



Original article

Public Intellectualism in Iraqi and African Stagecraft: A Comparative Study

Asmaa Mukaram Saeed 

The College of Education and Humanistic Sciences, The Department of English (Ibn-Rushd)

ABSTRACT

The study is a critical survey that analyzes the theatrical interventions of Yousif Al-Ani and Wole Soyinka in terms of the public intellectuals in *The Key- المفتاح* (1968) and *A Play of Giants* (1984), respectively, which has looked at each author separately but hardly in relation to one another, by applying a qualitative comparative textual reflection grounded in Edward Said's "intellectual" as one who confronts dogma and incites public reasoning. The satirical language by Soyinka and mythopoeic critique by Al-Ani supports the analysis, which considers language, symbolism, structure, and performance. Though Al-Ani uses reflective realism and moral dialogue to expose cultural exhaustion, he also works grotesque exaggeration to dissipate the potency of the authoritarian spectacle—as does Soyinka. Both ask their audience not to let the systems of oppression continue. The stage is like a place of moral struggle, where the audience is hoped to be alert and socially reborn.

*Correspondence author:

asmaa.alsadon@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

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Keywords: Yousif Al-Ani; Wole Soyinka; Public Intellectual; Political Theater; Satire; Myth; Postcolonial drama; *The Key*; *A Play of Giants*; Edward Said

الفكر العام في فنون المسرح العراقية والأفريقية: دراسة مقارنة

ا.م. أسماء مكرم سعيد

جامعة بغداد / كلية التربية ابن رشد للعلوم الانسانية / قسم اللغة الانكليزية

المُستخلص

تُعَدُّ هذه الدراسة مسحاً نقدياً يُحلل التدخلات المسرحية ليوسف العاني وولي سوينكا من منظور المثقفين في مسرحيتي "المفتاح" (1968) و"مسرحية العمالقة" (1984) على التوالي. وقد تناولت الدراسة كل مؤلف على حدة، دون ربط بينهما، وذلك من خلال تطبيق منهج تحليلي نصي مقارنة نوعي، يستند إلى مفهوم إدوارد سعيد للمثقف بوصفه من يواجه العقائد ويُحفز التفكير العام. يدعم هذا التحليل اللغة الساخرة لسوينكا والنقد الأسطوري للعاني، إذ يُراعي اللغة والرمزية والبنية والأداء. ورغم أن العاني يستخدم الواقعية التأميلية والحوار الأخلاقي لكشف الإرهاب الثقافي، فإنه يُوظف أيضاً المبالغة الكاريكاتورية لتبديد قوة المشهد السلطوي، كما يفعل سوينكا. ويدعو كلاهما جمهورهما إلى عدم السماح باستمرار أنظمة القمع. المسرح أشبه بمكان للصراع الأخلاقي، حيث يُؤمل أن يكون الجمهور متيقظاً وأن يولد من جديد اجتماعياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: يوسف العاني، ولي سوينكا، الفكر العام، المسرح السياسي، الهجاء، الأسطورة، مسرح ما بعد الاستعمار، المفتاح، لعبه العمالقة، ادوارد سعيد.

Introduction

Similar to a public intellectual, a playwright plays an essential role when intervening and participating in people's lives, challenging and undermining common ways of doing things along with making visible collective identity. In his essay "Representations of the intellectual", Edward Said defines the intellectual as one who "represent[s] a message to, as well as for, a public" and whose task is "to confront orthodoxy and dogma" (Murphy & Costa, 2025, p.32). This definition is in line with the strong engagement of Yousif Al-Ani and Wole Soyinka, whose works are characterized by civic manipulation via theater. Al-Ani's play, which directly tackles the issues of the common people in Iraq, has been characterized as "painful in their criticism of the prevailing situation and rooted in the fabric of the daily life of the common folks" (Hamdi & Odeh, 2019, p.45).

This comparative study investigates the two plays, *The Key* (1968) and *A Play of Giants* (1984), as two theatrical manifestations arising from different but related postcolonial crises. The authors of the works bring to light the same issue of societies trapped by the power of myths or by ruthless rulers, and they use the stage as a means for people's awakening. Al-Ani writes under the influence of the Arab defeat in 1967 and creates a reflective drama that questions inherited customs and cultural stagnation. Soyinka, seeing the violence of post-independence governments, reacts with a grotesque satire that reveals the rulers as devoid of moral integrity and theatrically lacking—a point that he makes through the portrayal of his dictators as "hollow, empty, and utterly ignorant" (Adenigbo & Alugbin, 2020, p.320).

