CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As we discovered the similarities and analysed the differences, we felt elated by the resemblances and fascinated by the unknown territories we were exploring, each tradition illuminating the other with the joy of discovery, enabling us to share in the pleasure inherent in the words, timbres and technical virtuosity, our encounter thus became a dialogue between the two different conceptions of rhythm, declamation and ornamentation.

Gerak Angin¹

It was a calm evening on July 7, 2001. There was only a hint of a breeze, yet it was cool enough for the audience seated on the cushions in Sutra House's outdoor theatre to relax and relish the rare performance.² On the wooden octagonal stage, Aruna Sairam and Dominique Vellard enchanted everyone present with their polyphony of Carnatic devotional songs and medieval European chants. Both vocal art forms, the former from southern India and the latter from Europe, are traditional forms of religious singing that exude a sense of profound calm. But in addition to the vocal aesthetics, what was also prominent in the presentation was the "dialogue" that was going on between the two voices, each articulating a different religious and cultural position. The Sanskrit and Hindi words in Sairam's Carnatic songs mingled and interacted with the Latin, French and Spanish in Vellard's European plainsongs. The former offered devotional songs to Hindu deities while the latter sang praises to Christian saints. The Asian half of the duet represented a cultural identity that had experienced colonialism in the past while the European half hailed from a history that propagated imperialism. Their voices – Sairam is an alto while Vellard a tenor – complemented each other even though each was singing a different song in a different key. This presentation was an attempt to explore "unknown territories" by mingling different religious texts (Gerak Angin). The result of such creative efforts was a melodic dialogue between different cultural, religious, musical and vocal positions. There were parts in their singing when only one voice
could be heard and other parts when both voices rose together in volume and intensity as they moved toward a crescendo. But despite the hint of tension, no one singer came out dominant or established some form of hierarchy in the presentation.

This notion of different, at times complementary and at others opposing, voices coming together and contributing to the creation of new spaces is pertinent to the theme of this thesis. In this study, I shall set out to examine the concept of 'hybridity' and its significance in postcolonial discourse. I will be discussing this with reference to a selection of plays by Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, namely *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975).

Before I proceed to explain my selection of texts and define my working concept, I would first like to clarify my use of the term 'postcolonial' in this study. The scope of meaning and discourse that the term should encompass has been much debated among theorists and critics. For instance, the problematic temporal boundary implied by the prefix, 'post', has led Ella Shohat to ask: "When exactly [...] does the 'postcolonial' begin?" (99). She argues that the effects of colonialism do not end the moment a colony gains self-government and also that the postcolonial experience is far from universal. Anne McClintock, citing the unequal global order of 'First' and 'Third' Worlds as an example, contends that the postcolonial nation is in reality still battling with other forms of imperialism as a result of the strong influence of Western institutions on the nation's economic, cultural and political spaces (291-303). Arif Dirlik has also aptly discussed at length the various shortcomings and pitfalls within postcolonial discourse, particularly the lack of critique of its relationship with global capitalism and neocolonialism (382-56). Meanwhile, other critics such as Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, in keeping with their post-structuralist view, have insisted on the hyphen in the 'post-colonial' to distinguish it as a branch of colonial
discourse. All these debates demonstrate the problematic scope of the term 'postcolonial'.

