

POLITICS AND COMMITMENTS IN THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF WOLE SOYINKA

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Abstract

This paper is set forth to explore the nexus between politics and the artist in society. It further highlights the place of Wole Soyinka as an artist with political intent, the place of artist in general politics. It also shed light in the concept of politics and the overall understanding of the "politics of Wole Soyinka" via his creative acumen.

Introduction

In as much as man still struggles for survival and total freedom, all of man's activities must take the political shape of that period. It is now so pronounced or very emphatic, that everything in life, as far as it concerns human, has direct affiliation to the politics of that period. That is to say, as humans, we eat, sleep, dance and act with politics in every of our endeavours.

It is so obvious, that people who would want to gain freedom of all sorts, delve into politics. So many do it unconsciously, while others do it consciously and at the long run, everybody becomes a politician of a sort. It is a fact that we cannot separate ourselves from politics, because everything is becoming political. It is also true that, politics, today is the only human activity that involves everybody. The world we live has turned political, our environment, family, church as well as individuals have all become political.

The essence of politics in our everyday engagement cannot be overemphasized. It is

on this very knowledge of political state that has provoked scholarly thoughts in politics. Scholars of different disciplines have opined or postulated their various ideas of what politics is all about. You will undoubtedly agree that once a subject becomes a public issue or discuss, it breaks the bans of restricting itself to one particular area of discipline. Politics is one of such that owes no ban or dwells only in one particular discipline. It is in view of this, that scholars like; Olu Obafemi, Femi Osofisan, Ngugi Wa-Thiogo, Wole Soyinka and many others whose professions are never limited only to the humanities, have given meaningful interpretation of the politics from the angle of the humanities via their various works.

They are able to see politics beyond what the social scientists conceive of it. Matter such as this would always arouse thought provoking questions like; how relevant are artists in politics. What is the nexus between Theatre and politics? Etc. however, the truth remains that, politics as a human activity

has gone beyond the level it was; limiting to the social sciences alone.

Scholars have attempted answering those thought provoking questions with their works. Some have been able to depose that politics is part of human activities, thus, there is no cause for separating some disciplines from the treatment of politics. Many have also opined that, since politics is all about our social life, our interaction with society, and our place and contribution to the well-being of the populace, there is no doubt that, those in the liberal arts, have a place in human development. The works they produce are clear exhibition of the human function in society, environment as well as solving the social problem of the society. It is on record however that some critics still argue against the relevance of artist involvement in politics either by writing or active participation.

Having provided a background knowledge of what this paper intends to show, it will be very paramount to succinctly draw our attention to the main thrust of this discourse. At the end of this paper, one would undoubtedly come to a reasonable conclusion that there is a nexus between artist and politics and also agree that artists are political activists who use their works as weapons of social change and political liberation.

It is in the light of the above and the attempt justifying our position that the study would focus on a very prominent scholar, artist, theorist, playwright, poet, novelist, and non-conformist called Wole Soyinka, with the aim of showing how much he has addressed social change and political issues via his works.

What is politics?

There are as many definitions of Politics as there are many scholars and students. However, we would examine a few ones that best capture the essence of politics from the standpoint of our discourse.

In the words of David Easton (1965), politics means "authoritative allocation of values". In a more simplified manner, he is saying politics is the struggle for power. Also, Michael Curtis (1981) defines politics as "organized dispute about power and its use, involving choice among competing values, ideas, persons, interests and demands".

Geoffrey and Peter conceive of politics as involving everything, like activity of individuals and their groups, for the reconciliation of conflicting interests without undermining or destroying a sense of security and participation among members of the community. Within this context, a working definition of politics suggests the way in which a group, organization or society understands and orders its social affairs, especially as regards the allocation of scarce resources, the principles underlying this task and the means by which some people or group acquire and maintain a greater control over the situation than others.

Vernon V. Dyke insists that an activity is political when it relates to public issue, and it relates to public issue when two conditions are met. First, it must concern group policy, group organization or group leadership, or it must concern the regulation of group interrelationships. Second, it must come within the realm of the controversial.

