a new model of commitment in the form of solidarity with the people. Approaching the concept of solidarity from a black nationalism point of view, Tricia Rose observes that 'black culture emphasizes sacrifice for the larger good and a steadfast commitment to affirmation and confirmation against relentlessly long odds' (cited in Elam and Jackson, 2005: vii). In many instances, there is an attempt by some of these writers to ensure that, as Soyinka (2003: 6) puts it, 'the stolen voice returns to its rightful proprietor'. In doing this, the likelihood increases of the ability 'to lead the societies successfully into a post-independence state of liberation- either from continuing western imperialism, or from their own internal contradictions,' (Lazarus, 2004: 43). Taking a broader look at autobiography, Linda Anderson would like to see it as 'a site for negotiating and challenging the different ways meaning is given to the self' (Anderson, 2004: 16). This contention appears to make the total isolation of the individual subject impossible when viewed especially from the point of view of the socio-cultural implications of human existence. Anderson's position is therefore strengthened by Ross Posnock through his argument that 'intellectuals as a social group is predisposed to status anxiety and disaffection' (Posnock, 1991: 567). This status anxiety often arises from the concern of intellectuals themselves about what society thinks of them and hence the need for them to create or maintain an image of the self that is not at variance with the social crusade for which they are known. The nation and the value which each individual places on it then becomes a measuring rod for the determination of relevance in the community. In Soyinka's case, the writer uses the autobiographical narrative of his own life in *You Must Set forth at Dawn* as a vehicle for the actualization of a particular perspective of the self, in this case his own personality. In doing this, he tries to paint the picture of a concerned personality who, as a member of a group of public intellectuals, sees the nation and the protection of its interest as a major preoccupation.

With the above scenario in mind, the manifestation of the autobiography as a medium of literary expression, especially in post colonial societies, can therefore be viewed as a pointer to the uniqueness of the experience of writers, and by extension their communities, during and after colonialism. This, as would be expected is usually done through a representation of the life experience of writers who themselves, in some cases, have been part of the liberation struggles in their communities. In doing this, writers of autobiography in postcolonial societies often bring out what Michael Chapman considers 'a distinctive quality of the autobiography: the quality of its assessing evaluating mind' (Chapman, 2006: 85). With this assessment and evaluation of the autobiography in postcolonial settings the writers in the final analysis affect their societies through a reinforcement of memory, reinvention of history and the fostering of a spirit of solidarity derived from populist nationalism for a balance of relations among various classes.

In the case of Wole Soyinka, there have been several attempts in his autobiographical works to reenact history and bring the various segments of society, and indeed every reader of these works, to understand the need for the people, especially the less privileged, to find a common ground and meeting point where their interests can be harmonized and taken care of[21]. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* Soyinka adopts various approaches in emphasizing the need for solidarity through a narrative that incorporates the activities of the author himself, in the main, and those of notable individuals whom he characterizes in the work. The portrayal of individuals, relationships, and behavioural traits of people whose real names are given in most cases tends to give an impression of the readiness of the author to define the character of personalities who have shaped the course of events, or are even at the moment involved in or likely to still attempt to have a hand in the affairs of his country. This appears to be borne out of a spirit of nationalism which is a major principle in most African life writing. Even the titles of some of such works suggest a nationalistic fervour. The title of Soyinka's work here under consideration suggests a wake up call and an underlying awareness of the urgency of the

[21] This trend can be found in some of Soyinka's earlier works like *The Man Died*, I*badan* and to a little extent *Isara*

socio-political situation in the setting of the narrative. It is also in realization of this need and urgency that Nadine Gordimer reflects:

> We have known that our task was to bring to our people's consciousness and that of the world the true dimensions of racism and colonialism beyond those that can be reached by the media, the newspapers column and screen image, however valuable these may be. (Gordimer, 2006: 29)

This shows a clear need for consonance with the needs of the people as a crucial element of literature especially in postcolonial societies. The demonstration of solidarity with the people is quite visible in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. For instance, the author finds it difficult to accept an impending electoral fraud and decides to take action on the side of the people by holding up a radio station to prevent the announcement of the cooked up results.

