

DANCE OF INTRIGUE: A SEMIOTIC READING OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *KONGI'S HARVEST*

Edith Awogu-Maduagwu (Ph.D.)
Covenant University,
Ota, Nigeria

Email- edith.awogu-maduagwu@cu.edu.ng, bismadu@gmail.com

Cell- +2348032233797

Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the importance of quasi verbal elements as dramatic motif in Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest. The plot is informed by the post-colonial leadership of African societies in the wake of the departure of imperialist powers, and dramatizes the conflict between the traditional authorities on the one hand, and the western styled new leaders on the other, as they struggle over the newly independent African countries. Through a semiotic analysis of the text, this paper examines the use of the non-verbal motif of dance as a message medium. The aim is to validate the relevance of non-verbal communication in the construction of African drama and to recommend greater allegiance to the application of traditional elements in the writing of contemporary African dramatic literature. Peirce's Structuralism theory of semiotics is employed in the analysis of the role of dance and gestural forms. Findings reveal the rich colour which traditional elements such as dance and mime can bring to the understanding of a contemporary play. The work is expected to contribute to the search for a concise dramaturgy of African literature.

Introduction

The use of dance in African dramatic works has become commonplace, but there was a time when playwrights could not negotiate that road because modern drama was not considered ripe for such ambitious experimentation. Many dance dramas were based on safely constructed little plays, designed for student examination in the non-critical departments of home universities, and adhered to the Western canons diktat of Art. This was the status of African drama in relation to dance theatre until Wole Soyinka stormed the dramatic stage with his iconoclastic play, *Death and the King's Horseman*. This emergence into international prominence of the author revamped the relevance of such earlier plays as *Kongi's Harvest* among many other plays. Like *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Kongi's Harvest* utilizes a rich employment of such dramatic motifs as dance and spectacle as fundamental elements of Yoruba performance style. Traditional Yoruba theatre, *Alarinjo*, from which Soyinka borrows his style utilizes dance as a predominant form. As in many oral cultures, dance is a medium which is utilized for entertainment as well as for social criticism; and it is this latter role of dance which Soyinka employs as he lampoons African leaders in his play, *Kongi's Harvest*.

Theory and Methodology

In this paper, the theory of Structuralism is employed as an analytical tool as this theory is sympathetic to the ideology of African theatre proposed in this paper. According to Adeoti (2004),

a theoretical investigation of African literature that undermines or denies its socio-cultural and political engagement is flawed....The production and consumption processes of literature in Africa, whether pre-colonial or post-colonial are inextricably linked with socio-historical and cultural conditions. Indeed, the social context that African writers explore in their works reflects a striking similarity with situations in ancient and contemporary Africa. In view of this, criticism needs to secure a balance between art and life, between literature and politics and between form and content. It must recognise the artwork as a significant record of social experience as well as a careful structuring of creative elements.

Therefore, simplest typologies of the sign-systems advocated by Peirce have been deliberately employed and these are the index in its least ambiguous sense as a pointer or indicator of objects; icons as the exact replica of objects; and the symbol as the relationship between it and objects, based on the principle of "an association of ideas". Additionally, the term "parakinesics" will be employed in instances of the analysis of dance gestures which occur in the context of other codes.

Dance in African Drama

In an oral culture, with its highly limited literary forms, the use of signs and symbols find their richest outlets, particularly in dramatic situations. Here, extra-linguistic forms assume profound codifying status and are often consciously employed to function as language' medium, operating separately or in conjunction with the linguistic mode. One of the most dynamic forms is represented in dance communication. Often, dance functions as the avenue through which inarticulate consciousness of religious and secular experience is expressed. Because the African is a basically mystic-conscious being, he does not draw a distinct line between his religious and secular awareness. The result is the intermingling of the sacred and the secular, so that in a given ceremony, while either the secular or the religious element may predominate, there still remains the retention of the other within the common dramatic situation. Underlying the use of extra linguistic forms is the cultural world-view of the given community which has somehow resisted the corrosive threat of language colonization among the Yoruba speaking people of West Africa. For instance, Ajayi (1986) working from the oral perspective reveals the role of dance kinesics in social and religious rites of passage. Her work is a brilliant exposition of traditional communication codes as realised in dance gestures among Yoruba worshippers. The result is a colourful merging of multi-faceted codes as unified meaning-processors.

