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(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen: An Overview of Ibsen Reception in Ghana Between 1930 and 1966

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(POST) COLONIAL GHANAIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS IBSEN: AN OVERVIEW OF IBSEN RECEPTION IN GHANA BETWEEN 1930 AND 1966

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

During much of the twentieth century, Ibsen's plays attracted the interest of many world theatres. In many western theatres and some non-western ones, the attraction to Ibsen by theatre practitioners was linked in different ways to the processes of modernization and the problems that come with it (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 96). Colonialism and modernization are related to each other in complex ways (Gillen and Ghosh 2007, 1). In some colonial contexts, the modernization process was implemented as a "civilizing mission" (Jeyifo 2007, 608). This civilizing mission was largely dependent on print literacy produced by European colonizers to suit the needs of a local context (Willis 2018, 13). In colonized territories in Africa, literary texts were actively used in missionary works and mass literacy projects. The missions and the schools provided "good literature" (Newell 2002, 5) for readers to conceive of themselves as part of the larger British Empire. Additionally, the colonial administration used these transmission modes of literature to "track and control nations and populations" (Willis 2018, 13).

As a consequence, reading regimes, practices, and performances were structured on the expectations and regulations of the colonial administration.¹ Also, the system of transmission of literature in the colonies was perpetuated and controlled by the colonial administration. As agents, they did not seek financial capital but what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "cultural capital"

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

(1993, 43–45). Access constraints often arose in the context of distribution where the social and political conditions of contact to texts, determine the kind of readers exposed to a text at a given time and location. The emergence of elite associations traveling between the colonies and Britain led to explorations of literary texts outside the prescribed repertoire. It is through the emergence of these “localized distributions channels” of literary texts that Ibsen’s plays found their way into some colonized territories. In places like India, Ibsen’s plays were in circulation among the local Indian intelligentsia around the 1940s (Ahsanuzzaman 2012, 10–13). The interest in Ibsen’s plays among these groups of readers was private and at the same time social because the narratives were resources to excite public debate and discussions (ibid). However, within the political context in which Ibsen is being received, the Indian intelligentsia’s reception of Ibsen could be read as an act of opposition to the “forced” literature in circulation during the colonial period. The idea of private individuals selecting and transmitting literature also suggests the development of “local agents” in the circulation of Ibsen. The timeframe of the localized reception of Ibsen in India intersected with their independence from colonial rule.

Colonial administrations resisted the emergence of proscribed literature within African colonies. African migrants such as university students and professionals traveling between the colonies and Great Britain aroused particular suspicion amongst colonial officers as purveyors of seditious materials (Newell 2011, 30).² Under independence and the early phase of self-rule, the reception of western literature in African nations was influenced by the effects of colonialism. The ways in which this political era framed reading and consumption of western literature has shaped distinct attitudes towards western texts in broader (post)colonial discourses. With these came certain stances that incriminated literature from European countries that were not involved in the colonial enterprise. For example, ancient Greek classical texts serve as matrixes of interpretation, a framework upon which indigenous African experiences – religious and social – can be

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

explored from neutral positions without imperialist sentiments (Wetmore 2002, 3). Ancient Greece had minor colonial influences on the African continent, but their model differed from imperial models that have shaped contemporary African culture, history, and politics. A few years into self-rule, many African countries rejected imperialist literature; their definition of imperialist literature included Scandinavian writers such as Ibsen.

There are many Ibsen traditions in the world today (Helland 2015, 2). On the theatre stages of the third world, post-colonial theatres have contributed to successful productions as well as critical adaptations of Ibsen's plays. Understanding the plays mediation with new social and political contexts – both past and present – are crucial in our exploration of intercultural performances and/or reception of Ibsen around the world. This study does not focus on performance analysis, but on instances of reception and incorporation of Ibsen's plays in reading and use of dramatic literature in colonial and early post-colonial Ghana. It is viewed through developments in Ghanaian reading culture, emerging ideologies in post-independent Ghanaian dramatic literature and performance, and post-colonial politics. The period under investigation, 1930–1966, marked pivotal developments in Ghanaian social and political spaces. By 1934 records indicate the use of an Ibsen text in a dramatic society, incidents of political unrest which led to independence in 1957, and a decade on, the politicized nature of the country's artistic spaces and practice provided critical reactions towards Ibsen. What emerges from this study is a strong connection between Ibsen, acts of contestation and rebellion, and then the search for cultural relevance and autonomy in dramatic literature and performance.

I use the term reception in this study to cover acts of reading, performance, audiences, and modes of transmission. Although the basic principle suggests an author, a message (text) and a receiver are the basic ideas that involve reception; a system of communication facilitates the transmission of the text between the author and the recipients (Eco 1976, 32–47). This premise places textual reception in an intriguing position by soliciting

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

various forms of reactions from readers, audiences, and agents – sources of transmission. The circulation processes are also indicative of the importance of the systems that control these modes, the position of the population in relation to these institutions as well as the content of the material. The term “reception” also suggests that the encounter between text and the reader/audience is mediated by contextual factors which structure and enable the encounter, attitudes, and responses (Willis 2018, 5). In the context under study, the application of the term extends to incidences of censorship which are analyzed within the frames of institutionalized responses to a text.

