Fettered Writers, Unfettered Minds: Illustrations from the Prison Memoirs of Wole Soyinka and Ken Saro-Wiwa

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Abstract
The euphoria of independence in Nigeria was followed by bitter disillusionment as different sorts of predicaments became the fate of the population: poverty, famine, corruption, and civil war. In such situations, can the writer remain indifferent? This was not the case of two writers, Wole Soyinka and Ken Saro-Wiwa, whose violent confrontations with the authorities led them to jail, followed respectively by exile and execution. Soyinka's The Man Died: Prison Notes and Saro-Wiwa's A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary reflect the status quo of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Nigeria, two different stages of what is commonly known as globalization.
Key words: Carceral writing, organic intellectual, commitment, neocolonialism, environmental protest

Ecrivains incarcérés, esprits affranchis : Exemples des mémoires de prison de Wole Soyinka et Ken Saro-Wiwa

Résumé
L'euphorie de l'indépendance au Nigeria a été suivie par une amère désillusion lorsque différentes sortes de malheurs devinrent le sort de la population : pauvreté, famine, corruption et guerre civile. Dans de telles situations, l'écrivain pouvait-il rester indifférent? Ce n'était pas le cas des deux écrivains, Wole Soyinka et Ken Saro-Wiwa, dont les confrontations violentes avec les autorités les conduisirent en prison, puis respectivement à l'exil et à l'exécution. The Man Died: Prison Notes de Wole Soyinka et A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary de Ken Saro-Wiwa reflètent le statu quo du colonialisme et du néo-colonialisme au Nigeria, deux phases différentes de ce qui est communément connu sous le nom de mondialisation.

Mots-clés: Ecriture carcérale, intellectuel organique, engagement, néocolonialisme, protestation environnementale.

كتاب مسجونون، عقول طليقة:

المذكرات السجنية لولي شوينكا و كن شارو ويوا أنموذجا

ملخص
أعقبت نشوة الاستقلال بنيجيريا خيبة أمل مريرة. إذ كان مصير الشعب أنواعا مختلفة من الأزمات: الفقر والمجاعة والفساد والحرب الأهلية. فهل يمكن للمبدع في مثل هذه الأوضاع ألاّ ينشغل بهذه الأوضاع ؟ لم يكن ذاك موقف الكاتبين النيجيريين ولي شوينكا و كن شارو ويوا، اللذين قادتهما المواجهات العنيفة مع السلطات إلى السجن ، فالمنفى والإعدام. يعتمد هذا المقال على مذكرات سجنهما على التوالي:

The Man Died: Prison Notes
A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary

تصور هذه المذكرات الوضع الراهن للاستعمار والاستعمار الجديد في نيجيريا، وهما مرحلتان مختلفتان لما يعرف عامة بالعولمة.

الكلمات المفاتيح: كتابة سجنية، مثقف عضوي، التزام، استعمار جديد، احتجاج بيئي.

Introduction

Prison writing is a poorly explored topic while there is a wealth of letters, poems, essays, and novels written by well-known incarcerated philosophers, writers, and freedom fighters. Intellectuals in general, and writers in particular, are often persecuted, incarcerated or murdered by authoritarian regimes and terrorist groups in an attempt to muzzle opposition because they are the mind and the voice of their communities. In Nigeria, the great aspirations of independence left room for greater disenchantments(1). The more than five decades of independence have been marked by social unrest, ethnic strife, dictatorship, corruption, and even alliance with multinational corporations against the interests of the people. In this situation, the stereotype of the intellectual in the ivory tower does not hold true for Wole Soyinka (1934-) and Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa (1941-1995), known as Ken Saro-Wiwa. The atrocities they have lived, as recorded in their prison memoirs, reflect the abuse of human rights in the post-independence era. In his prison memoir *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1972), Soyinka uses the trope of katabasis (Greek word for the descent into the underworld or hell) to express his experience in Kaduna prison. The title of this book can be applied on his fellow-citizen Saro-Wiwa who was executed in 1995 because he had organized peaceful protests against Shell and its partners. In *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995), Saro-Wiwa devotes a small part to his tribulations in jail, the rest to the "Ogoni Bill of Rights," and a speech on his people's aspirations.