From the above views of politics, one can opine that scholars such as Soyinka and others are not far from the truth of what politics entails. We can aver from the above, that politics viewed by different scholars, pays more attention to human activities and the contribution to the well-being of the populace. Thus, the artist whose function, also, is to address social problems, as well as conflicts arising from the various facet of life, cannot be separated from politics. In fact, politicians work side by side in achieving their goals. It is at this point we say, artists are politicians.

THE PROFILE OF WOLE SOYINKA

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria on July 13, 1934. The son of a canon in the Anglican Church, Soyinka grew up in an Anglican mission compound in Ake. However, his Parents were careful to balance this colonial, English-speaking environment with regular visits to his father's ancestral home in Isara. He attended the parsonage's primary school where his father was the headmaster, and then attended the grammar school in Abeokuta where his uncle was principal. When he was twelve, he left Ake for Ibadan to attend the Government College there.

Soyinka attended the University College Ibadan, now University of Ibadan (1952-54) before earning a BA in English from the University of Leeds. From 1957 to 1959, he served as a script-reader, actor and director at the Royal Court Theatre, London, and while there, developed three experimental pieces with a company of actors he had brought together. Although African writers have traditionally viewed

English, French, and other European languages as the tongue of the colonial power, the tool of stigma and imperialism, Soyinka made the decision to write in English in order to gain access to an international audience.

In 1960, Soyinka returned to Nigeria and founded the 1960 Masks, a theatre company that would present his first major play, *A Dance of the Forests*, in which the spirit world and the living world clash over the future of a half-born child. Although *A Dance of the Forests* exhibits a fairly serious tone, much of Soyinka's early work satirized the absurdities of his society with a gently humorous and affectionate spirit. As the struggle for independence in his country turned sour, however, Soyinka's work began to take on a darker tone.

In October 1965, Soyinka was arrested for allegedly seizing the Western Region radio studios and making a political broadcast disputing the published results of the elections. In December of that same year, he was acquitted. He then served as director of the Drama School of Ibadan University College in Nigeria until 1967, when he was arrested for writings sympathetic to secessionist Biafra. This time, he was imprisoned for twenty-two months.

In Madmen and Specialists (1970), written shortly after his release from prison, Soyinka's protest grows much more powerful, perhaps as much a tribute to the playwright's suffering as to his growth as an artist. *Madmen and Specialists* dramatizes what the NEW YORK TIMES calls, "a police state in which only madmen and spies can survive, in which the losers are mad and the winners are paranoid about the

possibility of another rebellion." In another powerful piece, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), the Elesin-chief minister to the dead King—fails to properly exercise his act of ritual suicide, thus jeopardizing the delicate and mystical balance between the dead, the living, and the unborn.

Soyinka served as head of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan (1969-72) and head of the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of Ife (1975-85). In 1978, Soyinka founded another theatre company, the Unife Guerilla Theatre. Based out of the University of Ife, this company presented plays and sketches in parks, markets, and on street corners, attacking corruption and political oppression.

As dramatist, Soyinka has been influenced by, among others, the Irish writer, J.M. Synge, but links up with the traditional popular African theatre with its combination of dance, music, and action. He bases his writing on the mythology of his own tribe—the Yoruba—with Ogun, the god of iron and war, at the centre.

He wrote his first plays during his time in London, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel* (a light comedy), which were performed at Ibadan in 1958 and 1959 and were published in 1963. Later, satirical comedies are *The Trial of Brother Jero* (performed in 1960, publ. 1963) with its sequel, *Jero's Metamorphosis* (performed 1974, publ. 1973), *A Dance of the Forests* (performed 1960, publ. 1963), *Kongi's Harvest* (performed 1965, publ. 1967) and *Madmen and Specialists* (performed 1970, publ. 1971). Among Soyinka's serious philosophic plays are (apart from "The

Swamp Dwellers") *The Strong Breed* (performed 1966, publ. 1963), *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (performed 1976, publ. 1975). In *The Bacchae* of Euripides (1973), he has rewritten the *Bacchae* for the African stage and in *Opera Wonyosi* (performed 1977, publ. 1981), bases himself on John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*.