The lack of any scholarly comparison between these two playwrights has uncovered a major shortcoming in literary criticism. This is so because, even though there are many studies on Al-

Ani's "intellectual resistance" (Hamdi & Odeh, 2019, p.47) and Soyinka's political satire (Adenigbo & Alugbin, 2020, p.320), none of the studies has brought the two together to investigate how both play the role of public intellectual in different aesthetic modes—realist moral critique in *The Key* and grotesque satire in *A Play of Giants*. The introduction of close textual analysis is the primary focus of this article. Consequently, the main parts of the article contain direct citations from the two plays—for instance, Nouar's assertion that "we can start again... changing ourselves from within,"

نوار: "يجب ان نبداء من جديد ونبداء بالتغيير من انفسنا" (العاني، المفتاح، ص.61)

Al-Ani's call for intellectual renewal, on the one hand, and Soyinka's bleak tyrants, discussed in criticism as "ruthless despots... totally uninformed" (Ospanova *et al*, 2024, p.104), additionally, reveal the theatricality and absurdity of power. Theater, as invested by Al-Ani and Soyinka, is an ethical and civic tool. The comparison of *The Key* and *A Play of Giants* exerts the authors' common agenda, which mainly revolves around spreading awareness, opposing injustice, and changing the cultural story through the performance itself. Thus, it assigns both playwrights the role of public intellectuals whose artistic agenda reaches past the delivery of mere entertainment into altering the political and moral landscape. The study thus provides one of the rare comparative readings of the two plays through the public intellectualism lens by bringing the texts into conversation, which, at the same time, points to the visual arts' power to raise political awareness in both Arab and African contexts. "The text is saturated with literary and artistic references" (Jasim, Hashim Taher, 2026, p.1366)

-Significance of the Study

The juxtaposed study that looks at both plays through the lens of public intellectualism has not tackled yet. The absence of in-depth textual comparison across these two varied cultural contexts results in a gap in understanding how the dramatists perform municipal functions by means of aesthetic strategies, in terms of enacting the role of public intellectuals through their respective plays along with the forms of civic intervention emerge from each playwright's dramatic strategies. Also, how do the plays differ in their use of dramatic language, symbolism, and characterization to stimulate public reflection?

The research examines both plays from the standpoint of public intellectualism. The comparison reveals that playwrights in various countries resort to theater to express their views politically, critically and through public participation. Hence, the results prove to be beneficial to the academic world dealing with modern drama, political theater and Middle Eastern as well as African literary studies.

-Literature Review

Theater has always been recognized as a critical perspective for questioning ruling powers and influencing people's minds through art by critics in the field. Scholars mention that the playwrights are the ones who, through presenting moral dilemmas in addition to revealing ideological contradictions, and giving voice to dissent, take part in municipal discourse. Investigations into

political theater have revealed that dramatists use performance as a means of cultural critique so that the audience is made to confront disputed social truths in the theater. Wole Soyinka's scholarship points out that his main weapon in the fight against political corruption in Africa after the white man left was satire plus grotesque exaggeration. Portraying ironic situations and absurdity, Soyinka's dramatic art usually uncovers the moral hollowness of tyrannical governments.

According to Adenigbo and Alugbin (2020) in *A Play of Giants*, "the author presents the dictators as empty who are 'insipid, vacuous, and absolutely senseless'. As a result, the act of foolishness displayed by these political titans' points towards the descent of power." It features four significant characters, each corresponding to a different dictator in Africa: Kamini as Field Marshal Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Kasco as Jean-Bédél Bokassa of the Central African Republic, Gunema as Nguema of Equatorial Guinea and Tuboum as Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga of Zaire (modern-day Congo). Soyinka suggests that "no serious effort is made here to mask the identities of the real-life actors. In the 1970s, these African leaders drove the politics of their countries. They did terrible things to the people whom they ruled. This was what was referred to as "a grotesque foursome of real-life African dictators" [9].

A Play of Giants is set in the Burgaran Embassy in New York, where a menace of Africa's worst dictators assembles. The play portrays a gathering of dictatorial African leaders, highlighting their stupidity and follies as they attempt to navigate cooperation and decision-making. The three figures (Gunema, Kasco, and Kamini) are easily identified, and when Toboum falls in next, his really bad intentions have been revealed. As Soyinka remarks, "No serious attempt is made here to camouflage the identities of models in real life who have provided the material for *A Play of Giants*" (v).

Kamini, the central figure, exerting his power throughout the events. The embassy staff, including the sycophantic Chairman and Gudrun, a Scandinavian journalist, cater to the leaders' egos. Soyinka foreshadows chaos through Kamini's erratic behavior and the tense interactions among the dictators, who compete for dominance. A Soviet and American diplomat, present to negotiate, highlight the Cold War's influence on African politics. As the meeting progresses, the dictators' insecurities and rivalries surface. Kamini, obsessed with his statue, demands it reflect his "divine" status, while Gunema and Kasco mock each other's regimes, revealing their corruption. The Sculptor, tasked with creating Kamini's bust, struggles to satisfy his demands, as Kamini insists, "Make me eternal!" (Soyinka, 1984, p. 65).

Meanwhile, a Bank President and UN delegates question the dictators' human rights abuses, prompting defensive rants. The Secretary, a junior diplomat, attempts to expose Kamini's atrocities, but his colleagues silence him, fearing repercussions. Soyinka uses chaotic dialogue and stage directions, like the dictators' drunken antics, to amplify the play's satirical tone. The Secretary, emboldened, publicly accuses Kamini of genocide, triggering a violent reaction. Kamini, enraged, orders his guards to attack, but the chaos spirals as a bomb threat (later revealed as a prank) disrupts the embassy. The dictators' façade of control crumbles, as Soyinka writes, "The giants fall, and the earth trembles" (Soyinka, 1984, p. 68).

