

Drama as a Bridge to Religious Spirituality Using Ahmed Yerima's *Igatibi* and *Pari* as a Paradigm

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Abstract

This study examines drama as a mediating bridge between religion and spirituality in contemporary Nigerian society through an analysis of Ahmed Yerima's Igatibi (2011) and Pari (2016). While existing scholarship has explored religion and spirituality in African drama, limited attention has been paid to how theatre functions as a performative space for negotiating competing religious worldviews and facilitating spiritual reflection. Adopting a qualitative textual analysis, the study is anchored on Performance Theory and Postcolonial Religious Discourse to examine how characterisation, symbolism, dialogue, and ritual enactment construct spiritual meaning within the selected plays. Findings reveal that Yerima employs drama as a critical site for interrogating religious extremism, promoting tolerance, and reasserting the relevance of African indigenous spirituality. Whereas Igatibi foregrounds the consequences of abandoning ancestral traditions, Pari exposes the complexities of faith under conditions of violence, insecurity, and trauma. The study argues that drama transcends representation to become a medium of spiritual mediation through which religious identities and beliefs are negotiated. It concludes that theatre possesses significant potential for fostering understanding, coexistence, and critical reflection in religiously plural societies.

Keywords: Ahmed Yerima, drama, *Igatibi*, indigenous religion, Nigerian theatre, *Pari*, performance theory, religion, spirituality.

1. Introduction

Drama, according to Crow (1983:1), simply means “to do or to act,” which is a nod to its ancient Greek roots, emphasising performance above all else. Lawal (2015:50) expands on this, suggesting it can be the playwright’s words on a page, a play meant for the stage, or even a silent pantomime mirroring life itself. Whatever form it takes, drama’s main goal is to be seen and enjoyed, with reading often taking a backseat. The playwright crafts the story, but the director’s creativity and interpretive skills bring it to life on stage, weaving in theatrical magic. What is often overlooked is that the playwright’s deepest concerns, be they social, political, or, as we will explore, religious; are what drive these stories. Characters, through their carefully chosen words, embody these tales in settings that help us, the audience, truly grasp their meaning.

Nigeria is widely regarded as one of the most religious societies in the world, with religion deeply embedded in everyday life and social structures. Contemporary scholarship continues to emphasise the enduring significance of religion within African societies, where indigenous, Christian, and Islamic

traditions frequently interact and overlap (Olupona, 2024). However, scholars such as Olupona (2014) and Marshall (2009) argue that this intense religiosity does not always translate into critical religious consciousness or interfaith tolerance. Rather, religious identity in Nigeria often intersects with politics, ethnicity, and power, sometimes producing tension and conflict.

This dynamic has led to what may be described as performative religiosity, where outward expressions of faith coexist with underlying spiritual anxieties and contradictions. As Adagbada (2004) observes, many adherents oscillate between orthodox religions and indigenous practices, particularly in moments of crisis.

It is within this complex religious landscape that drama becomes a vital medium for interrogation and mediation. This study therefore examines how Ahmed Yerima's *Igatibi* (2011) and *Pari* (2016) dramatize the tensions between religion and spirituality, and how theatre functions as a bridge for reconciliation, tolerance, and deeper spiritual reflection.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Ahmed Yerima's dramaturgy, religion in Nigerian literature, and the relationship between theatre and society, relatively little attention has been devoted to examining drama as a mediating bridge between religion and spirituality. Existing studies have largely focused on Yerima's engagement with history, politics, gender, and cultural identity, while the spiritual dimensions of his dramatic vision remain underexplored. Recent scholarship on African religious studies has increasingly called for more nuanced examinations of the intersections among spirituality, performance, culture, and religious identity within contemporary African societies (Olupona, 2021). Furthermore, scholarship on religion in Nigerian drama often concentrates on conflicts between Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion without adequately investigating how theatre itself functions as a performative space for negotiation, reconciliation, and spiritual reflection.