THE GOLD COAST 1930–1957: COLONIALISM, REBELLION, AND IBSEN CENSORSHIP

Ghana officially became a territory under the British Empire in the latter part of the 19th century. However, European trade activities had begun as early as the 16th century on the coast of West Africa. The Portuguese were the first European power to dominate trade with Ghana. Danish-Norwegian traders rode to prominence thereafter. These empires left behind physical evidence along the Ghanaian coastline in the form of castles and forts. The Germans also had some trading interests, but their involvement in these undertakings was not on a large scale when compared to the Portuguese or the Danish-Norwegian business holdings. The southeastern coast of the Gold Coast was under the control of the Dano-Norwegian fleet called the Danish West Indian-Guinea Company, thus the location fell under the Royal Danish territorial protectorate between 1658 to 1850. As a protectorate, it was called the *Danske Guldkyst*³ with Christiansburg Castle functioning as its headquarters.⁴ Christiansburg castle was vital to the Danish economy because the presence of this castle enabled their control and monopoly over the western African coast and trade routes.⁵ The importance of this edifice to trade and the economy of Denmark solicited incidents of attack from their fellow European competitors, even a local chief with a

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

powerful army took the castle over in 1693. Norway's union with Denmark was critical to the survival of Danish-Norwegian trade in this location. After the loss of Norway to Sweden, Denmark faced financial challenges which affected its oversea territories. Denmark's financial and political challenges also meant that their holdings were susceptible to attack; therefore, the Danes sold their properties including plantations to the British in 1850. Commercial activities on Guldkysten were the primary interest of the Danes, therefore, fighting a war was of no profit to their ventures (DeCorse 1993, 153).

The commercial activities of the Danish companies shaped their relationship with the locals, which differed considerably from the other European monarchies on the western African coast. These business holdings indicate the population of Danes and Norwegians on the Gold Coast was small, with a relatively insignificant military force. In this regard, they had less contact with the larger local population and hostilities from competitors were mostly contained within the areas under their control – mostly settlements surrounding their forts and castles (DeCorse 1993, 168). Other forms of relationships, even primary trade transactions, were coordinated and transacted within the “context of African social relations” (ibid). In effect, no form of imperial cultural imposition transpired between the Danish-Norwegian settlers and the locals. Building on this historical connection between Denmark, Norway, and the Gold Coast, it is safe to say that considering the earliest plays and works by Ibsen, his arrival in this location did not occur through the presences of Danish-Norwegian merchants. However, the likelihood that Ibsen's texts arrived through another “outpost of an empire”⁶ was highly probable.

When the territory came under British control, the administrative demands required the posting of British workers (and their families) to the Gold Coast. They came with their personal libraries; and from them, literary texts were accessible to their local acquaintances. The British colonizers regulated the circulation of print media to ensure that texts promoted imperial ideals. While

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

Ibsen's works might have been part of a private collection in circulation among the colonial officers, exchanges of these texts with the locals is debatable. Given that access to literary texts was controlled, locals likely gained access to Ibsen's works through unofficial channels.⁷ Gold Coast students travelling between Great Britain and their homeland, had been accused by the colonial administration of circulating proscribed literary texts and other print media. Building on this existing incrimination of these "traveling" students, this study traces the circulation of Ibsen's texts in the Gold Coast to these students by linking developments in their circles and networks.

Political and ideological developments among West African student groups in London saw increasing withdrawal from the dominant ways of English indoctrination, control, and literary influences. Additionally, these students created channels of communication between London and their various associates in the four main English colonies in West Africa – The Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. Local student unions, reading and drama clubs, and locally owned newspapers were integral aspects of these London student groups. In 1926, these West African student bodies regrouped themselves into an association called the Western African Students' Union (WASU). Besides the union being a regular student association, "certain features not normally found among student unions, and which are reminiscent of 'protest movements'" (Garigue 1953, 55) were present. The aspirations of the union were succinctly expressed by Dr. J.B. Danquah as follows:

Viewing the West African problem as a whole, one cannot help expressing the conviction that, if West Africa is to sustain an intensive national consciousness in a larger Imperial programme, no effective progress can be achieved except through the aboriginal rulers, through whom alone concerted action against all obstacles obstructing Negro progress in West Africa can be carried out with all the unquestionable force of constitutionalism and legality (Danquah 1927, 1)⁸

To achieve their objectives, the association developed channels of communication with groups and individuals in the four British colonies in the region.⁹ The union's influences were expanding, it was thus obvious that it had come under the radar of the

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

colonial administration in the various territories. A conflict developed between the union and the colonial office in London. The union accused the British government of planning to exert control over them in a way that mirrored their control over colonial territories.

The union's considerable influence trickled from local students and intellectuals to various self-help groups in the territories that were gradually becoming politically involved in the circumstances of their daily experiences as well as the state of their lands. The local student unions could be easily controlled by the administration, however, the reading and drama clubs that made the lesser beneficiary of these student unions' influences posed a challenge. In order to avert indoctrination, which could occur through the smuggling of unapproved literary products, the literary clubs were placed under patrons.¹⁰ These assigned patrons had the responsibility of vetting the literary works selected for use in these societies. The patrons were expatriates, mostly British, who doubled as decentralized censorship regulators for the colonial administration.

The Accra Dramatic Society, a prominent reading and drama club, had links to this regional student union in London. Many of the members of this literary society had studied in England and were the wards of politically and financially influential families in the Gold Coast. While their attention appeared to be towards literary appreciation and performances, this group was also politically visible. They often held political debates where members campaigned for their rights (Newell 2002, 32). One of the prominent members of this drama club was Mabel Dove. She had studied in London, returned to Sierra Leone where she advocated for women's rights and was active in literary and theatre circles. Born to a Ghanaian mother and a Sierra Leonean father, she relocated to the Gold Coast where her father and mother lived. In the Gold Coast, she met and married J.B. Danquah in September 1933. Dove's marriage to Danquah concretized her relationship with the student resistance movement. Given what the students union advocated for and its association

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

with this drama group, interests in dramatic literature would not align with the prescribed texts of the colonial administration. The first documented presence of an Ibsen play in the Gold Coast was its circulation in the Accra Dramatic Society. In 1934, documents indicate the group had chosen an Ibsen play for performance (Amankulor 1993, 144). The standard account about this first known public use of an Ibsen text in the Gold Coast is an interesting one. Per the regulations in place, a text selected must undergo evaluation by a group's patron. The club's patron, Winterbottom, found the Ibsen texts problematic and unsuitable for performance.¹¹ He writes that the play presented topics that were not of any particular relevance to the socio-cultural context of the territory (Winterbottom 1934, 114 – 115; as cited in Amankulor 1993, 144). In effect Ibsen was censored, however, there is no documented evidence that shows that this decision extended to the neighboring territories.

