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Full Length Research

Dictatorship and Resistance in Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the theme of dictatorship and resistance in Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, with a focus on how the dramatist portrays authoritarian rule and the struggle for national identity through the character of *Kongi*. As one of Soyinka's most politically charged plays, *Kongi's Harvest* offers a satirical yet profound exploration of post-independence African governance, where the promises of liberation are quickly subverted by the rise of autocratic leaders. Through *Kongi's* character, Soyinka dramatises the paradox of a leader who seeks to reinvent tradition while simultaneously suppressing dissent, thereby exposing the contradictions inherent in authoritarian rule. The paper argues that Soyinka situates resistance not merely as an oppositional force but as an essential element of reclaiming cultural autonomy and collective identity. Using close textual analysis and contextual interpretation, the study demonstrates how Soyinka employs satire, symbolism, and ritual aesthetics to interrogate the legitimacy of political authority and the tension between imposed modernity and indigenous values. Ultimately, the paper reveals how *Kongi's Harvest* transcends its immediate Nigerian context to reflect broader concerns about the failures of postcolonial leadership in Africa, highlighting Soyinka's enduring commitment to using drama as a vehicle for political critique and cultural reimagination.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Postcolonial Drama, Resistance, Wole Soyinka

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and politics in Africa has always been intimate, reflecting the continent's turbulent history of colonialism, independence, and the struggles of nation-building. Writers have consistently used their craft to interrogate the contradictions of political leadership and to provide alternative visions of society. In Nigeria, one of Africa's most culturally diverse nations, the arts have become a particularly powerful avenue for expressing the collective frustrations of the people. Among the literary genres, drama has played a central role in exposing the abuse of power and fostering debates on governance, legitimacy, and accountability. This paper situates itself within this discourse by examining Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* as a critical dramatisation of dictatorship and resistance in post-independence Africa.

The choice of *Kongi's Harvest* is deliberate, as it represents one of Soyinka's most incisive critiques of

authoritarianism. Written in the 1960s, the play captures the early disillusionment with independence when leaders, rather than pursuing the ideals of democracy, turned to despotism. Through the figure of *Kongi*, Soyinka presents a portrait of the African dictator as both grotesque and tragic—a man obsessed with consolidating power yet divorced from the cultural and spiritual values of his society. This duality reflects the broader paradox of African leadership: the pursuit of modernisation at the expense of identity.

In this sense, *Kongi's Harvest* transcends its immediate Nigerian context. It resonates with the wider African experience of betrayal, where the expectations of liberation were replaced with cycles of repression, coups, and political instability. Soyinka's dramatisation of this reality demonstrates how theatre serves not only as an aesthetic form but also as a tool of historical

documentation and political resistance. The play thus provides a critical entry point into discussions on dictatorship, national identity, and cultural renewal.

By exploring dictatorship and resistance in *Kongi's Harvest*, this paper points out Soyinka's work as both an artistic and political intervention. The study underscores how the dramatist uses satire, ritual, and symbolism to interrogate power while amplifying the agency of resistance. Ultimately, it aims to show that Soyinka's play remains relevant in contemporary Africa, where the struggle against authoritarianism and the search for accountable leadership persist.

1.1 Background to the Study

The independence movement across Africa in the mid-twentieth century was greeted with widespread optimism, as many believed that self-rule would deliver prosperity, dignity, and freedom. However, the immediate post-independence era revealed the fragility of newly formed states, which often inherited weak institutions from colonial administrations (Falola, 2019). Instead of consolidating democracy, many leaders centralised their power, prioritising personal ambition over national development. This phenomenon set the stage for the emergence of authoritarian regimes.

In Nigeria, the transition from colonialism to self-rule was equally turbulent. The parliamentary system introduced at independence in 1960 soon collapsed under the weight of ethnic rivalries, corruption, and electoral violence. The military seized power in 1966, ushering in decades of instability marked by coups and counter-coups (Osaghae, 1998). These developments created an atmosphere in which dissent was silenced, and governance was defined by repression rather than inclusion. The euphoria of independence was thus quickly replaced with disillusionment.

It was within this environment of broken promises that writers like Wole Soyinka rose to prominence. Literature became a vehicle for critiquing governance and for amplifying the voices of the people. In particular, drama provided a medium through which complex political realities could be staged, exposing the contradictions of leadership while simultaneously offering imaginative possibilities for resistance and renewal.

By foregrounding the failures of leadership in Nigeria, Soyinka and his contemporaries engaged with the broader African predicament. Their works highlighted how dictatorship, rather than being an isolated Nigerian issue, reflected a continental pattern of postcolonial governance. This background frames the analysis of *Kongi's Harvest*, a play that captures both the specificity of Nigeria's political crises and the universality of Africa's struggle with authoritarianism.

1.2 Context of Post-Independence Africa and the Rise of Authoritarian Leaders

The post-independence African state was deeply marked by a crisis of legitimacy, as political authority was inherited from colonial structures without the necessary socio-political foundations for democratic governance. Leaders who assumed power in the aftermath of colonial rule were confronted with ethnically diverse societies, weak state institutions, and artificially drawn boundaries that paid little regard to precolonial polities (Englebert, 2009). Instead of pursuing inclusive and participatory governance, many rulers centralised their authority, positioning themselves as custodians of unity and development. Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), and Idi Amin in Uganda became archetypal figures of African strongman politics, characterised by repression, patronage networks, and the cultivation of personality cults (Meredith, 2011; Young, 2012). This authoritarian turn was not incidental but rather the outcome of structural weaknesses and political insecurity that accompanied state formation in the postcolonial era.

Authoritarian regimes across Africa often employ the rhetoric of unity, modernisation, and national security as justifications for curtailing freedoms and consolidating personal power. While such leaders claimed to be guardians of national sovereignty against internal and external threats, their governance patterns undermined democratic development and entrenched corruption (Cheeseman & Fisher, 2019). In Nigeria, the descent into the Biafran War (1967–1970) epitomised the dangers of militarism and exclusionary governance. The war revealed how authoritarian responses to political dissent not only deepened ethnic fractures but also produced humanitarian disasters with long-term consequences for national integration (Suberu, 2001; Madueke, 2022). This legacy of militarised authoritarianism has had lasting effects, creating cultures of repression and distrust that continue to shape postcolonial African states' political trajectories.

In this climate of disillusionment, African literature and theatre emerged as vital platforms for interrogating the failures of independence. Writers and dramatists assumed the role of moral critics, documenting the betrayal of nationalist aspirations while envisioning alternative forms of community and resistance (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2018). Literature, in this sense, became both an archive of memory and a tool for social consciousness. By dramatising the contradictions of power, writers challenged the structures that normalised authoritarianism and offered a public space for imagining freedom beyond repression. This artistic resistance underscores the inseparability of culture and politics in postcolonial Africa.

Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* serves as a powerful case study of how drama critiques authoritarian leadership. The play depicts *Kongi* as a dictator obsessed with monopolising cultural rituals and distorting tradition to legitimise his political dominance. Through satire and symbolic imagery, Soyinka exposes how authoritarian leaders manipulate heritage and rituals, transforming them into instruments of domination rather than vehicles of communal identity (Irele, 2001; Okuyade, 2017). By embedding political critique within cultural discourse, Soyinka underscores how authoritarianism is not only a political problem but also a distortion of a people's existential values and historical consciousness.

This fusion of politics and cultural critique highlights the broader intellectual project of African writers and artists in the post-independence era. Their works reflect not only disillusionment with failed leadership but also enduring debates about the meaning of freedom, justice, and authenticity in African societies. The artistic interrogation of dictatorship therefore becomes a means of reclaiming the narrative of independence, which authoritarian rulers had attempted to monopolise through violence and censorship (Mbembe, 2001). In this way, literature functions as a counter-hegemonic force, one that keeps alive alternative visions of community and resistance.

Ultimately, the rise of authoritarianism in post-independence Africa represents more than a political crisis; it constitutes a cultural and existential rupture that compelled intellectuals to re-examine the promises of liberation. By confronting the contradictions of power through literature and theatre, African writers have not only documented the betrayals of independence but also contributed to a broader discourse on resistance and nationhood. Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, alongside other works of postcolonial critique, remains crucial for understanding how art negotiates the tensions between tradition and modernity, repression and freedom. The cultural production of this period thus offers invaluable insights into the struggles for legitimacy and democracy that continue to define Africa's political landscape (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Adebani, 2021).

1.3 Wole Soyinka's Role as a Dramatist and Critic of Governance

Wole Soyinka occupies a unique position in African intellectual history as more than a playwright; he is a public intellectual whose work fuses art and activism. His literary corpus demonstrates a commitment to exposing the moral bankruptcy of postcolonial African leadership while affirming the endurance of cultural traditions. Soyinka's award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 affirmed his global significance, but his influence extends beyond literary circles into the broader political and cultural imagination of Africa. His plays are deeply rooted in Yoruba cosmology, while simultaneously engaging with

modernist dramatic forms to critique authoritarianism and corruption (Gibbs, 1994; Jeyifo, 2004; Awodiya, 2019). By weaving indigenous epistemologies into global literary frameworks, Soyinka asserts the legitimacy of African cultural thought in confronting political crises.

In *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), Soyinka dramatises the figure of the dictator as both comical and tragic, laying bare the contradictions of authoritarian governance. *Kongi's* obsession with reinventing tradition reveals the paradox of postcolonial authoritarianism: while claiming to modernise society, rulers simultaneously distort cultural heritage to consolidate their grip on power. In this way, the play critiques not only the hubris of individual despots but also the systemic conditions that enable tyranny to thrive. The blending of satire and tragedy in *Kongi's Harvest* illustrates Soyinka's capacity to dramatise authoritarianism in a way that both entertains and unsettles audiences, compelling them to interrogate the legitimacy of unchecked authority (Okuyade, 2017; Nnodim, 2020).

Soyinka's literary critique cannot be separated from his lived political commitments. Throughout his career, he has endured imprisonment, harassment, and exile for challenging dictatorial regimes in Nigeria and beyond. His activism, particularly during the Nigerian Civil War and the military regimes of the 1980s and 1990s, exemplifies his belief that writers cannot be neutral observers in times of crisis (Gikandi, 2003; Ojaide, 2020). In this respect, Soyinka embodies the archetype of the writer as a conscience of society, one who insists that literature must confront not only aesthetic concerns but also the moral and political dilemmas of the age.

Moreover, Soyinka's integration of Yoruba cosmology and ritual into his dramaturgy positions his plays as cultural interventions in the face of political repression. By reinterpreting myths, festivals, and rites of passage, he reclaims African traditions from distortion by authoritarian leaders who instrumentalise culture for political purposes. This reimagining of tradition serves both as a critique of the misuse of heritage and as a reaffirmation of cultural resilience. Scholars argue that Soyinka's dramaturgy represents a form of cultural resistance, one that situates African knowledge systems at the centre of debates about modern governance and democracy (Irele, 2001; Agho, 2018).

When viewed within the larger trajectory of Soyinka's oeuvre, *Kongi's Harvest* emerges as more than satire; it is part of a sustained intellectual project that uses theatre as a medium for cultural reimagination and political critique. Other plays, such as *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), similarly interrogate the interface between tradition, authority, and moral responsibility. Together, these works reflect Soyinka's enduring conviction that drama must serve as a site for critical reflection on power and identity. In this way, Soyinka situates literature as an indispensable tool for both remembering betrayed national dreams and envisioning emancipatory futures.

(Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2018; Adebani, 2021).

Ultimately, Soyinka's significance lies in his dual role as dramatist and critic of governance. His art and activism converge in a consistent struggle against tyranny, demonstrating the power of literature to contest authoritarianism while sustaining cultural memory. *Kongi's Harvest* exemplifies how drama can destabilise hegemonic narratives and affirm alternative visions of leadership, community, and identity. Soyinka thus continues to resonate in contemporary debates on democracy, human rights, and nationhood in Africa, standing as a testament to the enduring relevance of intellectual and artistic resistance in the postcolonial context (Cheeseman & Fisher, 2019; Mbembe, 2001).

1.4 Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this paper is to critically examine how Soyinka dramatises authoritarian rule and the struggle for national identity in *Kongi's Harvest*. By analysing the play's central character, *Kongi*, the study seeks to uncover the contradictions inherent in dictatorship and explore how resistance is represented as a pathway to reclaiming cultural autonomy.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it contributes to scholarship on African literature and postcolonial politics by demonstrating the role of drama in critiquing governance. It underscores Soyinka's unique position as a dramatist whose works transcend aesthetics to function as political commentary. Furthermore, the study situates *Kongi's Harvest* within contemporary debates on leadership and democracy, offering insights into the enduring challenges of governance in Africa.

1.6 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Soyinka construct the character of *Kongi* as an embodiment of authoritarian leadership?
2. In what ways does *Kongi's Harvest* dramatise resistance to dictatorship?
3. How does Soyinka employ satire, ritual, and symbolism to critique authoritarian governance and reassert cultural identity?

1.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of this paper is limited to Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, though reference will be made to his broader body of work to highlight recurring thematic and stylistic concerns. The analysis is framed within the historical context of post-independence Africa, with particular emphasis on Nigeria's political trajectory. While the study engages with wider African examples of

authoritarian rule for comparative purposes, its central focus remains the interplay of dictatorship and resistance as dramatised in *Kongi's Harvest*.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Review of Scholarship on Soyinka's Political Plays

Wole Soyinka's dramatic works occupy a central place in African literary and political discourse, functioning as spaces where politics, ritual, and satire converge. Scholars consistently acknowledge his commitment to exposing the failures of African post-independence governance, often through allegory and parody. Jeyifo (2004) has argued that Soyinka's dramaturgy is both an aesthetic experiment and a political intervention, a theatre that negotiates the contradictions of the postcolonial condition. Similarly, Gibbs (1980) highlights Soyinka's "theatre of commitment," which not only critiques the abuse of power but also affirms the endurance of cultural resilience. These scholarly assessments reinforce the view that Soyinka's plays transcend literary form to serve as socio-political critiques of tyranny and authoritarianism.