This study addresses this gap by examining Ahmed Yerima's *Igatibi* (2011) and *Pari* (2016) as dramatic texts that interrogate religious tensions while simultaneously creating possibilities for spiritual dialogue and coexistence. By exploring the intersection of performance, faith, ritual, and spirituality, the study demonstrates how drama transcends mere representation to become a critical medium through which religious identities, beliefs, and experiences are contested, reimaged, and reconciled within contemporary Nigerian society.

2. Religious Spirituality: Conceptual Perspectives

Adesewo (2007:3) notes that defining religion precisely is tough, as it means different things to different people, but suggests it is "... man's total response to his entire realised environment." Nwosu (2013:14) adds that religious folks often feel their very existence is tied to something 'wholly other'. The power in the worship of a particular religion is deeply connected to a network of beings, unable to be truly detached. Maurier takes us back to the Roman 'Religio', implying a binding not just to the transcendent, but to everything around us, reminding us that we exist in relation to a higher power (Nwosu, 2013:14).

Spirituality, on the other hand, is more about an inner journey, a personal faith that blossoms from within. It is not necessarily about following strict rules or teachings, as religion often is. In accordance to religion and spirituality, drama serves as a critical medium for representing and interrogating reality. By holding a mirror to life, it naturally expresses these ideas, both our inner feelings and what we see

around us.

Religion and spirituality are closely related concepts, although contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises important distinctions between them. Religion is generally understood as an organised system of beliefs, practices, symbols, and institutions through which individuals and communities relate to the sacred or transcendent (Pargament, 2013). It provides formal structures of worship, moral guidance, communal identity, and doctrinal frameworks that shape human understanding of ultimate reality.

Spirituality can also be perceived to be associated with personal experiences of meaning, transcendence, connectedness, and inner transformation. Sheldrake (2012) argues that spirituality concerns the individual's search for purpose and relationship with the sacred, whether expressed within or outside formal religious institutions. While religion emphasises collective beliefs and ritual practices, spirituality foregrounds lived experience and personal encounters with the divine.

Within African societies, however, the distinction between religion and spirituality is often less rigid than in Western scholarship. According to Olupona (2014), African religious traditions integrate social life, cultural values, communal relationships, and spiritual realities into a holistic worldview. Consequently, spirituality is frequently expressed through religious practices, rituals, symbols, myths, and communal performances.

This interconnectedness makes drama a particularly significant medium for examining the relationship between religion and spirituality. As a performative art form rooted historically in ritual traditions, drama possesses the capacity to represent, interrogate, and negotiate spiritual experiences within socially recognisable frameworks. Through characterisation, dialogue, symbolism, and ritual enactment, dramatic performance provides a space where religious beliefs and spiritual questions can be explored, challenged, and reimaged.

3. Ahmed Yerima, His Dramatic Vision and the Selected Plays

Ahmed Yerima occupies a prominent position in contemporary Nigerian theatre and dramatic literature. A professor of theatre arts, playwright, director, and cultural administrator, Yerima has contributed significantly to the development of modern African drama through his extensive body of creative and scholarly works. His career includes service as Artistic Director of the Nigerian National Troupe and Director-General of the National Theatre, Lagos. Across his dramatic oeuvre, Yerima consistently engages themes of history, politics, religion, identity, power, memory, and cultural transformation.

Among his notable plays are *Attahiru*, *Hard Ground*, *Akuabata*, *Mojagbe*, *The Angel*, *Ipomu*, *Pari*, *Ketiku* and *Igatibi*. While many of these works explore socio-political realities and cultural conflicts within Nigerian society, they also reveal the playwright's sustained interest in questions of faith, morality, spirituality, and human existence.

Igatibi (2011) centres on a Yoruba community confronted by the consequences of abandoning ancestral traditions in favour of religious absolutism. Through the conflict between indigenous spiritual practices and Islamic orthodoxy, the play examines the dangers of intolerance and the significance of cultural continuity. *Pari* (2016), on the other hand, is situated within the historical context of the Chibok

schoolgirls' abduction by Boko Haram insurgents. The play explores how trauma, insecurity, and uncertainty shape religious consciousness and spiritual identity.