Ibsen censorship was not unique to the Gold Coast, Ibsen's plays were subject to censorship in diverse ways in many European countries from the beginning (Helland 2015, 79). The prohibition of Ibsen's plays on some European stages was in accordance with respective national laws attempted to prevent the flow of information – new social and cultural formations (Imre 2021, 9). In imperial Britain, Ibsen had a warm reception on the theater stages of London. Generally, the English theatre was receptive of foreign influences during the 19th century (Bullock 2017, 360). Despite this cordial relationship, the content of some of his plays quickly sparked controversy. A notable example is the dispute that surrounded *Ghosts* (1881). In London, *Ghosts* premiered in 1889 as an opening production of the Independent Theatre Society (Imre 2021; Sova 2004). As a private production, the Independent Theatre Society escaped censorship from the Lord Chamberlain's Office which had placed *Ghosts* under its radar with restrictions to public performances (Imre 2021, 12). The content of the play was problematic – an illegitimate child, euthanasia, incest, a strong female lead, and the playwright's radical stances. After the production, which was sold out

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

to capacity, followed a media frenzy with reviewers provoking more controversy (Davis 1990, 448). Ibsen became known to British authorities as a provocateur within the theatrical and socio-cultural spaces.

Besides the controversies surrounding *Ghosts*, George Bernard Shaw's interests in Ibsen's works and social ideologies extended Ibsen's influence further into English political circles. In his acclaimed and criticized work *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, he indicates that his purpose is "to distill the quintessence of Ibsen's message to his age" (Shaw 1913, 15). As a political playwright, writing and spreading socialist ideas both on the stage and among the British intelligensia, Shaw incorporated Ibsen's social stances into his politics. Shaw presented Ibsen as a socialist to the British public and used Ibsen to infiltrate British political spaces. While Ibsen gained popularity in British socialist circles, he was quick to respond to their misrepresentation of him. Ibsen disavowed his links to socialism in a modest and unsympathetic letter to Braekstad, a colleague to Archer and Shaw.¹² Shaw successfully coupled Ibsen with socialism in British political discourse. Due to their association in British culture, imperial authorities felt it would be ineffective to ban Ibsen without Shaw in the dramatic and reading clubs in the Gold Coast. The performance of plays by these two playwrights were banned concurrently (Amankulor 1993, 144). The attempt by the Accra Dramatic Society to perform an Ibsen play was parallel to Dove's adaptation of Shaw's story, *The Adventures of Black Girl in Search of God* (1932) under a new title, *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of Shaw* (1934). It was published as a series in *The Times of West Africa* from September to October of 1934 – commencing on the 25th of September with the last publication on the 18th of October 1934 under the pseudonym Marjorie Mensah. The final episode of this series was never published. It is likely that the intended date of publication coincided with the prohibition of Ibsen which then led to the censorship of Shaw as well.

In this rewritten and serialized narrative, Dove does not solely show her admiration of Shaw but participates in a "network of

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

inspirational solidarity” (Boehmer 2005, 2) where dissenting texts from anti-colonial authors in one location would be borrowed as instructive models and rewritten to suit another colonial location and reality (Newell, Gadzekpo, and Dove 2004, xvii). Literary materials have been engaged in cross-border exchanges of anti-imperial ideas which unsettled colonial administrations (Boehmer 2005, 5). While Ibsen’s works are not explicitly (anti) colonialist, members of the Accra Dramatic Society are a group of critical recipients of texts and their reading/performance was situated in a particular interpretative context. The reception of Ibsen and performing his work in the Gold Coast could, therefore, be understood as an act of resistance. This resistance could be further analyzed from the content of the text caught in the censorship disagreement, but in the various documented accounts of this event, the title of the play was not mentioned. In general, politically frustrated readers of an Ibsen play would have found ideological ideas to build a stance against the colonial establishment. Ibsen’s portrayal and critique of capitalism, class and gender hierarchies reveals the systemic oppression and segregation in colonial contexts.

In general, the 1930s in British West Africa was a “stormy”¹³ decade. Censorship laws in these West African British colonies were strict after the realization that educated West Africans – emergent political elites (leaders) indulged in literature and publications in the local newspapers to spread information to the less educated populace.¹⁴ As a result, a two-pronged censorship approach was achieved, whereby imported publications were rigorously censored and local editors of newspapers were forced to adhere to pro-imperial materials (Newell 2013, 12). Often notions surrounding censorship suggest an attempt to protect the public from unfavourable or inappropriate expressions. But clearly in this colonial framework and its response to Ibsen, attention is focused on the emergence of alternative agencies through unprescribed texts or reading materials. Even if we put this censorship incident on one side, it is clear that Ibsen’s work(s) remained in circulation among this elite; thus, interacting

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

with other texts of ideological importance to local political and literary circles in the Gold Coast.

GHANA 1957–1966: THE AFRICANIST IDEOLOGIES, PERSONALITY
CULTS AND IBSEN CENSORSHIP

The Gold Coast gained its independence from Great Britain on the 6th of March 1957. Kwame Nkrumah led agitations and negotiations that steered the territory away from the Empire's control. After Independence, shifts towards nationalism and the creation of an independent African identity were of eminent importance. First, the territory's name was changed to Ghana in reverence to the old and influential Ghana Empire.¹⁵ Nkrumah's fascination with traditional African empires and cultures further influenced his political, cultural, and social ideologies. The arts were not spared from Nkrumah cultural ideologies which included the creation of an autonomous African identity.