A recurring theme in Soyinka scholarship is his deployment of Yoruba ritual and myth as tools for interrogating political legitimacy. By embedding indigenous traditions within modern dramatic frameworks, Soyinka resists both colonial distortions and postcolonial appropriations of African identity. As Jeyifo (2004) observes, Soyinka transforms ritual into an arena where cultural memory confronts political authority. In *Kongi's harvest*, for example, the festival becomes a contested site of power, dramatising the conflict between authentic tradition and *Kongi's* authoritarian reappropriation of ritual. This ritualised politics highlights the broader dynamic of leaders manipulating culture to consolidate control, thereby blurring the boundaries between governance and performance (Agho, 2018; Irele, 2001).

Soyinka's use of satire has also attracted substantial critical attention. Gugler (1997) notes that *Kongi's Harvest* destabilises authoritarian narratives through its multiple endings in stage and film adaptations, thereby exposing the fragility of dictatorship. Jeyifo (2004) extends this argument by suggesting that Soyinka's grotesque parody dismantles the self-mythological tendencies of postcolonial rulers. *Kongi's* exaggerated obsession with controlling harvest celebrations is both comical and menacing, illustrating the absurdities of authoritarian power. In this light, Soyinka's dramaturgy aligns with broader traditions of political satire that ridicule tyranny while simultaneously warning audiences of its destructive potential (Okuyade, 2017; Nnodim, 2020).

However, much of the scholarship on Soyinka has tended to be text-centered, with limited attention given to performance studies and audience reception. Gugler

(1997) rightly observes that while critical readings of *Kongi's Harvest* abound, analyses often neglect the dynamics of live performance and audience interpretation. The 1966 staging of the play at the Dakar Festival of Negro Arts was not only an aesthetic presentation but also a politically charged act of cultural resistance. Nonetheless, detailed studies of how performance choices and audience responses shaped its reception remain rare in Soyinka studies (Banham, 2004). This gap suggests the need for scholarship that moves beyond textual hermeneutics to embrace performance as a critical dimension of Soyinka's theatre.

Recent scholarship has begun to address this lacuna by situating Soyinka's plays as cultural events embedded in historical and political contexts. Scholars such as Awodiya (2019) and Ojaide (2020) highlight how Soyinka's works function simultaneously as dramatic texts and public interventions in the struggles against dictatorship. This approach foregrounds the interplay between text and performance, recognising that Soyinka's theatre cannot be divorced from the socio-political environments in which it is enacted. Performance, therefore, becomes an extension of Soyinka's political critique, transforming his plays into arenas of collective memory and resistance.

The review of scholarship on Soyinka's political plays reveals a body of work that is both rich and evolving. Earlier studies emphasised the textual and allegorical dimensions of his drama, particularly his reliance on myth and satire to interrogate power. More recent interventions, however, call for performance-centred approaches that capture the lived dimensions of Soyinka's theatre as a cultural practice. By bringing together textual analysis, ritual symbolism, and performance studies, scholars can more fully appreciate Soyinka's political plays as dynamic engagements with tyranny, culture, and identity in postcolonial Africa. Such a holistic approach ensures that *Kongi's Harvest* and similar works are understood not only as literary artefacts but also as historical acts of resistance embedded in Africa's ongoing struggles for freedom and democracy.

2.2 Postcolonial Theory, Fanon, and Foucault on Power and Resistance

Postcolonial theory remains indispensable for interpreting Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, particularly for understanding how colonial legacies shaped the political behaviour of African elites. Contemporary scholarship continues to emphasise that colonial discourse influenced African leaders' conceptions of sovereignty and authority. Mbembe (2001) demonstrates that postcolonial power is often marked by the grotesque and the spectacular, where rulers both mimic and distort colonial structures of domination. Similarly, Young (2016) foregrounds the ambivalence of postcolonial governance, arguing that leaders who position themselves as

modernisers often reproduce the authoritarian practices of their colonial predecessors. In Soyinka's play, *Kongi* exemplifies this paradox: though claiming nationalist legitimacy, he appropriates indigenous rituals to entrench his dominance.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's cultural theory further sharpens this analysis. In his later reflections, Ngũgĩ (2018) underscores that postcolonial leaders frequently co-opt indigenous languages, rituals, and traditions not to empower the people but to perpetuate new forms of hegemony. This dynamic is visible in *Kongi's Harvest*, where *Kongi* manipulates the harvest festival—an emblem of communal renewal—into an authoritarian display. By subordinating ritual to his image, *Kongi* embodies what Ngũgĩ describes as the betrayal of cultural authenticity in the service of power. The play therefore illustrates how postcolonial authoritarianism operates through both political coercion and cultural appropriation.

Fanon's critique of post-independence leadership remains equally relevant. Fanon's analysis of the "national bourgeoisie" as a class that internalises colonial modes of dominance has been revisited by scholars such as Sharpe (2020), who argue that postcolonial elites often transform liberation into new structures of exploitation. *Kongi* embodies this trajectory: he proclaims a mission to "purify tradition" but instead distorts it into a tool of self-legitimation. His psychological insecurity and obsession with controlling rituals reflect Fanon's insights about how postcolonial leaders, haunted by colonial humiliation, reproduce authoritarian practices as compensatory performances of power.

Foucault's theory of power offers another critical dimension for understanding Soyinka's play. As revisited by Garland (2014), Foucault's framework emphasises that modern power operates not only through brute repression but also through discipline, surveillance, and spectacle. *Kongi's* insistence on controlling the harvest festival exemplifies this mode of power: by dictating the ritual of renewal, he seeks to govern not merely political institutions but the rhythms of collective cultural life. The festival thus becomes a disciplinary technology, echoing Foucault's insight that power infiltrates everyday practices to normalise obedience and reinforce hierarchy.

Recent scholarship has applied Foucault's theories to African contexts, showing how ritual and performance become instruments of authoritarian governance. Mbembe (2019) in particular highlights the "aesthetics of vulgarity" in African regimes, where spectacle is central to consolidating domination. *Kongi's Harvest* anticipates this analysis, portraying how ritual spectacles are mobilised not as genuine traditions but as political theatre that secures authoritarian legitimacy. Soyinka thus dramatises the entanglement of power and culture; rulers convert communal practices into sites of surveillance and dominance.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a multidimensional framework for reading *Kongi's Harvest*. Postcolonial theory situates *Kongi* as a mimic of colonial

authoritarianism, Ngũgĩ underscores the betrayal of cultural authenticity, Fanon illuminates the psychological insecurities underpinning postcolonial authoritarianism, and Foucault reveals how ritualised spectacle becomes a disciplinary technology. Soyinka's play thereby emerges as a profound meditation on power and resistance in the African postcolony, offering insights that remain urgently relevant to debates on leadership, culture, and democracy..

