

Reconstructing History Through Drama: A New Historicist Study Of Modern African Plays

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Abstract: *This study explores the reconstruction of history in modern African drama through the theoretical framework of New Historicism. African playwrights have consistently employed drama as a medium for revisiting historical events, interrogating political structures, and preserving cultural memory within postcolonial African societies. The paper argues that modern African plays are not merely artistic expressions but significant historical and ideological texts that engage with the socio-political realities of their time. Drawing on the ideas of Stephen Greenblatt and other New Historicist scholars, the study examines the interconnectedness between literary texts and historical contexts. Using qualitative textual analysis, selected plays by prominent African dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, and Athol Fugard are critically analysed to demonstrate how drama reconstructs colonial experiences, political oppression, cultural conflicts, and resistance movements in Africa. The findings reveal that modern African drama serves as a powerful instrument for historical reinterpretation, ideological resistance, and socio-political consciousness. The study concludes that New Historicism offers an effective framework for understanding the complex relationship between literature and historical reality in African dramatic traditions, while also reaffirming the significance of drama as both a literary and historical discourse in contemporary Africa.*

Keywords: African Drama, New Historicism, Historical Reality, Postcolonial Literature, Literary Representation

Introduction

The relationship between literature and history remains a significant scholarly subject. Literature reflects, interrogates, and reconstructs human realities within historical contexts, while history documents past events and cultural developments shaping societies. Literary texts emerge from historical circumstances while contributing to historical interpretation and preservation, functioning as alternative archives for suppressed voices and cultural memories (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000; Williams, 1977). Drama possesses unique capacity to mirror society through its performative and representational nature, reflecting social conditions, political tensions, and historical experiences. African dramatists employ drama for social criticism, political engagement, and historical reconstruction, extending beyond entertainment to interrogate oppression, expose socio-political contradictions, and preserve indigenous consciousness. Rooted in communal experience and oral tradition, African drama engages colonialism, neo-colonialism, dictatorship, corruption, cultural displacement, and resistance movements (Breitinger, 1999; Ricard, 2000).

Historical consciousness occupies central place in African literature due to colonial and postcolonial experiences. Writers reclaim distorted histories, challenge colonial narratives, and reconstruct indigenous realities, dramatizing struggles against colonial domination, post-independence crises, military authoritarianism, and societal inequalities. Drama becomes a site where history, ideology, and cultural identity intersect (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Soyinka, 1976). Modern African drama emerged from indigenous performance traditions and socio-political transformations accompanying colonialism and independence. Traditional performances existed as rituals, festivals, storytelling, and communal theatre, while modern drama developed as written literature influenced by Western education and postcolonial realities. Playwrights like Soyinka, Ngũgĩ, Osofisan, and Fugard interrogate political power, colonial violence, apartheid, corruption, and resistance (Clark-Bekederemo, 1980; Etherton, 1982).

New Historicism emphasizes inseparable relationships between literary texts and historical contexts. Emerging through Greenblatt's works, the theory rejects studying literature independently of historical forces, arguing texts are products of specific socio-political conditions while history is constructed through narratives. New Historicism provides effective framework for examining how dramatists reconstruct historical realities, negotiate power, and challenge dominant historical discourses (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000; Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989). Despite growing scholarship, gaps remain in studies examining historical reality reconstruction in modern African plays through New Historicism. Existing studies often focus on postcolonial themes without adequately exploring literature-history interaction or dramatic texts as alternative historical narratives contesting official histories (Atteh, 2025; Oso, 2022). This study investigates history reconstruction through drama in selected modern African plays using New Historicism, examining representation of historical realities, power engagement, and dramatic techniques reconstructing socio-political experiences.

Conceptual Clarifications

Literature as Social Representation

Literature encompasses imaginative creative works expressed through language for artistic, social, moral, and intellectual purposes, reflecting human experiences and societal realities. Literary texts serve as cultural products embodying people's consciousness within socio-historical contexts (Eagleton, 1983; Culler, 1997). Literature mirrors society by reflecting realities, contradictions, values, and experiences characterizing human societies. In African context, literature reflects colonial domination, political instability, corruption, poverty, cultural conflict, and resistance, interrogating societal problems and stimulating consciousness (Achebe, 1975; Ngũgĩ, 1986).