Soyinka's latest dramatic works are *A Play of Giants* (1984), *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985) and *Beautification of Area Boy* (1994). He is also known for his novels, autobiographical works, poetry, and criticism, and in 1986, he became the first African writer ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Soyinka has written two novels, *The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1973). Soyinka's poems, which show a close connection to his plays, are collected in *Idanre, and Other Poems* (1967), *Poems from Prison* (1969), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972) the long poem *Ogun Abibiman* (1976) and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988).

Artist in the Paradigm of politics

It is an established fact that, this universe is itself both a product and reflection of the material process of living. Drama and politics are about living men, men in his history, of which they are its product and maker. Artists in society are directly or indirectly affected by the way power is organized. The Artist is himself a product of history of time and place. As a member of society, he/she belongs to a certain class and

is inevitably a participant in the class struggle of his/her time.

The relationship between the artist and politician is particularly important in our situation where our cultures: our literature, music, songs, dances are developing under the strangulating embrace of the western industrial and finance monopoly capital and the fierce struggles of our people to break even. In our society, the relationship has taken various shapes. Most often artists and politicians have been the same person.

In a situation where the artist has not ordinarily been actively immersed in politics, i.e where the artist does not consciously see himself in terms of political activism either as an individual citizen or in the subject matter of his literary concern, he may well find himself suddenly involved in the hot political power struggles of the day.

At this point, the words of Chinue Achebe would be relevant. He remarks thus;

"it is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flame."

No doubt, one will agree with this submission, considering the glaring fact that, politics is an important issue in life that one needs not avoid. What is important is not just the artist's honesty and faithfulness

in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, but also his attitude to those big social and political issues.

It is in lieu of the above that Wole Soyinka and others have embraced such a vision. A vision anchored in the struggles of the people; thus making the populace not to succumb to self-despair or become mesmerized by superficial bourgeois progress, which in the words of Karl Marx, it has never been possible without dragging an individual and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation.

Wole Soyinka, as an artist in politics, has via his works cleared or made an in-depth understanding of the struggle of man for survival and his political intensions are very clear.

Soyinka: His Political Commitment & Intensions

The central focus for any arbitration between the different critical views of Soyinka falls on his expressed attitude towards commitment. Commitment has always been a theme in his work, whether on the level of religious self-sacrifice as in the case of Eman in *The Strong Breed* (1963), or of dedicated political violence as in the case of the dentist in *Season of Anomy* (1973). James Booth in his book; *Writers in politics in Nigeria* (1981) quoted Soyinka saying:

"There are no binding laws of commitment... each individual discovers sooner or later his own level and areas of commitment. If I had a choice in the matter I'd rather be a writer with no

social commitment. That is by far the most comfortable form of creativity. For many years now I have lived with the knowledge that I could lose my liberty at any time”

Genuine commitment is forced upon the individual by the pressures of giving itself. It is not, as is often assumed a simple matter of enlisting under a pre-existent banner. Commitment to specific social and political causes is a natural process, the consequence of a prior dedication on the individual's part to something more basic than political movements, ideologies and morality.

To what organization, political party or definable 'movement' is the artist to commit himself? Where is it to be found? The element of personal histrionics in Soyinka's public actions is undeniable. But what other, more constructive, course can his critics suggest he should have taken during the first republic and the civil war? The status he has created for himself since then, as a crusader on social and political issues, whose views are frequently quoted in the press as the voice of a nascent Nigerian 'public opinion, is surely by no means a negative one.

In view of these considerations, there must be a certain naivety in any straight-forward condemnation of Soyinka for a failure of commitment. He may indeed be criticized for sharing the vices of his society and class. He does show an elitist arrogance at times, a desire to flaunt his cultural credentials. But on the other hand, he is constantly examining his experience, attempting to understand himself and his society in order to find a constructive role.

Artist as politician

In whatever form a creative art is, it is a product of the artist who operates at a position superior to the ordinary mind. So many scholars have opined that, creative process encompasses different stages, beginning from observation or analysis of a need, to the formation or preparation, incubation, illumination, innovation, experimentation and verification. The truth is, artist's pre-occupation does not involve all the stages that the creative process of a scientist would take, but it sure follows the general theory. The theory involves suddenness of intuition or insight, ego, and energy for self-expression and growth. The nature of politics that artists engage in could be visible in three different levels: activism, observation and neglect.