Taken together, the two plays provide a fertile ground for investigating the relationship between religion and spirituality in contemporary Nigeria. While *Igatibi* interrogates the marginalisation of indigenous belief systems, *Pari* examines the crisis of faith generated by violence and social instability. Both texts demonstrate Yerima's conviction that drama can function as a platform for spiritual reflection, social critique, and religious dialogue.

4. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *Igatibi* (2011) and *Pari* (2016). Qualitative textual analysis enables the researcher to examine the thematic, symbolic, ideological, and performative dimensions of dramatic texts through close reading and interpretive engagement. The analysis focuses on characterization, dialogue, imagery, symbolism, ritual enactment, and dramatic structure as vehicles through which religious and spiritual meanings are constructed.

The study is anchored on Performance Theory as developed by Richard Schechner (2002) and Postcolonial Religious Discourse as articulated in the works of scholars such as Jacob Olupona (2014). Performance Theory conceptualises theatre as restored behaviour, that is, the repeated enactment of cultural practices, rituals, and social experiences. The theory has been widely applied in theatre and performance studies to examine the relationship between ritual, performance, identity, and spirituality. Within African dramatic traditions, performance often transcends entertainment to become a site of communal memory, spiritual encounter, and cultural negotiation.

Postcolonial Religious Discourse provides a complementary framework for understanding how colonial encounters transformed religious consciousness in Africa. The framework interrogates the historical processes through which indigenous African religions were marginalised and often represented as inferior to imported faiths such as Christianity and Islam. Olupona (2021) further argues that African religious traditions should be examined as dynamic and interconnected systems rather than isolated belief structures, an approach that is particularly relevant to the religious tensions represented in Yerima's plays. By examining the tensions between traditional and foreign religious systems, postcolonial religious discourse offers valuable insights into the dynamics of faith, power, identity, and cultural resistance in postcolonial societies.

The integration of these two frameworks enables the study to examine both the performative and ideological dimensions of spirituality in Yerima's plays. While Performance Theory illuminates the ritual and theatrical mechanisms through which spiritual meanings are enacted, Postcolonial Religious Discourse facilitates an understanding of the historical and cultural tensions informing religious identities within the texts.

Previous studies have successfully employed Performance theory to examine ritual enactment, cultural memory, and spiritual symbolism in African theatrical performances (Schechner, 2002; Turner, 1982). Likewise, postcolonial approaches to religion have been widely utilised in studies investigating the interaction between indigenous African belief systems and imported religious traditions (Olupona, 2014; Olupona, 2024). The present study builds upon these established approaches while extending their

application to the examination of drama as a medium of spiritual mediation within contemporary Nigerian society.

4.1. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to scholarship in African drama, religious studies, and performance studies by demonstrating how theatre functions as a site of spiritual mediation and interreligious dialogue. While previous studies have examined religion as a thematic concern in Nigerian drama, this research advances the argument that dramatic performance actively participates in negotiating spiritual identities and religious relationships. The study therefore offers a framework for understanding theatre not merely as a representational medium but as a performative space capable of fostering reflection, tolerance, and coexistence within religiously plural societies.

5. Findings

5.1. Drama as Social and Spiritual Discourse

Drama has long functioned as a medium through which societies examine social realities, cultural values, and existential concerns. Beyond its entertainment value, dramatic literature provides opportunities for critical reflection on issues affecting individuals and communities. Through performance and representation, theatre creates opportunities for audiences to engage critically with human experiences and the ideological structures that shape them. According to Patrice Pavis (1998), drama operates as a system of representation through which social realities, cultural values, and human experiences are communicated and interpreted.

Within African dramatic traditions, playwrights frequently engage with questions of identity, power, morality, religion, and cultural transformation. Theatre therefore becomes a site of social dialogue where competing worldviews may be examined and contested. Yerima's dramatic works exemplify this tradition through their engagement with historical memory, religious tensions, and cultural continuity.

In the context of religion and spirituality, drama possesses unique capacities for rendering abstract beliefs visible through performance. Rituals, symbols, myths, and sacred narratives can be embodied on stage in ways that invite audiences to reflect critically on their significance. Consequently, dramatic performance functions not only as artistic expression but also as a medium through which societies negotiate questions of faith, morality, and spiritual identity.