Dance as Index of Political Ideology in *Kongi's Harvest*

The world of *Kongi's Harvest* (Soyinka, 1967) is informed by the political atmosphere of post-colonial African society. Fusing modern and traditional dramatic forms, Soyinka portrays the decadence of post-colonial Nigerian society characterized by effete leadership and political instability. A brief synopsis of the plot will reveal the thematic direction of the action.

As the play opens, the fictional state of Isma is in a mood of feverish excitement as the people prepare for the annual harvest festival. The political leader of the people, 'President' Kongi, is a ruthless dictator who is determined to exploit the occasion to further his political interests. His master plan is to ensure that the traditional ruler of the people, Oba Danlola, is seen to publicly present him (Kongi) with the prize yam of the harvest. Customarily, the yam is presented to the traditional ruler of the people who, as the spiritual father of his community, invokes the spirit of harvest by his symbolic blessing and prayers during the ceremony. Kongi now reverses the tradition: the yam should be handed over to him. In the new dispensation, Kongi believes that Danlola should see that his own authority over his people had been forfeited and hopes that the king's loss of fame would strengthen his own influence over the state of Isma. Although he is behind bars, Danlola is determined not to give in to the demands of Kongi when the play opens. The dance semiotics reflects differing levels of message contexts which will be examined in the following sections.

Dance as a symbol of political identity

There are three major dance styles in the play and these individually serve as kinesic indices of the given ideological group. The first of these dance forms, is characterized by sharp, mechanical and aggressive movements. It is exemplified in the marching steps of the carpenters brigade and complemented musically by the shrill whistle of their instrument. This gestural form is an ideological index of Kongi's dictatorial government.

The second dance movement is characterized by fluid and expressive body gestures. The content of this dance form is rhetorically coded and flows in synchronised rhythm to the direction of the traditional talking drums and royal drums. Its meaning is, therefore, mystic and spiritual in gestural semantics. Unlike the physical aggressiveness suggested in the first dance, this dance employs more subtle and coercive means.

The third and last dance form is characterized by a dance style which combines aspects of the gestures of Kongi and Danlola to create a totally new and unique form. The gestures here suggest a liberal ideological orientation because it occupies a middle position between the extreme ideologies of the previously described dances. By demonstrating traditional gestural forms in dance to the accompaniment of modern musical instruments, the liberal position of Daodu and Segi is highlighted and realised in the juju dance.

Kongi's Harvest opens with the national anthem. The most prominent symbol in gestural kinesics here is the physical response of the audience to the anthem. In semiotic terms, the musical rendition of the anthem is an invitation and appeal to the citizenry to respond to the call of duty in the interest of the larger society. Thus, both acting cast and audience are standing upright in response to the anthem. And standing upright is the new mode of dance. Besides this appeal to the patriotic conscience of the audience, the anthem also locates the generic mode of the play as a political drama. Consequently, both audience and cast are enveloped in a spirit of unity in their common destiny.

Within Kongi's ideological camp, there are gestural features which reinforce the impression of aggression as a unitary analysis of the first dance will reveal. Let us take the smallest significant kinesic feature from the Kongi camp, that is, the extension of the first accompanied by the one word 'Ismite'¹. Here, the hand is shot

forward aggressively and held stiffly with the bunched fist pointing at the crowd, audience or party members. These, r- turn, respond by shouting back the response, 'Is might', the response of which further reechoes the aggressive suggestion of the fist. However, it is important to note that the interpretation of a kinesic feature is sometimes modified by accompanying subcodes. For instance, the meaning of the closed fist takes on another meaning/ during the discussions Between the organising secretary and members of the Reformed Aweri Fraternity. This is distinct from the message suggested when the same fist is extended by the organising secretary to the layabouts in the night club scene:

Secretary: Kongi raises his fist. His favourite gesture, have you noticed? Raises his right fist and says just one word - Ismite.
Layabout: Is might

The meaning of the fist here undergoes a change during his discussion with the fifth Aweri:

Secretary: All right, you name your terms
Fifty: No, that's not the way it's usually done. You make me an offer. And don't think I'm a novice at this game.
Secretary: All right. What about...?
(casually holds out a closed fist, Fifth Aweri shakes his head) No? I've known contracts for a ten mile road settled for less than... (two closed fists)

In this exchange, aided by the verbal code, the 'fist' is revealed as a symbol of bribery. The fact that the secretary and fifth Aweri studiously avoid a verbal pronunciation of the terms further enhances the impact of the fist as a symbol of bribery.