Activism

Artist gets involved in politics from a perspective informed by the creative process. He sees his work as an instrument, not only as a word in itself but for creating the society, he considers ideal. The artist could go ahead to create in real life that ideal society that has been portrayed in the work of art through direct participation in the governmental process. This means the organization of political activities and parties, contest in elections and get involved in governance.

It could mean instigating others, through the propelling force of the work of art, to take up the challenge and face the task of shaping the society. Well, in this, the artist is not involved directly, but through the instrumentality of his art.

Observation

The artists in this category are those whose art are regarded as art for art's sake and aestheticism. The artist observes some political phenomena and records them without any intention of either changing the people's attitude towards them or proposing alternative course of action through the instrumentality of his art.

The artist uses his unusual capacity to impart unto the consciousness of people his world-view.

Neglect

In this category, artists transmute what they see from a perspective informed by regression. The artist at this level becomes not a demonstrator, using his art to portray events and developments, but as a promoter of a philosophy of life and society that tends to suggest a direction dictated by strong conservative instincts.

Irrespective of the category an artist finds himself, the capacity to impart upon general consciousness is limitless, depending upon his control over images, symbolism and emotions. The artist succeeds in carrying the people to believe certain norms and world-views and to accept certain philosophies, at the same time, rejecting or neglecting others.

It is obvious, and without doubt, that the creative ingenuity demonstrated in the categories above, the artist plays the politician, and politics ultimately becomes one of the phenomena under the artist's influence.

Art as a political tool is used to purge society, redeem and remake the world through existing painters, musicians and writers. Political emotions run through

many of the works. What has become glaring about the artist and politics over the years is that events play significant role in motivating creativity. The artist feels the need to represent his experience (conflict, frustration, satisfaction etc) and wishes in arts work or artistic creation.

The political activity that commands his attention determines and stimulates specific experience and objective that is conditions by his upbringing and social environment.

The artist as politician, has provoked questions in different sectors of life. But the truth remains that, in as much as politics still remains the general activity in which everyone engages in, the artist can never be separated from politics, and he will ever be regarded as a politician. Artists have in diverse manners played the role of politicians via their various art works. However, some scholars and critics have raised eyebrow against artists playing the role of politicians.

Soyinka as a polygon

Society can only stand on a sound footing by the efforts of all and sundry. Everyone has to contribute his or her quota in ways that reflect the utmost use of their abilities and capabilities. It is no small disservice if one folds his or her arm while others summon their energies into concrete developmental actions. It therefore means that societal growth is anchored on hard-work and commitment at individual and group levels.

Scholars in different fields of human endeavour, have variously expressed their wits, fantasies and strengths in formal and informal settings. Soyinka is no small figure in this regard, and naturally deserves

mention in any serious scholarly discourse. His achievements speak volumes especially on the Nigerian and African creative scene, wherein he has displayed high intellectual.

Soyinka: A Non-conformist

In *The Politics of Wole Soyinka* by Tunde Adeniran (1994), he quoted Ojetimji Aboyade, a renowned Nigerian professor who described Soyinka as "a free spirit". He agrees totally with Aboyade by saying; "for an artist, this is not unusual".

He stressed further that, "Wole did not suddenly become 'a free spirit'. That, it is an outgrowth rooted in the circumstances leading to his revolt against formal traditions, against convention and practices that inhibit or impose any limitations on the scope of reason, initiative and action, especially creative action".

In view of the above, Tunde (1994) justifies his statement by further clarification of why Soyinka revolts against conventional practices. This is his comments:

"Wole's exposure to anything in print, coupled with "the nature of man" he exhibited at childhood, prepared him for a revolt against established traditions, against the prevailing systems, and against the common run of things-leading to non-conformism as a philosophy of life".