Literature-ideology relationships strengthen literature's social representation role. Ideology comprises belief systems, values, assumptions, and power structures influencing reality understanding. Literary texts shaped by ideological forces challenge dominant ideologies by exposing injustice and giving voice to marginalized groups. African dramatists employ literature for ideological resistance against colonialism, authoritarian governance, and socio-economic exploitation (Althusser, 1971; Jameson, 1981).

Historical Reality in African Context

Historical reality refers to actual social, political, cultural, and economic events shaping societies, encompassing lived experiences, institutional structures, conflicts, transformations, and collective memories. In literary discourse, historical reality includes interpretation and representation of historical experiences within cultural narratives, aligning with New Historicism's view that literature and history are interconnected representations influenced by power, ideology, and social conditions (Greenblatt, 1980; White, 1973).

African historical reality connects to colonial and postcolonial experiences. Colonialism disrupted indigenous political systems, cultural institutions, economic structures, and social identities, generating social dislocation, identity crises, political resistance, and cultural conflicts central to African literature. Post-independence challenges including neo-colonialism, dictatorship, ethnic conflict, corruption, and instability shape thematic concerns of modern dramatists (Fanon, 1963; Nkrumah, 1965). Postcolonial political and cultural realities influence literary production. Playwrights dramatize bad governance, abuse of power, electoral violence, social injustice, gender inequality, civil war, migration, and cultural alienation, exploring tensions between traditional African values and Western influences. Drama preserves historical memory, critiques societal failures, and advocates transformation (Gikandi, 1991; Osofisan, 2001).

Modern African Drama

Modern African drama emerged from interaction between indigenous performance traditions and external literary influences during colonialism. Traditional performances served religious, social, political, and cultural functions, while formal written drama developed through Western education, missionary activities, colonial institutions, and nationalist consciousness (Adedeji, 1971; Clark-Bekederemo, 1980; Kennedy, 1973). Evolution represents transition from oral communal performances to written dramatic texts. Early playwrights employed drama for cultural assertion and anti-colonial resistance; post-independence drama focused on corruption, dictatorship, civil unrest, and leadership failures. Playwrights including Soyinka, Ngũgĩ, Osofisan, and Fugard contributed significantly through politically conscious works (Breitinger, 1999; Gikandi, 1991; Ricard, 2000).

Modern African drama addresses diverse themes: colonial oppression, cultural identity, nationalism, corruption, political violence, class struggle, gender inequality, social injustice, resistance, and authentic identity search. Dramatists employ symbolism, satire, irony, myth, and historical reconstruction to expose contradictions and criticize oppressive systems (Babalola, 2000; Oso, 2022). Drama serves as resistance instrument and historical documentation. Playwrights reconstruct historical experiences to challenge colonial narratives, preserve indigenous memories, and expose oppression, recording struggles, political crises, and cultural transformations from African perspectives. Drama transcends entertainment, becoming powerful medium for social critique, historical reconstruction, and cultural preservation (Atteh, 2025; Omotayo, 2020; Uka, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: New Historicism

This study anchors on New Historicism, emphasizing literature-history relationships and arguing texts cannot be understood outside socio-historical production conditions. The theory emerged against formalist approaches focusing on textual structure while neglecting historical, political, and cultural influences, seeking to reconnect literary studies with historical analysis by examining text interactions with power structures, ideological formations, and cultural realities (Greenblatt, 1980; Veenser, 1989). New Historicism originated in late twentieth-century United States, influenced by post-structuralism, cultural studies, and French theorists like Foucault. Stephen Greenblatt shaped theory development, challenging traditional historicist criticism by rejecting history as objective and fixed, arguing history is constructed through narratives, language, ideology, and discourse (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000; Greenblatt, 1980).