Gestural kinesics, as a feature of the modern political system, is naturally situated in the Kongi ideological camp and through the symbol of the fist the decadent characteristics are represented. Interestingly, the bunched fist is also a symbol of negro identity, popularly tagged 'black power' and within this context, it is also employed to suggest the inherent strength of black identity.

Another kinesic symbol of identity within the Kongi camp is the march of the carpenters' brigade. Their gestural dance is 'the march', characterised by the energetic stamping of the feet and swinging of the arms, both synchronised to the shrill dictates of the penny whistle. Their march - past which is similar to that of modern soldiers, reflects their ideological fanaticism. Their song reveals the spirit of the dance:

Our hands are like sandpaper Our fingernails are
chipped Our lungs are filled with sawdust But our
anthem still we sing We sweat in honest labour
From sunrise until dawn For the dignity of labour
And the progress of our land For Kongi is our
father And Kongi is our man Kongi is our mother
And Kongi is our saviour Redeemer, Prince of
Power For Isma and for Kongi We are proud to
live or die

Their song reveals a slavish devotion to Kongi and all that he represents. Thus, the import of their dance, as conveyed by the impression of rigid uniformity and organisation, is that of a total lack of human will and a slavish mindlessness, which is irrequisite to the vision of Kongism. This slavish devotion to Kongi's whims is evident in the character make-up of all his followers. For instance, the organising secretary comes under the threat of Kongi's anger. Fuming, he complains that members of Kongi's Carpenters Brigade are invoking the spirit of harvest to come to the aid of their leader. But the secretary suffers for this tactlessness in even suggesting that there is any force (even if a mystic one as the spirit of harvest) which is higher in authority than Kongi himself Kongi is incensed by this suggestion and his subsequent persecution of the secretary confirms his dictatorial stance on any issue in which his authority is threatened, and such paranoid displays are rampant in the play. Kongi demonstrates maniacal tendencies towards even his closest associates; even the Reformed Aweri Fraternity is not immune to Kongi's unstable disposition, as on one occasion, he contemplates having them executed. But for the pleading and intervention of his organising secretary, the order would have been irreversible. For the sin of sleeping, the starved members of the Reformed Aweri invoke Kongi's anger:

Kongi: Strike the gong and wake them up

(secretary strikes the gong, there is no response)

Secretary. They are practically dead.

Kongi: Dead? How dead? I don't remember condemning any of them to death. Or maybe I should.

Secretary: You still need them. Leader.

Kongi: But they are sleeping.

Of all the symbols of identity, that which most vividly portrays in gestural code the Decadence of Kongi's government is the gesture of his reaction to the news of the escaped prisoner.

Kongi: Get out! AND BRING HIM BACK!
(Secretary turns to escape)
And hear this! The amnesty is OFF!
The others hang tomorrow.

Secretary: My Leader, your promise!

Kongi: No Amnesty! No Reprieve! Hang everyone of them! Hang them!

Secretary: Your promise, my Leader. The word of Kongi!

Kongi: And find me the other one for hanging - GET OUT! GET OUT! GET ...AH ...AH (His mouth hanging open, from gasps into spasms and violent convulsions, Kongi goes into an epileptic fit over his struggle for breath rises Kongi's chant).

Kongi's reaction here, according to Adelugba, is reminiscent of the symptoms of spiritually possessed members of the bori cult of Northern Nigeria. It is the most vivid of the gestural kinesics of identity within Kongi's ideological camp and firmly stamps his group with the symbol of megalomaniac dictatorship.