I am compelled, therefore, to clarify my definition of the term as it is employed in this study. The 'postcolonial' in this thesis refers to the social and political environment in the colonized or formerly colonized society, in particular to those aspects affected and effected by the colonial encounter, and how postcolonial discourse attempts to counter and dismantle these implications of colonialism. Postcolonial nations today still find themselves pressured to operate in economic, cultural and political conditions shaped by the world's powerful institutions and nations – many of which were colonizers in the past. Postcolonial discourse rejects such domination and works toward dismantling the structures established by colonial discourse that allow such domination of the marginalized communities to persist. Here I find Robert J.C. Young's argument in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* most pertinent. One crucial way to intervene in the "oppressive circumstances" established by imperialism is by rejecting the metropolitan domination over epistemological structures – systems that direct the production of knowledge – and introducing new "forms and strategies of critical analysis and practice" (Young 2001: 57-8). In this study, I will examine the ways and processes through which postcolonial discourse challenges the systems of knowledge and analysis assumed and proclaimed to be 'normal' and 'superior' by the colonial project. As Young points out, it is imperative that postcolonial theory, in order to "undo the ideological heritage of colonialism not only in the decolonized countries, but also in the west itself," works toward "decentring" the "intellectual sovereignty and dominance of Europe" and "challenging the limits of western ethnocentricity" (Young 2001: 65). In my opinion, such a resistance is imperative to efforts to dismantle the rigid boundaries established by colonial discourse and give agency to voices from the margins.
Theoretical framework

In this study, I hope to examine the forms and strategies (Young 2001: 58) employed in Soyinka's plays to address the implications of colonialism on Nigerian cultural and national identities. In my opinion, the writer's depiction of such concerns in local Nigerian society is deeply implicated with issues of hybridity. To cite Young again, who presents an extensive study on hybridity in Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, the notion is derived from the horticultural practice of grafting different species of plants to produce a new hybrid form or species. The notion was extended in colonial discourse to describe the biological offspring of miscegenation. However, it is the idea of hybridity as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Homi K. Bhabha that interests me in this thesis.

In The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, Bakhtin argues that a "hybrid construction" is a result of the "dialogic interaction" between different voices representing different ideologies (304). Words, to Bakhtin, do not merely denote specific objects, experiences or situations. They also represent and convey a particular discourse, which may be described as a socially-constructed system of perceptions, assumptions and rules (Bakhtin 304). The term 'discourse' also denotes a dialectic discussion, a continuous process that develops ideas and positions into a larger network whose boundaries are constantly being redefined as a result of the negotiations. As Sara Mills notes in Discourse, rather than being static or "fixed," discourses are "the site of constant contestation of meaning" (16). Terry Eagleton, in Literary Theory: An Introduction, observes that "[for] Bakhtin, all language, just because it is a matter of social practice, is inescapably shot through with valuations. Words not only denote objects but imply attitudes" (122). In his analysis of the language in the novel, Bakhtin points out that there exists within the text different voices articulating different, sometimes opposing, positions or discourses. The mingling of these differences leads to
an interaction that is not monologic but dialogic. This dialogic process, which takes place in the language itself, produces a hybrid construction or "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (Bakhtin 304). Bakhtin maintains that it is the novel that is the most appropriate text in which the idea of dialogic interaction is played out. However, I find his theory no less pertinent to my examination of Soyinka's plays, which also explore the interaction between different voices articulating different positions in the text.

Bakhtin's idea of hybridity in language has been further developed in the field of cultural studies to explore the production of cultural and national identities. This process forms the crux of Bhabha's discussion in The Location of Culture. Here, Bhabha argues that colonial power is not a stable entity as it has been made out to be by colonial discourse; rather, its "shifting forces and fixities" reveal its uncertainties and undermine its claim to absolute authority (Bhabha 1994: 112). Such "ambivalence" opens up an opportunity for the colonial or postcolonial subject, who as he/she engages with colonial discourse, to begin to question colonial assumptions of domination and authority. Bhabha points out that

[hybridity] is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (Bhabha 1994: 112)

To Bhabha, this "strategic reversal of the process of domination" represents an empowering strategy in postcolonial discourse since it "[turns] the discursive conditions
of dominance into the ground of intervention" (Bhabha 1994: 112). As Young puts it, "the crucial effect of hybridization," or the creation of a hybrid construction, is "political," defined by "the moment where, within a single discourse, one voice is able to unmask the other" and "where authoritative discourse is undone" (Young 1995: 22).