The play ends with Kamini's statue unveiled, only to be mocked by the Sculptor, who calls it "a monument to vanity." (Soyinka, 1984, p. 79). The dictators scatter, their power exposed as fragile, leaving the embassy in disarray. Soyinka's absurdist ending underscores the futility of their grandiose ambitions. It includes a few Western stooges who buttress and flatter other ones: Gudrum, a Scandinavian journalist, and Professor Batey, the Secretary-General of the UN. Ultimately, it also presents the US and Russia, the two superpowers, as leaders. Just about all of the characters in the play are stereotypes, and it lampoons everybody and everything politically. It's hilarious, and it tells us that these African leaders are cowards and delusional. We see a glimpse of Kamini's power play moments even in short duration. Soyinka doesn't have to exaggerate their missteps very far to sketch these caricatures. This is pretty much who these guys are and what they do. These leaders don't dwell much on themselves, but Kasco does allow:

Power comes only with the death of politics. That is why I choose to become emperor. I place myself beyond politics. At the moment of my coronation, I signal to the world that I transcend the intrigues and mundaness of politics. Now inhabit only the pure realm of power. I fear that all three of you have chosen to remain in the territory of politics. But – is it a choice? Or are you trapped? (21).

At the same time, the Americans and Russians are cynically realistic that they don't care about African people and countries as long as their own needs are met. Eventually, it's plain that the tyrants in this play resemble a lot of awful African leaders at the present moment.

Yousif Al-Ani is known for making a huge contribution towards modernizing Iraqi theater. He was concerned with the difficulties common people faced and with the incompetence of the ruling elite. Al-Ani is an artist whose plays are "sharp in their criticism of the current situation" and whose works are extensively linked to the life of Iraqis (Hamdi & Odeh, 2019, p. 32). The people's theater he represents is understood as an academic resistance that wants to make the public think, and while doing so comes and goes from then and now. So Yousif Al-Ani's job of being a theater artist can be read as something like late style in its conversation with ordinary folks of an intellectual-artistic sort. He does not accept or submit to the dogma, authority, and colonialism of corrupt national elites and empires in the form of foreign and local conquerors. To be clearer, Al-Ani's stage originated as a literary resistance to the submissive ideas in the university. It was very hard during the 1940s and 1950s for Iraqi theater to flourish due to social and political life in Iraq at the same time. Claims about the fragile development of Iraqi theater are present in Al-Ani's *The Theater Experience* (1979). During the same period, Iraqi theater makers had to confront the political leadership that shied away from art that could open new prospects for social and political protest and resistance in addition to societal regulations.

The Key (المفتاح) is Al-Ani's attempt to bring about a change in thought by "talking" directly to people and showing them why they have to move on and drop their old-fashioned mentality. In other words, it can be seen as his effort not to think about such fixed ideas anymore but to think through them. It was performed in 1968 by the Modern Artistic Theater group.

Al-Ani was an intellectual, as Edward Said believed he could not but think that such a humiliating episode should make him reconsider the suffering of the Arabs -that is, beyond Iraq- and of the Arab people in general. In regard to the Arab disaster, He explained, is because they don't "know what's happening." This is well illustrated in the husband and wife of the drama, namely Heeran ("bewildered" in Arabic) on the one side and Heera ("bewilderment") on the other, indicating this ignorance and sense of loss. In this drama Nouar is an "intellectual male" character whose name means "light" or "the enlightened one." Lastly, the couple go on a symbolic journey together to find a key that would provide them some kind of security in order for them to have a child in this conflict-filled world. Heeran and Heera are typical Arab voices-unthinking slaves of tradition and story.

-Theoretical Framework

Al-Ani and Soyinka are good examples for the dramatization of public issues who show political rot, and at the same time call for ethical reformation. In this regard, said highlights intervention, critique, and public interaction; therefore, his framework permits a concentrated interpretation of the manner in which both playwrights perform their intellectual resistance through the medium of theater.

Soyinka's theatrical approach is very much in line with the theories of political satire and grotesque realism. Satire is used to disclose structural injustices by magnifying vice; consequently, the rulers are the same as what critics call "hollow, empty and totally ignorant", whose ridiculous conduct brings to light the decay in postcolonial African rule (Adenigbo & Alugbinlu, 2020, p.49).

KAMINI: I said go back and get cracking with government mint, when I return, I want to see brand new currency notes in circulation, not hearing all this grumble of shortage of money and so on and so forth.

CHAIRMAN: But you're Excellency that is why we came to seek this loan in the first place. Now that we haven't got it, there is nothing to back the new currency with.

KAMINI: What the man talking about? You short of good currency paper at government mint?

CHAIRMAN: I'm trying to explain. You're Excellency. Even now, at this moment our national currency is not worth its size in toilet. If we go ahead and print more, it would...KAMINI: What? What you say just now?CHAIRMAN: Your Excellency?