From his position, he deposed that, Wole Soyinka has started questioning the existence and power attributed to God; from his childhood. Tunde (1994) presented an excerpt of Soyinka's statement thus:

"I do not claim to know what has been the experience of others, but as a child, I found myself frequently indulging in a rather exotic mental exercise. It was an exercise which originated from my attempt to come to concrete terms with the Christian myth of the creation of the world".

From the above statement deposed by Soyinka himself, it's obvious, his attitude and character towards questioning the existence and power of God was formed by his experience of some of those escapades in his early days.

The overwhelming thing is that, against his well-known Christian background, Soyinka revolted (spiritually) and became an atheist! It all happened following his newly found freedom at Apataganga. It was a build-up upon the spirit of inquiring, nurtured at Ake and watered by the airy spread of the woods of Government College.

Soyinka's background, discipline and orientation provided at childhood was designed to propel him into some solemn relationship with God. The revolt took him out of the fears of any force on earth, oceans, sky etc that began to make him see religion as mere propitiatory worship of these forces through sacrifices, offerings, prayers and incantations. His parents had anticipated that he will be a good Christian, that will be highly disciplined, but his restless and inquisitive nature, coupled with his exposure to many views through the printed word and the unfolding historical drama of the conflict between church and state all combined to make him skeptical

and expansive in his mental survey of the universe.

Soyinka certainly could not do much about the orthodox of his time. But the issue of "ties, gowns, and so on" could not but prompt the other revolt which Soyinka carried out against the system. He led the revolt against the traditions, "unwelcomed measure", imported from Oxford and Cambridge.

The second revolt was the consolidation of non-conformism, which had to come not necessarily because of the timid conservatism of the University College Ibadan, but because of what would appear a self-imposed obligation of Wole Soyinka who viewed the unconscious repression of some social ideals and unmitigated adherence to foreign and other questionable conventions as reprehensible. His revolt freed many others from being continually bathed in sentiments on any issue. Soyinka left behind a record of creative initiatives and unconventional accomplishments for which he is always remembered for at the University College Ibadan, now University of Ibadan.

Soyinka's political intentions in his literary works

It is an established fact that the idea of art serves as solution to human problem. And this has remained one of the most contentious issues in the debates concerning the arts in all forms.

Soyinka with his massive creative imagination demonstrated quite clearly not only his awareness but an enduring understanding of the implications of these which sum up to constitute the African condition, for his society and the human

race. He has contributed immensely through his creative sustention to the liberation of Africa and the empowerment of the dispossessed and deprived people of the continent, via his literary power.

Some of the writings on him have in fact clearly shown that his life is inseparable from his works, much of which arise from a passionate, almost desperate, concern for his society. Indeed, because of his peculiar fascination with myth and rituals, scholars and critics have considered much of his works as lacking adequate political content.

In justification of the above observations of scholars and critics, Tunde Adeniran (1994) says;

"We haven't begun actually using words to punch holes inside people. But let 's do our own best to use words and style when we have the opportunity to arrest the ears of normally complacent people, we must make sure we explode something inside them which is parallel of the sordidness which they ignore outside" 51.

Politics as central themes in his dramatic works

Soyinka has written many plays that have direct and meaningful imitation of humanity, or of human life and action. Among his many plays, just a few will be mention in the course of this study. His first play that caught the attention of the public was **The SwampDwellers**, written in the late fifties. The truth is, one cannot depose what prompted his writing this play in the

first place, a period just when oil was discovered in the swampy Oloibiri (then Rivers State, now Bayelsa State), at a time when Nigeria is struggling for independence. Among the many themes of the play, rebellion, the concern for change and the resistance against it are manifest. No doubt, it is a great fact that, Soyinka has treated politics in **The Swamp Dwellers**.

Soyinka's second play, **The Lion and the Jewel** with an African setting, is faced with the challenge of change. It posits that change should be resisted, except that which could be manipulated. The play's major concern was both for life and for preservation of values that do not create social and political distortion.