According to Bhabha, the negotiation into being of a new culture that represents the postcolonial experience, where the power relations between different and at times conflicting cultural perspectives are redefined, is located in the "liminal space", an "in-between" space where boundaries are constantly being modified according to the course of the negotiations (Bhabha 1994: 4). The idea of the liminal space has largely been developed in the disciplines of psychology and anthropology. One of the forerunners of psychoanalysis, German psychologist and philosopher, Johann Friedrich Herbart, describes "limen" – the Latin word from which "liminal" is derived – as a threshold of consciousness, located between the conscious and the unconscious, and where different unconscious perceptions compete with each other to be represented in the conscious (Kazdin 116-7). This idea has been adopted and developed by other disciplines such as education and cultural studies. In anthropology, Victor Turner, expounded on what fellow anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep, calls the "liminal phase" of rites de passages when neophytes – adolescents who have reached puberty – in certain African tribes are between stages of separation and re-incorporation (Turner 94). In The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Turner argues that these neophytes are "liminal personae" or "threshold people"; they are "ambiguous" and "elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (95). "Liminal entities are neither here not there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 95).

While Turner's neophytes are "humble" subjects expected to "obey their instructors" and "accept arbitrary punishment without complaint" (Turner 95),
postcolonial theorists have appropriated this anthropological idea and given it a more assertive stand. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin note in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, the "sense of the liminal as an interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area, distinguishes the term from the more definite word 'limit' to which it is related" (130). In postcolonial studies, the liminal space can be said to be located at the margin separating the dominant culture from its other, or that which the former deems inferior by comparison. In my opinion, 'limit' implies a boundary that restricts the extent to which one is permitted to venture out, whether materially or symbolically. It confines the subject within a specific, clearly designated space. The 'liminal', on the other hand, represents an 'in-between' space located between the dominant power and its other. This space plays a vital role in postcolonial discourse. For rather than accepting the limits imposed by colonial ideology, postcolonial theorists have chosen to see the boundaries as a threshold area, which destabilizes the assumptions of colonial thought and practice.

The liminal space then, is that space between the binary designations "black" and "white" or "Orient" and "Occident". This space is a site for the dialogic interaction between different and at times oppositional positions, which I had sought to illustrate earlier through the example of the melodic dialogue between the Indian Carnatic chant and European liturgical plainsong. In the vocal presentation, the two voices articulated their different cultural traditions and positions, and their very collaboration in this encounter symbolized a new dynamics in their relationship in contrast to the dialectics of colonialism that framed their encounter in the past.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha sees the liminal space as a site for intercultural negotiation and the production of all cultural meaning and identity (4). In his "Introduction", he makes reference to an installation by African-American artist Renée Green, who perceives the stairwell as an important liminal space that provides an
"interstitial passage" connecting the different levels representing the binary opposites of 
"upper and lower areas" and "blackness and whiteness" (Bhabha 1994: 3-4). As Bhabha 
explains, this in-between space "becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the 
connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and 
white," which "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference 
without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (my emphasis, Bhabha 1994: 4). The idea 
that cultural differences could exist without there being some form of hierarchy in the 
relationship strikes me as particularly interesting and important. This is because it 
challenges the various forms of hegemony – in relations between races, classes, 
genders, etc. – prevalent around us that underlie the social, economic and political 
structures and consciousness within as well as between communities and nations. Many 
of the injustices witnessed in society and the world occur as a result of one party 
assuming superiority over and dismissing the voice of the other. The notion of 
hybridity, therefore, seems most appealing because it propounds the dismantling and 
redefinition of the hegemonic relationship into one that is no longer stratified into 
 Hierarchies.8