KAMINI: I say, what you talking just now about Bugara currency? (Soyinka,1984, p. 6-7)

Through humor, hyperbole and mockery, literary satire ridicules abusive power and encourages people to question the extent of their complicity in the perpetuation of such power. And the "Giants" are unhappy about where they are because they have a negative self-image. At the beginning of the drama, Gunema had been denouncing people who do guerrilla fighting against his own country. This is because he thinks that he and the other despot are naturally born leaders when they quite simply not. He writes about his fellow tyrants: "We are a race naturally formed for tyrannical prowess. We stop governing, we stop leading, after a while, and we actually exist I think in a rare space in power." Is 'erdad? (p. 2) Gunema believes they are not human. Soyinka depicts the African

rulers of this time as those who have turned into heroes through self-lies and deception. As the play proceeds, this comes to make his and other people's actions seem short-sighted. The play jokes about people who have the label of being a leader, but are not. For this reason, Gunema says

-Like me and our camarade the Emperor Kasco, we are not ordinary. Why you think we rule our people? Some people are born to power. Others are - cattle. They need ring in their nose for us to lead. (p. 11)

It is quite ironic that when the Secretary-General of the United Nations requested that each country is expected to present a work of art representative of their culture, Kamini and other African despots mistook his idea and the plan to present their statues. To show how inept Kamini is of governance, he believes that he controls the economic affairs and he can curb stealing when he travels with the Chairman of Bugara Central Bank.

KAMINI....You excuse me while I talk some business. Is my chairman of Bugara Central Bank. When I travel, I take Bank of Bugara with me, then nobody can steal money behind Kamini's back. Too many kondo wearing European coat and tie and forging signature of this and that bank manager. When Kamini not home, only chairman can sign cheque, and he here with Kamini. (p. 4)

-Mythopoetic Critique and Folkloric Symbolism.

Yousif Al-Ani considers critiques of myth, custom, and cultural stagnation to present the Iraqi political crux at that time. In their study, (Hamdi and Odeh, 2019, p.48) highlighted the application of "popular traditions and folklore" His interpretation concords with Fanon's conception of custom as a cultural deterioration as its very ground cannot be claimed if no new ideas have been brought in. Al-Ani's disintegration of traditional stories in reiterated songs, myths, morals, is aimed at showing people their own helplessness stemming from their stubbornness in following the ways of the past as the only truth. Heeran's and Heera's adherence to a mythical/folkloric/traditional story that is repeated several times in the form of a song or nursery rhyme in the play, each time with one additional line that is meant to guide Heeran and Heera to their next destination in search of the key that would guarantee them their desired security. This song is repeated over and over again until the very end of the story when Heeran and Heera discover that their quest in search of the key was useless after all. i.e.

يا خشية نودي نودي

وديني على جدودي (العاني ، 1968، ص. 335)

In this way, Al-Ani uses myth, folklore and song for their hypnotic effect on his audience to explode this myth or folk tale at the end of the play. In fact, he specifically confronts the outdated beliefs of his audience by showing them the nonsense of strictly adhering to the folk tale and by allowing them to observe the meaningless twists and turns in the story. Nouar, who is the 'intellectual' and the voice of Al-Ani in the play, tells his brother Heeran and his brother's wife Heera at the end of their fruitless journey, which Nouar has joined out of curiosity.

-وديني على جدودي وجدودي بطارف عكا ويعطوني ثوب و كعكة وصندوق يريد المفتاح والمفتاح عند الحداد و الحداد يريد الفلوس والفلوس عند العروس والعروس بالحمام والحمام يريد القنديل .

البير يريد الحبل والحبل بقرون الثور.

البير يريد الحبل والحبل بقرون الثور والثور يريد الحشيش والحشيش بالبستان. (العاني ، 1968، ص. 335)

Take me to my ancestors, and my ancestors are on the outskirts of Acre. They'll give me a robe, a cake, and a chest. My chest needs the key, and the key is with the blacksmith. The blacksmith wants money, and the money is with the bride. The bride is in the bathhouse, and the bathhouse needs the lamp. The well needs the rope, and the rope is in the horns of the bull. The well needs the rope, and the rope is in the horns of the bull. The bull needs grass, and the grass is in the garden. (Al-Ani, 1968,278)

The rhythm and format of both plays reflect the comments of the playwrights to the political and cultural crises. In *The Key* -المفتاح- Al-Ani gives a circular form, which causes the repetitive statement that reflects the trapped community into psychical inactivity (Hamdi and Abu-Odeh, 2019, p.54). The absurdity of *A Play of Giants* is achieved by the piling up of the scenes that demonstrate the madness of the rulers, Kamini even says, I will rule here, even in exile, which makes the tragedy turn into a grotesque parody (Adenigbo & Alugbin, 2020, p.325). This disturbing impression created by both structures makes the beholders of the structures to be witness of the continuity of the dysfunction.

On the one hand, the character of Nouar who freely utters that a new era will rise on the basis of self-criticism as a public duty then proclaimed endeavor to make one's inside good mirrors. On the other hand, Soyinka's daring exposure of the rulers, as Kamini borders on assertion by saying "I am the storm sweeping nations" reflects the sort of grand self-mythologizing that is thoughtful, heroic and imaginary all at once, but it doesn't show strength; rather it demonstrates political madness. (Espanola *et al*, 2024, p.114). The disparity in meditative allure between Nouar's and Kamini's over-the-top bluster demonstrates that both writers are questioning the morality of power. So he attempted to get people to think about and to rethink the dogmatic ideas of his day.