2.3 Textual Illustrations from *Kongi's Harvest*

Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* vividly demonstrates the intersection of theory and dramaturgy through its depiction of ritual, authority, and resistance. In the opening scenes, *Kongi* insists that the traditional New Yam Festival be renamed and repurposed as the "Annual Harvest Festival" under state control. This act of symbolic appropriation aligns with Young's (2016) observation that postcolonial regimes frequently hollow out tradition, transforming it into state spectacle. By recasting himself as the custodian of renewal, *Kongi* enacts what Foucault, as interpreted by Garland (2014), describes as governmentality—the disciplining of both cultural practices and collective identities through ritualised control.

The dramatic exchanges between *Kongi* and Daodu further illustrate Fanon's critique of postcolonial authoritarianism and his insistence on the necessity of revolutionary rupture. Daodu, representing the voice of a younger generation, refuses to concede the ruler's monopoly over sacred communal rituals. His defiance echoes Sharpe's (2020) reassessment of Fanon, which emphasises that meaningful resistance must reclaim both political and cultural autonomy from authoritarian elites. Soyinka's staging of Daodu's resistance foregrounds the intergenerational struggle for legitimacy and reclaims indigenous values against the distortions of authoritarian mimicry.

The anxieties of *Kongi's* bureaucrats add another layer of theoretical resonance. Their debates on how to stage-manage the festival—focusing on costumes, processions, and ceremonial scripts—reveal how authoritarian power depends upon appearances. Mbembe (2001) has shown that African postcolonial regimes frequently rely on the aesthetics of power to mask their insecurity. Soyinka's satire of bureaucratic obsession resonates with this insight, exposing the fragility behind *Kongi's* façade of control. The play thus anticipates Mbembe's "aesthetics of vulgarity," where political spectacle simultaneously consolidates and undermines the regime's authority.

The climactic disruptions of the festival encapsulate the instability of authoritarian rule. Across productions, the ambiguous ending—ranging from comic to tragic to ironic—underscores Soyinka's rejection of simplistic closure. Mbembe (2019) argues that authoritarianism is never absolute, always shadowed by its potential undoing. In Soyinka's play, the eruption of resistance

during the festival symbolises precisely this instability, suggesting that authoritarian power is inherently fragile. Resistance, therefore, is not only a political act but also a cultural inevitability.

Through these textual illustrations, Soyinka dramatises the entanglements of postcolonial power, ritualised spectacle, and resistance. *Kongi's* manipulation of tradition exemplifies the postcolonial state's attempt to govern through cultural appropriation; Daodu's defiance enacts Fanon's revolutionary rupture; the bureaucrats' obsession with appearances highlights Foucault's disciplinary logic; and the disrupted festival reflects Mbembe's analysis of the instability of authoritarian spectacle. Collectively, these scenes affirm Soyinka's theatre as a site where political critique, cultural authenticity, and theoretical insight converge.

2.4 Critical Gaps in Studies on *Kongi's Harvest*

Despite the significant body of work on Soyinka's political theatre, critical gaps persist in the study of *Kongi's Harvest*. A notable limitation is the inadequate mobilisation of Foucauldian frameworks to investigate how rituals in the play function as technologies of discipline and governance. Scholars often recognise the symbolic manipulation of the harvest festival, but few extend their analysis to the structural mechanisms of power embedded within ritual performances. n recognise the symbolic manipulation of the harvest festival, but extend their analysis to the structural mechanisms of power embedded within ritual performances. As Garland's (2014) interpretation of Foucault demonstrates, power is most effective when it is normalised through everyday practices. Applying this lens to Soyinka's text would illuminate how *Kongi* transforms cultural rituals into instruments of state surveillance and control.

Another gap lies in the underexplored terrain of performance reception. Gugler's (1997) analysis of multiple endings and the cinematic adaptation provides important insights into narrative instability, yet audience reception—particularly during the play's staging at the 1966 Dakar Festival of Negro Arts—remains largely absent from scholarship. Nnodim (2020) emphasises that African drama must be studied not only as a text but also as a performance, embedded within political and cultural contexts that shape audience interpretations. The failure to critically historicise the Dakar performance limits our understanding of how Soyinka's dramaturgy resonated in a Pan-Africanist setting marked by both optimism and political repression.

A further gap concerns the psychological dimensions of authoritarianism in the play. While Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie is frequently invoked, deeper psycho-political readings of *Kongi* as both victim and perpetrator of colonial trauma remain limited. As Sharpe (2020) argues in revisiting Fanon, the authoritarian psychology of postcolonial leaders often stems from

unresolved colonial violence that is internalised and reenacted against their citizens. Analysing *Kongi* through this lens would go beyond satire to expose the profound contradictions of postcolonial subjectivity, where liberation is haunted by the residues of colonial dominance.

The dominance of text-centred approaches also reflects a wider methodological gap. Much scholarship privileges literary criticism at the expense of performance studies, political theory, and anthropology. Okuyade (2017) reminds us that Soyinka's theatre thrives in the interstices of ritual, politics, and performance, and any reading that neglects these dimensions risks flattening its complexity. Integrating interdisciplinary perspectives could allow for a more holistic analysis of *Kongi's Harvest* as both an aesthetic text and a cultural event situated within broader struggles over identity, legitimacy, and resistance.

Furthermore, there is a need to connect Soyinka's critique of authoritarianism with contemporary debates on power in Africa. Mbembe's (2019) work on necropolitics, for instance, offers fresh avenues for understanding how states deploy spectacle, violence, and ritual to manage life and death. Situating *Kongi's Harvest* within this broader intellectual conversation would underscore the play's enduring relevance and highlight Soyinka's prescience in diagnosing authoritarian tendencies that persist in contemporary governance.

This paper addresses these gaps by adopting a synthetic approach that combines postcolonial theory, Fanon's psycho-politics, and Foucauldian analysis of ritual with close textual and performance-orientated readings. By situating Soyinka's play within both its immediate historical moment and ongoing debates about authoritarianism, culture, and resistance, the study foregrounds *Kongi's Harvest* not simply as satire but as a complex meditation on power that remains acutely relevant to African and global political discourses today.

3. AUTHORITARIAN RULE AND THE CHARACTER OF *KONGI*

3.1 *Kongi* as a Symbol of Postcolonial Dictatorship

In *Kongi's Harvest*, Wole Soyinka constructs *Kongi* as the archetype of the postcolonial dictator, a ruler who inherits the colonial state apparatus and redeploys it against his own people. Scholars have observed that Soyinka's portrayal of *Kongi* resonates with the phenomenon of what Adebani (2021) calls "internal colonialism", where African elites perpetuate domination under the guise of independence. *Kongi's* political strategies—built on coercion, manipulation, and cultural appropriation—reflect this continuity of authoritarianism. In dramatising *Kongi's* rise, Soyinka emphasises how the structures of colonial power were neither dismantled nor

democratised but rebranded in the post-independence era.