Before Ghana's independence the Nigerian theatre scene bustled with modern European plays. By 1956 there were various performances of plays of modern European playwrights by students' groups at the University of Ibadan and amateur drama societies in Nigeria (July 1987, 64). The new director of the theatre arts department, Geoffrey Axworthy,¹⁶ identified interest in European playwrights. He established a curriculum that combined European influences with themes that were relevant to the Nigerian situation. In effect, plays like "Gogol's *The Inspector General*, chosen for its relevance in a colonial situation, and Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* that could be shared easily by Africans and Europeans alike" (July 1987, 64–65) were included in the repertoire of the University of Ibadan amateur theatre groups. However, the use of these European social dramas was short-lived due to developments in post-independent dramatic literature and performance in Ghana. Before independence, the Provisional Arts Council of 1955, established the National Theatre Movement of the Gold Coast (Shipley 2015, 60). Under Nkrumah's administration, the National Theatre Movement

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

became an institution under the government's control. The group was mandated to revive traditional performance forms in ways that would initiate a cultural renaissance. The first post-independence leader of this theatre movement was Efua Sutherland, charismatic and equally pan-Africanist as Nkrumah. By 1961, a drama studio edifice was built to facilitate the works of the theatre movement, and also to host African artists and their counterparts in the diaspora. The grand opening of this edifice occurred the same year with the president and the expatriate community present. The drama studio delivered a visualized representation of the principles of this theatre movement:

It was a small structure, unpretentious but handsome, traditional in inspiration yet modern in design. The dazzling whitewashed walls with their dark trim resembled a village compound and were meant to. Inside, at one end, a platform stage was covered by an overhanging roof; but the auditorium, with its seats of carved Ghanaian stools, was open to the night sky. It stood in a rough, weedy place approached by dusty footpaths, its simplicity contrasting sharply with the gaudy grandeur of Accra's nearby Ambassador Hotel. The crowds were gathering at the entrance that was shaped like a huge traditional stool and flanked by two massive Akuaba dolls, sculpted male and female symbols of fertility ... (July 1987, 73)

Conceptualized by Sutherland, the dominance of traditional motifs in the architectural design of this theatre edifice was a statement of cultural renaissance, independence, and nationalism because she believed "political independence suggested cultural autonomy" (July 1987, 74). Kwame Nkrumah was the guest of honour; ambassadors, university professors, rich market women, and the ruling political party's officials were also in attendance. In his speech to the gathering, Nkrumah condemned the long – standing dependence on western cultures for material and cultural growth charging them to "look inwards" to their own exertions and endeavours "to bring about the progress, unity and strength of Africa" (July 1987, 74). A few years earlier at Ghana's independence declaration, Nkrumah declared the creation of an independent African personality and identity.¹⁷ His speech at the inauguration of the Drama Studio associated the National Theatre Movement to the wider Africanist project.¹⁸ In *Trickster Theatre: The Politics of Freedom in Urban Africa* (2015), Jesse Shipley

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

reads the overall initiative of this theatre movement as one that is culturally and politically anti-colonial:

While the British preservation of African culture provided a technology of moral control and a way to separate African identity from political power, the Nkrumah state redeployed art and culture as vehicles for forging a centralized identity to undergird the project of self-rule ... The national theatre movement emerged as a state-based project to inspire and develop the use of the theatre (Shiple 2015, 60)

The developments in Ghanaian politics were closely followed by Nigerian freedom fighters; likewise, the changes in cultural and performances discourse in the Ghanaian theatre movement also made their impact. On the theatre scenes, “intense nationalism, vigorous tribalism, and political stress” (July 1987, 66) pushed attention to performance methods from the diverse local ethnic groups. According to Femi Osofisan, Sutherland will be remembered for the evolution of modern African drama through the use of appropriate traditional images, expressive idioms and structural devices.¹⁹ In the face of these influences, performances of plays by modern European playwrights, like Ibsen, were stopped as they were no longer of interest to local theatre enthusiasts and practitioners.²⁰ Kevin Wetmore in *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky* (2002) notes that “theatres and companies stopped performing Moliere, Shakespeare, Racine, Shaw, and even Ibsen and Chekhov as all were part of a colonial culture and mind-set that the African artists were attempting to purge in order to establish an independent, post-colonial identity” (2002, 21). Even though conventional narratives²¹ on post-colonial Africa’s reception of modern European drama suggested unanimous ideological inclination, there were ideological differences; some favoured modern European drama literature and performance methods. The change in attitudes towards European literature was primarily about the struggle for legitimacy and self-rule. This could be read as a production of “symbolic power” (see Bourdieu 1993, 7, 44) considering the imperial hegemony of power and cultural production as well as dissemination modes during the colonial period. In order to develop power and cultural autonomy through literature and other cultural modes,

viable institutions were needed; the National Theatre Movement was one of them. The problem at stake was one that encompasses the execution of self-rule, and the reconceptualization of the post-colony's complex history. Below, this article seeks to show that such political and nationalist meddling with literature progressively displayed by Nkrumah and some individuals impacted the diffusion and use of Ibsen's plays during the period under discussion. It will also illustrate incidences of shifts towards Ibsen (i.e., modern European drama in general), and the diverse responses these actions elicited.