The Key seems to have been inspired by the Arabs' humiliating defeat in the third Arab-Israeli war in 1967. As a man of letters (in Said's sense), Al-Ani felt he had to react to this embarrassing event by re-examining the problems of Arabs. He thinks that the reason of Arab's misfortune is that they do not know what's going on and we see it very well in the couple of this play:

Nouar: Not all the doors are closed yet, not all the roads are blocked. We can

Start again, start by changing ourselves from within. Not keep clinging

to the story and following its course, and believing it. Not keep going

Round and round following nothing greater than a delusion.

goes on to clarify:

No use to search because our ways of searching were founded on a

delusion – nothing greater than a delusion. (Al-Ani,1968,p. 287)

نوار: لم تُغلق جميع الأبواب بعد، ولم تُغلق جميع الطرق. يمكننا أن نبدأ من جديد، أن نبدأ بتغيير أنفسنا من الداخل. لا أن نستمر في التشبث بالقصة واتباع مسارها، والإيمان بها. لا أن ندور في حلقة مفرغة، متبعين وهمًا لا أكثر.

يُكمل نوار موضحًا:

لا جدوى من البحث، لأن طرق بحثنا كانت مبنية على وهم - وهم لا أكثر. (العاني،1968،ص.287)

Language is utilized in both plays as a means of ideological exposure while revealing the weakness of authority. Al-Ani makes use of subtle and indirect expressions, such as in the line “the song repeats because nothing changes,” which is a clear indirect criticism of cultural stagnation and the cyclical paralysis that followed the defeat of 1967 (Al-Ani 1968; see Yousif Al-Ani: *The Intellectual Resistance* 2019). On the contrary, Soyinka uses extravagant and militarized language, as when Gunema proclaims, “I stand above all laws,” and in doing so, his claim, which is also quite theatrical, breaks down the idea of power being invulnerable (Adenigbo & Alugbin, 2020, p.321). Al-Ani employs gentle repetition to offer a muted critique, while Soyinka uses word inflation to poke fun at tyrannical authority. Symbolism opens up diverse and deep possibilities for the analysis of collective memory and ideological myths. In *The Key*, the symbol of the locked door that keeps coming back, the one that is brought up when the characters say:

“The key is lost because we lost ourselves,” (Al-Ani,1968, p. 287)

المفتاح قد ضاع لاننا خسرنا أنفسنا. (العاني،1968،ص.287)

The lines above represent cultural confusion and sense of ambivalence that trigger moral revival (Hamdi & Abu-Odeh, 2019, p.56). The reverse is the case with Soyinka who uses repulsively ugly visuality as a means of critique, especially in the case of the dictator Kamini who orders a life-size statue of himself with the words, “Let the world bow before my image,” a symbolic amplification that reveals the ruler’s vanity (Ospanova et al, 2024,p.111). Both symbols are ways of thinking about how societies remember, misrepresent or mythify power. It is in theatrical metaphors that the two playwrights will meet on the field of public-intellectual criticism: one to tear down joint illusions and the other to provoke a civic re-examination.

-Dramaturgical Intervention and Audience Awakening

Theatrical forms are the common tool used by both dramatists to unmask the audience's involvement in political and cultural decline. Al-Ani's repetitive story, seen when one of the characters, through despair, says

“we walk in circles because we fear the new,” (Al-Ani,1968,p. 287)

نحن ندور في دوائر لاننا نخشى ما هو جديد. (العاني، 1968، ص.287)

brings to the surface the psychological resistance to change that has taken root in Iraqi society (Al-Ani, *Intellectual Resistance*, 2019).

In the case of Soyinka, the gradual absurdity leads to the most ridiculous of all Kamini's demands: "I shall rule from here, even in exile," turning the political tragedy of the playwrights' homeland into a comic, liberating act (*A Play of Giants* Adenigbo & Alugbin, 2020, p.321). The two methods work toward the same goal, active participation of the audience.

-Crisis, Leadership Failure, and Public Accountability

Political decline is represented in both drama as a dilemma of moral obligation, thereby revealing the failures of the ruling class that require an intellectual-public reaction. The old man's confession in *The Key*—"our leaders talk, but nothing changes"—brings to light a deadlock based on moral cowardice and a fear of taking action together (Hamdi & Abu-Odeh, 2019,p.55). Soyinka makes this issue clearer when Kamini pronounces, "History will kneel before me,"(71) showing a despot who, through his self-adulation, keeps his ignorance deeply hidden (Adenigbo & Alugbin, 2020,p.320). These dissimilar happenings reveal political power as being merely a display, not authentic authority. By emphasizing and exhibiting moral decay and false self-assertion, both playwrights enact Said's concept that intellectuals should uncover and confront the false stories that support power and, at the same time, reassert the ethical necessity of public accountability.