Similarly, Oba Danlola's ideological allegiance is symbolised in gestural features. In contrast to Kongi's aggressively portrayed leadership, Danlola's gestures are regal and raieistic with a mystic overtone. His followership is characterised by a reverence for the mystic powers of traditional leadership symbolised in the person of Oba Danlola. In traditional society, the office of kingship is a highly revered one. Thus, the kings, particularly among the Yoruba, reside in a realm which transcends the level of common mortals and is second in cosmic hierarchy only to that of the gods. Such is the aura of an *Oba* that he reserves the power to decree or reprieve the death sentence of a subject, hence his traditional praise-name, '*iku baba yeye, ekeji orisa*'. Depending on the theatre director's genius, the spatial arrangement of court dancers should be made to reflect this reverence for the King. For instance, in the scene where Daodu breaks the lead drum, all the dancers of Danlola's court participate in the dance and their gestures are such that while displaying individual elegance, grace and buoyancy of movement, it is nevertheless obvious from their parody of angels that their dance is a complement to that of Danlola and Sarumi. The semiotic content of their dance gestures here is a supplication for forgiveness and a simultaneous obeisance to Danlola's authority. These gestures are primarily meant to soothe the bruised ego of the King and invite his favour. Again, throughout the play, the members of Danlola's group are involved in an unending pre-occupation with dancing, drinking and general merriment. Danlola hardly takes any interest in the plight of his subjects and is more concerned with the slight to his personality by Kongi. Nevertheless, the scene where Dsodu breaks the drum represents one of the highest moments of dramatic achievement. The combined codes of costume, cosmetics, music, drumming and dance lend a stunning aura of splendour and regal grace to the dance in Danlola's palace. However, this continual dilly in Danlola's camp portrays him as a hedonistic figure. While Kongi is excessively Hojtic in his attitude to the pleasures of life (except political power), Danlola demonstrates an excess in the pleasure that life has to offer to the detriment of his subjects (Sekoni, 1983).

In musical terms, the most obvious symbol which reflects the ideological position of Danlola is the lead mother drum. As a symbol of the voice of traditional authority, it embodies the mysticism and spirituality associated with Danlola's position as King. Thus, when Daodu splits the drum, the dramatic atmosphere is rent with a sense of horrified suspense. In reaction to Daodu's act, Danlola is at last confronted with the fact of his waning authority. He says:

I know the drums were silenced long ago
Before you,
but you have split The gut of our make-believe,
suddenly The world has run amok and left you
Alone
and sane behind.

Danlola's speech is an important commentary on the importance of the drum as the voice of spiritual authority. In the first line where he says "the drums were silenced long ago", he makes a penetrating reference to the blow which the modern political system and civilization repeatedly deals the traditional ruling system represented by the crown. The result of this blow is a demystification of the sacrosanct authority and reverence which was synonymous with traditional office, especially those of the King and his chiefs. The assault on the Ogboni Aweri by Kongi, is a major blow to Danlola because they represented, until Kongi's interference, his "props of office". By splitting the lead drum now and by no other than the heir apparent himself, the voice of Danlola seems to have been symbolically and finally silenced. The dance of Danlola's followers can thus be interpreted as a response to the imaginary authority of Danlola. With the splitting of the drum, however, his followers suddenly realised that such powers are no longer in existence.

The gestures of Danlola and Sarumi, necessarily differ both in content and style from that of the Carpenters Brigade. Kongi is extreme in his display of deceptive, self-conscious martyrdom, evident in his fasting conditions. Danlola, on the other hand, takes the opposite trajectory in his hedonistic and insensitive neglect of his subjects. On Kongi's part, despite his insistence that he does not want the nuisance of press publicity, he is nevertheless apparently flattered by the attentions of the photographer. It is both comical and ironical that right through his 'complaints', he is simultaneously striking different poses for the press cameraman. This is one instance in the play where the kinesic is brilliantly employed to offset the irony of dialogue. Similarly, the same susceptibility to flattery is evident in the portrayal of Danlola. In response to Sarumi's fulsome praise, Danlola becomes "totally swelled", a description which evokes the image of a strutting peacock. As a uniting force against the negative leadership of Kongi and the lack of any leadership initiative on the part of Danlola, there exists a third group jointly headed by Daodu and Segi. This group reflects the origin of their merger as an offshoot of Kongi and Danlola's ideological camps.