The reconfiguration of the New Yam Festival into the state-controlled "Annual Harvest Festival" exemplifies this logic of appropriation. A ritual originally intended to foster communal renewal is transformed into a spectacle for consolidating *Kongi's* power. As Osofisan (2016) notes, Soyinka's critique here lies in exposing how political leaders exploit indigenous traditions to extend their authority into sacred and cultural domains. By demanding that Oba Danlola hand over the new yam, *Kongi* symbolically displaces the traditional custodianship of culture, centralising legitimacy in the state. This manipulation of cultural symbols reflects the broader authoritarian tendency to conflate spiritual and political authority, erasing the boundary between governance and ritual.

Kongi's authoritarian personality is also marked by paranoia and the cultivation of a personality cult. His insistence on absolute loyalty, coupled with his reliance on bureaucrats and surveillance, recalls what Falola (2020) identifies as the "aesthetics of African strongmen", where power is sustained through spectacle, coercion, and constant image management. Rather than relying solely on violence, *Kongi* carefully curates rituals of obedience, projecting himself as an indispensable figure at the centre of political and cultural life. This obsession with control aligns with Mbembe's (2019) insight that authoritarian power operates as much through performance and symbolism as through repression.

Beyond his personal ambitions, *Kongi* symbolises the betrayal of nationalist aspirations in Africa's immediate post-independence period. As Achebe (2012) observed in relation to Nigeria, the postcolonial state often failed to translate liberation struggles into participatory governance, instead reproducing the alienation and corruption characteristic of colonial rule. *Kongi* thus emerges as a dramatic embodiment of these failures—his governance is detached from cultural legitimacy, preoccupied with control rather than community. Through this lens, Soyinka's play resonates as a warning about the dangers of substituting one form of domination for another.

Soyinka positions *Kongi* not merely as an individual dictator but as a structural symbol of authoritarian continuity in Africa. His character condenses multiple features of postcolonial governance—appropriation of tradition, obsession with spectacle, paranoia, and betrayal of nationalist ideals—into a satirical yet incisive critique. In this way, Soyinka transforms theatre into a medium for interrogating the cyclical nature of power and resistance in postcolonial states. *Kongi's* symbolic function thus affirms Soyinka's broader project of exposing tyranny while insisting on the resilience of cultural and communal values as potential grounds for resistance.

3.2 Suppression of Tradition, Rituals, and Opposition

A central feature of *Kongi's* authoritarianism in *Kongi's Harvest* is his deliberate suppression of tradition and its custodians. Soyinka stages this conflict through the figure of Oba Danlola, the deposed traditional ruler, whose detention and humiliation symbolise the subjugation of indigenous authority to the postcolonial state. This dramatisation reflects what Agho (2019) identifies as Soyinka's preoccupation with the struggle over legitimacy between inherited cultural traditions and modern authoritarian rule. By reducing the Oba to a ceremonial relic, *Kongi* enacts a broader allegory of how postcolonial regimes displace communal structures in their quest for absolute power.

Rituals become the most visible site of this cultural suppression. The New Yam Festival, traditionally a ritual of renewal and community, is stripped of its spiritual significance and reconstituted as the "Annual Harvest Festival", a state-managed spectacle. This appropriation exemplifies what Barber (2018) describes as the manipulation of cultural performance by political elites to serve ideological ends. In Soyinka's staging, the ritual is emptied of its restorative function and redeployed as propaganda, underscoring the authoritarian strategy of hollowing out tradition while retaining its symbolic authority.

Equally important is the regime's suppression of dissent. Figures such as Daodu and Segi embody resistance, yet their opposition remains precarious under *Kongi's* apparatus of control. The Carpenter's Brigade, functioning as both ideological enforcers and instruments of intimidation, reflects how authoritarian states deploy informal and formal structures to neutralise critics. Adebani (2021) notes that in postcolonial Africa, authoritarian leaders often rely on a mix of surveillance, co-optation, and coercion to silence resistance. Soyinka's dramatisation thus mirrors these dynamics, embedding them in a satirical yet incisive critique of power.

This repression extends beyond politics into the ideological domain. *Kongi* does not simply detain opponents or manipulate rituals; he seeks to control the narrative of nationhood itself. As Mbembe (2001) argues in *On the Postcolony*, authoritarian regimes sustain their dominance by scripting public discourse, transforming cultural life into a theatre of power. Soyinka anticipates this critique by showing how *Kongi* attempts to monopolise the symbolic order, ensuring that both tradition and opposition serve the narrative of his indispensability.

Kongi's Harvest demonstrates that authoritarian suppression operates at multiple, interconnected levels: political (through the detention of rivals), cultural (through ritual manipulation), and ideological (through narrative domination). Soyinka's portrayal of *Kongi* illustrates the totalising ambitions of postcolonial dictatorship while also highlighting the fragility of such regimes when confronted with the resilience of dissenting voices and cultural

memory. In doing so, Soyinka situates authoritarianism not merely as a political structure but as a cultural and existential crisis.

3.3 Satire and Parody as Tools of Critique

Soyinka's most incisive dramatic weapon against authoritarianism in *Kongi's Harvest* is satire. By exaggerating *Kongi's* delusions of grandeur and his obsessive quest for legitimacy, Soyinka foregrounds the absurdities that underpin authoritarian ambition. Satire here functions not only as entertainment but as a critical mode of resistance. As Ebewo (2017) observes, Soyinka uses laughter as a mirror, compelling audiences to confront the grotesque distortions of power in postcolonial Africa. In exposing the comic dimensions of tyranny, Soyinka underscores its fragility and calls attention to the psychological insecurity that sustains authoritarianism.

Parody constitutes an equally powerful strategy in Soyinka's dramaturgy. Through the re-staging of rituals, the bureaucratic charade of the "New Aweri," and *Kongi's* ceremonial pretensions, Soyinka parodies both modern governance and traditional authority. This deliberate inversion of roles—forcing *Kongi* to assume the duties of a ritual leader while posturing as a modern statesman—creates a doubleness that strips these institutions of their seriousness. Barber (2018) notes that African performance traditions often employ parody to destabilise hierarchical structures, and Soyinka adapts this technique to reveal the fragility of political and cultural institutions under authoritarian capture.

Irony also plays a crucial role in Soyinka's critique. While *Kongi* meticulously cultivates his public image, the audience is simultaneously exposed to the private doubts, resistance, and subversive plotting of other characters. This dramatic irony creates what Osofisan (2016) terms the "counter-spectacle," a dramaturgical device through which audiences perceive the hollowness of rituals and political performances that characters are compelled to enact. In this sense, Soyinka aligns with Mbembe's (2019) notion that power under authoritarian regimes is inherently performative, relying on repetition and spectacle that can be mocked and destabilised through irony.