Unlike in **The Swamp Dwellers** and **The Lion and the Jewel**, the political content of *A Dance of the Forests* is neither imperceptible nor illusory. The political history of that time, the late fifties and decades to follow, are carefully mirrored to the society through the play. One is tempted to opine that, Soyinka was motivated to write this play based on the fact that, prior to independence, many Nigerians in Diaspora were all coming over to take political position just after independence. He was motivated to write this play by the rush of these individuals. It is well deposed in the play that the future remains uncertain as African leaders are not prepared to face their history and experience and confront truthfully their future with a sense of soberness.

In **The Strong Breed**, the play represents some development on the early consciousness of Soyinka regarding the concept of the scape goat in societies. In the

play, the tension and foreboding apparently show that in any society, feelings are mixed for those who choose to stand in for others in matters of supreme sacrifice.

The play admonishes that sacrifice for a cause or personal leadership is costly but necessary for societies to move forward, and that the challenges or burden foisted on men, particularly leaders, are not to be avoided, in that their resolution paves the way for solutions to other problems, which confront societies from time to time.

In **The Trials of Brother Jero**, Soyinka lightens our hearts with a satirical comedy that drums into our consciousness the danger posed not necessarily by the proliferation of churches and sects in Nigeria, but by the sheer crudity and falsehood of the religious leaders, coupled with their hold on the minds, thoughts, and actions of the country's political leadership. The various communities in Nigeria have become Theatres of religious activism, and the activists have penetrated the political terrain at different levels. Some critics have argued that Soyinka's sensitivity to Africa's political problems were sharpened only after his solitary confinement during the Nigeria civil war, such critics may not have watched nor read *Kongi's Harvest*.

Kongi's Harvest is a more direct comment on the emerging vortex of African politics of the midsixties. A broader view of the play suggests that it is a commentary on a class of leaders generally and a class between modern dictatorship and a collapsing traditional system. He used this play to show the Leaders of Africa who were becoming increasingly tyrannical and

were denying their citizens political liberties as well as human rights.

Madmen and Specialists was written as a fresh reaction to the events of the Nigerian civil war. It portrays "a betrayal of vocation for the attraction of power in one form or the other. Among the many subjects treated in this play are; moral depravity, the bankruptcy of leaders and bare-faced corruption that choke humanity. The play creates the awareness and consciousness that; it is terror once evil forces resolve to resist the challenge of humanity, especially when the one who decides to seize and abuse power is armed and partially demented.

In **Death and the King's Horseman**, we are taken down the memory lane. This passionate and rather extravagant play is linked to the local environment of the mid-forties in Yoruba land. It is precisely about an event which occurred long ago in the ancient town of Oyo.

So much is contained in the play. The bride elements point out how material things, attachment to pleasures of the flesh, etc; block the realization of social and political goals, as self indulgence and indiscipline set in to block vision, dampen the will or entrap and lead to the path of defeatism.

Opera Wonyosi, is indeed largely a parody of Nigeria of the seventies. It is very clear that, the episodes in the play are structured to comment on social, economic and political decadence and abuses of the seventies: The arrogant misuse of power, corruption in government, varieties of injustice. By attacking on too many fronts, Soyinka fails to penetrate deep enough into

the political implications of each issue but the messages are clear.

A Play of Giants was written a few years after **Opera Wonyosi**. Soyinka moved beyond Nigeria, the "immediate humanity" for whom he speaks the entity to which he immediately identifies. The play was inspired by the atrocities of African leaders in the seventies. The play is entirely political. It focuses on the dark and bloody exploits of African tyrants. The play has provoked scholarly comments, one of which is a quotation of Gibbs, cited by Tunde (1994), he noted:

*"A play of Giants represents an attack on African leaders of unprecedented ferocity and is a -work of considerable courage... Soyinka seems to stride among African tyrants past and present pointing to their excesses, recalling their ill-deeds, and drawing attention to the forces which manipulate them"*⁷⁴.

Tradition, to Soyinka, should always serve as a guide and an inspiration, while change that must remain a constant factor within the vortex of humanity's propellers should advance man's journey to the ideal rather than abduct it. He no longer mocks the "glories of the past" nor shows pessimism about the future; he now stings political absurdities with poisonous sarcasm and presents the world, especially Africa, with the image of itself.