Furthermore, the dramatists place the anguish of common people at the center of their narratives while indicating their ability to resist tyranny. In *The Key*, a Herdsman (الراعي) laments, "we carry burdens not ours to bear," points to how ordinary people are made to be bearers of political failure (Al-Ani1968). It is this mingling of myth and history that he draws on to get his audience to consider the futility of Heeran's and Heera's narrative against the story told by the herdsman, which Al-Ani offers as a counterpoint or counter telling. It is these ideas, represented in the words and deeds of the herdsman, that contain the essence of his thought.

Herdsman: (Now he speaks quietly.) But my dear, I can't leave my land.

Nouar: So what will you do?

Herdsman: I'll start again from the beginning.

Nouar: That's wonderful.

Herdsman: I'll start again from the very beginning.

Nouar touches him on the shoulder, supportively.

Herdsman: I'll plant the grass in my land. I'll water it. I'll plough it with my hands. I'll increase the crop, and as the days go by I'll be able to

bring back the bulls that were stolen from me. I'll work as long as I live

Herdsman: May you go safely. I've got to work; I have no time to waste.

I'll start now. (Al-Ani,1968,p.277)

الراعي :يتحدث الآن بهدوء لكن يا عزيزي، لا أستطيع مغادرة أرضي.

نوار :ماذا ستفعل إذا؟

الراعي :سأبدأ من جديد.

نوار :هذا رائع.

الراعي :سأبدأ من جديد من البداية.

لمسه نوار على كتفه داعماً.

الراعي :سأزرع العشب في أرضي .سأسقيه .سأحرثه بيدي .سأزيد المحصول، ومع مرور الأيام سأتمكن من استعادة الثيران التي سُرقت مني .سأعمل ما دمت حيّاً.

الراعي :دمت سالمًا .عليّ أن أعمل؛ ليس لديّ وقت لأضيعه.سأبدأ الآن . (العاني,1968,ص.227)

The Palestinian cause is serving as a vehicle for transforming Arab social consciousness after the disastrous defeat. He is a dispossessed man, with his disastrous dispersions and wholesale killings of his own people, but the herdsman remains more attached to the land than ever; he will not leave or flee. Whereas Heeran and Heera will set off in search lest life 'breaks', the herdsman will 'only stay and begin again from scratch. In the sense that he sought ontological security of a way of life when all is lost; this character, with no wish to integrate into civil society, refuses existential flight due to the same reason. The herdsman's words display will, human labor and the recovery of his land, while remaining to Said's mind the first stage of decolonization (11) centrally a people "demanding their right to self-determination."

Heeran: [...] thousands and thousands of Arab refugees are dying from

heat or the cold. They were driven out of their land on a black, dark night [...]

Nouar: A new Nazism has planted itself in our land, a modern Nazism;

the United Nations is asleep drinking the health of the napalm bomb

and of all twentieth-century barbarism.

Heeran: A new Hulagu is trying to crush humanity and destroy the world.

Nouar: The blacks have revolted against him and threatened his power. Guevara has shaken the regimes of two entire continents. He's become a symbol like the sun. (Al-Ani,1995, p. 261)

حيران :آلاف وآلاف اللاجئين العرب يموتون من الحر أو البرد .طُردوا من أرضهم في ليلة حالكة السواد.

نوار :نازية جديدة غرست نفسها في أرضنا، نازية حديثة؛

الأمم المتحدة نائمة تشرب من قنابل النابالم

وكل همجية القرن العشرين.

حيران :هولاكو جديد يحاول سحق البشرية وتدمير العالم.

نوار :ثار السود عليه وهددوا سلطته.

هزّ جيفارا أنظمة قارتين كاملتين .أصبح رمزًا كالشمس .(العاني , ١٩٩٥ , ص. ٢٦١)

This dialogue unites the oppressed in this world, The Wretched of the Earth, to use Fanon's words, in anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist struggle, beginning with Palestinians, whom Al-Ani refers to more than once in this play, blacks who revolted against the new Hulaqu (perhaps a reference to African -Americans, such as Martin Luther King and especially the more radical anti-imperialist Malcolm X in the 1960s), the great revolutionary Guevara and Latin Americans, and a few lines later, the Vietnamese, the Algerians, who 'offered up a million martyrs', and black Africans (Al-Ani, 1995, p. 262). Al-Ani, then, is the very definition of Said's intellectual who represents the oppressed based on 'universal principles' (Said, 1994, p. 9). This show that the freedom seekers in any country are paving the path to long road to liberty. The indefatigable spirit, this refusal to be killed catastrophically is one of the major themes as expressed mostly through the figure of the Herdsman who stands for The Palestinian case. Therefore, he sympathizes with all the voiceless, not only would-be co-religionists in Israeli-occupied and brutalized Palestine—because he becomes involved through his creation Al-Nouar in his people, Palestine, as 'our Land'. We have since changed much of our thinking, but the change in Arab mentality has to happen here. The Call is the last play, and then the message, actually, it's Nouar quoting himself:

I've got to move. I've got to run; a new generation's about to be born. If

I don't start running now, I won't catch up with it. We've all got to run.