5.2. Drama's Sacred Roots

It is widely acknowledged that drama sprang from religious rituals, the ancient ways of worshipping gods, goddesses, honoring ancestors, or celebrating immortalised heroes. Worthen (1993:6) reminds us that in ancient Egypt, religious ceremonies often involved imitating deities, while in Greece, plays became central to the huge festivals honoring Dionysus. To appease these celestial beings, people performed rituals that mirrored their essence. Impersonation was key, with priests or acolytes acting as bridges between the human and divine, eventually evolving into the actors we know today. At first, the sacredness of worship was paramount, but then entertainment crept in, with individuals mimicking the gods. This performance did not lessen the ritual's holiness; it deepened it.

Over time, consistent ritual practice transformed into what we call religion. And drama, quite naturally, became the perfect way to preserve these rituals for both spiritual and entertainment purposes, strengthening belief. The entertainment and imitation aspects of drama eventually helped separate the sacred from the purely performative, bridging the gap between everyday people and society, and between the actor and the audience. This is how dramatic forms slowly but surely came into being. As a direct descendant of religion and spirituality, drama proved to be a potent force. It refined, sustained, and gave voice to religious feelings through its vibrant audio-visual expression, incorporating dance, music, rhetoric, acrobatics, drumming, and storytelling. Drama truly became the thread weaving together human dreams, stark realities, hopes, and desires. So, in essence, a playwright, depending on their message, is an activist, eager to open our eyes to their beliefs and inspire a more ideal world.

The historical relationship between ritual and theatrical performance provides important support for Performance Theory. Schechner (2002) argues that theatrical performances evolved from ritual practices that enabled communities to rehearse, preserve, and transmit cultural knowledge. Similarly, Turner (1982) identifies ritual performance as a liminal space where social meanings are questioned, transformed, and renewed. Viewed from this perspective, contemporary drama continues to perform functions traditionally associated with religious ritual by facilitating reflection, negotiation, and communal engagement with spiritual realities. This theoretical understanding is particularly relevant to Yerima's dramatic representation of religious conflict and spiritual reconciliation in *Igatibi* and *Pari*.

5.3. Ahmed Yerima's *Igatibi*

Yerima's use of the masquerade in *Igatibi* is not merely theatrical but deeply symbolic. Within Yoruba cosmology, the masquerade represents ancestral presence and spiritual authority (Drewal, 1992). By portraying the neglect of *Igatibi* as the cause of communal suffering, Yerima critiques the abandonment of indigenous spirituality in favor of imported religious ideologies.

Kamal's blindness functions as both a literal and metaphorical device, symbolizing spiritual ignorance and the consequences of religious extremism. This aligns with Schechner's notion of performance as "restored behaviour," where ritual reenactment serves corrective social functions.

Yerima's *Igatibi* takes us profoundly into the religious landscape of a Yoruba clan, revealing the ongoing tension between their ancient traditions and the newer Islamic faith. We meet three generations; Nga, representing the wisdom of the old ways; Lemomu, her son, a bridge to the present, who has embraced Islam; and Kamal, Nga's grandson and Lemomu's son, embodying the future, a staunch opponent of the traditional worship of *Igatibi*, the ancestral masquerade.

The clan is suffering, plagued by pestilence, sickness, and childlessness. *Igatibi*, their ancestral god, has been neglected, his masquerade confined for years, "... languishing in the ancestral world, hungry and thirsty for worship with palm oil which symbolises calmness, his praise singing, drumming and dancing." Lemomu, the clan head, and the zealous Kamal have turned their backs on him. Nga, a loyal follower who holds the cure, is even branded a witch by Kamal, who, in his fanaticism, tries to stone her to death. But unfortunately, he is struck blind, a punishment that only Nga can cure. Yerima skillfully shows us Kamal's arrogance leading to his downfall, as Nga quietly observes, "Watching your sinful plots against me."