Satire and parody in *Kongi's Harvest* are not merely aesthetic devices but instruments of political pedagogy. By ridiculing *Kongi's* authoritarian practices, Soyinka empowers audiences to recognise the contradictions of dictatorship and to imagine resistance where open defiance may be dangerous. As Adebani (2021) argues, cultural critique in postcolonial Africa often depends on symbolic strategies—such as parody and satire—that erode the aura of power. Soyinka thus demonstrates that laughter, irony, and theatrical inversion are potent forms of resistance, capable of destabilising authoritarian legitimacy while affirming the resilience of communal values.

4. RESISTANCE, IDENTITY, AND DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

4.1 Traditional Institutions and Dissenting Voices as Agents of Resistance

In *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka situates resistance not simply in outright rebellion but within the subtle endurance of traditional authority and dissenting voices. Oba Danlola, though deposed and humiliated by *Kongi*, remains a symbolic custodian of cultural legitimacy. His refusal to yield spiritual authority underscores the enduring capacity of indigenous traditions to challenge authoritarian imposition. As Jeyifo (2004) notes, Soyinka often constructs traditional rulers as latent sources of power whose symbolic presence alone destabilises the totalist claims of modern dictatorship.

The contestation over the New Yam Festival is emblematic of this dynamic. While *Kongi* seeks to appropriate the ritual for his political spectacle, Danlola's withheld blessing reveals the limits of authoritarian manipulation. According to Barber (2018), African performance traditions often embed ritual practices that carry deep communal legitimacy, making them resistant to political capture. Soyinka dramatises these practices by showing how even a deposed ruler retains cultural authority that the dictator cannot fully suppress.

Resistance also emerges through dissenting voices such as Daodu and Segi, whose intellectual and emotional defiance articulate alternative visions of governance and community. Daodu, representing reformist impulses, and Segi, embodying popular consciousness, challenge *Kongi's* authoritarianism through subtle but persistent opposition. Their presence recalls Fanon's (1963) insistence that the postcolonial subject resists domination not only through violent uprising but also through the affirmation of cultural and communal values.

Moreover, Soyinka describes resistance as multifaceted, blending traditional authority with grassroots mobilisation. Danlola's legitimacy survives alongside the conspiratorial activities of Segi's club, suggesting that resistance is sustained both from above (traditional rulers) and below (popular voices). As Osofisan (2016) argues, Soyinka's dramaturgy resists simplistic binaries of tradition versus modernity, instead presenting a continuum where dissent arises from multiple social locations.

Eventually, Soyinka underscores the resilience of communal identity as a form of counter-power. By foregrounding traditional rulers, intellectual dissidents, and ordinary citizens, he suggests that authoritarian regimes, however powerful, remain vulnerable to cultural legitimacy and collective memory. As Adebaniwi (2021) observes, postcolonial authoritarianism often falters where traditions of community and identity refuse to be subsumed. Soyinka's play, therefore, affirms the enduring

capacity of cultural and intellectual resistance to disrupt tyranny and envision alternative futures.

4.2 Symbolism, Ritual, and Indigenous Aesthetics in Reclaiming Identity

Soyinka's dramaturgy consistently draws on indigenous aesthetics to critique postcolonial dislocation and to reaffirm cultural identity. In *Kongi's Harvest*, ritual functions as a contested site where political power and cultural tradition collide. *Kongi's* attempt to appropriate the New Yam Festival for state propaganda reflects what Barber (2018) identifies as the struggle between political modernity and cultural continuity in African performance traditions. Yet, Soyinka destabilises this authoritarian project by presenting the festival as an enduring expression of communal identity that resists political hijacking.

The symbolism of the yam is central to this dynamic. Beyond being a staple crop, the yam represents fertility, renewal, and communal survival. Its manipulation by *Kongi* is contrasted with its cultural depth, reminding audiences that identity and tradition persist beyond authoritarian control. As Okagbue (2019) argues, Soyinka's symbolic layering of objects and rituals transforms performance into a vehicle of cultural memory, where suppressed histories and identities re-emerge in opposition to tyranny.

Soyinka also reclaims identity through his use of ritual aesthetics, drawing on Yoruba cosmology to dramatise the resilience of collective memory. The New Yam Festival in the play is not merely decorative but functions as what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) calls a "decolonial archive," where indigenous traditions preserve and transmit alternative worldviews despite political suppression. By embedding ritual into the dramaturgy, Soyinka asserts the centrality of indigenous epistemologies in countering postcolonial dislocation.

Momentarily, Soyinka's deployment of symbolism and ritual demonstrates that identity is not a static inheritance but a living, contested practice. The communal ownership of ritual, even when appropriated by authoritarian leaders, ensures that culture retains its autonomy and capacity to challenge domination. As Adebaniwi (2021) notes, African cultural memory often serves as a form of resistance by grounding identity in shared heritage rather than state narratives. In this way, *Kongi's Harvest* affirms the power of indigenous aesthetics as a tool for reclaiming identity in the face of authoritarian erasure.

4.3 Use of Satire, Irony, Allegory, and Performance as Strategies of Subversion

Soyinka's dramaturgy is marked by his deliberate use of satire to destabilise authoritarian authorities. In *Kongi's Harvest*, satire ridicules the excesses of *Kongi's* self-

glorification, exposing the absurdity of his attempt to merge political power with sacred ritual. Through exaggerated ceremonial performances, Soyinka deflates *Kongi's* aura of invincibility, transforming him into a figure of ridicule. As Barber (2018) notes, African theatre often deploys humour and ridicule as critique strategies, and Soyinka harnesses satire to reveal the farcical nature of postcolonial dictatorship.

Irony operates alongside satire as a critical device. The audience perceives the dissonance between *Kongi's* carefully orchestrated image of supreme authority and the private anxieties that betray his insecurity. This dramatic irony functions as a “counter-spectacle”, allowing spectators to recognise the fragility of authoritarian power despite its public projection of strength. Okagbue (2019) argues that Soyinka's theatre often cultivates this layered perception, encouraging audiences to see beyond the surface of political rituals to the contradictions that undermine them.

Allegory is another key dimension of Soyinka's subversive strategy. *Kongi*, though in a specific fictional nation, represents the archetypal postcolonial dictator whose betrayal of nationalist ideals resonates across Africa. His manipulation of ritual and cultural memory allegorises the broader structures of political domination in postcolonial states. As Adebani (2021) observes, Soyinka's allegorical figures provide a lens through which audiences interrogate political betrayal, situating national crises within wider postcolonial discourses of power and legitimacy.