You've got to run. Leave the story, forget about the trunk, run so you'll

catch up with those who've already beaten you in the race for the real

key. (Al-Ani, 1995, p. 287–88)

عليّ أن أتحرك .عليّ أن أركض؛ جيل جديد على وشك أن يولد .إن لم أبدأ بالركض الآن، فلن ألتحق به .علينا جميعًا أن نركض.
عليك أن تركض .دعك من القصة، انسّ الجذع، اركض لتلتحق بمن سبقوك في سباق المفتاح الحقيقي .

(العاني , 1995, ص. 287-288)

Soyinka corresponds to this situation through the frightened citizens pleading, “We are prisoners of their quarrels,” which shows how tyrants make a war zone of the whole nation (Ospanova, *et al*,

2024, p.110). However, both playwrights suggest mass awareness: Al-Ani via self-renewal, Soyinka in the public recognition of absurd tyranny. One of the characters in *The Key* states that "their voices are loud because their hearts are weak," revealing the very leaders who use the show to hide their self-doubt. Soyinka, on the contrary, amplifies this through grotesque exaggeration when Gunema roars, "I crush nations with my steps," a direct boast whose ridiculousness underscores the illusion of power (Adenigbo & Alugbin 2020). The two instances illustrate the same truth, authority is weak and supported by symbolic display rather than real legitimacy.

Both plays have one common conclusion- they have to remove injustice in the society and this can be achieved by awakening on personal and social fronts. Nouar states: the moment we cease being scared of the truth is when the change begins, which means that it is a time of introspection, which turns into a civic duty. An awakening like this is also offered by Soyinka, when one of the characters notices, "Their terror is a reflection of our silence", implying that the society itself allows tyranny (Ospanova *et al*, 2024,p.112). With these observations, the general commitment of theatricality is created: to awaken the audience to their moral obligations. Both playwrights, thus, fulfill the intellectual role of Said by encouraging the audiences not to be passively complicit but to reconceive the political and cultural futures based on moral courage.

-Language as a Tool for Political Exposure.

The words of the two playwrights indicate their didactic motives. The aim of Al-Ani is to ensure that ordinary people in Iraq are able to understand the play, therefore, he chooses simple and straightforward words, which also demonstrates his intention of addressing the people directly (Hamdi and Odeh 2019). The dramatization of *The Key* is expressed in terms of renewal and clarity, which forms a self-reflection mood. Soyinka, on the contrary, does not even sacrifice simplicity: satirical criticism uses irony, humor, wit, and sarcasm (Adenigbo and Alugbin 2020) to provoke the audience, not always making them cognizant of the criticality of what they read. Al-Ani's infernal presence gives rise to the sinner's repentance, whereas Soyinka's devilish fun strips away the disguise of power. One of the main points of comparison among the playwrights is their claim that the audience is composed of citizens. Al-Ani's "people's theater" was meant for the victims of the "corruption and bureaucracy of state institutions," encouraging them to take part in the process of change and eventually claim the power of the nation. The manner in which he used words was merely simple and more or less like a child explaining something, which made his message more reachable. Minor dialogues such as the song repeats because nothing changes, making use of understatement to point out apathy. Dialogue serves the purpose of being a teaching tool, whereas in *A Play of Giants*, it serves the purpose of being left to mock.

Rather, Soyinka employs language of more complex nature and introduces the audience to the political arena as participants. His irony "heightens the consciousness of the masses and stings the conscience of the rulings" by making fun of despotism to such a degree that the moral standpoint becomes unambiguous. It is in the translation of theatrical perspective to civic responsibility that the two playwrights meet (Felicetti 2022). Their works gradually create an avenue for the public to be politically literate, stirring communities from slumber and showing them ways to fight oppression

and reclaim power. Soyinka chooses the opposite: wasteful, hyper masculine dialogue. In the situation when Gunema boasts that he is above the law, the exaggerated wording indicates the absurdity of dictatorial personalities (Adenigbo & Alugbin 2020). The end of these various approaches i.e. the bareness of Al-Ani, and the exaggeration of Soyinka, are directed at the same to disclose the corrupted power structures in different communities in the form of dialogue.

Both of these dramas recast the dramatic space as a public space. Al-Ani unites Yeats' concept of theater as a 'public space', where the artist could exercise "hypnotic manipulation" over his audience via ritual and symbol, affecting an undermining of groundless adherence to tradition. The play's unresolved journey space reflects the moral crossroads of Iraq, urging the audience to rethink the direction. Soyinka's embassy is the place of satire where the dictators display their outrageous power; at the same time, it becomes clear that political power is always dramatic in nature (Petersen & Nielsen 2021). The playwright places tyrants at the very center of international diplomacy to criticize the involvement of world powers in the wrongdoing of the Third World. He uses big things, namely, when Kamini orders to create a huge statue of himself and to say, Let the world bow down to my image, showing the egocentric exhibition of power in the form of dictatorship (*A Play of Giants*; Ospanova *et al*, 2024, p.109). The two icons also accentuate the imperfection of the ruling elite and the need to reclaim morality.