Within the leadership of the Ghana Theatre Movement diverging views developed as cultural and nationalist discourses took over textual reception and theatrical experimentation. The increasing influences caused ideological clashes which further shaped the reception of modern European drama. What it meant in practice was that ideological factions emerged with majority of members leaning towards the cultural and nationalist discourses of Nkrumah. Sutherland and Joe de Graft, both playwrights and theatre directors were in leadership positions in this theatre movement. The former was considered a Nkrumah loyalist and a Pan-Africanist in her own right; while the latter was neutral, so to speak.²² These playwrights were "charismatic larger than life figures at the center of a small group of politically influential writers and artists revolving around the drama studio" (Shipley 2015, 61).²³ The design of the Drama Studio (see Figure 1) was in solidarity with Nkrumah's post-colonial politics and nationalism, thus the theatre space was a statement of "architectural nationalism" (Schwarzer 2016, 19) where aesthetics and president's politics were not far apart. Overall, the architecture of independent Ghana was dependent on the employment of abstracted and idealized culture in the advancement of national identity (Hess 2000, 36). Embedded in the nationalist architectural designs are deconstructive attacks on colonialism.

Emancipatory attempts to break away from colonialism were distinctively displayed in the physical structure but it also affected the types of stages and spatial divisions between the performers



Figure 1. (Aerial view): The Drama Studio (now known as the Efua Sutherland Drama Studio) replicated and relocated to the School of Performing Arts premises at the University of Ghana. Photo credit: Phaniel Parbey.

and the audiences. The stage configurations in this theatre were as follows: an improvised proscenium stage with longer wings and aprons, an octagonal shaped stage in the middle to cater for performances in the round – for example, Anansesem storytelling performances – and an end stage. De Graft’s criticism of the Drama Studio was this theatre space’s overpowering focus on the liberational aspects of the theatre over the mastering of proscenium staging (see also, Shipley 2015, 65). The configuration of the stages in the Drama Studio demarcates and removes itself from colonial dependency; both politically and artistically. In Nigeria, Ola Rotimi has tried to replicate moving away from the proscenium-arch stage. Although success was limited, it was a deliberate attempt to “affront the conventions of proscenium style of production” (Rotimi 1974, 60). Besides the politics underlying the “spatial turn,” the proscenium stage’s inapplicability to the African theatre forms was also of concern to those in the theatre industry at that time. In many of these productions, entrances and exits access the stage through the wings onstage; and sometimes through the aisles in the auditorium while the crowd

scenes further defy the proscenium rules (Rotimi 1974, 61). The failure of Nigerian theatre spaces to be configured as the Ghanaian one was due to the fact that the latter could not be independently separated from politics. Even though de Graft critiqued the design because he preferred the proscenium stage, his defense of this stage type did not correspond to the emancipatory role of this theatre space.²⁴ The theatre space demonstrated urgency to African performance styles while negating European (imperialist) forms.

De Graft's quest for social efficacy of proscenium staging and modern drama in this new post-colony was to borrow from these dramatic styles and staging techniques. Besides the techniques, the plays he wrote during his work with the movement appropriated "... bourgeois modern moral dilemmas" (Shipley 2015, 68). In *Sons and Daughters* (1964) and *Through a Film Darkly* (1970), de Graft reveals some problems of the emerging Ghanaian bourgeoisie. While the latter focuses on money, deceit, education, and prestige, *Through a Film Darkly* problematizes the negotiation of multiple identities within this social class. The central characters in these two plays were sensitive, "... creative men caught in the pragmatics of contemporary urban Africa who are misunderstood by intimates and the world around them" (Shipley 2015, 69). Although generalized as appropriations of modern drama, some features of these plays suggest borrowing from Ibsen's repertoire – such as the subjects of money, deceit, and the middle-class (the bourgeoisie). Even though the relationship between de Graft's works and Ibsen's is not strikingly obvious, it falls within Gerard Genette's term of being "in the second degree"²⁵ (1997, 1). De Graft's plays borrowed heavily from European dramatic styles, social conflicts, and characterization to varying extents. As a result, de Graft's interest in modern European playwrights, like Ibsen, becomes evident. In relation to the culturally charged context in which he worked; a "thorough" rewriting of a modern European play might further implicate his opposition to the ideological leanings of the group.

To many in the Ghanaian theatre industry during the debut of *Sons and Daughters*, de Graft betrayed the essence of the post-

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

colonial state (Gibbs 2009, 160). De Graft's critics perceived the play as "un-African" (Shipley 2015, 68), and unsympathetic to the nationalist movement. Although he tried to tone down the "Europeanness" of the play, it did not satisfy the expectations of the theatre movement at that time. Through his characterization, it was concluded that he "... opposed the part of the African personality idea that suggested that the communal ethos is the underlying and unchanging true soul or essence of the African" (Donkor 2017, 48). Some of the reactions were stern; Sutherland perceived him as "a new colonist" (Donkor 2017, 49) and Kwabena Nketia described him as "a dramatist who has no interest in African theatre" (ibid). The criticisms of this "modern European styled" play demonstrated the stern reaction towards this genre of work. It also further implicated the strong anti-colonial sentiments that governed the theatre movement in Ghana during that period. Additionally, it highlighted the ideological intentions of displacing imperialist texts, performances forms, and techniques. A condition for reception was set for modern European drama. This meant that colonial conditions that set the tone for reception of literature had influenced early post-colonial Ghanaian politics, literature, and performance, thereby creating a site for contest and rebellion. As part of the modern European – imperialist – dramatic texts corpus, Ibsen's works directly or implicitly contributed to repertoire of themes and characters that emerged in de Graft's early post-independence dramas.

Anxieties about new forms of colonialism pushing the continent into different forms of dependency altered Nkrumah's political and economic objectives considerably.²⁶ He grew cautious of political and bilateral relationships with the United States of America and much of western Europe while the country's relationship with the Soviet Union flourished.²⁷ Cultural and educational exchanges with the Soviet Union impacted the Ghana theatre movement.²⁸ A group of selected actors were sent to Romania, then part of the Soviet Union, to train professionally.²⁹ When the actors returned, the president assembled them into a theatre group called Osagyefo Players³⁰ in 1965. This impacted

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

the theatre movement's monopoly negatively. The president, in the opening speech said: "I look upon this drama group to be the intellectual center, artistic stimulus and driving force behind the theatre movement in Ghana and the cultural renaissance of Africa" (Nkrumah, 1965).³¹ Nkrumah's interpretation of imperialism was Leninist leaning³² thus his anti-colonial stances were strict to the extent that the theatre was politicized and steered towards his ideological beliefs. Training actors in the USSR was within the president's large socialist networks and did not imply learning performances of imperialist Europe. As it appears, theater and the arts without the trappings of imperialism were safe for consumption under Nkrumah's terms. The political and ideological thoughts from which the National Theatre Movement benefited deflated its autonomy. Sutherland maintained the movement by focusing on experimentations with local and traditional performance forms while the Osagyefo Players were pushed into residence at the presidency.