Performance itself becomes an arena of resistance. By transforming the stage into a contested political space, Soyinka highlights the performative dimensions of power while simultaneously enabling audiences to participate in its deconstruction. The New Yam Festival, reimagined as a state spectacle, doubles as a theatrical critique in which viewers witness both the regime's attempt at control and its unravelling through performance. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) suggests that such re-staging of ritual functions is a “decolonial performance”, foregrounding indigenous aesthetics as tools for resisting authoritarian appropriation.

The interplay of these strategies—satire, irony, allegory, and performance—cultivates political consciousness among audiences. Soyinka does not merely entertain but actively enlists theatre as an instrument of critique and resistance. His dramaturgy challenges audiences to recognise the constructed nature of authoritarian power and envision alternative possibilities for governance. As Vaughan (2022) argues, Soyinka's theatrical methods highlight how African drama serves both aesthetic and civic functions, enabling political critique in contexts where direct opposition may be curtailed.

Finally, *Kongi's Harvest* demonstrates the capacity of theatrical form to enact subversion through layered aesthetic strategies. Satire destabilises the dictator's image; irony exposes his insecurities; allegory situates his

actions within broader histories of betrayal; and performance reclaims the ritual as resistance. Together, these techniques ensure that Soyinka's drama functions as a cultural intervention, one that affirms the role of art in challenging authoritarianism and reclaiming African identity.

4.4 The Dialectics of Resistance and Identity

What emerges with clarity in *Kongi's Harvest* is the deeply dialectical relationship between resistance and identity: resistance affirms identity, while identity, in turn, sustains resistance. Soyinka carefully dramatises this tension through his use of ritual, tradition, and satirical subversion, making visible the ways in which dictatorship seeks to erase cultural memory yet inevitably fails. The play reminds us that authoritarianism, however totalising in its ambitions, cannot eradicate the deeper resources of cultural life. As Falola (2020) has persuasively argued in his examination of African political trajectories, authoritarian regimes are frequently undone by the very cultural forms they attempt to appropriate or suppress. Soyinka translates this historical reality into the symbolic language of theatre, showing that acts of ritual and art become crucial spaces for defiance.

The strength of Soyinka's dramaturgy lies in the insistence that resistance is not confined to overt rebellion or political confrontation; it is equally enacted in the symbolic, the aesthetic, and the spiritual. The reconstitution of ritual in *Kongi's Harvest* functions as a means of cultural preservation, where the yam, the festival, and the voice of the community become metaphors for an identity that survives—even flourishes—in opposition to tyranny. As Barber (2018) notes, African performance traditions have long carried the capacity to sustain community identity, transmitting collective memory even in contexts of oppression. Soyinka's theatre embodies this principle by staging resistance as a reaffirmation of identity.

Moreover, the play underscores the point that identity itself is not static but continually redefined through acts of defiance. Characters such as Daodu and Segi embody this dynamic process: they refuse to surrender to *Kongi's* cultural re-engineering, instead reasserting indigenous values as the bedrock of communal legitimacy. In this way, Soyinka aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020) notion of “decolonial identity”, which insists that authentic selfhood is not granted by the state but reclaimed by communities through conscious resistance to domination. The dramatic conflict between *Kongi* and his people thus resonates as both a political and an ontological struggle.

What *Kongi's Harvest* ultimately offers is not simply a critique of authoritarian rule but a meditation on the inexhaustible resilience of identity under duress. Theatrical strategies—satire, parody, ritual inversion—serve to destabilise power, but they also remind us that identity is most forcefully articulated in the very act of resisting attempts at erasure. Vaughan (2022) observes

that Soyinka's oeuvre consistently foregrounds the interdependence of cultural survival and political resistance, situating drama as a vital site for the renegotiation of collective memory and legitimacy. By bringing this dialectic to the stage, Soyinka elevates the play beyond political allegory to a profound statement on the endurance of cultural being.

In this sense, *Kongi's Harvest* should be read not merely as a portrayal of one dictator's failure but as a philosophical reflection on the capacity of communities to reclaim their identity through creative acts of defiance. It demonstrates that authoritarianism, no matter how suffocating, cannot permanently silence the symbolic and spiritual resources of the people. The play thus performs a double function: it critiques the political structures of postcolonial Africa while simultaneously affirming the enduring vitality of indigenous identity as the foundation for resistance.

5. BROADER IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 The Play's Reflection of African Postcolonial Governance Challenges

Kongi's Harvest provides a profound reflection on the persistent governance crises that have troubled Africa since independence. Soyinka dramatises how postcolonial rulers, while presenting themselves as liberators, frequently replicate the authoritarian practices of colonial regimes. *Kongi's* drive to monopolise authority and subordinate traditional structures echoes the broader failure of postcolonial leadership to reconcile imported models of modern statecraft with indigenous systems of legitimacy. As Adebani (2021) reminds us, the African state has often been haunted by a "postcolonial paradox", where independence produced sovereignty in form but authoritarianism in practice. Soyinka captures this paradox by situating *Kongi* as an indigenous autocrat whose rule mirrors, rather than transcends, the violence of colonial domination.

One of the central features of postcolonial governance crises is the centralisation of power, which undermines the pluralism required for democratic consolidation. *Kongi's* suppression of dissent and manipulation of ritual highlight this dynamic, suggesting that authoritarian regimes seek not only to silence opposition but also to reconfigure cultural symbols into instruments of control. Young (2012) describes the African postcolonial state as a "gatekeeper state," characterised by its fragile institutions and tendency towards personalised rule. Soyinka translates this theoretical insight into the theatrical language of power, showing how *Kongi's* centralising tendencies suffocate both political participation and cultural expression.

Corruption also emerges as a thematic concern in Soyinka's critique of governance. By surrounding himself with sycophantic bureaucrats, *Kongi* illustrates the culture

of patronage and opportunism that often characterises authoritarian regimes. These functionaries obsess over appearances, speeches, and rituals rather than substantive governance, thereby enacting what Falola (2020) identifies as the institutionalisation of corruption and spectacle in African politics. Soyinka's satire underscores that corruption is not merely financial but also symbolic: it erodes the moral authority of leadership by distorting cultural practices into propaganda tools.

Furthermore, Soyinka interrogates how authoritarian leaders manipulate cultural traditions to entrench their dominance. *Kongi's* appropriation of the New Yam Festival exemplifies the strategy of using culture as a political resource, hollowing out its communal significance to reinscribe state power. This reflects Mbembe's (2019) observation that postcolonial rulers often deploy rituals of power to blur the line between the sacred and the political, creating an aura of inevitability around their authority. Yet, by staging the contradictions of such manipulations, Soyinka demonstrates that the very attempt to monopolise culture exposes the regime's insecurity and fragility.

Kongi's Harvest therefore stands as more than a political satire; it is an allegory of Africa's broader postcolonial governance challenges. The erosion of democratic institutions, the persistence of authoritarianism, the corruption of bureaucracies, and the instrumentalisation of culture are dramatised throughout *Kongi's* reign. Soyinka thus provides not only a critique of a fictional dictator but also a mirror of the systemic failures that continue to undermine African political development. In doing so, the play affirms the role of drama as a critical medium for interrogating governance and inspiring reflection on alternative futures.