> I would have preferred that we take over the broadcasting station entirely and occupy it for some days, stoking up the now-inevitable uprising with the usual messages of resistance and solidarity, but what forces we could muster were hopelessly inadequate for such an undertaking. (p.81)

In spite of the inadequacy of forces, which is self-identified, the author still goes ahead using his intellectual capacity to swap the tape of the slated broadcast of the premier as a way of letting the people know that all was not well with regard to the elections whose results were being eagerly expected. Grave as the real and imagined consequences of such a daring action could be, Soyinka embarks on his mission as a way of showing solidarity with the people whose voices were on the verge of being subdued.

The author's obsession with justice, which can be ascribed as one major motivation in pursuing this course of action, reinforces the position of the African autobiography as a genre that is unable to confine itself to personal experience alone. This kind of attitude is also reflected in Soyinka's presentation of his relationship with the Biafran state and his

insistence on crossing the lines to see the possibility of snatching some peace from the muzzle of the gun and thus preventing the inevitable dislocation of society that was imminent in the prosecution of the Nigerian civil war. Before embarking on this journey, however, there have been moments of interrogation of the self by the author in order to secure a conviction that the action was indeed a useful one especially in the humanist sense. At this point of his narrative Soyinka sets up a dialectic which does not allow for absolutism in the perception of both oppression and collusion. For him:

> Consolidation of military power would be inescapable once war was declared. In the thinking of many of us, a military dictatorship with no foreseeable end appeared to be worst of all possible evils, including even the "evil" of secession. (p. 107)

The rejection of both war and secession at the same time, signposts a kind of commitment to the nation and humanity in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. It betrays an attempt to resolve, in a literary sense, the conflict between the nation and a fraction of its margins. Understandably, none seemed desirable between the prospects of a civil war and that of a fragmentation of the geographical entity so soon after the departure of the imperialist colonialists.

Even before this time, Soyinka sympathizes with the post-colonial nation for its fate in falling into the hands of a political elite who either were completely oblivious of the use of power in an evolving economy, or simply saw their ascension through a mandate given by their people at the polls as a great opportunity to replay often with greater ferocity the game of imperialist domination which some of them had fought against as supposed nationalists:

> I was not pessimistic about the future but extremely cautious, having once come into contact with the first generation leaders in my student days in England. The enemy, as I identified it, was power and its pitfalls, a cautionary motif that dominated my would-be independence play, *A Dance of the Forests*. (p. 53)

The earlier representation of these leaders further validates Soyinka's concern and solidarity with the people who have placed their mandates at the disposal of those they believed were civilized enough to know what was good for a nation in its infancy:

> The nationalists, the first-generation elected leaders and legislators of our semi-independent nation, had begun to visit Great Britain in droves. We watched their preening, their ostentatious spending, and their cultivated condescension, even disdain, toward the people they were supposed to represent….Visiting politicians financed lavish parties for one sole purpose ─ to bring on the girls! They appeared to have only one ambition on the brain: to sleep with a white woman. (p.42)

Such was the situation with many emerging African nations around this period who suffered far greater injustices in the hands of people who were initially considered to be on the side of the people as a result of their activities and confessions to the nationalist creed.[22]

The desire to create an unambiguous identity often pervades most post-colonial writing. In the life writing category, Soyinka refreshes our memory and brings to mind the importance of cultural identity in his presentation of the story of the missing *Ori Olokun*[23] as well as the resultant deceit imposed on the community through the faking of this artifact of genealogical significance especially to the Yoruba race. The pains and risks through which Soyinka leads his team of recovery expeditionists consisting of intellectuals and highly exposed individuals only goes a long way to prove the primacy of cultural retrieval as a major concern in postcolonial societies. The need for restoration, and even purification arising from the sacrilegious faking of the original *Ori Olokun*, bears forth as Soyinka narrates his feelings after acquiring the knowledge of the existence of the original head in a foreigner's private gallery in Brazil.