Nkrumah carried his anti-colonial sentiments "too far." The economic state of the country began to suffer as his authority and cult of personality grew. A period of increasing dissatisfaction grew among the populace gravely affected his popularity in the civil service and the military. Nkrumah was also focused on the unity of independent African states, an initiative that led to the formation of the Organization of African Union. The president's popularity on the continent was also a cause of concern for other African leaders; many were wary of his apparent quest for power. In May 1965, a series of meetings among member states of the organization took place in Ghana. In preparation for this grand assembly of the heads of states, the presidential theatre group, the Osagyefo Players, selected a play for performance. The group's director, George Andoh-Wilson, chose Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. Censorship rules were strict under this government;³³ even the resident theatre group at the presidency could not escape the demands of the censorship board. The play was submitted for evaluation, and it was banned from performance.³⁴ There was no explanation provided for the play's

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

ensorship, however, propositions suggest the president's class ideologies were culpable, which then implicates the individualism of the protagonist, Dr, Stockman (Gibbs 2001, 951). Furthermore, the play's Europeanness and capitalist ideas – even though Ibsen adequately critiqued them – could have been read as problematic (ibid).

Besides the proposition that Nkrumah's ideologies influenced the censorship of this Ibsen play, the state of politics and Nkrumah's popularity could have significantly induced the injunction as well. A brief look at some events in the country's political space implicates the choice of this play in the context of politics, criticism and perhaps rebellion within Nkrumah's cult of personality.³⁵ In August 1962, a bomb blast nearly killed Nkrumah in Kulungugu (the northeastern part of Ghana), the security agencies called it an attempted assassination. Subsequently, two other assassination plots were uncovered the same year which led to the imposition of curfews and other state emergencies. Also, the Preventive Detention Act of 1961 was introduced to keep the opposition and political rivals in check.³⁶ In the wake of these security challenges, by 1963 the security services were on high alert. Further, Nkrumah grew suspicious of many people. Nkrumah became more controlling as a result. Resultantly, he began to reveal more despotic traits. A year on, the press was under control, freedom of speech was closely guarded, and many of his opponents were imprisoned.³⁷ To consolidate his power, the result of the 1964 referendum purportedly won by him overwhelmingly showed that 99.9% of Ghanaians were in favour of a one-party state. These events reference a highly polarized political context which indicate agitations, opposition political parties' contestation and desire to overthrow Nkrumah. The essence of this play is not necessarily suited in its content but the symbolism in its title – "an enemy of the people." As authority became personified in Nkrumah, he and his political party betrayed the masses that placed in him power. On the 24th of February 1966, the military took control of the government while Nkrumah was on a state visit to China and Vietnam.³⁸

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

It is clear that the title of Ibsen's play can be read at many levels with reference to Nkrumah's politics and his dwindling relationship with the masses. By not appropriating the title nor the narrative, the proposed production did not attempt to invite interpretations from the audience. It was providing a review on the state of the nation and its ruler through the lens of Ibsen. This commentary was, perhaps, the central motivation for the proposed performance of this play. While censorial rules were strict, the decision to not adapt or rewrite the play by changing the title or introducing allegories that could hide its political implications suggests a deliberate attempt to provoke the Nkrumah administration.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This periodized history of Ibsen reception in Ghana shows how complicated it could be to produce one of Ibsen's plays in some locations. It is not simply the matter of Ibsen's plays making an impact on local theatre stages but navigating through political spaces where literature and the theatre are connected to power, struggles for freedom, and cultural autonomy. Unlike other former colonies, like India where Ibsen reception thrived, Ghana's colonial administration and independent state worked to keep Ibsen away from the people. Colonial Ghana presented a context where imperial powers used literature as a tool to attempt to colonize the minds of local Ghanaians. The importation of appropriate literature for consumption created a literary space that heavily depended on prescribed reading materials. A resistance to this structure meant selecting a text out of the norm, and also about displacing a regime of a cultural order. The hypothesized entry of Ibsen's plays into colonial Ghana and the group of people within which his texts were circulated incriminated this playwright in the spaces of rebellion and contestation against colonial rule. The experience of colonialism shaped the early post-colonial era where the struggle for cultural autonomy was highly politicized. The theatre was not immune to this process since its

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

primary aim was to preserve local performance customs from the dominating western ones. The National Theatre Movement of Ghana had the mandate and ideological support from the president to implement a culturally defining performance space which directly and indirectly attempted to eliminate western theatrical forms. By involving the theatre space and industry in post-colonial politics, activities outside the firm ideological parameters were met with harsh criticism. When this post-colonial administration turned authoritarian, the Osagyefo Players attempted to critique the president through one of Ibsen's plays. In a move that echoed their predecessor, the post-colonial administration banned Ibsen.

The censorship controversies that Ibsen's plays suffered in Ghana during the period under study is not a uniquely Ghanaian experience, but it is vital to our understanding of attitudes of reader/audiences, theatre practitioners, and political contexts towards Ibsen's works. This study finds that while consumption of Ibsen's plays had potential, it was the political context that stifled their performance and popularity. As a consequence, Ghanaian theatre practitioners and scholars of this period strongly associate Ibsen with acts of rebellion or critiques of political power. The ways in which Ibsen was received and positioned in the political context of the various epochs studied offer fascinating insights into how the social significance and usage of the plays can be both politically determined and controlled. In other words, it illustrates the adaptability of Ibsen's narratives in that they can acquire added significance that reflects the new contexts into which they are circulated, read, or performed.