Kamal's devotion to Islam is unshakeable; he even burns the masquerade. This act infuriates Igatibi's spirit, a scene Amina vividly describes:

Amina: "The masque animated by force we did not understand rose, in fire and engulfed my husband at the same time. Then came the sound of drums, music from a distant land we did not understand. My husband wanting to free himself, fighting for his soul, and the masque wanting to trap himself into a rhythm of dance. Nga started along with the chant, speaking to the masquerade in the dialect they both understood. On her knees she went, and I unsure of what to do went down too. The masquerade turned took pity on us, drenched in sweat and tears, and in one swift movement, like a large big vomit of a python, undigested, unswallowed kill, he threw my husband back at us. We caught him breathless. We caught him, not a scratch on his body."

Yerima masterfully uses dramatic elements to explore the supernatural. The animated masquerade, dancing and even weeping before returning Kamal, powerfully symbolises the importance of cultural and religious appreciation, especially the belief systems that sustained their ancestors. Obedience to traditional religious culture is paramount; when Nga sings praises to Igatibi, and Lemomu finally agrees to dance, Igatibi responds to Lemomu's desperate plea for his grandson's healing with a promise:

Lemomu: "Er great one how about my grandson?"

Igatibi answered;

Igatibi: He will be born, and all those smitten with pestilence will be healed. Laughter shall return to your household, like your mother asked for at the shrine. Tomorrow Ologbojo, as you fulfill your promises, I shall fulfill mine, All or nothing, Tomorrow Ologbojo."

This shows the power of their traditional beliefs.

Yerima cleverly uses myth to render solutions and proclaim moral principles, challenging the narrow views of those with religious prejudices. Lemomu wisely points out, "Life is a battle and man cannot sit still and wait for his enemies. (chuckles) No religion preaches disrespect to elders nor the stoning of grandmothers when they are wrongly accused." This serves as a powerful defense of other religions and a plea for genuine tolerance. When Kamal questions Allah's apparent inability to save him, Nga reminds him that his troubles stemmed from his own actions.

Symbols and images are key to understanding *Igatibi*. Palm oil, for instance, is a symbol of calm, demanded by Igatibi to soothe his agitated spirit. Kamal's blindness is not just a physical affliction; it is described as "... walking in the darkness of life, and that there is more to what the eye sees," a symbolic punishment meant to stop him from harming his grandmother.

The playwright deftly blends prose and poetry, delivering simple yet profound messages through proverbs:

Nga: "No matter how long a thrown pebble floats on top of the river, it will surely sink to the bottom (p.26)."

Nga: “No one can change the everlasting bitter taste of gall to the sweetness of honey (p.36).”

Hajia: “Forgive me mama, but the Yorubas say that a hunter who comes home with empty hands will be taught how to shoot at prey without being missed by his wives (p.19).”

Lemomu: “The handle who does not know the masquerade is not fit to hold the whip (p.44).”

Metaphors also sprinkle the dialogue, often embedded within these proverbs. Kamal, in his despair, sees himself as “... compressed folds like a fallen overripe bloated pawpaw” (p.36). Nga, with a touch of irony, describes herself as “the looking glass of shame, I am the reflection of the village fool who thinks herself the belle.” Amina simply states, “I am a just a looking glass, a dressed up doll (p.7).”

No African drama is complete without its rich sociocultural praise songs. Nga passionately chants the *oriki* of Afonja, the legendary war general, and sings praises for the masque, Igatibi. Drums and the trance-like dance also act as vital religious motifs, driving the play’s rhythm.

The characters in *Igatibi* are strikingly distinct. Nga comes across as gentle, calm, and unwavering in her faith, yet she fiercely protects and endures the insults of her rebellious grandson. Lemomu is a less steady figure, caught between the old and new religions, even compromising his role as an Imam by agreeing to dance for his ancestor’s masquerade. Kamal, in stark contrast, is fiercely loyal to his new religion, ready to enforce Quranic law by stoning a ‘witch’ to death, even if it is his own grandmother. Wild and bold, he absolutely rejects traditional religion as “paganistic” and “satanic”. His extreme fanaticism is painfully clear when he drags and sets fire to the Igatibi masque, showing he is prepared to die for his beliefs.