Bhabha's appropriation of Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic account of the 
colonized black subject provides an example of how hybridity can be empowering to 
the subject. According to Fanon, the colonized man, traumatized by the workings of 
colonialism, and specifically by the experience of cultural deracination, attempts to 
disavow his black roots, put on a white mask and mimic the dominant, metropolitan 
culture in order to obliterate his otherness. This puts the black man in an identity schism 
between the black race and tradition he has been born into and the white cultural 
identity that he strives to mimic (Fanon 1967: 210-222). Bhabha points out that this 
schism between black skin and white masks "is not a neat division," but an ambivalent 
liminal space where the subject's identity is a frustrating struggle and oscillation
between "the colonialist Self" and "the colonized Other" (Bhabha 1994: 44-45). To Bhabha, the subject's attempt to mimic the dominant culture can be subversive because the former does not necessarily reproduce the exact traits he sets out to imitate. Mimicry can end up being a parody that mocks the very object of its emulation. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out, mimicry "locates a crack in the uncertainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 139).

Another important concept that Bhabha raises is the 'third space', which he argues is also an ambivalent space that inadvertently emerges in the process of enunciation; it is a space that forms a split between the communicator and the recipient of that message. Bhabha argues that the structure of language is not sufficient in itself to fully convey the meaning that the former intends. The recipient is thus unable to interpret the exact meaning as a result of this semiotic difference. The third space, thus, provides room for meaning to be modified and negotiated by the different parties involved (Bhabha 1994: 46). Ania Loomba observes in her essay, "Local-manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows", that the "ambivalence of colonial discourses" indicates a failure on the part of authority to smoothly "impose itself upon those it seeks to govern" (145). For postcolonial critics, the liminal space and the third space are sites where hybrid constructions of knowledge, meaning and identity are negotiated. In this thesis, I will examine how this process is employed by Soyinka to challenge colonial assumptions and give agency to the postcolonial voice.

**Main texts**

This study will examine the idea of hybridity manifested in representations of language, cultural identity and literary mode in a selection of Soyinka's plays, namely *The Lion and the Jewel, A Dance of the Forests, The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. I am aware that language and culture are deeply inter-related. Language expresses culture
while the latter plays a vital role in informing the meanings conveyed by language. In this thesis, however, the discussion on hybridity in language will examine the way words are employed to demonstrate the dialogic interaction between different cultures and ideologies. Meanwhile, the examination of the role of hybridity in representations of cultural identity will focus on the postcolonial person's sense of identity as a result of all the cultural influences he has encountered. I would also like to clarify that this study's discussion of Soyinka's plays will be based on an examination of the text of the plays and not their performance, given the rarity of any staging of Soyinka's plays in Malaysian theatres as well as available recordings of such performances elsewhere in local libraries. These plays have been chosen over others plays by Soyinka because I think they best illustrate the process of hybridity that I explained earlier. Although Soyinka is mainly a man of the theatre, he has written poems and novels that also foreground this dialogic process. In this study, however, I have chosen to work on his plays because Soyinka's achievement as a writer is mainly represented by the large body of works he has produced for the stage. To date, he has written at least twenty-nine plays and revues, compared with two novels and six collections of poems. His plays have also earned him the honor of being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first African writer to be conferred the award.

Some of Soyinka's plays such as *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and the King's Horseman* are set during British rule while others, like the Jero plays, take place after the nation attained independence in 1960. Though set in different stages of Nigerian history, these plays demonstrate that the effects of colonialism are not confined to that period of British rule alone, but permeate across society over generations. Present-day Nigerians are still grappling with the structures of colonial discourse that underlie their social, economic and political systems. Although this study focuses on a few plays, a number of Soyinka's other plays and writings of other genres
will also be referenced where relevant to gain greater insight into the writer's perspectives and positions on pertinent issues. These supplementary works include his memoirs, *The Man Died* (1972), *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1982) and *Isara* (1990). His essays and books on Yoruba worldview, literary theory and socio-political activism will also be referred to in my analysis.