Major proponents include Greenblatt, Montrose, Gallagher, and Foucault, whose discourse and power ideas influenced the theory. Greenblatt emphasized social energy circulation within literary and cultural texts, arguing literature reflects ideological tensions. Foucault's power relations, discourse formation, and institutional control became central to analysis (Foucault, 1972; Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989). Core assumptions: literature and history are inseparable; literary texts are products of historical conditions; historical narratives are textual constructions shaped by ideology and power. Unlike traditional criticism treating

literature autonomously, New Historicism views works embedded in political authority, cultural beliefs, social practices, and ideological struggles (Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989).

Dynamic text-history relationships: literary texts shape and are shaped by historical realities, reflecting conditions while influencing cultural perceptions and ideological consciousness. Literature participates in constructing social meaning and historical understanding; analysis examines engagement with political events, cultural conflicts, institutional structures, and societal anxieties (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000; Veesser, 1989).

New Historicism provides valuable framework for analysing how African dramatists transform historical experiences into artistic representations challenging official histories and dominant ideologies. Through dramatic reconstruction, playwrights preserve marginalized voices, question political authority, and expose socio-cultural contradictions (Oso, 2022).

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research design examining history reconstruction in selected modern African plays through New Historicism. Qualitative research allows detailed textual interpretation, critical analysis, and contextual examination within socio-historical environments, focusing on understanding dramatic engagement with historical realities, ideological structures, and power relations (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Textual analysis and content analysis serve as primary investigation methods. Textual analysis examines themes, symbols, language, characterization, dramatic techniques, and historical representations; content analysis identifies recurring socio-political issues (colonialism, resistance, corruption, cultural conflict, oppression, postcolonial identity) embedded in dramatic texts (Fairclough, 1995; McKee, 2003).

Primary texts: *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka (1975), *Morountodun* by Femi Osofisan (1982), and *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* by Athol Fugard (1972). Purposively selected for engaging historical realities across diverse African contexts, providing perspectives on colonialism, apartheid, cultural conflict, political resistance, and identity formation (Atteh, 2025; Oso, 2022; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994).

Death and the King's Horseman reconstructs historical encounter between African traditional institutions and British colonial administration in Nigeria, exploring colonial interference, cultural misunderstanding, power relations, and indigenous tradition disruption (Atteh, 2025; Soyinka, 1975).

Morountodun reflects postcolonial Nigerian socio-political realities, revisiting peasant resistance and class struggle experiences, engaging oppression, ideology, revolutionary consciousness, and social inequality (Osofisan, 1982; Raji, 2009; Austen-Peters, 2003).

Sizwe Banzi Is Dead dramatizes apartheid South Africa realities, exposing racial oppression dehumanization, institutionalized discrimination, identity, survival, political domination, and social injustice (Fugard, 1972; Seidu, 2024; Kruger, 1999).

Selection informed by literary significance and strong historical discourse engagement. Playwrights employ drama for societal crisis documentation, collective memory preservation, and oppressive structure challenges, providing rich materials for analysing literature-history relationships (Breitinger, 1999; Gikandi, 1991).

Analytical approach grounded in New Historicism principles. Plays analysed in relation to socio-political, cultural, and historical production conditions, focusing on power systems, ideological formations, and historical experiences representation (Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989). Analysis focuses on "historicity of texts" and "textuality of history" concepts, investigating how selected plays are shaped by historical realities while reconstructing and reinterpreting history through dramatic narrative, treating plays as literary works and historical documents participating in socio-political meaning production (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000; Oso, 2022).

Literature and Historical Reconstruction in Modern African Drama

Modern African drama occupies significant position in reconstructing and interpreting African historical experiences. Playwrights revisit colonial encounters, expose postcolonial political failures, interrogate oppression, and preserve cultural memory. Drama functions as entertainment, historical archive, political commentary, and resistance instrument against domination (Babalola, 2000; Irele, 1990; Okafor, 1998). Selected plays demonstrate how dramatists reconstruct socio-political realities through dramatic discourse, engaging colonialism, apartheid, dictatorship, corruption, cultural alienation, class oppression, and resistance movements, revealing complex literature-history interaction.