5.4. Ahmed Yerima’s *Pari*

Ahmed Yerima’s *Pari* plunges us into the urgent crisis of insecurity gripping Northeast Nigeria. *Pari* is situated within the socio-political reality of the 2014 kidnapping of over 200 schoolgirls by Boko Haram in Chibok, Borno State, a heartbreaking event that shocked the world and an event that exposed the fragility of state security and intensified religious tensions in Nigeria. Yerima uses this historical backdrop to interrogate the relationship between faith, violence, and survival.

Pari lays bare the agonising pain, despair, and depression of a family whose daughter has been stolen by Boko Haram. As the government falters and hope dwindles, religion becomes Ama’s (Pari’s mother) last refuge. This mirrors the reality for countless Nigerians who desperately seek miracles from religious leaders and places of worship.

Ama, driven to the brink, justifies her dramatic switch in faith by embracing the God and religion of her daughter’s captors. Her desperation rings clear:

“From now on, I swear by Allah, this is what I want to do. I believe it is the right thing to do. If you take what is mine forcefully, and claim that it is right in the sight of a god...your god...and you get away with it, then I want to know why? I want to know what language your god understands...when he sleeps...what he eats. I just want to know what humanity they stand for (Yerima, 2016:9).”

The crisis in Pari's family pushes them to question everything (fate, faith), and the very idea of believing in any particular god. Ama, a Christian, starts practicing Islam, believing that if the abductors' Allah is seemingly tolerant of their atrocities, perhaps aligning with that faith might bring her daughter home safely. Ama's transformation reflects what scholars describe as crisis-induced religiosity, where individuals renegotiate faith in response to trauma (Ellis & ter Haar, 2007). Her shift from Christianity to Islam is not theological but existential, driven by desperation rather than conviction.

Pari's realistic narrative raises critical, uncomfortable questions: What are our governments (State & Federal) really doing to rescue the abducted girls and end the terror? Why is terrorism so often tied to religion? Why does faith seem to be the only source of hope for so many Nigerians? These are vital questions that demand answers if our country is to heal. This suggests that, in some contexts, religious practice may reflect dependency rather than critical spiritual engagement. We see this in Ama, whose initial Christian faith seems to lack strong and undisputed conviction, making it easy for her to jump ship in search of a 'true god' among her daughter's tormentors. If religion is not rooted in genuine spirituality and faith, its practice becomes hollow. True spirituality, with its belief in God, should bring purpose and connection. When transcendence is missing or when one's spirituality lacks a solid foundation, an individual can indeed become a 'slave to religion'.

The dialogue between Ama and her husband, Tada, drives this point home:

Ama: "I doubt your God now. He must forgive me, but where is the miracle He promised me? He has let two years go past, with nothing happening, not one glimpse of hope...

Tada: Agi, no! Miracles take time, Agnes. Patience bears better fruits.

Ama: Patience? How can your God sit still and watch my daughter plundered? How can I be patient when your God watches my daughter roam the forest, hungry like an orphan? How can I?

Tada: Shh, woman. Have faith.

Ama: My faith?... It melted ... like the morning dew ... it melted with the early scorching rays of the rising morning sun. Gone! My faith shook. I want my child back. I will do anything to have her back. And if Jesus is going to allow this to happen to me, then I am done with him. I shall remain with the prophet until I find my poor lost child. He must understand (Yerima, 2016:13-14)."

Immersed in the thought of losing her daughter to the cold hands of terrorists, Ama's despair led her to a shocking point where she nearly murdered Ibrahim, the terrorist who impregnated Pari. This horrifying moment reveals how fear can twist into vengeful hatred, clouding one's moral compass. Her frightening words reveal this dark transformation:

"First, in my dream, I saw you in a blaze of flames ... burning by the fire I lit. In my pain, I want you to roast by the fire you have lit ... fried ... cut into pieces ... and when your spirit has left you, your heart will be gouged out. You turned our once peaceful land into a fireball from hell. Like a cursed maddened wild bull, you stormed, raged, raped, burnt and wasted. In your false moment of self-glory, you forgot that if one throws a stone into murky water, it splatters mud all over him. See how drenched in stench your damned soiled soul is. Coated in your own tomfoolery, get ready to

burn. See how well you fail bound by Scramou-uvu. Oh, the gods of Askirau-Uba, guide me with this blood I am about to shed ... Now I shall cure the world of a harbinger of nightmares. Ibrahim! ... I shall cut your body into little pieces... (Yerima, 2016:56).”