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[22] Experiences in other African states like Ghana, Togo, Kenya, and Tanzania among others reflect this kind of problem with post-colonial leadership.

[23] *Ori Olokun* is the bronze head of a principal Yoruba deity, *Olokun*, who is believed to preside over the seas. Soyinka's interest in the deity can also be understood from the point of view that *Ogun*, his patron deity is believed to be a grandson of *Olokun.*

> The walls of my office dissolved in mists of ancient legend, turning my three interlocutors briefly into three sons of Oduduwa[24]. From across time, I heard only their plea for the restoration of their being, *my* being, to its original repleteness. (p.192)

Ori Olokun thus becomes a metaphor for the growing need for restoration and purification of desecrated cultural values with which the continent of Africa is now replete. The constant return to ethnic-specific artifacts by Soyinka is indicative of a Yoruba nationalism which speaks to the divergent nature of nationalism in multi-ethnic societies.

Taken a bit further, the plight of *Ori Olokun* hints resoundingly at the problem of exile and return, which is a prominent feature of post-colonial cultures and literatures. In a sense, the conflict generated by contact with foreign cultures in every once-colonized community often imposes on such community some form of desecration of certain traditional values and norms which ordinarily should assist in stabilizing and giving proper identity to such community and its people. The quest for restoration is, therefore, understandable as a necessary step of solidarity towards the replacement of all such values that might have been lost to the colonial experience. Also, the failure of Soyinka and Yai to recover the authentic head in spite of such daring efforts goes to show the near impossibility of total restoration once society succumbs to the harming infiltration of its valued principles. The decision to give up on bringing the treasured head back home from exile signifies in a way the permanence of exilic experience in societies which also fail to rise above the injuries inflicted by experiences of the past. Soyinka, thus, seems to throw up his arms:

> If I had felt that a resumption would stand any chance of success, I probably would have persisted, but- I *knew*. The moment I held that bronze weight in my hands, I knew, with every strand of intuition, that we had reached the end of a

[24] Oduduwa is the legendary progenitor of the Yoruba race to which Soyinka himself belongs.

> trail. Too many cooks now had their ladles in this broth. Best to withdraw and abandon the lord of the seas to his overseas retreat. (p.216)

Perhaps another example worthy of a quick mention here is the attention that Soyinka draws to the potency of traditional African medicine against ailments which continually defy curative overtures from Western medical practice.

> It was a harsh confinement. Tai Solarin was subjected to a life-threatening regimen in an inclement far-north prison. He was refused access to his accustomed medication for asthma, one that had been prepared for him for years by a traditional herbalist and had proved a hundred percent effective, whereas western medicine had failed. (p.223)

A closer examination of Soyinka's stand here would suggest a deeper concern on an issue which has often placed Africans in a serious dilemma—that of using Western recipes for African predicaments. Using Tai Solarin's condition as analogy in this instance Soyinka clearly recommends the adoption of African solutions to ailments and by extension other forms of predicaments afflicting African peoples. Beyond this, the bringing into focus of the travails of a fellow activist, Tai Solarin, in the hands of a military dictatorship is indicative of an expression of solidarity with the community of revolutionary individuals and groups which are a common feature in societies striving to rise above the challenges of colonialism and imperialism.