Colonialism and Cultural Displacement

Colonialism disrupted indigenous political systems, religious practices, cultural institutions, and social identities. African dramatists reconstruct these experiences to expose foreign domination destructive effects and cultural dislocation, challenging colonial narratives of African inferiority (Achebe, 1975; Ngũgĩ, 1986; Soyinka, 1976). In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka dramatizes conflict between indigenous Yoruba tradition and British colonial authority. Ritual suicide interruption by colonial officials symbolizes destructive interference in African cultural practices, revealing colonialism's failure to understand African spiritual foundations. Colonial encounter reflects broader historical realities associated with Western authority imposition (Atteh, 2025; Soyinka, 1975).

Loss of indigenous identity emerges as major colonial domination consequence. Colonialism imposed foreign languages, religions, educational systems, political structures weakening traditional values and cultural consciousness. Dramatists reconstruct experiences to reclaim indigenous identity and cultural dignity, emphasizing tension between African heritage and Western influence (Appiah, 1992; Gikandi, 1991). Cultural domination represented through indigenous knowledge suppression and colonial ideology promotion. African playwrights resist by reconstructing indigenous histories and cultural experiences from African perspectives, making drama cultural resistance preserving collective memory and reasserting African identity (Boahen, 1987; Irele, 1990; Ngũgĩ, 1986).

Power, Politics, and Postcolonial Leadership

Critique of political leadership and abuse of power in postcolonial African states constitutes important dramatic concern. Following independence, nations experienced political instability, military dictatorship, corruption, and authoritarian governance. Dramatists expose postcolonial leadership failures and socio-political contradictions (Adebayo, 2009; Okonkwo, 1995).

Military dictatorship recurs in African dramatic literature due to authoritarian regimes prevalence. Playwrights portray oppressive political systems suppressing freedom, violating human rights, silencing opposition through satire, symbolism, and political allegory, reflecting historical realities of military intervention and democratic development negative consequences (Akinwumi, 2000; Olaniyan, 2000).

Corruption occupies central place in modern African plays. Postcolonial leaders portrayed as selfish, exploitative, disconnected from citizens, mismanaging resources while poverty and inequality persist. In *Morountodun*, Osofisan critiques class oppression and socio-political inequality by exposing ruling elite-oppressed masses contradictions, reconstructing historical struggles associated with peasant resistance (Osofisan, 1982; Obasi & Aloysius-Orjinta, 2013; Raji, 2009).

Resistance and National Consciousness

Resistance against oppression remains defining feature of modern African drama. Playwrights reconstruct anti-colonial struggles, liberation movements, and protest narratives to promote national consciousness and social transformation. Drama preserves and reinterprets historical struggles for contemporary audiences (Breitinger, 1999; Oso, 2022).

Anti-colonial struggle represented in African dramatic literature due to continent's colonial domination experience. Dramatists celebrate resistance movements and nationalist struggles challenging foreign control, preserving collective resistance memory while exposing colonial brutality and exploitation, reinforcing national identity, cultural pride, and political liberation importance (Fanon, 1963; Nkrumah, 1965; Soyinka, 1976).

Protest narratives occupy significant position. Playwrights employ drama to challenge social injustice, political oppression, economic exploitation, making text ideological confrontation site where dominant power structures questioned and resisted. Oppressed characters symbolize broader societal struggles against domination, encouraging critical consciousness and collective resistance (Eke & Ambrose, 2025; Babalola, 2000).

Liberation movements reconstructed as important historical experiences. Selected plays demonstrate how individuals and communities resist oppression through sacrifice, solidarity, and political consciousness, portraying resistance as physical confrontation, cultural assertion, and ideological struggle. African drama contributes to national consciousness by encouraging societies to confront historical injustices and pursue social transformation (Omotayo, 2020; Uka, 2021).

Gender and Historical Silencing

Gender representation constitutes important historical reconstruction dimension. Historically, women marginalized from official historical narratives despite social and political struggle contributions. African dramatists recover women's voices and challenge patriarchal structures silencing female experiences (Adeola, 2000; Nnaemeka, 1998).