Our first meeting with Segi and Daodu in the night club scene is on the dance floor as they both dance to the music of a juju band. Juju music is technically a creation of traditional and modern musical forms. The instruments are predominantly modern with a few traditional instruments. However, the lyrics and body response to the music are completely traditional. As a symbol of ideological identity, the element of modernity in the music is traceable in kinesic allegiance to Kongi's camp, while the traditional aspect is a reflection of Danlola's camp. Their joint dance, therefore, is a symbolic union, conveyed in kinesic codes to positivise the weaknesses of their different ideological backgrounds by sacrificing the individual interest for the general good of the society. Thus, Daodu forfeits his rights to Danlola's throne through his rejection of the king's mystic tactics and more forcefully by the gestural indication of breaking the drum. Segi, on the other hand, is prepared to pursue the ideal with Daodu to the very end and even when it becomes apparent that her father for whom she became involved has escaped Kongi's claws. Eventually, as their plan is on the brink of materialisation, she receives news of her father's death. Rather than act as a deterrent to her spirits, Segi vows to continue with their plans for the harvest. As a gestural index of identity, therefore, the dance in the night-club scene by Segi and Daodu is an ostensive symbol of their united forces for the noble purpose of redeeming the populace of Isma from the bondage under the dictatorship of Kongi.

Gestural Modifiers as Sub-codes

Another important use of dance kinesics is in the area of strengthening the semantic content of weaker sub-codes. An exhaustive discussion of this function would constitute the volume of a separate thesis on the subject. I shall, therefore, resolve this problem by concentrating on the most prominent areas which feature the use of this aspect in Kongi's Harvest.

I shall take my first example from the first scene of the play. As the anthem is being played at the opening of the play, we observe that Danlola and his entourage are standing at attention along with members of the audience. The lyrics of his rendition of the anthem immediately define his stance as one of derision and mockery for the anthem, and therefore, for Kongi. So as to leave no one under the illusion that he possesses any patriotic sentiments for Isma, he specifically addresses Kongi by name and refers to his Reformed Aweri Fraternity as "a big name for little heads". This is a clear pointer to his opposition of the present leadership. Danlola's attitude to Kongi and his opinion of the deader of Isma are even more demeaning. As he dances with his retinue to the anthem, he compares Kongi to the baby crow who, unable to digest the weak yams which prove too rough for its mother, demands to test its teeth on the well ripened first yam of the Harvest. In response to this pun, his retainers burst into derisive laughter. This action further drives home the impression of mockery already suggested in Danlola's lyrics of the anthem.

Again, shortly after the confrontation with the superintendent, Danlola's dance makes a subtle change from one of mockery to that of foreboding. As he joins his retainers and Sarumi in dance at the end

of the first scene, one observes a distinct quality of solemnity in his gestures. Unlike the earlier dance gestures, his movements here evoke a feeling of pathos in the mournful theme of his dance. His dance here is a prophetic enactment of the despair and hopelessness which threatens to swallow the state of Isma. To drive home his tale of despair, Danlola uses the parable of the monster child whose mother is instructed by the oracle to abandon him. She retains the child contrary to the dictates of the oracle. As the parable goes, the monster child with its abnormally large head and unnaturally distended stomach soon devours its mother and becomes a menace to the community. As a parallel to the parable, Danlola presents Kongi as the monster child. Danlola represents the mother and the traditional political order. As the mother of the monster child, his cordial accommodation of the modern system forebodes calamity, both for himself and his community. Clearly, Danlola's dance highlights through the parable, the dilemma of the traditional state in confrontation with the foreign system of government. The modern state now threatens to ensure the final demise or destruction of the old order, having rendered its authority ineffective. In gestural kinesics, the deliberate extension of his left-foot in dance highlights Danlola's fears for Isma and is a symbol of the calamity which threatens the state.

As Danlola and his entourage prepare to leave the stage at the end of this scene, he insists on the extension of the left-foot in dance, thereby strengthening the suggestion of calamity and instilling a sense of foreboding in the audience.

Danlola Delve with the left foot
 For ill-luck, with the left Again for ill-luck; once
 more With the left alone, for disaster Is the only
 certainty we know.

As the stage direction aptly states, the two Kings, Danlola and Sarumi "dance slow minute steps". The emphasis in this dance on the left-footed gesture bears an all-embracing kinesic significance for their entire dance gestures in this section. Again, this significance is traceable to the Yoruba system of mystic interpretation and awareness. Traditionally, the left symmetry of the human body represents the negative half of general life forces, while the second and right half stands for positive elements and forces.