Soyinka's solidarity with his patron god, Ogun, is quite instructive in this particular work. This is closely tied to his sympathy for the numerous people who lose their lives daily on Nigerian roads. This solidarity with Ogun and by extension the people who witness his wrath on the road for no fault of their own provides for Soyinka himself a kind of 'reunion' as 'The road and I thus became partners in the quest for an extended self-discovery' (p.47). In spite of his hatred for the military adventurers, Soyinka therefore chooses to 'dine with the devil' as he accepts to lead the formation and also head a road safety commission under a military dictator. Perhaps this is one of the compromises

needed in solidarity with the common people who feel the pangs of the nonchalance of those who have appropriated power without necessarily effecting the needed changes required for the benefit of their subjects.

The question of solidarity assumes a transnational dimension in Soyinka's narrative as the entire continent is brought together in a relationship of socio-cultural inclusion through notable interventions in the plight of the people and even their leaders. Two major examples that readily come to mind here will include Soyinka's intervention in rallying support for a fellow writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo during his incarceration in Kenya as well as his efforts towards arresting post-apartheid black-on-black violence by meeting ANC and *Inkatha* leaders in the heat of the vexed relationship between the two groups arising from a contrived spatiality authored by the dimming imperialist civilization from which a new South Africa was expected to emerge. For Soyinka, therefore:

> My first demand, in outlining a plan for a Mandela-Buthelezi encounter to Ibrahim Babangida, was absolute secrecy. Knowing the torrid ideological space that demarcated the ANC from Inkatha, the very idea of creating a bridge left one exposed. (p.266)

If the effort of the writer in this instance is to make peace through reconciliation, his concern for South Africa dates back to his younger days when he saw the inhumanity of the apartheid regime as one that needed to be challenged whatever the cost:

> South Africa, however, occupied a special place of bafflement, rage, and despair. Awareness of that degraded zone of existence on the soil of our own continent, the apprehension of a world that assigned to one's race a condition of subhumanity, was all consuming. We began to prepare ourselves for the day when we would reclaim humanity—by force of arms if need be. (p.36)

From all indications, Soyinka's nationalism becomes an open one which also captures the popular imagination to a large extent. In identifying with people faced with similar

circumstances across the globe, Soyinka creates the image of an intellectual whose province is bigger than Nigeria. Dwelling in large part on international black solidarity, his bridge-building nationalism coupled with diasporic solidarity makes the word 'nationalism' appear inadequate to contain the sprawling nature of Soyinka's commitment. The interest in global affairs from the colonial days to the present time no doubt sets apart Soyinka as a public intellectual in a class of his own. This remarkable difference, in the final analysis, plays a crucial role in the determination of identity and the making of selfhood.

Apart from the pitfalls of solidarity which Soyinka himself tries to portray in the intractable differences arising from the proposition of different approaches to the struggle which afflicted NADECO and his subsequent withdrawal and establishment of the United Democratic Front of Nigeria (UDFN) (p405), the major problem that afflicts solidarity is how to imagine and relate with the concept itself in the African sense. One key element of solidarity especially in Africa is not to assume an individualistic position as it involves engagement, mobilization and conscientization. Where writers decide to go it alone, as Soyinka does for instance in the case of the radio station, as some critics have argued, appears to amount to an over-inflation of the significance of the writer in society. It is important however, to also understand the new trend of demarcation between aloof writers or scholars as the case may be and intellectuals. The identity of the intellectual, it should be pointed out at this point, is unique. As Edward Said reminds us, he is 'an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public' (Said, 1996: 11). This agency for the public hinted at by Said presupposes that the intellectual expresses concern on behalf of the nation and its constituents.

The seeming marginality of nationalism in recent critical discourse or, put differently, the reinvention of the idea of nationalism can be said to be a result of the realization by writers especially in the postcolonial world, of the need for them to maintain certain identities and as a matter of necessity project such identities in spite of the hybridizing tendencies of globalization. The question of nationalism is even more difficult in multi-

ethnic societies like Nigeria where Soyinka tries to narrate his intellectual contribution to historical, cultural as well as socio-political development. As Anthony Smith observes:

> The continuous revolts of peripheral units within nations now is seen as an attempt by those who have been pushed to the margin by the system to reaffirm and reassert their identities in the face of economic and cultural threats. (Smith, 1988: 9)