5.2 The Intersection of Power, Culture, and Identity

In *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka examines the intersection of power, culture, and identity, revealing how authoritarian regimes seek to manipulate cultural practices to reinforce their legitimacy. *Kongi's* attempt to appropriate the New Yam Festival illustrates the instrumentalisation of tradition for political purposes. By imposing his authority over the ritual, *Kongi* aspires to collapse the boundaries between state power and cultural heritage, projecting himself as both political leader and custodian of tradition. This act exemplifies what Mbembe (2019) describes as the "aesthetics of domination", where culture is reconfigured into a performance of power designed to naturalise authoritarian rule.

However, Soyinka's dramaturgy exposes the inherent contradictions of this strategy. While *Kongi* seeks to transform the festival into a spectacle of his authority, the ritual retains its deeper cultural significance, resisting political appropriation. The yam, as a symbol of renewal and sustenance, embodies a collective memory that transcends the ambitions of any one ruler. As Irele (2001)

observes, Soyinka's use of ritual foregrounds the resilience of indigenous identity even under authoritarian assault. In this way, culture becomes a site of contestation, where the people's identity resists its subordination to political expediency.

Soyinka also underscores how identity serves as both a resource and a weapon of resistance. Characters such as Oba Danlola and Daodu stand as embodiments of cultural continuity, asserting values rooted in tradition and communal belonging. Their opposition to *Kongi* reflects what Fanon (1963) identifies as the role of cultural affirmation in resisting domination: identity is not merely inherited but actively reasserted in the face of suppression. By dramatising this tension, Soyinka demonstrates that culture can never be fully subsumed by authoritarianism; it remains a reservoir of meaning that sustains resistance.

The interplay of power, culture, and identity also raises questions about the legitimacy of postcolonial governance. Soyinka suggests that political authority that alienates itself from its cultural roots cannot endure, for it lacks the moral foundation required for genuine leadership. As Falola (2020) argues, identity in African societies is deeply intertwined with communal traditions, and any regime that seeks to erase or exploit these traditions risks delegitimising itself. In staging these dynamics, Soyinka positions *Kongi's Harvest* not only as a political allegory but also as a meditation on the enduring power of culture to challenge, unsettle, and ultimately outlast authoritarian structures.

5.3 Relevance to Contemporary Debates on Leadership and Democracy

The continuing relevance of *Kongi's Harvest* lies in its capacity to illuminate enduring debates on leadership and democracy in Africa. Soyinka's dramatisation of dictatorship, propaganda, and cultural suppression speaks directly to the persistence of authoritarian tendencies that recur under both military and civilian regimes. In presenting *Kongi* as a figure who embodies the betrayal of nationalist ideals, the play anticipates the cyclical crises of governance that Falola (2020) identifies as central to Africa's postcolonial trajectory. The drama thus engages with the question of why political independence did not automatically translate into accountable and democratic leadership.

Soyinka's critique resonates with contemporary political realities, where leaders often rely on symbolic manipulation and coercion rather than transparent governance. *Kongi's* appropriation of ritual mirrors the ways in which some modern regimes exploit cultural forms to bolster their legitimacy, while simultaneously eroding the very traditions they claim to honour. This tension reflects Young's (2012) observation that the postcolonial state frequently struggles to reconcile inherited colonial structures with indigenous legitimacy,

producing fragile democracies prone to authoritarian relapse.

The play also prompts reflection on the ethical responsibilities of leadership. By contrasting *Kongi's* hollow displays of authority with the moral weight of figures such as Oba Danlola and Daodu, Soyinka foregrounds the values of accountability, humility, and communal service as essential to political legitimacy. In doing so, he anticipates contemporary democratic theory, which links ethical governance not only to institutional design but also to the moral character of leaders and their responsiveness to the people.

At the same time, Soyinka reminds audiences that resistance remains possible even under conditions of repression. The persistence of dissenting voices, the symbolic resilience of ritual, and the satirical exposure of power's absurdities suggest that authoritarianism is never absolute. In this way, *Kongi's Harvest* contributes to ongoing debates about democracy by situating political authority within broader cultural and ethical frameworks. The play demonstrates that sustainable governance requires not only constitutional order but also cultural legitimacy and a recognition of the people's right to resist domination.

5.4 Summary of Findings and Implications for Soyinka's Political Dramaturgy

This study has shown that Soyinka, through the figure of *Kongi*, represents authoritarian rule as the postcolonial continuation of colonial domination. By stripping traditional rulers of authority, manipulating rituals, and silencing dissent, *Kongi* exemplifies the mechanisms by which African dictators sought to control both the political and cultural spheres after independence. At the same time, Soyinka makes clear that power built on coercion and symbolic appropriation is fragile, always haunted by the possibility of resistance. The analysis highlights how *Kongi's* authoritarianism reflects wider crises in African governance—centralization, suppression of pluralism, and betrayal of nationalist promises—while situating these issues within a cultural and historical frame.

Equally significant is Soyinka's use of satire, irony, allegory, and ritual to destabilise authoritarian ambition and affirm the resilience of communal identity. These aesthetic strategies ridicule the excesses of dictatorship and empower audiences to imagine alternatives grounded in ethical leadership and cultural renewal. As Jeyifo (2004) and Osofisan (2016) observe, Soyinka's dramaturgy operates as a political intervention, using theatre as a space where governance is interrogated and resistance rehearsed. His art thus bridges aesthetics and politics, offering both critique and strategy, and underscoring the capacity of drama to serve as an intellectual and cultural resource in the struggle against domination.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Future research could broaden the scope of this study by situating *Kongi's Harvest* within comparative frameworks of African political drama. Playwrights such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Femi Osofisan have similarly grappled with questions of leadership, cultural authority, and resistance, though their dramaturgical strategies differ in form and emphasis. A comparative lens would therefore highlight both the shared preoccupations and the divergent methods through which African dramatists critique postcolonial governance, enriching our understanding of Soyinka's position within a wider intellectual and artistic movement.

Tantamountly valuable would be interdisciplinary enquiries that draw on political science, anthropology, and performance studies to examine how rituals and indigenous aesthetics are appropriated or resisted in political contexts. Such studies could clarify how theatre not only represents but also participates in struggles over legitimacy and power. By engaging these multiple perspectives, scholars could better illuminate the structural and cultural dimensions of authoritarianism, as well as the symbolic resources mobilised in the contest for autonomy and identity.

Finally, further research might investigate the reception of Soyinka's political plays among contemporary African audiences. Audience studies focusing on performance contexts, adaptations, and community responses could reveal the extent to which Soyinka's dramaturgy shapes civic consciousness and democratic practice. This line of inquiry would advance Soyinka scholarship and contribute to broader debates on the capacity of literature and performance to foster critical engagement with governance and to sustain traditions of cultural resistance.

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