1.Literature Review

Prison writing comprises the testimonial narratives of "survivance" (of both "survival" and "endurance"), whether in verse or prose, memoir or fiction. The most outstanding among them in literary history, to name but a few, are Plato's "Apology" (around 399 BC), containing the trial speech of Socrates, Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* (around 524 AD), John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead or Prison Life in Siberia* (1861), Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" (1897), Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935), Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963), and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968). Although this genre has existed since antiquity, Ioan Davies considers that the 20th century produced more prison writings than the sum of all the previous centuries(2). It was considerably the century of unprecedented human conflicts.

In Africa, prison writing is a relatively young genre, as the prison is an institution that was brought forth by European colonizers. The wealth of African prison writings, however, shows that the colonized have appropriated this institution and excelled in its dehumanizing torture. The most prominent African prison writings, in addition to the two memoirs chosen for this article, are Nelson Mandela's lost prison manuscripts, later rewritten in *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's *491 Days*: *Prisoner Number 1323/69* (1969), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Detained*: *A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981), Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoir from the*

Women's Prison (1986), Chris Abani's *Kalakuta Republic* (2000). Excerpts from these works and many others were gathered by Jack Mapanje in his anthology *Gathering Seaweed: African Prison Writing* (2002).

Most of these seminal prison writings were written on toilet paper, cigarette packages, newspaper and book margins, then smuggled secretly out of prison. Although Ngũgĩ has jotted down his prison cogitations and afflictions on toilet paper, he believes that the prison is a mighty Muse. He describes his solitary confinement in cell 16 of Kamiti Maximum Security Prison and his objectification by the carceral system as detainee number # K6, 77. He says, however, "Cell 16 would become for me what Virginia Woolf had called *A Room of One's Own* and which she claimed was absolutely necessary for a writer. Mine was provided free by the Kenya government"(3). In a similar manner, South African activist Lehlohonolo Moagi celebrates the surge of spirituality and creativity in the prison conditions. He believes that "the mind is at its peak behind bars" since "solitary confinement unearths some pure depth of thought, hidden beneath layers of vague existential contradictions." Time is one of the few things the inmate has at his/her disposal to "interrogate appalling fallacies of modern thought"(4). The testimonies of Ngũgĩ and Moagi show that the attempt of power to incarcerate the mind of committed intellectuals often provokes the opposite reaction. Hence, detention, which Ngũgĩ describes as "a terrorist programme for the psychological siege of a whole people"(5), becomes an opportunity to enliven the struggle for liberation, in so far as oppression can lead to more resistance.

According to Barbara Harlow, political prison is a "university" for resistance, and prison memoirs are "actively engaged in a re-definition of the self and the individual in terms of a collective enterprise." They are not written "for the sake of a 'book of one's own,' " but as "collective documents, testimonies written by individuals to their common struggle"(6)**.** In their memoirs, significantly, writers like Soyinka and Saro-Wiwa develop more concern for the predicament of their community, a strategy by which they deconstruct the self/other binary to cope with their solitary confinement.

Apart from their societal function, prison writings also have a psychological function. Traumatic events are known for producing a wealth of literary works that transmit, frequently through symbols and metaphors, messages that cannot be expressed straightforwardly. Suzette Henke coins the concept of "scriptotherapy" to describe the process of writing the traumatic experience for a therapeutic purpose(7). Interestingly, narrative therapy and narrative medicine(8) are two disciplines that seek to cure human beings by paying a greater attention to their life stories, spoken or written.

For "prisoners of conscience," those who have been incarcerated for political, religious or other ideological motifs, detention is an extreme environment that is favorable for further questioning and meditation. They need to regain control over their lives, and telling their trauma is an important part in this process. This idea is reminiscent of Aristotle's "catharsis" and Sigmund Freud's "talking cure." In

Time and Narrative, Paul Ricoeur asserts that narrative springs from "the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative"(9). The testimonial narratives of Soyinka and Saro-Wiwa therefore serve as healing and survival narratives.

In prison, writing acts as a therapy for the psychic distress of the convicts, particularly because in their isolation, they are transformed into objects by the gaze and torture of the prison system. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, Michel Foucault observes that prison is the place where individuals are constantly observed. In his view, "the theme of the Panopticon – at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization and transparency" finds "in prison its privileged locus of realization"(10). Specifically, the Panopticon is a circular architectural design based on the principle that the convicts can be observed all the time, wherever they move. Generally, the prison offers a unique setting where inmates can be permanently observed and power excessively exerted, and even presented as a moral obligation. The carceral system is considerably a "state apparatus"(11) that can punish, repress, and subdue. Prison writings attest, however, that incarceration gives organic intellectuals the possibility to think and withdraw from their counter-hegemonic actions; it also gives a warning shot to those who are outside. As it will later be demonstrated through the chosen works, the solitary mind can reach climactic levels of cogitation behind prison bars. Although Foucault believes that the carceral system is inescapable, prison writings prove that convicts can escape through the word: the Word of God, and the word of the intellectual.