A clear example of this kind of insurgency is narrated by Soyinka in a major section of *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* which he terms 'Uncivil wars: The Third force and the Midwest Incursion.' The history of the Nigerian civil war which dominates this section of the text further shows the reinvestment of loyalty in favour of smaller geographical units who see themselves as occupying the margin in the political terrain. This is a strand of nationalism which Joshua Forest prefers to identify as subnationalism. For Forest, subnationalism 'refers to movements by regional actors to pursue greater autonomy within the existing nation-state, a relatively loose degree of political separatism, or outright secession' (Forest, 2004: 5). In extreme cases, where this happens people tend to first seek to protect the interest of their immediate constituencies before thinking of the entire nation. In a sense, each of the regional leaders mentioned in the text, including Ojukwu, the leader of the break-away Biafran region, Awolowo of the Yoruba and even Gowon who presided over the entire nation made spirited attempts to protect the interest of their ethnic constituencies, at times above the interest of the entire nation. This is not to say that each of the regional groups did not have their own internal divisions which, especially in the case of the Igbo worked against the actualization of the regional goal. Though Forest sees subnationalism as a kind of 'alliance building', it is better appreciated as a kind of solidarity arising from loss of confidence in the ability of the nation as originally constituted to take adequate care of the interest of the component units. It is, therefore, through alliance building that different categories of people are able to forge new relationships based on their ideological beliefs and other forms of preferences.

In an overall sense, we begin to witness in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* a greater fraternity with the people and other smaller units other than the state. In order to provide a counter narrative to dominant views and manufactured state nationalism, Soyinka creates an atmosphere of greater mobilization to foreground the significance of collectivity and communality in the course of the narrative. The historical experience which produces the autobiography itself is presented here as a communal and collective one. The author of the autobiography in this case merely becomes a template, or better still, a mirror through which the communal experience is enacted and a larger story is told. This generates a kind of solidarity which does not merely single out the author as the sole subject of the narrative but rather as a partaker or an actor in the historical experience of the entire community. The writer's commitment here is then guaranteed as a form of didactic engagement with the past with not just one life but several lives put in the public sphere where people are allowed to make inferences and draw their own conclusions from the kind of representations made by the author. The agency that the writer assumes is also presented as a step that can be effective as part of a collective effort in confronting anti-people forces which often make progress difficult in society. Soyinka's narration of the Ipaja experience in which a great multitude of the people comes out to confront armed soldiers and the police in a resolve to put an end to dictatorship not only points out the power in a common resolve but also inscribes in the memory of the reader a turning point in the struggle by the people to liberate themselves. There is no wonder then that the writer at this point sees himself as part of a majority and while acknowledging his role as a fraction of a bigger effort:

> A teeming crowd is an awe-inspiring phenomenon. As an objective spectacle, that is all it is, a spectacle, but when you are within it, when you are one of the bits and pieces that make up the tumult, you become one with it, you share in the force that it represents and you experience a loss of identity, except as a compressed lump within the crowd…. The safest crowds are those that are made up of a majority of individuals who know *why* they have coalesced into one, why they have chosen to jettison their individual identities to form a new substantive, a *mass*. (p364)

The major task of the intellectual which Soyinka seems to identify here is that of conscientizing and providing direction for the mass of the people in order to achieve the goal of attaining a better society. In taking on agency, therefore, the committed public intellectual just as the committed writer 'is also and especially a social seer who identifies and highlights the weaknesses of present-day society' (Nyamndi, 2006: 571).