In the course of my discussion, I hope to explore Soyinka's contribution to postcolonial practice not only in terms of how his plays represent resistance to the metropolitan center but also how they reject essentialist ideas and promote cultural syncretism. In my opinion, the rejection of any notion of returning to a 'pure' cultural state is crucial in the postcolonial endeavor. The colonial encounter is irreversible – society is no longer able to return to the exact state it was before it fell into the hands of the colonizers. A present-day postcolonial individual such as Soyinka is, therefore, a hybrid construction. His multiple roles – among others, as writer, actor, editor, critic, activist, teacher – and the varied genre of his writings – plays, novels, poems, autobiographies, critical essays – all articulate the writer's hybridity. His personal views expressed in essays as well as in interviews, and the different sources of influences underlying his works, particularly the plays, convey very clearly that he has always been open to external influences.

Born Akinwande Olunwole (Wole) Soyinka to Yoruba parents in 1934, he received his primary education in a missionary school in the Western Nigerian town of Abeokuta. His secondary education in Ibadan was "more Yoruba-oriented and nationally minded" (Wright 1). He went on to take up English studies at the University of Leeds in England from 1954-57. Upon graduation, he spent eighteen months as a play reader at the Royal Court Theatre in London, where he became more familiar with the works of playwrights such as John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht. In the two years following his return to Nigeria in 1960, he
undertook a study of Yoruba theatre as a Rockefeller research fellow in the University of Ibadan (Moore 3-9).

Given such a vast range of influences, it is hardly surprising that Soyinka rejects both Negritude and Africanism, theories which propound that 'true' African literature and identity are necessarily distinct from 'European' ones, and have their own African roots (Soyinka 1976: 126-7, 134-6). While he appreciates the movements' intention to proclaim the legitimacy and dignity of African culture, he does not agree with the essentialist position held by this group of "African chauvinists", as he calls them, who deliberately reject ideas of 'non-African' origins (Soyinka 1988: 180). Soyinka argues that the premises of the Negritude movement are inherently flawed for, "[in] attempting to refute the evaluation to which black reality had been subjected, Negritude adopted the Manichean tradition of European thought and inflicted it on a culture which is most radically anti-Manichean" (Soyinka 1976: 127). The movement deliberately extols African "intuitive understanding", an attribute dismissed by colonial discourse, which claims that the European is analytical and thus scientific – the so-called marks of "high human development" – while the African is not analytical and therefore emotional (Soyinka 1976: 128). In so doing, the movement has failed to recognize that the problem lies not in whether analytical thinking or intuitive understanding is superior, but in the very authority of such Eurocentric assumptions that the Negritude movement has neglected to challenge (Soyinka 1976: 126-30). His view on the problematic nature of the essentialist argument is clearly presented in books such as *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) and *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness* (1999). Not only does he not subscribe to the idea of a 'purely African' cultural position, the writer favors the option of being exposed to and drawing inspiration from a variety of other cultural influences.
This position is clearly demonstrated in Soyinka's works. In *Wole Soyinka Revisited*, Derek Wright describes him as a "protean figure" who is "bafflingly contextualized by his many professional and popular identities" and that "Soyinka is the most eclectic and syncretic of writers" (3-5). The playwright himself has acknowledged that his views and writings are influenced by a myriad of literary, cultural and philosophical sources.\(^{12}\) This is evident to a large extent in his writings. For instance, the seduction of a naïve lass by an old, wily, lecher common in English Jacobean and Restoration comedies, is adapted and reproduced in *The Lion and the Jewel* (Wright 5). The pastoral and naturalistic elements characteristic of the works of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey have been linked to peasant society in *The Swamp Dwellers* (Wright 5). In *The Strong Breed*, the sacrificial carrier bears strong resemblance to the Christian motif of the martyred savior. Another of Soyinka's plays, *The Bacchae of Euripides*, and the novel, *Season of Anomy*, adopt and mix Greek and Yoruba mythologies. Meanwhile, the avant-garde sense of despair and world-wariness in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* is seen in Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* while *Opera Wonyosi* is obviously his adaptation of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*.