It is important at this stage to refer to the distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals made by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. He believes that organic intellectuals must not be "separate from the people-nation," having no feelings for "the elementary passions of the people"(12). As opposed to traditional intellectuals who do not question the status quo, they use their cogency to lead the masses in cultivating a "counter-hegemonic consciousness." Their role does not "consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator"(13). For Soyinka, Nigerian intellectuals are rarely of this type; many of them are deeply westernized and detached elites. Others are disillusioned observers who simply deplore the situation with "an overdose of cynicism," (14) rarely trying to change it.

The role of intellectuals is a major concern in postcolonial theory. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon explains that colonized intellectuals go through three development phases. After the phase of assimilation of colonial culture, they start the phase of introspection and retrospection to understand the past of their community. They eventually, in the third phase, assume the role of "awakeners" and "find themselves in exceptional circumstances - in prison, with the Maquis or on the eve of their execution - feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which

expresses the heart of the people and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action"[15]. This definition of the intellectuals' role stresses active participation for the interest of the community rather than the mere cynical observation of its plights. The social capital, coupled with the intellectual capital, can lead the community to an emancipatory praxis[16].

Edward Said, in his study of the role of postcolonial intellectuals, considers that after the primary form of fight against colonialism, they need to engage into a secondary form of fight to reconstruct their "shattered community." He sees that "at the dawn of the twenty-first century the writer has taken on more and more of the intellectual's adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, and supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority"[17]. According to him, even though many intellectuals are compelled to leave their nation to avoid persecution, those who stay and comply with the hegemonic discourse also suffer from exile of a metaphoric kind. In other words, despite their life within the borders of their country, they are exiled from their community by not engaging in its preoccupations. In the same vein, incarceration or execution can be metaphorical if not real, when the mind is not free to think and communicate.

1. Wole Soyinka's The Man Died: Prison Notes

Soyinka, the first African writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature (1986), was a prominent activist against the ethnic strife and the intestine war that have torn his country. According to "Nigeria Demographics Profile 2013"[18], the country is the most heavily populated and ethnically diverse in Africa, with more than 175 million inhabitants and 250 ethnic groups. The Nigerian population is divided along ethnic, religious, political, as well as economic lines, a fact that often leads into bursts of violence. The years after Nigeria's independence in 1960 were characterized by an intense warfare between the nation's major ethnic groups: the mostly Muslim Hausa-Fulani, the Christian and animist Igbo, the Muslim and Christian Yoruba. On July 6, 1967, the mostly-Igbo south-eastern region seceded as the Republic of Biafra, sinking the country in civil war for about two years and a half. The cessation failed for Biafra's weaker military and economic resources, and the war ended on January 15, 1970.

Soyinka was against the war, but he was kept 27 months in detention from 1967 to 1969 with orders from General Yakubu Gowon. The charges against him were contact with Biafra leaders to resolve the conflict, campaign for an arms embargo, and approval of "the Third Force," a group of military socialists who sought to cast the yoke of bigoted and murderous ethnic loyalty. During his imprisonment, Soyinka was not allowed to read or write because "books and all forms of writing," he notes, "have always been objects of terror to those who suppress the truth." Soyinka used "soy ink" (a pun that means ink made of soybeans) to write prison notes, bits of poems, plays, and novels "between the lines" of Paul Radin's *Primitive Religion* and his own *Idanre and Other Poems*. He was cautious not to let "a clue which would lead to a reconstruction of the circumstances and the certain

persecution of probably innocent officers"[19]. Soyinka needed to write his memoir, as well as *Poems from Prison* (published in 1969), in order to bear witness for his and his inmates' conditions of incarceration. He originally intended *A Slow Lynching* as a title, but he changed it into *The Man Died: Prison Notes* when he received a message that "the man died." The man is a journalist who was appointed to cover a celebration attended by the governor and his spouse. Because the latter complained against some journalists for lack of respect, they were fired, incarcerated, and beaten; one of them was amputated and eventually died. The essence of Soyinka's prison memoir is hence summarized in the following sentence: "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny"[20]. This is the message of the book, and probably most books by Soyinka and other African writers: Never let the human being internally die by humiliation and inaction.