The examples cited in this chapter are aimed at driving home the point that African life writing would be better appreciated if considered against the background of the kind of peculiar experiences that produce it. The illustrations have also shown how Wole Soyinka attempts to revalidate himself within his community by expressing loyalty to certain causes, in order, possibly, to remain relevant as not just a writer but a committed writer who even while writing his own narrative sees beyond his individual self into the entire nation through the travails of the people individually and collectively. It is however pertinent to observe that both agency and commitment can be said to be major instruments in the construction of a good image of the self as it concerns public intellectuals whose roles in society as well as personality becomes a subject of scrutiny from time to time. Most writers of the autobiography in Africa and by extension the postcolonial world find it difficult to isolate their experiences from those of their immediate communities. This imposes on them a kind of nationalism that also reverberates through their works. And one of the ways by which they express this nationalism is through an engraftment of narratives which display solidarity as an ingredient of communal understanding of the series of experiences that make up such auto/biographical works. This new wave of expressing solidarity in literary works, no doubt requires careful handling in order not to allow the democratic passion for egalitarianism get in the way of art or create the impression that the solution to paradoxes existing today in Africa can be found only in this kind of approach to writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore Wole Soyinka's making of selfhood in his autobiographical work *You Must Set forth at Dawn*. In the discussions in the previous chapters it has been established that Soyinka, like most intellectuals in postcolonial situations, engages with history, memory, exile and nationalism in such a way as to point out the intricacies involved in these concepts and also make bare the dislocations in the structure of society. In addition to this, the study has been able to establish that the adoption of subaltern positions in Soyinka's text under consideration is for a specific purpose. This purpose, having to do with the question of identity and selfhood, can be understood against the background of the likely misinterpretation of the activism of Soyinka as an individual and the constant attempts by the state to discredit him and in the process create an impression of uncomplimentary disposition towards the nation and its people. In setting historical records straight, therefore, Soyinka goes down memory lane to remind the reader of certain actual national, continental and, in some instances, global events. The writer does this as part of a self representation effort which also extends to involve people around him who have played different roles in his evolution as an activist and public intellectual. In this way, the writer presents to the reader a self which is unique and different but which equally relates to others. This incorporation of other people in Soyinka's life narrative is crucial in the understanding of life writing especially when it has to do with African subjects because, as Judith Coullie argues, 'perceptions of uniqueness and individualism as precondition for autobiographical practices are only one side of the coin' (Coullie, 2006: 39). In recreating history, therefore, Soyinka also retells the story of Nigeria from a subaltern angle attempting to fill some gaps and put in place some missing links in the national grand narrative. In the course of this, new dimensions are brought to the fore about what had been told before and what official history would want us to believe.

Although it would be difficult to firmly establish the veracity of everything said in any autobiographical work, judging from the problematic of what may qualify as universal history in the Hegelian sense, Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* represents a landmark narrative in the sense that it serves to challenge the official position on historical events hitherto fed to the people and thereby questions the grand narratives with which the ruling class seeks to validate its disruptive activities which continue to be a drawback for the progress of society. This kind of approach goes along with the thinking of Jana Gohrisch to the effect that 'scholars need to investigate the historical situation' of a region in order to adequately appreciate the social contexts within which developments take place (Gohrisch, 2006: 234). In addition to this, the text also tries to exhume what would qualify as repressed memory by touching on those aspects of history that the state and the ruling elite would wish to be confined to oblivion. A good example of this can be seen in the story of the Nigerian civil war especially those aspects having to do with the massacre of the Igbo before and during the strife.

I hope to have demonstrated to the reader that the life of public intellectuals as represented in their autobiographies, is often shaped by various factors and historical realities of situations in which such intellectuals find themselves. The implication of this is to the effect that the composition of every individual's life, as in the autobiography, is often a function of the interplay of both external and internal forces. Putting the influence of the external factors on individual personalities more succinctly Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd argue that 'we are largely what our genes and culture make us' (Richerson and Boyd, 2005: 6). The point here is that genetic orientation may, in large part, constitute internal factors which shape human behaviour while culture, taken to include the social activities and institutions surrounding the individual as well as their performance, would also impact greatly on the attitude and behaviour of people in a particular environment. This is the reason why self representation accounts written by African intellectuals as we have seen in Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* tend to go beyond merely relating the life stories of individual characters to dwell extensively on socio-political matters in the society. This is in line with the thinking of Angel Loureiro on the autobiography especially in developing societies. For Loureiro, 'an examination of