What this work shows, then, is that political, cultural, and social developments in a location can generate multiple dimensions to the reception of Ibsen. Hence, West Africa offers a rich patchwork of cases of Ibsen reception which have the potential to illuminate how Ibsen's plays were used as alternative modes of contesting colonial power, their rejection during the search for cultural autonomy, and expressions of disillusionment at post-independence regimes.

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

NOTES

1. See James S. Read. "Censored." *Transition* 1967, 37–41.
2. "In East Africa, it was a crime to post anything which bears or encloses any words, drawing, or pictures of a seditious, scurrilous, threatening, obscene or grossly offensive character and post authorities can open and examine to search out the questionable" (Read, 1967, 38).
3. Translates into English as "The Danish Gold Coast."
4. Besides the administrative purposes of this castle, it was a major slave holding and route where enslaved West Africans were transported to the Danish West Indies. For further interest see: Svalesen, Leif. "The Slave Ship Fredensborg: History, Shipwreck, and Find." *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 455–458.
5. Weiss, Holger, ed. *Ports of globalisation, places of creolisation: Nordic possessions in the Atlantic world during the era of the slave trade*. Brill, 2015.
6. A phrase borrowed from Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 9.
7. In the secondary schools, playwrights like Shakespeare and Sophocles were popular. Among the larger populace, Christian literature designed specifically for Africa were widely consumed. English classic novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *King Solomon Mines* were popular and accepted literary products. See Newell 2002, 70–113.
8. As cited in Philip Garigue's "The West African Students' Union: a study in culture contact" (1953). This quotation is curled from Dr. J.B. Danquah's preface to Ladipo Solanke's *United West Africa*, WASU pamphlet. Danquah doubled as a student and the editor of the union's pamphlet. He later became the president of WASU. Solanke was a Nigerian law student who led the formation of this student union.
9. The union's leader Solanke went on a tour in Nigeria, The Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. On this tour, he helped form local student unions and thus promoted the ideologies of WASU.
10. "In West Africa, bans were directed in the 1930s against certain publications from across the Atlantic: *The Negro Worker* was proscribed in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, but policies were not always coordinated: *African and the World* was banned in the Gold Coast only and *The Negro Champion* and *The Gaelic American* in Nigeria. In the 1950s, the censor's attention turned elsewhere: now bans were imposed on publications of the International Union of Students" (Read 1967, 40).
11. The Ibsen play at the center of this controversy is not known. The various documents I reviewed did not specify the play selected for performance.
12. See also: Britain, I. M. "Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, and the Ethics of English Socialism." *Victorian Studies* 21.3 (1978): 381–401.
13. Stephanie Newell aptly describes this decade as 'stormy' due to the emerging initiatives that occurred in literary reception and expressions in

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

- locally owned newspapers. Many of these owners were the political influential local colonial subjects. See Newell 2013, 12.
14. For further interest in the politicized nature of British West African newspapers and censorship, see Newell's *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa* (2013).
 15. The ancient Ghana Empire was a West African Empire which existed between 6th to 13th century. It was a vast location representative of present-day Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali.
 16. "Geoffrey Axworthy, like many other expatriates in the British colonies was British. In 1951, he took up a teaching job in Nigeria in the early 1950s in the Department of English, University College, Ibadan, from where he was deployed as the first Director of the School of Drama in 1962. Axworthy, who was an accomplished stage director, administrator, and teacher, is best remembered for bringing two of Wole Soyinka's early plays to Nigeria from London in 1959; i.e. *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and The Jewel*, and also for the *Artiste-in-Residence Programme* of Kola Ogunmola in 1962, which led to the historic production of Amos Tutuola's novel, *The Palmwine Drinkard*. He returned to England in 1967 where he took up the job of Director, Sherman Theatre, University College, Cardiff, Wales, and he remained there until retirement. He died on Thursday, April 16, 1992, at the age of 64." (From the brochure of the first Geoffrey Axworthy Lecture at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria) <https://www.ui.edu.ng/content/1st-geoffrey-axworthy-lecture> accessed: 02.06.2018.
 17. See also Donkor 2017, 29.
 18. *ibid*
 19. Osofisan, Femi. "The Attainment of Discovery: Efua Sutherland and the Evolution of Modern African Drama," in Adams and Sutherland-Addy (eds.) *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland*. Oxford: Ayebia Clarke Pub. 2007, 23.
 20. Famous Nigerian writers Soyinka and Achebe spent time in Ghana as artists in residencies, and they also engaged with known Ghanaian writers. On the political front, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's first visit to Nigeria as a political leader was in 1959. He was in attendance at the first All African People's Conference, which Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe praised as the commencement of the Federation of Independent West African States. For further interest, read Bukola Saraki's article in the *Vanguard* called "Nigeria-Ghana: The Imperative Unity" at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/03/nigeria-ghana-imperative-unity-bukola-saraki/> accessed: 02.06.2018.
 21. For further reading on what appears to be the conventional narrative about the reception of modern European texts on the post-colonial western African stage, see Wetmore (2002), Amankulor (1993), July (1987), Balme (1999), Budelmann (2004), and the list goes on.
 22. Prior to joining the theatre movement, de Graft worked as a teacher at Mfantshipim School. As a teacher in a secondary school, de Graft organized

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

drama societies and performance. He also experimented with adapting modern European plays into the popular Ghanaian Concert Party tradition. A document attempt of his was the staging of a Concert Party version of Chekhov's play, *The Bear and The Proposal*. Sutherland was educated in Oxford and returned home to work as a teacher. Unlike de Graft, Sutherland engaged in the Pan Africanist movement at that time. She married Bill Sutherland a young African American Pan African who relocated to Ghana to serve in the Nkrumah administration.