In the first section of the memoir, Soyinka provides an account of how he was captured, interrogated and tortured in prison. In the second one, he expresses his opinion about the Nigerian Civil War, his attempt to prevent it and then end it. In the third one, he accuses the military junta for the fascist methods employed against the citizens. In the fourth one, he engages into philosophical cogitations about power and corruption. He recounts the treatment of the Igbo convicts and their standing in death rows, as well as the psychotic behavior of those in the lunatic ward of Kaduna prison. Soyinka, fearful of losing his sanity, says, "I had begun to lose sane distinction between the supposition and the reality"[21]. Indeed, as the title of Soyinka's poem "Live Burial" illustrates, his incarceration is part of General Gowon's attempt to bury the mind of intellectuals. *The Man Died: Prison Notes*, however, is a testimony for the resilience and "survivance" of the human being in extreme situations.

Soyinka's style and diction in *The Man Died: Prison Notes*, as in most of his publications, is obscure and hermetic. The increased hermeticism of this book can be justified by "the strange, sinister byways of the mind in solitary confinement" and "the strange monsters it begets"[22]. Besides, his mythopoeia is deeply entrenched in Yoruba culture, or more precisely, what can be termed "Ogunian aesthetics." His "cosmic vision" can be summarized in the existence of different worlds: one for the "ancestors," one for the "living," and one for the "unborn." The fourth stage is the median location in "the life-death continuum" or "the abyss of transition," and it is inhabited by Ogun, the warrior, explorer, and creative god. When the "cosmic balance" is shaken, he and his disciples catalyze an "organic revolution" to bridge the widening abyss[23]. If the prison is like "the abyss of transition," therefore, Soyinka should, like Ogun, perform an "organic revolution" to bridge the widening abyss of post-independence Nigeria. Like Ogun, Soyinka is the bold and struggling pathfinder, the one who has the stamina to cross the "abyss of transition" using his creative talent. As in the myth of katabasis, the abyss of chaos becomes the wellspring of creative vigor.

In *The Man Died: Prison Notes*, Soyinka describes his katabatic experience in detention, and more particularly in solitary confinement. The journey into the underworld is a

universal archetype performed by mythic heroes like Gilgamesh, Orpheus, Hercules, and Odysseus. In psychoanalysis, katabasis is metaphorically used to describe the journey into the obscure side of the self and return with a psychic transformation. In the underworld, the hero must struggle to find illumination, or to borrow from a religious parable, make his/her way through the "Belly of the Whale"(24) from which s/he will experience a symbolic "rebirth."

Soyinka depicts his traumatic experience in prison as a descent into a multi-floored hell, each floor with a different kind of ordeal. For instance, he is fettered in manacles, "the like of which [he] had seen only in museums of the slave-trade"(25). He witnesses the unattended agony of a convict, which stands for some persons' no return from the katabatic experience. He tries to forget the man's cries by remembering other sounds he heard before. The cry of a baby born in prison gives him some consolation; he says, "unto us a child is born"(26). Notwithstanding the horror, this example shows the author's hope for a better future in Nigeria.

Soyinka left prison in 1969, but thereafter, he was constantly persecuted by the authorities of Nigeria, and finally opted for exile in the United States of America during General Sanni Abacha's rule. In "Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa's Culture Producers," Soyinka asserts that the continent has been "twice bitten," first by colonialism, and second by neo-colonialism. Writers should, in his opinion, attempt to cure both wounds, even at the cost of persecution or exile. On the question of "brain drain," he says with his illustrious sardonic tone, "Lucky drainees! The brains of their stay-at-home colleagues will be found as grisly sediments on the riverbed of the Nile. Or in the stomach linings of African crocodiles and vultures"**(27)**. Exile is therefore, according to him, the price for the duty to bear witness. If not real exile, the intellectuals' exile is metaphorical, as in Said's view, when they shy away from the concerns of their community.

1. Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*

Saro-Wiwa considers that the only weapon he has to face the persecutors is "TRUTH," whether it costs him detention or death because he has to choose between fighting or expiring. Comparing his writing to "walking a minefield," Saro-Wiwa sees a great responsibility when the aim is to depict the truth, a multifaceted truth with as many facets as there are proponents and interests in a multiethnic nation like Nigeria. The almost half-million Ogonis essentially live on agriculture in an oil-rich land, laid waste by multinational corporations which do not care about security norms along the pipelines. The pollution generated by oil has detrimental consequences on farming and fishing, drinking water and agricultural produce. Oil leaks usually provoke fires in erstwhile fertile lands, and acid rains contaminate water and kill fish. Grassroots activists thus wage an "oil war" against the multinational corporations which "drill and kill**"(28)** in their country.

Saro-Wiwa was the mouthpiece of the MOSOP (the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People), claiming the right of his community for a clean environment. In 1990, the MOSOP presented "The Ogoni Bill of Rights" to the Government of Nigeria, defending the right for a fair proportion of the

economic resources of Ogoniland, the right to practice Ogoni language and religion, and the right to prevent further depredation of the environment. In 1992, Saro-Wiwa exposed the cause of the Ogoni people to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, with a copy of the "Ogoni Bill of Rights" and his book *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*. Shell Oil Company was subsequently accused of genocide and environmental racism**(29)**, and on January 4, 1993, more than 300,000 Ogonis went into peaceful demonstrations against Shell to celebrate the United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People. It was the largest demonstration ever against an oil company, and the 4th of January thenceforward became "Ogoni Day."

Saro-Wiwa's fight against what he calls a "monstrous domestic colonialism"(30) can be described as a fight against "internal colonialism," a phrase employed by Gramsci to denounce the capitalistic foundation of ethnic oppression. In his article, "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt," sociologist Robert Blauner identifies four similarities between external and internal forms of colonialism: a) both start with a "forced involuntary entry"; b) both have "an impact on the culture and social organization of the colonized people" through "a policy which constrains, transforms, or destroys indigenous values, orientations, and ways of life"; c) both involve "a relationship by which members of the colonized group tend to be administered […] and manipulated by outsiders"; d) both entail racism, "a principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or different in terms of alleged biological characteristics is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially and physically by a superordinate group"**(31)**. Through the lens of these four characteristics, it is pertinent to describe the Ogonis' condition as one of "internal colonialism." They undergo foreign presence in their land against their will, and they suffer from racism. Their culture and social organization are deeply affected by the intruders, and they are administered by external forces. They lack simple commodities like drinking water, food, electricity, schools, and hospitals.

Shell and other multinational corporations are also responsible for "ecological imperialism"(32) in Ogoniland. They are guilty of the depredation of the ecosystem and the dehumanization of the inhabitants; they reap important revenues from the land without compensation for its owners. They do not study the social and environmental repercussions of their industrial activities because they benefit from the support of the Nigerian government, which uses the military and the judicial bodies to quench all forms of protest. The frequent industrial discharges, oil leaks, and gas explosions endanger the flora and fauna, reducing the sustenance of the local inhabitants, most of whom are farmers and fishermen.

On May 21, 1994, four elders were killed by Ogoni rioters; they were accused for associating with the government against their community. Saro-Wiwa and fifteen MOSOP activists were arrested with charges of inciting rebellion and homicide. Amnesty International considered Saro-Wiwa as a "prisoner of conscience," incarcerated for his non-violent action against oil companies. While he and the

other leaders of the MOSOP were incarcerated, tortured, forbidden visits, judicial and medical assistance, Ogoni men were captured, aggressed, murdered, and Ogoni women were raped. Many of them fled their land frightened by the campaign to "sanitize Ogoni"**(33)**.

After more than a year of incarceration and torture, Saro-Wiwa and his fellow-prisoners of the MOSOP were judged by a military tribunal which ordered their hanging on November 10, 1995. Before dying, he managed to smuggle out a letter in which he announced that he was "to appear before a kangaroo court, dubbed a special military tribunal, where the proceedings leave no doubt that the judgment has been written in advance"**(34)**. This letter reflects his certitude about the imminent execution and the impossibility of appeal. The following are some of the most poignant words taken from his "Statement before Execution": We all stand before history. I am a man of peace, of ideas. Appalled by the denigrating poverty of my people who live on a richly endowed land, distressed by their political marginalization and economic strangulation, angered by the devastation of their land, their ultimate heritage, anxious to preserve their right to life and to a decent living, and determined to usher to this country as a whole a fair and just democratic system which protects everyone and every ethnic group(35).

This statement provoked a worldwide indignation against the executioners and sympathy for the men of peace killed on the altar of economic profits.