Women portrayed as victims of colonial and patriarchal oppression, with traditional structures limiting public participation and decision-making. However, modern dramatists challenge limitations by presenting female characters as active participants in resistance movements and societal transformation, repositioning women as important historical and political discourse agents (Arndt, 2000; Maduka, 2000).

Patriarchy and representation remain central African literary criticism concerns. Male-dominated structures shape historical narratives and literary production. Contemporary dramatists increasingly challenge patriarchal assumptions by presenting women as politically conscious, intellectually capable, and socially influential (Bâ, 1980; Ogunyemi, 1996).

In *Morountodun*, female representation becomes significant through protagonist transformation developing political awareness and solidarity with oppressed peasants, challenging class privilege and gender expectations while demonstrating women's resistance and social change role. African drama contests historical silencing and contributes to gender, identity, and power discussions (Osofisan, 1982; Austen-Peters, 2003; Obasi & Aloysius-Orjinta, 2013).

New Historicist Reading of Selected Texts

Reading modern African drama through New Historicism reveals dramatic texts deeply embedded in historical, political, and ideological production conditions. Rather than treating plays as isolated aesthetic artefacts, New Historicism situates them within

power relations, cultural struggles, and historical realities networks, connecting dramatic events to historical experiences, ideological structures, political discourse, and broader societal power relations.

Death and the King's Horseman and Colonial Ideological Conflict

Soyinka presents dramatic conflict rooted in historical encounter between British colonial administration and Yoruba traditional authority. From New Historicist perspective, play represents colonial power interfering with indigenous epistemologies and spiritual systems. District Officer Pilkings embodies imperial authority and rationalist ideology clashing with Yoruba metaphysical and ritual worldview. Elesin's ritual suicide prevention becomes symbolic colonial intervention disrupting cosmological balance (Soyinka, 1975; Atteh, 2025).

Historically, colonial administrations misunderstood or suppressed indigenous practices misaligned with Western legal and moral frameworks. Dramatic tension reflects this historical reality, where colonial power asserts ideological dominance over local customs. Text becomes ideological conflict site between African traditional cosmology and Western colonial rationality, reconstructing history as struggle over meaning, authority, and cultural legitimacy (Atteh, 2025; Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989).

Power and discourse perspective illustrates colonial authority operating through institutional control, language, and ideological imposition. Colonial officers assume moral superiority dismissing indigenous rituals as barbaric, reflecting Foucault's circulation of power through discourse where knowledge systems justify domination. Indigenous community resists ideological imposition by maintaining cultural values and ritual obligations despite colonial disruption, revealing complex power negotiation (Foucault, 1972; Greenblatt, 1980).

Characterization reinforces ideological conflict. Elesin embodies Yoruba tradition, honour, and spiritual obligation; Pilkings symbolizes colonial authority, legalism, and cultural arrogance. Clash reflects broader historical tensions between African traditional institutions and colonial administrative structures. Soyinka's dramatic techniques, particularly ritual and symbolism use, elevate indigenous perspective while exposing colonial rationality limitations, functioning as historical reconstruction challenging colonial narratives of African cultural inferiority (Soyinka, 1975).

Recent scholarship affirms play's relevance to contemporary postcolonial discourse. Atteh (2025) confirms play as alternative history source offering insights into past and societal growth relevance. Onwe and Afolabi (2024) discuss New Historicism and postcoloniality in cultural change context, providing framework for understanding Soyinka's colonial history dramatic reconstruction.

Play's conclusion, where colonial intervention leads to tragedy and cosmic disorder, reinforces New Historicist argument that literature reflects historical action consequences. Ritual order disruption results in Elesin's son's death and cultural dislocation perpetuation, suggesting colonial interference produces lasting damage shaping postcolonial African experiences. Soyinka contributes to historical consciousness while critiquing colonial domination ideological foundations (Atteh, 2025; Soyinka, 1975).