6. Discussion

This study demonstrates that drama functions as a critical medium for negotiating religious and spiritual tensions in contemporary Nigeria. Through *Igatibi* and *Pari*, Yerima presents religion not as a fixed doctrine but as a dynamic and contested space shaped by history, culture, and crisis.

The findings reveal three key contributions:

1. Drama as Mediation Tool

Theatre provides a neutral space where conflicting belief systems can be examined without immediate social repercussions.

2. Critique of Religious Extremism

Both plays caution against rigid religious ideologies, emphasizing tolerance and coexistence.

3. Re-centering Indigenous Spirituality

Igatibi in particular advocates for the recognition of African traditional religion as a legitimate spiritual system rather than a primitive relic.

The theoretical frameworks employed prove effective in explaining how performance embodies spiritual negotiation. However, they may not fully capture the emotional and psychological dimensions of faith under crisis, suggesting the need for interdisciplinary approaches.

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Performance Theory in understanding the relationship between drama and spirituality. Schechner's notion of restored behaviour is particularly evident in *Igatibi*, where ritual performances surrounding the masquerade serve not merely as cultural displays but as mechanisms for communal healing, spiritual restoration, and social reconciliation. The repeated enactment of ancestral rituals transforms performance into a site where spiritual truths are negotiated and reaffirmed.

Similarly, the findings support the assumptions of Postcolonial Religious Discourse. Through the representation of *Igatibi* as a legitimate spiritual force rather than a primitive relic, Yerima challenges colonial narratives that historically delegitimised African indigenous religions. The play demonstrates that indigenous spirituality continues to possess moral authority and cultural relevance within contemporary African societies.

Pari extends this discussion by illustrating the vulnerability of religious identity in moments of crisis. The play reveals how trauma can destabilise conventional religious commitments and compel individuals to renegotiate their spiritual beliefs. Ama's movement between religious systems reflects the complexities of faith in contexts of violence and uncertainty.

Beyond confirming the usefulness of these theoretical frameworks, the study proposes that drama functions as a dialogic spiritual space where competing religious worldviews can encounter one another

without violence. In this regard, theatre does not merely represent spiritual realities but actively facilitates engagement, reflection, and reconciliation among divergent belief systems. This constitutes the study's contribution to knowledge by extending Performance theory beyond ritual enactment towards the understanding of drama as a medium of spiritual mediation.

7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Ahmed Yerima's *Igatibi* and *Pari* employ drama as an effective bridge between religion and spirituality. Through characterization, symbolism, ritual enactment, and dialogue, the playwright interrogates religious extremism, advocates tolerance, and reasserts the significance of African indigenous spirituality within contemporary society. The analysis further reveals that theatre functions not only as a mirror of religious realities but also as a performative space where competing spiritual perspectives can be negotiated and reconciled.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by proposing drama as a medium of spiritual mediation capable of fostering dialogue among diverse religious traditions. By extending the implications of Performance Theory and Postcolonial Religious Discourse, the research highlights the transformative capacity of theatre in addressing complex questions of faith, identity, and coexistence.

Future studies may investigate audience reception of religious themes in Yerima's plays, explore performance-based interpretations of spirituality in contemporary African theatre, or undertake comparative analyses of religious representation in the works of other African playwrights. Further interdisciplinary research incorporating trauma studies, psychology, and performance studies may also deepen understanding of how religious beliefs are shaped and transformed in contexts of conflict and social instability.

7.1. Limitations:

This study is limited to textual analysis of two plays and does not include audience reception or performance-based interpretations.

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