On the conditions of execution, Soyinka recounts in *The Open Sore of a Continent* that the Port Harcourt Prison authorities found no one to do the dreadful task, and the victims were obliged to wait in unendurable conditions for their hangman coming from a northern province. Besides, the gallows were not used for a long time, and Saro-Wiwa's agony was prolonged, as he did not die until the fifth attempt. His final words were: "Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues"(36). Human rights reports indicate that acid was poured on the executed prisoners to speed up their decomposition, and their anonymous graves were watched over by soldiers for almost one year. In addition, Saro-Wiwa's publications were withdrawn from Nigerian bookshops and libraries.

The United Nations, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and many other international organizations, condemned the execution. The Commonwealth excluded Nigeria for about three years and a half, and some governments withdrew their ambassadors from the country.

President Bill Clinton and Queen Elisabeth II considered the execution as illegal. British Prime Minister John Major decried "a fraudulent trial, a bad verdict, an unjust sentence, [a] judicial murder," and Nelson Mandela described it as "a cruel and callous execution"(37). Throughout the world, sympathizers lighted candles at the doors of Nigerian embassies and Shell headquarters.

During his lifetime, Saro-Wiwa believed in the dictum that the pen is mightier than the sword, and that those who conspired against him were perturbed by the power of his writing. Witness of the Ogonis' agony, he was convinced that a writer should not

simply be a storyteller, a teacher, an x-ray analyst who detects the ills of his society; he must rather be actively implicated in the construction of its present and its future. His novels, *Prisoners of Jebs* (1989), *Pita Dumbrooks Prison* (1991), and *Lemona's Tale* (1996), are all set in prison and show that life in detention is his main source of inspiration.

In *A Month and a Day: A Prison Diary*, Saro-Wiwa shows his satisfaction for using his "talents as a writer to enable the Ogoni people to confront their tormentors." He could not "do it as a politician or a businessman," but his "writing did it," an achievement he considers as "a moral victory"(38). Anticipating his execution, he claimed that "to die fighting to right the wrong would be the greatest gift of life!"(39). Indeed, through his death, he offered a gift of life to his people, as he brought the cause of the Ogoni to global notice. He rightly expected a large readership after his execution among environmental justice activists and humanists worldwide. The MOSOP and Saro-Wiwa were granted the "Right Livelihood Award for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people," which is designated as the "Alternative Nobel Prize" and awarded in Stockholm one day before the Nobel Prize Award ceremony.

1. **Soyinka's and Saro-Wiwa's Prison Memoirs: Comparisons and Concluding Remarks**

Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* and Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* were both written in Nigerian prisons under authoritarian regimes. They were nonetheless written in different periods and historical contexts. While the former was written in the 1960s during the Civil War in Nigeria, the latter was written in the 1990s when the natural resources became the new curse of the country. Despite the rich oil production, the majority of the citizens were living below the threshold of poverty, which caused frequent grassroots protests, some of them led by Saro-Wiwa in Ogoniland.

Despite Soyinka's stout defense of Saro-Wiwa and profound indignation for his execution, the study of their respective prison memoirs highlights some differences in the intensity of communal commitment. Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* lacks the communal fervor that characterizes Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*. The reason probably lies in Soyinka's occasional refuge in an existentialist philosophy of despondency and cynicism. Although Soyinka shows a deep concern for his community, regardless of ethnic or religious belonging, he also excels in the task of introspection. He delves into the depths of the human psyche in its attempt to preserve balance under such extreme pressures as corporal punishment and solitary confinement. These differences in the degree of communal commitment are probably responsible for another major difference between the two authors, mainly at the level of style. While Soyinka's style is hermetic and elitist, Saro-Wiwa's style is more comprehensible by ordinary readers. Starting from the premise that the great number of Nigerians cannot read, Saro-Wiwa believes that a writer should be a man of action, deeply committed to grassroots struggles, and that he should use their language because "the word is power and more powerful is it when

expressed in common currency. That is why a writer who takes part in mass organizations will deliver his message more effectively than one who only writes waiting for time to work its literary wonders"(40). This is the reason for the production of *Basi and Company*, a 1985-1990 sitcom in which he uses Nigerian pidgin and folklore to lampoon the sociopolitical condition of Nigeria.