Morountodun and Postcolonial Class Struggle

Osofisan reconstructs peasant resistance and class struggle historical narrative within Nigerian society. Drawing from agrarian revolts and revolutionary consciousness historical events, play explores ideology, oppression, and liberation. From New Historicist perspective, text reflects postcolonial Nigerian socio-economic realities where class divisions and political inequality remain significant (Osofisan, 1982; Raji, 2009).

Dramatic events connect to historical struggles between ruling elite and marginalized rural populations. Titubi undergoes ideological transformation from privileged background into solidarity with oppressed peasants, reflecting broader historical realities of political awakening and class consciousness in postcolonial African societies. Play becomes medium reconstructing and reinterpreting resistance historical experiences (Althusser, 1971; Jameson, 1981).

Ideologically, *Morountodun* exposes postcolonial governance contradictions, particularly state authority-popular suffering gap. Ruling class depicted as exploitative and disconnected from ordinary people, while oppressed groups engage in resistance responding to systemic injustice. This reflects New Historicist concerns with ideology shaping social relations and legitimizing power structures, functioning as both historical reconstruction and ideological critique (Adebayo, 2009; Raji, 2009).

Obasi and Aloysius-Orjinta (2013) examine play through Marxist lens, demonstrating Osofisan's dramatic techniques (satire, irony, allegory) exposing postcolonial governance failures and advocating social transformation. Austen-Peters (2003) analyses mytho-historical base comparing to Jean Giraudoux's dramatic traditions. These analyses align with New Historicist principles revealing literary engagement with societal ideological tensions.

Women representation in *Morountodun* illustrates New Historicist concern with marginalized voices and historical silencing. Titubi's transformation from privileged individual to revolutionary figure challenges patriarchal assumptions and class hierarchies, demonstrating women as active resistance agents and contesting historical narratives marginalizing female political struggle contributions. Osofisan contributes to women's historical experiences recovery within African dramatic literature (Osofisan, 1982; Raji, 2009).

Revolutionary ideology engagement reflects broader historical contexts of political activism and social movements in Africa. Osofisan draws inspiration from historical social justice struggles while encouraging contemporary audiences to question oppression systems. Dramatic peasant resistance reconstruction serves as reminder of class struggle continuing relevance in

postcolonial African societies, aligning with New Historicist arguments that literary texts participate in historical meaning and ideological consciousness construction (Jameson, 1981; Oso, 2022).

Sizwe Banzi Is Dead and Apartheid's Dehumanization

Fugard, with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, presents powerful dramatization of apartheid dehumanizing effects in South Africa. Play reconstructs racial oppression, institutionalized discrimination, and identity struggle historical realities under repressive political system. From New Historicist perspective, text reflects apartheid socio-political conditions while interrogating racial domination ideological foundations (Fugard, 1972; Kruger, 1999).

Central conflict revolves around protagonist's need to obtain passbook determining legal status, work ability, and urban residence. This bureaucratic requirement reflects apartheid legislation historical reality, particularly pass laws restricting black South African movement and economic opportunities. Passbook symbolizes state control and dehumanization, reducing individuals to administrative documents rather than recognizing humanity, exposing ideological mechanisms maintaining racial oppression (Fugard, 1972; Seidu, 2024).

Identity central to play as Sizwe must assume dead man's identity for employment and survival. Dramatic situation reflects existential crisis experienced by black South Africans under apartheid, where identities defined and constrained by state regulations. Play reconstructs identity suppression and resistance historical experiences, demonstrating individual survival negotiation within oppressive systems. From New Historicist perspective, text reflects apartheid society power relations and ideological structures (Foucault, 1972; Greenblatt, 1980).

Seidu (2024) explores colonialism elements in play, arguing characters' identity struggle reveals apartheid psychological impact. Loss and identity reinvention become survival strategies in system denying basic human dignity. Psychological dimension reflects broader apartheid historical realities where racial discrimination produced profound psychological trauma and social dislocation. Play contributes to historical documentation while exposing institutionalized racism human costs.