autobiography must pay attention to the complex interplay among the cognitive, the political, the ethical, and the rhetorical' (Loureiro, 2000: np). For the public intellectual in Africa, the complexities of the political realities of the continent thus become a serious point to note even when writing an autobiographical narrative. Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* becomes, therefore, a story of political engagement trumping up the literary and the personal without losing its life narrative essence. In this way, the constituency of the writer incorporates what Soyinka himself regards as 'the cosmic totality' (Soyinka, 1976: 3) as he shares in the anxiety of the community thereby taking on agency in demonstration of commitment to the cause of humanity.

In addition to the above, the research report has also shown that the genre of autobiography provides a significant lens through which we can better appreciate the lives of writers and by extension public intellectuals. As evidenced in this case by Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, African writers and public intellectuals in the course of writing their life stories also tend to make important statements about themselves and the society in such a way that we are led to a better understanding of not just their character and personality but also the existing paradoxes which impact on the general well being of the people as well as the polity. The postcolonial condition that produces most of the works of African writers and intellectuals, therefore, becomes a major factor that can never be wished away in a proper appreciation of these works. The colonial legacy which defines the African space and also contributes to the frustrations of the present moment then becomes a yarn in the literary loom of intellectuals and writers who keep weaving tales of the national and continental predicaments dominating their territory. But in appreciating this approach by African writers there may be need for some measure of caution. The tendency to hold the ruling class exclusively responsible for the national or continental malaise may be a potential danger to a dispassionate understanding of the problem at hand. As Adewale Maja-Pearce contends, 'to put the blame for Africa's present predicament…only on the excesses of brutal governments is to misunderstand the scale of the problem' (Maja-Pearce, 1991: xii). In most of African writing as we have seen in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, the ruling class is often made to bear, almost exclusively, the blame for the dysfunction of the polity.

In the autobiography, we find as a result of the nonfictional orientation of the genre, an avenue for direct representation of reality having to do with the identity and person of the author. In the light of this, we see in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* a challenge to the authority of the individual subject resulting in a multicultural approach which places the oppressed individuals in society at the centre of a new discourse. In a sense, we find playing out in this work an extension of the kin-based reciprocity that African cultural values espouse. This is not to suggest, however, that the writer ignores the self in order to take on agency for his community or that the autobiographies of some public intellectuals may in any way validate Nietzsche's declaration of the death of the subject or the self. The self actually continues to exist, gains more currency and commands a great measure of attention in the autobiographical works of African intellectuals. As a matter of fact, the multicultural approach used here becomes a tool for fashioning a new identity which produces a new identity and vividly paints the picture of an intellectual with genuine concern for the nation and the people. The commitment to the under-privileged, in other words, has its own value for the image of the public intellectual as well as his standing in society.

All said and done, it will then be more pragmatic to see *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* as an attempt by Soyinka to come to terms with memory, history, exile and the convoluted reality of the present day which constantly harass the psyche of the public intellectual whose concern for order in society goes beyond merely wanting to put pen to paper. This explains why we are confronted in the text with the myriad ways in which the past and present conjugate in order to produce the future. This conjugation of past and present is also relevant for both the personality of the individual himself as well as the plight of the polity. While serving as a re-production of a life in order to bring forth a novel character the work at the same time goes beyond mere textual construction to become a piece which is at once discursive, intertextual, ethical, rhetorical and political. These multiple ramifications discernible in Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* seems to point to a new direction in African writing where intellectuals are beginning to use their own life

narratives as avenues for not just making statements about the self but as a rhetorical tool for intervention in the existing debates concerning the past and present of society.

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