23. Some notable persons who were a part of resident performers and writers at the studio were Felix Morisseau-Leroy from Haiti, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria and Maya Angelou from the United States of America. Morisseau-Leroy was in exile from Haiti and while in Ghana he was the "National Organizer of Drama and Literature" (Gibbs 2009, 26). Like the many other artists in residence, Morisseau-Leroy appears to be a dramatist from the diaspora that left a lasting ideological influence on the Ghanaian theatre scene. He was the brain behind what became known as the Nkrumah's Brigade Concert Party, which was ran on a socialist ideology. Influenced by Nkrumah's Pan Africanist thought and his own socialist ideas, Morisseau-Leroy attempted to politicize the Concert Party popular theatre form. He maintained that: "Here in Ghana, our concern is for the maintenance of the functional character of our People's Theatre" (Gibbs 2009, 27).
24. Morisseau-Leroy and others labeled de Graft as being blinded by the idea of "artistic liberty" and "ideological neutrality" to "the reality of their ideological commitment to the opposing side of Africa's struggle for cultural emancipation" (Morisseau-Leroy, 1968:91 as cited in Donkor 2017, 49).
25. Genette explores texts from a trans-textual point of view where several mechanisms connect texts to each other. Secondary signals can also indicate a relationship uniting "text B" to an earlier "text A." For example, staging styles, characterization and plot development could signal instances of invocation of an earlier text but not explicitly. In de Graft's work, specific stylistic and thematic feature orient with Ibsen's plays. Although not explicit, a network of imitation is identifiable.
26. Maya Angelou who lived in Accra at the height of the country's nationalism and post-colonial politics was also concerned, somewhat disillusioned as well. "The year 1964 was a difficult one for me. I'd been editor of the Ghana edition of *Drum* magazine for over three years, during which I'd been attempting to straddle the very frisky political horse that Ghana was riding. The strain had been making me ride close to the very edge of the saddle. This horse was itself confused. On the one hand, it wanted to achieve socialism, with all the totalitarian features that such a system incorporates. On the other hand, Ghanaian society was brought up, traditionally, to value freedom of thought: in our chiefs' courts, for instance,

(Post) Colonial Ghanaian Attitudes Towards Ibsen

- we could say what we wanted to say and not be punished” (Cameron Doudou’s conversation with Maya Angelou). <https://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2018/February-27th/maya-angelous-african-connection.php> accessed: 28.02.2018.
27. See also Biney, Ama. “Nkrumah’s Foreign Policy, 1958–1966.” *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011. 135–154.
 28. More than 600 Ghanaian students studied in the USSR between 1957 and 1966. See Katsakioris, Constantin. “Nkrumah’s Elite: Ghanaian students in the Soviet Union in the Cold War.” *Paedagogica Historica* 57.3 (2021): 260–276.
 29. Solomon Sampah, a former member of this theatre group clarified that the members were “hand-picked by Nkrumah” (interview cited in Shipley, 2015:76) and the dramatic repertoire was “western oriented” (ibid).
 30. Osagyefo means “redeemer” in Akan. In some Akan traditional chieftaincy institutions, it is a title used by chiefs. During Ghana’s independence celebration, Nkrumah was hailed “Osagyefo.” This name/title often prefix to his name, even on official documents.
 31. An excerpt of Kwame Nkrumah’s on the inauguration of the Osagyefo Players at the Flagstaff House in Accra. Retrieved from <http://nkrumahinfobank.org/article.php?id=446&c=51> accessed 28.02.2018
 32. For further reading see: Mazuri Ali A. “Nkrumah: The Leninist Czar” *Transition* 75/76 (1997):106–126; also, Nkrumah’s book, *Towards Colonial Freedom*.
 33. “In Ghana, by 1965, Nkrumah has banned a number of books which he considered subversive In Ghana, by 1965, President Nkrumah had banned a number of books which he considered subversive (including *Africa Now*, *The Evangelical* and *General Alexander’s African tightrope*). *Drum* was banned for a short period in 1960. But the President had also acquired in 1960 the power to place internal publications or persons under censorship. In 1962, press correspondents were obliged to submit their despatches to prior censorship. The *Ashanti Pioneer* was placed under censorship three times before it finally ceased publication” (Read 1967, 40).
 34. See also Gibbs 2001, 951.
 35. Nkrumah had a large personality cult made up of loyal party members, elite students trained in the USSR, Pan-Africanists, and local politicians. According to Mazuri and many other historians these personality cults made Nkrumah “less opened to frank advice” (1997, 125).
 36. Fischer writes: “His style of government turned increasingly authoritarian. In 1961, one year after independence, he introduced legislation, which allowed the government to send people to prison for five years without trial” (DW, 24.02.2016). For further reading see: <http://www.dw.com/en/>

SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

- ghanas-kwame-nkrumah-visionary-authoritarian-ruler-and-national-hero/a-19070359. See also: Skinner, Kate. "Who knew the minds of the people? Specialist knowledge and developmentalist authoritarianism in postcolonial Ghana." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39.2 (2011): 297–323.
37. "Being disrespectful of the president became a criminal offence. Nkrumah controlled the media and his party's influence extended into almost all civil society organizations" (Fischer 2016).
38. The people were delighted that Nkrumah had been deprived of his power because freedom of speech was closely guarded, many were imprisoned unjustly, and cost of living was high. Many were angry and there were many strikes, which appeared to have gone unnoticed by the administration. "We had to queue up at the stadium to get our ration of sugar" (recalls Mike Ocquaye, a Ghanaian professor of politics as cited in Fischer 2016).

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SOLACE SEFAKOR ANKU

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