Performance and storytelling use within dramatic structure reflects African oral traditions and communal experiences. Styles, the photographer, serves as narrator and commentator framing events within broader historical contexts; his photographs represent dignity and identity preservation attempts against dehumanization. This dramatic technique aligns with New Historicist concerns with literary texts reflecting and shaping cultural practices within specific historical conditions (Fugard, 1972; Kruger, 1999).

Resistance portrayed through characters' determination to survive and maintain humanity despite oppressive conditions. Sizwe's new identity adoption represents resistance against apartheid's dehumanization, though at personal identity cost. Play reconstructs resistance historical experiences as survival and defiance acts, reinforcing New Historicist argument that literary texts participate in ideological struggles by challenging dominant power structures (Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989).

Collaborative creation with black South African actors and playwrights reflects collective voices importance in historical reconstruction. Text emerges from lived experiences under apartheid, making it authentic historical document and literary work. Collaborative dimension aligns with New Historicist principles emphasizing text embeddedness within specific historical and cultural conditions (Fugard, 1972; Kruger, 1999).

Findings and Discussion

Analysis through New Historicism reveals significant findings concerning history reconstruction through drama. Selected texts demonstrate African dramatists employ drama as powerful medium engaging historical realities, interrogating power systems, and preserving cultural memory within postcolonial societies.

Representation of Colonial and Postcolonial Historical Realities

Modern African drama reconstructs historical realities by representing colonial encounters and consequences on African societies. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka dramatizes ideological conflict between indigenous African traditions and colonial authority, revealing colonialism's cultural system disruption and foreign value imposition. *Morountodun* reflects postcolonial class struggle and political oppression realities, exposing independent African state contradictions. *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* reconstructs apartheid historical experiences, demonstrating institutionalized racism's black population dehumanization and identity restriction.

These representations align with New Historicist assumptions that literary texts are specific historical conditions products. Plays emerge from distinct historical contexts: colonial Nigeria, postcolonial Nigeria, and apartheid South Africa. Playwrights respond to political, social, cultural environment realities, transforming historical experiences into dramatic narratives critiquing oppression systems (Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989).

Interrogation of Power and Ideology

Modern African playwrights critically examine power relations and ideological structures within societies. Texts expose political authority operation through institutional control, legislation, and ideological imposition. *Death and the King's Horseman* portrays colonial power as arrogant, culturally insensitive, imposing foreign values while dismissing indigenous knowledge.

Morountodun depicts postcolonial power as exploitative, disconnected from popular suffering, perpetuating class divisions and social injustice. *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* represents apartheid power as dehumanizing, oppressive, reducing individuals to administrative categories while denying humanity.

Representations reflect New Historicist concerns with power circulation through discourse, institutions, and social practices. Playwrights employ drama to expose oppressive systems' ideological foundations and challenge narratives justifying inequality and domination, making African drama ideological resistance and social critique site (Foucault, 1972; Greenblatt, 1980).

Cultural Preservation and Historical Memory

Modern African drama functions as medium preserving cultural memory and challenging official historical narratives. Playwrights reconstruct indigenous histories and cultural experiences from African perspectives, countering colonial representations marginalizing or distorting African realities. Selected texts preserve collective memories of resistance, cultural identity, and social struggles otherwise forgotten or suppressed.

This aligns with New Historicism's "textuality of history" concept arguing historical narratives constructed through language and representation. African dramatists contribute to alternative histories construction challenging dominant power structures and preserving marginalized voices, participating in cultural meaning and historical consciousness production (Greenblatt, 1980; Montrose, 1989).

Resistance and National Consciousness

Modern African drama represents resistance movements and liberation struggles as important historical experiences. Selected plays portray characters resisting oppression through sacrifice, solidarity, and political consciousness. Anti-colonial resistance, class struggle, and apartheid resistance reconstructed as significant historical experiences contributing to national consciousness and social transformation.

Representation reflects New Historicist argument that literary texts participate in ideological struggles by challenging dominant power structures. African playwrights employ drama to encourage critical consciousness and collective resistance among audiences, reinforcing social justice and political liberation importance within African societies (Eke & Ambrose, 2025; Oso, 2022).