Although Al-Ani and Soyinka are both regarded as postcolonial writers, the crises in their societies were very different, influencing their choice of dramatic modes. The cultural disorientation of the Arab world after the 1967 defeat plagued Al-Ani's Iraq; thus, he portrays what has been described as "an Arab consciousness in confusion" seeking guidance (Ponzanesi & De Medeiros, 2024). His drama focuses on questioning the origins of myths and participating in the reconstruction of the mind. Soyinka, in contrast, stood against the horrors of military governments after independence and ridiculed dictators who represented "tyranny and abuse of power."

The two playwrights turn to theatrical representation in order to bring out the psychological aspects of dominance. The mental immobility and the deadness of the Iraqi culture after 1967 are externalized in the physical immobility and repetitive motion e.g. the characters going round the stage. Soyinka on the other hand makes use of excessive physical presence: the massive size of Kamini and his aggressive gestures speaks of his exaggerated view of himself, especially when he glorifies that his shadow is the only object to be feared (Ospanova *et al*, 2024, p.110). These paired figures of Al-Ani, with his oppressive realism, and Soyinka, with his raucous grotesque are instances that power does not have to be announced; it simply is.

-Synthesis

There is a separation between the dramatic philosophies of the plays, which are divided by time orientation. For instance, Al-Ani looks into the future optimistically. *The Key's* finale with the statement, not all the doors are closed yet which is understood as the promise of a new beginning. The characters are pending hope for a happy altered life. This assertion places the future in the context of renewal and the possibility based on intellectual clarity. Soyinka on the contrary

prefigures apocalypse through satire. His tyrants live in a politically destroyed world where corruption and violence are the order of the day. The works of both playwrights end up meeting on one point, which is the vision of the playwright as a citizen intellectual whose role is to challenge mental stagnation and provoke civil change. Although the dramatic styles are radically different: reflective realism of Al-Ani and grotesque satire of Soyinka utilize theatrical form as a venue of democratic inquiry. He does not set up the experience of myth among the audience in order to maintain the culture on the nostalgic grounds; rather, he reveals the ideological risks of myth, as in the case of Nouar, who insists on one main idea which is, We can start again... changing ourselves from within. This demand makes the stage a morality battlefield where hereditary delusions are tested. The two playwrights focus on social fragmentation but they do it differently. The criticism of Al-Ani is inwardly directed; he shows how the characters are enclosed in the narrative of ritualized repetition and conformity of the story, which they blindly adhere to. This is an internal trap that is envisaged as the downward drift of culture into custom as was described by Fanon. Instead, Soyinka focuses on the performance of power that is apparent. The weakness of authoritarian power is shown on the ridiculously depicted tyrants with exaggerated poses, bombast speeches and the use of fear. Both plays have a common objective of making the viewer's political actors. Al-Ani uses Turath-التراث, repetition, and song to first lure the audience into a known aesthetic world so that it can subsequently destroy it and demonstrate ways of ideological conditioning. By doing so, he puts the audience in the position of citizens who should bring back cultural consciousness. Soyinka, using ridicule and extravagance, similarly denies the spectators the comfort of passive observation.

Al-Ani indicates that the power of thought can reawaken moral and political possibilities. The road of Soyinka leads to the dead end: the demise of the tyrannical government is the doom. However, some critics believe that dystopias of Soyinka have a utopian drive when destruction is an agent of social cleansing.

-Conclusion

The dramatic elements that express the role of the playwright as a social figure as well as an intellectual in Yousif Al-Ani *The Key* and Wole Soyinka *A Play of Giants* are different and at the same time harmonious. Using the model of the intellectual as an oppositional, truth-telling figure of Edward Said and the analysis of the text, the study proves that both dramatists are involved in civic life by revealing oppression and challenging the dominant narrative and forcing the audience to face moral obligations. Al-Ani achieves this by reflective realism and mythological dislocation, where cultural paralysis comes out as a result of blind following of practices.

The comparative analysis indicates that, even though the political and cultural settings of both plays are different, their authors employ theater to create awareness on the part of the population. Al-Ani focuses on inward moral renewal, i.e., beginning with us, as one way of making social change, and Soyinka reminds the audience of the absurdity and brutality that underlie postcolonial tyranny. Their techniques are different, but both serve the goal of Said in designating the intellectual in talking where they should remain silent and silent, and playing on the stage not as an image but as an echo of a communal voice.

The study supplements literary surveys since it provides a comparative study in terms of public intellectualism, which has never been presented in the literature before. Although previous research has been done on the playwrights separately, few scholars have drawn parallels on how they carry out the intellectual role in the world in criticizing the ruling orders in the Arab and the African worlds. Because of its analysis of symbolic objects, linguistic strategies and embodied performance, the study proves that theater is a medium of ethics with the ability to reveal the oppressive narratives and imagine cultural re-imagination.

The results provide guidance to the future studies. Researchers might analyse the ways in which other Middle Eastern and African playwrights utilize theater to make contributions in the public discourse, and how reception can be different in the cultural, generational, and political spheres. Comparative studies might also investigate the intersections of satire, myth, and civic responsibility in postcolonial theater, extending the insights revealed by this research.

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