Gestural Index of the Unspoken

As earlier stated, the African is an essentially mystic being, thus his self-expression in drama often reflects an abstract dimension. Dance provides a ready avenue for the articulation of the 'unspoken' on such occasions. Whether the occasion is ritualistic or otherwise, the arena of such a ceremony is often elevated to embrace both the spiritual and physical entities. On such occasion, dance assumes the major mode of communication between the living and the dead. As a go-between of the living and the dead or the physical and the abstract, there are physical representatives among the living whose duty it is to liaise with the two opposite realms. Most often, they consist of a select group of high priests, traditional medicine men and titled chiefs. The distinguished ones among these are, in turn, initiated into equally distinguished and powerful spiritual cults and are directly responsible to the King (who is more often than not a statutory member). In these individuals, are vested important state decisions and they act as ministers or advisers to the King. This briefly is the role of the Ogbo Aweri in Kongi's Harvest. As the privileged medium between abstract and physical entities, they symbolise the authoritative voice of supernatural intervention in human affairs. The dance of the Ogbo Aweri in the company of Danlola reflects the symbolic relationship between the physical and the spiritual. By demystifying the essence of spirituality, through the splitting of the drums, Daodu shatters the connection between the living and the dead and 'silences' the avenue of mystic communication symbolic in the lead drum. An examination of Sarumi's lyrics will reveal this essence of mysticism symbolised in the King. For analysis, I shall examine one of the many songs of Sarumi starting from the point of Sarumi's praise-singing, immediately to -sing the stage direction "Danlola begins to swell... affected by the praise-singing" (pg. 59).

SONG

Oba o see te
Bi eni te r'awe
B'anajaku o rora rin
Ate'gun mole
Adatiro

=

Adatiro tiro, tiro Oba o see gbon Bi eni gbon t'akun Igbon Oba awon eru Ogbon oba iwon eru Esin to r'ebo ti o sare Tin ta fele fele alantakun *rtio* bo

TRANSLATION

The king is for treading on
As a man steps on dried leaves
If the elephant does not warily step,
He will tread on a thorn

And hobble like a pair of stilts The King is not to be shaken off As a man shakes off cobwebs A King's beard is an awesome net A King's wisdom is inestimable Whatever fly cuts a careless caper Around the scent of sacrifice Will worship down the spider's throat.

The first few lines of the song, precisely lines one to seven, are obviously a jibe directed at Kong and his company. The part which reads, 'if the elephant does not warily step, he will tread on a thorn' is a proverbial warning for Kongi who employs aggressive tactics and brute energy as means of achieving his aims. This song further complements another more proverbial one (pg. 44).

Ema gun "yan Oba kere o E ma gun
"yan Oba kere o Kaun elepini fo see gbe
mi Eweyo noin nii fi youn E ma gun" yan
Oba kere o.

TRANSLATION

Don't pound the King's yam in a small mortar Don't pound the
King's yam in a small mortar Small as the spice is It cannot be
swallowed whole

A shilling vegetable must appease a half-penny spice.

This song is a chant about the double-edged strength of the powers of a King. Though benevolent, a King possesses enormous powers. Because his ordinary human form rather belies his ambiguous strength, his powers are to be feared all the more for their intangibility and mystery. The song is an affirmation of the supernatural powers of the King using rhetorical idioms. The beat of the drums and the cadences are therefore a dialogic parlance between the King and his drummers. There is also a distinct aspect of self-sublimation in the dances of Oba Danlola and Sarumi. It is obvious that the two Kings have been nostalgically transported to the early days predating foreign intrusion in traditional affairs and which were characterised by utmost reverence for the King. Their dance is, therefore, a kinesic recapitulation of the glorious traditional past.

The dance of Danlola's wives also possesses a significant gestural content. By and large the contribution of their dance kinesics is similar, at least in basic form to that in *Death and the King's Horseman*. Fundamentally, the dance in Danlola's palace enhances the atmosphere of mysticism already suggested in the movement of the Ogbo Aweri. In addition, their dance is a gesture of respect for Danlola's royal stature. By accompanying •am in dance, the women enhance the physical or material aesthetics of the dance scene by wringing a communal and gender balance to bear on the dance. As the dance grows increasingly frenzied, Daodu suddenly puts an abrupt end to the merriment by splitting the lead mother drum. This action may be coded as a desperate gesture to reawaken Danlola and his followers to the urgent problems of the present time, especially the growing menace of Kongi's dictatorship. It is now up to Danlola to make his own personal contribution. As Daodu insists, Danlola's participation 'is a vital part' to their plans and in a moment of inspired wisdom, Danlola realises the enormity of Daodu's sacrifice and is even more astounded by Segi's contribution. There and then Danlola vows to contribute his own bit towards the success of Daodu's plans.