And **From Zia with Love** Soyinka says in an introductory note that, "the play is based on". an actual event which took place in

Nigeria, in 1984, under the military rule of Generals Buhari and Idiagbon. It is an entire product of the imagination, and makes no claim whatever to any correlation with actuality. It is all about military dictatorship in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Soyinka pounds home his political messages in a rather canny way- with the poet and literature in him surfacing. Soyinka has through these plays demonstrated his love for political freedom, social and good leadership.

No doubt, he has stood very tall via his plays as a mouth piece of the populace in the advocacy of good leadership and social change in our society; giving room for justice, equity and good governance. Politics as a subject of public interest and of discourse permeates all his plays.

Soyinka's Poems as political tools

In the words of Tunde, (1994)"it is indeed, with poetic tones that he 'fashions the drama of existence" and he further observed that Wole Soyinka's poetry as a symbolic action stretches the Aristotelian notion of imitation and action to the time of awareness.

Soyinka uses poetry to promote popular causes and project true democratic spirit. The poems are not of the same mood, as there are political poems that are tied by tissue of relevance, and the messages are in the tradition of poetry, aimed at the good of the people and based on some universalpolitical vision that also recognizes self and communal identities. His poetry comes out as a product of conscious thought. He uses poetry as a viable vehicle for delivering political messages. His poetry has been used politically, usually when

provoked by terrible events, and in so far as the issues of concern have immediacy that requires poetic transmission.

Soyinka's Politics through Novels

According to Tunde, (1994)"Soyinka started the first sentence of his novel with *The Interpreters*, which takes us through a fascinating, symbolic and mystical piece full of social and political messages that shows esoteric style of his prose".

The Interpreters: Written in the early sixties, exhibits a strong desire to explore political and sociological issues of the day. It is an established fact that every aspect of the Novel carries either social or political messages. But it is apparent, on points of circumspection, that the personality of each Interpreter is embedded in an extraordinarily complex vision of social life, politics and society. Within each stratum are to be found sub categories whose dispositions point at the distribution of values in the society.

The Interpreters is ambitious in an attempt to expose the ill of Nigerians, especially in elite circles and the frightening extent to which the oligarchy goes in frustrating social change and initiative. If, in Soyinka's first novel, men of intellect fail to speak with determination and authority in a versatile era, if they turned out to be a negligible force and could not use their professions, broad cultivation and unique opportunity to solve the exigent problems of the day and liberate Nigeria from all shackles. His second novel, *Season of Anomy*, is an overwhelming testimonial to the fact that the sordidness, myopia and

betrayal of yesterday are largely responsible for the troubles of today.

In *Season of Anomy*, we are taken through a society in a state of greater decadence. The plight of the individual, his alienation by forces that, shield fulfillment against the human will and the challenges that a society faces through the disposition of individuals are projected.

Soyinka showcases a disguised representation of a political situation, a symbolic story with characters embodying specific moral qualities and political implications. Its global perspective reveals an appeal to international morality and decisive action on the strength of the intolerable burden of justice, human greed, corruption and violence.

The society Soyinka portrays in these two Novels is a dismal one, sometimes from a perspective of detached sympathy and very frequently from an angle that exposes his personal concern. His novels suggest a peculiar concern for the creation of a just socio-political order, based on morals and laws that evolve out of a collective tradition reinforced by freedom and facilities for the origination, fruition and expression of ideas.

We see from the two novels, the confluence of reaction of political fruits connected with unstable polities, the worth of the individual determined by dynamics within ethical or unethical systems, with the tensions and conflicts expected or encountered that could be ruinous or fulfilling.

Associations as Political Vehicles

Tunde Adeniran (1994) quoted Bola Ige, a close friend of Soyinka saying; "Wole is passionately patriotic but does his things his

own way. He would take on a cause that he considered just and pursue it to any extent without caring whether you are with him or not".

Associations initiate political orientation and action targeted at stages of the life cycle or status in society. People are inducted into the political system to adopt a world-view, develop feelings and participate in activities which reflect interest and concern for politics and in some cases, identification with political parties. Within an association, individuals learn much in the way of political information through which they are expected to develop coherent attitudes on particular political issues.