Gender and Historical Silencing

Modern African drama addresses gender representation and historical silencing. Selected texts challenge patriarchal assumptions by presenting women as active historical experience and resistance movement participants. In *Morountodun*, female protagonist undergoes political transformation becoming social change agent, contesting narratives marginalizing women's resistance contributions.

Finding reflects New Historicist concerns with marginalized voices and historical narrative construction. African dramatists contribute to women's historical experiences recovery by representing female characters as politically conscious, intellectually capable, and socially influential, contesting historical silencing and contributing to gender, identity, and power discussions (Adeola, 2000; Arndt, 2000).

Drama as Historical Documentation

Modern African drama functions as alternative historical archive documenting societal struggles, political crises, and cultural transformations. Selected texts provide valuable insights into historical experiences excluded from official narratives, preserving collective memory and contributing to historical understanding within African societies.

Finding aligns with New Historicist arguments that literary texts serve as important historical documents reflecting and shaping historical consciousness. African drama transcends artistic expression to assume historical documentation and cultural preservation role, demonstrating drama's contribution to historical knowledge construction and cultural memory preservation (Atteh, 2025; Oso, 2022).

Conclusion

This study examined history reconstruction in modern African drama through New Historicism. Analysis of selected plays by Soyinka, Osofisan, and Fugard demonstrated modern African drama serves as powerful medium engaging historical realities, interrogating power systems, and preserving cultural memory within postcolonial African societies. Study revealed dramatists reconstruct historical experiences by representing colonial encounters, political oppression, cultural conflicts, resistance movements, and gender struggles through dramatic discourse. Selected plays reflect specific historical conditions while challenging dominant narratives marginalizing African perspectives and experiences, contributing to alternative histories construction preserving collective memory and promoting social consciousness.

New Historicism proved effective for understanding literature-history relationships in African dramatic traditions. Theory's emphasis on "historicity of texts" and "textuality of history" enabled examination of dramatic text shaping by historical conditions while participating in historical meaning construction, providing valuable insights into power, ideology, and discourse operation within African dramatic literature. Study demonstrated modern African drama functions as artistic expression and historical

discourse. Playwrights employ drama for social critique, political engagement, and cultural preservation, exposing oppression systems, questioning political authority, and advocating social transformation. Drama assumes historical documentation and ideological resistance roles within contemporary African societies.

Resistance and national consciousness significance in African dramatic literature was highlighted. Playwrights reconstruct anti-colonial struggles, liberation movements, and protest narratives to promote national consciousness and social justice, preserving collective resistance historical memories while encouraging contemporary audiences to confront social injustices and pursue political liberation. Gender representation and historical silencing issues were addressed, demonstrating dramatists challenge patriarchal assumptions and recover women's historical experiences. Through female character representation as active resistance movement and social change participants, drama contests historical marginalization and contributes to gender equality and social justice broader discussions.

Recommendations Based on findings:

1. **Greater integration of historical context in African drama studies:** Scholars of Literature should consistently situate African dramatic texts within their specific historical and socio-political contexts. This will strengthen critical understanding of how playwrights reconstruct historical realities through drama.
2. **Adoption of New Historicism in African literary criticism:** Researchers and students should increasingly apply New Historicist approaches in analysing African plays, as the theory effectively reveals the relationship between literature, ideology, and historical power structures.
3. **Curriculum review in African universities:** Departments of literature should revise their syllabi to include more historically grounded interpretations of African drama. Emphasis should be placed on how playwrights such as Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan engage with colonial and postcolonial histories in their works.
4. **Encouragement of interdisciplinary research:** Scholars should collaborate across disciplines such as history, political science, and literary studies to deepen understanding of how African drama functions as a historical archive and ideological critique. This will enhance the richness of African literary scholarship.
5. **Promotion of African drama as a tool for civic awareness:** Governments, cultural institutions, and educators should promote African drama as a medium for historical education and civic consciousness. Plays that reconstruct political oppression, resistance, and cultural identity should be encouraged for public performance and academic study to strengthen societal awareness of historical and contemporary issues.

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