From this point, the atmosphere is charged with tension and an expectation of crisis. Daodu's actions thus introduces an accelerated pace of feverishness and becomes a suspended forerunner of the events at the Harvest celebrations.

Finally, we approach the Harvest scene which is the most completely fused scene of dance dynamics. On the morning of the Harvest celebrations there are, already, suggestions of the disastrous outcome of the ceremony. The remarks of the organizing secretary are highly suggestive in this direction.

Secretary : Something is not quite right
My number seven sense refuses To be silenced.
Looked here batman ... so, select some point quite
Distant and reasonably protected. I hope your legs
are in good training My instructions may likely be
Fast and Furious...

When Segi appears in the arena with the women's wing of the Carpenters Brigade, now aligned with Daodu's farming settlement, the premonition of conflict is considerably heightened. Segi and her women execute an introductory dance, significantly curtsying to the Obas, elders and the Ogbo Aweri while adopting a pose of derision for members of the Reformed Aweri Fraternity. It is suddenly clear from the lyrics of their song and gestural attitude in dance to whose side they belong. Events increasingly unfold as the New Yam is presented to Kongi by Danlola. The news of the tragic death of Segi's father, ordered by Kongi, is

delivered to her shortly after. Momentarily dispirited, Segi recovers her composure as she vows to see the struggle to the end.

At the signal of Segi, the feast commences and as the stage direction indicates, it is a real feast, a genuine Harvest orgy of food and drink that permits no spectators, only celebrants". The Harvest scene represents the densest and most inspiring fusion of traditional dramatic elements. The dance of Segi and her women is a celebration of the traditional dance art with all its attendant motifs in costume, song, drumming and rhetoric. These elements come together to portray the spirit of urgency and crisis which underlie the celebrations. The stage direction best describes the mood of the celebrations:

The rhythm of the pounding emerges triumphant, the dance grows frenzied
Above it all, on the dais, Kongi, getting progressively inspired, harangues
his audience in words drowned in the background. He exhorts, declaims,
reviles, cajoles, damns, curses, vilifies, excommunications, execrates until
he is a demonic mass of sweat and foam at the lips...Segi returns, disappears
into the area of pestles. A copper salver is raised suddenly high; it passes
from hand to hand above the women's heads; it is thrown from me to the
other until at last it reaches Kongi's table and Segi throws open the lid . .

The scene of the dance here is evocative of a cultic and ritual orgy. The frenzied singing and dancing by the women provide an effective background for the demonic ravings of Kongi. The pounding rhythm of the pestles further emphasizes the mood of urgency. Its steady rhythm reaffirms the expression of determination on the faces of the dancers. The participants at the feast collectively share an aspect of spiritually possessed communicants at a religious or ritual initiation. The dancing reaches a climax as the copper salver is thrown open to reveal the severed head of an old man. At last, Kongi reaps his harvest of horror and bloodshed. Confronted by the consequences of his actions, Kongi expresses his demonic portrait, brilliantly revealed in his violent convulsion, which is in itself a form of dance to the mad rhythm of the harvest music. This scene effectively portrays the confusion characteristic of the political atmosphere of Isma.

Conclusion

In *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka makes an impressive use of traditional dramatic elements, especially dance. Dance is employed not only as a theatrical embellishment, but also as a tool of thematic cohesion which unites the structural logic of the plot. It is impossible to overlook the monumental function of dance as an elevating and binding force in the play. Dance provides a ready avenue for the re-definition of other sub-codes, particularly the spatial. In addition, by strengthening the meaning or content of rhetorical codes, dance often communicates more powerfully by transcending verbal or geographical delineations. Like all other plays by Soyinka which employ the dance motif, *Kongi's Harvest* is a validation of authenticity and versatility in the blending of traditional dramatic elements, especially dance.

References

- ADEOTI, Gbemisola Aderemi 2004 Literary Studies in Contemporary Nigerian Universities:
The Challenges of Nationalism and Globalisation
- SOYINKA, Wole 1983 *Kongi's Harvest* in Collected Plays, Oxford University Press
- Ogunbiyi Yemi, 1971. Theatre in Africa
- Ibitokun, B 1986 Dance as Ritual Drama and Entertainment in the Gelede of the Ketu Yoruba
Sub-group of West Africa
Semiotics of the Theatre