Wright opines that "Soyinka's works are really artistic hybrids of mixed Yoruba and European parentage, blending African themes, imagery, and performance idioms with Western techniques and stylistic influences" (5). I would add that the hybridity of such works is also the result of the dialogic interaction between African and European ideas and forms within the texts. There is also a sense of ambivalence in Soyinka's multifaceted-ness. As Wright observes: "Soyinka's bewildering versatility has at times seemed to make him a rich mine of contradiction. It is never safe to assume that ideas he propounds in one context will be consistent with ideas on the same subject he expresses in a different one" (3). Wright argues that this is not necessarily equivalent to that kind of self-contradiction that ultimately invalidates the individual's initial position. "These
multiple selves," he maintains, are "but tributaries of the same single flow" (Wright 4). Soyinka himself has stressed that "[one] must never try to rigidify the divisions between one experience and another," and that "all experiences flow into one another" (cited in Wright 4). This view, in my opinion, reflects the writer's hybridity. There is never a clear division between the different experiences that influence his cultural identity and positions on various issues. Rather, they are all linked in a constant dialogic interaction.

Interestingly, Yoruba beliefs and customs also display a sense of multiplicity and contradiction. This is largely because of the nature of Yorubaland itself. The region located southwest of Nigeria is "not a cultural unity, with doctrinal uniformity and religious orthodoxy," but an area and a society made up of "a collection of cult practices, with many local variations, loosely organized around the Ifa oracle" (Wright 7). As Wright notes:

Soyinka subscribes to an appropriately mobile and eclectic concept of traditional culture and has always distrusted talk of "tradition" and "authentic African values" because these are not inert bodies of value or retrievable cultural curiosities but dynamic, cumulative wisdoms still in flux and being invigorated by new ideas: "We must not think that traditionalism means raffia skirts; in other words it's no longer possible for a purist literature for the simple reason that even our most traditional literature has never been purist". (13)

Soyinka's position, which opposes the essentialist ideal and propounds cultural syncretism instead, underscores the argument by postcolonial critics such as Bhabha and Young that the postcolonial individual is a hybrid construction.

In the ensuing three chapters, I will be discussing the concept of hybridity in the context of an examination of the selected plays mentioned earlier. In the course of my research, friends have often expressed surprise that as a Malaysian, I have not chosen to work on a Malaysian writer. While my decision to work on Soyinka's writings is by no
means a disregard of the achievements by Malaysian writers, I have nonetheless decided to look at the plays by this Nigerian instead. The reason behind this decision is perhaps more sentimental than anything else – it was Soyinka's plays that sparked off my interest in postcolonial studies. I first encountered his works as an undergraduate student in the early 1990s. I found the issues raised by the African writer equally pertinent to my postcolonial experience as a Malaysian who grew up in a social, economic and political environment still grappling with the ramifications of its encounter with British colonialism. As a second-generation descendant of the migrant Chinese community in Malaysia, my cultural identity has always been a dilemma for me. Am I a Chinese or a Malaysian first? The generally perceived litmus test to one's patriotism seems to be the ultimate declaration that one is able to privilege one's national identity over one's ethnicity or allegiance to one's ancestral homeland. I do not think, however, that one could really establish a clear hierarchy between the two. The multicultural state of local society, and the constant dialogue between cultural differences that takes place in society, form an inextricable feature of the Malaysian experience and identity. Therefore, any nationalist sentiment that one may have toward the nation has, to a large extent, to be based on such pluralism as well as dialogic interaction. In my opinion, both ethnicity and national identity are intertwined – although not all Malaysians share this view. The racial segregation instigated by the British divide-and-rule system in the colonial days has evolved over the generations to remain in present-day society in other forms as race-based social, economic and political institutions. These structures, in the course of protecting the interest of the different communities, also create barriers between the different ethnic groups in society. The ramifications of all these permeate every aspect of society, from language to the construction of cultural and national identities. Soyinka's attempt to address these
issues in Nigerian society drives home the realization that my own country and community are also grappling with such similar issues.