Soyinka sought to use associations for political ends at the various stages of his development, ranging from informal to formal outfits that lacked anxious and desirous rise of a mass society, the cult of the common man and a mass culture. By periodically opting out of the use of art as instrument of social, economic and political change, Soyinka picks on the use of Associations. Through this, he engages in objective manipulation of symbols, the control of the mind through the passing of information towards prompting action to change society.

Soyinka joined many associations which took him to the frontiers of politics. All these associations were established with the sole aim of promoting the political interest of Africa and the continent's economic well-being and nurture it. It was borne out of the conviction that Africa was in the trouble of being suffocated within the choking confines of capitalist framework. The association sought to promote awareness at

all levels, so as to put an end to individual and national alienation, external control of African policies and production process.

Soyinka's political ambitions, while limited, may not have been entirely realized through associations, but he has certainly optimized their potentials through daring and by subsuming his iconoclastic tendencies into the loom of his creative ingenuity, and by placing them in the service of political change.

Soyinka in public service politics

Soyinka's background, orientation and disposition did not, however, hook him on to a channel through which he could take advantage of the opportunity to be a minister, chairman or member of some statutory corporation.

He was aware that government controls the agencies which influence the minds of the people or determine policies which directly affect the day to day lives of the masses. As an Artist, Soyinka was conscious that politics is the human Theatre of conflict which brings out all the vanity and venom, the narcissism and aggression and, indeed, the irrational impetus or bases of the contending parties and related forces. To him, the political order, with all its irrational non-rational sanctions, could not be accepted without a challenge.

Soyinka was appointed chairman of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) on 18 February, 1988. He brought into the service of the FRSC a high degree of administrative efficiency, discipline and accountability. In view of his status as a social critic and a political activist in a different class by himself, it was logical to anticipate that Soyinka's tenure in public

office would have been placed under permanent searchlight by inquisitive public, critical political spectators and sundry fault-seekers while his political appointment lasted.

Soyinka's acceptance to serve and his record of service attest to his visionary capacity and true leadership. He sets a goal for himself and put in place a structure he considered appropriate for effectiveness.

Soyinka has worked or served meritoriously in the public service which has portrayed him as a great icon of leadership.

Conclusion

Politics as an issue of general talks is a human phenomena that man in general cannot isolate himself from. It is so obvious that so many critics have in their own opinions, condemned artists who have in one way or the other addressed political issues of their time. It is an established fact, that every artist is influenced by the political situation of his period, though, and some at the initial time may not be relevant. Some actually write with no political intention, but unconsciously, address political issues in their works.

So, the general impression or observation is that all artists in as much as they would want to relate or create this social relationship with the society, must also be political. Many writers believe that the role of art is political, others say, it should be apolitical. Scholars like Stendhal are of the view that literature generally should not have political interest. That literature should not be politically aligned, that any attempt at it, would be detrimental. I think his view is strictly that writers are sensitive beings,

thus, politics does not in any way suit into that state. In his view, as a writer who is sensitive, should attend or commit only to a sensitive audience and that should be their primary objective.

The truth remains, that we cannot isolate ourselves from politics for the singular reason that, art itself cannot escape in an essentially political era from the political world. Bamidele (2000) in his argument posits that, Artists who are hard core political writers, who are devoted to a political persuasion, who are devoted to changing in way the political views and convictions of the society are sometimes not taken seriously as Artists but rather as siren that is always making loud noise to catch attention, I will in no doubt agree totally with Bamidele, (2000) because they are seen as those who only write to get fame or seen as those who are passive in action but active in words.

Wole Soyinka has in many ways related socially with the society via his works. It's obvious, he is not involved in active politics like other writers, but his writings have been influenced severally by the political situation of Nigeria, and at the same time, influenced many Nigerians. His works have both political and social relevance.

In a nutshell, politics is a human phenomenon, thus, we cannot shy away from it because, we in a time may directly or indirectly get involved in it without being conscious of it. We are political animals. Artists and politics are intertwined, so, whatever criticism that may come in relation to art and politics, should be welcome, because either way, they go side by side in

the effort of changing or making the society a better place.

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