As illustrated in the two memoirs, some of the journeyers into jail would survive the hardships of the katabatic odyssey and return transformed; that was the case of Soyinka. Others, however, would never return, and that was the case of Saro-Wiwa. Unlike Soyinka, he did not opt for exile and devoted his entire "intellectual and material resources, [his] very life to a cause in which [he has] total belief and from which [he] cannot be blackmailed or intimidated"(41). He paid his commitment with his own blood, but his fight is going on because he called worldwide attention to the exploitation of his people. He was hanged, but his death rekindled the struggle of all the minorities that are victims of greedy multinational corporations.

Conclusion

The therapeutic prison writings of Soyinka and Saro-Wiwa demonstrate an engagement in the denunciation of neocolonial oppression. With fettered bodies but unfettered minds, the two authors bear witness to the predicament of their nation and provide a sense of empowerment for themselves and their communities as a whole. Their conviction and devotion lead them to persecution, incarceration, exile or execution, but to borrow Kwame Nkrumah's words, "the struggle continues"(42) in Africa. Further research in prison writing is needed to understand the trauma of incarcerated intellectuals and the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) they are condemned to carry until the end of their lives.

Notes and references

1- Historians argue that the first wave of globalization started with Western slavery and colonialism some 500 years ago; the second wave was fueled by the industrial revolution, when the West used its military power to get natural resources and markets, and the third one started with the post-World War I system led by the United States of America. In the last wave, economic control is exerted through institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, or multinational corporations that, in the case of Nigeria, corrupt the leaders to exploit the people. See R. Robertson's *The Three Waves of Globalization. London & New York: Zed Books, 2003.*

2- Davies, I. *Writers in Prison*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 7.

3- Ngũgĩ, wa T. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, 1986, p. 64.

4- Moagi qtd. in Nagel, M. " 'I write what I like': African Prison Intellectuals and the Struggle for Freedom." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. Vol.2, no.3, March 2008, p. 72.

5- Ngũgĩ, wa T. *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981, p. 14.

6- Harlow, B. *Resistance Literature*. New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 120.

7- Henke, S. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999, p. xii.

8- Courses in literature and medicine are presently gaining popularity, in an attempt to stress the emotional aspect of medicine and the therapeutic aspect of literature. See M. White and D. Epston's Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends. New York: W. W. Norton, 1990. See also L. Mehl-Madrona's

Narrative Medicine: *The Use of History and Story in the Healing Process*. Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2007.

9- Ricoeur, P. *Time and Narrative*: Volume I [1983]. Trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1984, p. 75.

10- Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p. 249.

11- French philosopher Louis Althusser proposes a detailed analysis of hegemonic mechanisms, distinguishing between two sets of "apparatuses" by which the dominating class exploits the dominated one. The "Repressive State Apparatuses" (RSAs), as the police, and the army, rely on violence. The "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs), like religion, education, and the media, rely on ideology to create a "willing compliance" within the exploited group. See L. Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978.

12- Gramsci, A. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971, p. 418.

13- Ibid, p. 10.

14- Soyinka, W. *The Interpreters*. London: Heinemann and Andre Deutsch, 1965, p. 227.

15- Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963, p. 223.

16- "Praxis" is a philosophical equivalent to "practice." Aristotle argues that there are three ways of knowing: "theoria" which involves thinking, "poiesis" which involves creation, and "praxis" which involves action. The concept of practice has particularly been developed by Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire. See K. Knight's *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

17- Said, E.W. *The Edward Said Reader*. Eds Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. New York: Vintage, 2000, p. 11.

18- "Nigeria Demographics Profile 2013." Index Mundi. 21 Feb. 2013.
http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/

19- Soyinka, W. *The Man Died: Prison Notes*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1972, p. 8.

20- Ibid, p. 13.

21- Ibid, p. 81.

22- Ibid, p. 12.

23- Soyinka, W. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976, p. 26.

24- The "Belly of the Whale," an allusion to the Biblical parable of Jonah, symbolizes the soul-searching experience that happens in strenuous conditions.

25- Soyinka, W. *The Man Died*, p. 38.

26- Ibid, p. 199.

27- Soyinka, W. "Twice Bitten: The Fate of Africa's Culture Producers." *PMLA* 105.1 (Jan. 1990): 110-120, p. 112.

28- "Drilling and Killing: Chevron and Nigeria's Oil Dictatorship" (1998) is a documentary produced by American journalists Amy Goodman and Jeremy Scahill.

29- Environmental racism is an important conceptual tool to understand the predicament of the Ogoni people; it notes a close correlation between the selection of hazardous waste sites and the race of the inhabitants. Environmental justice activists consequently denounce the global depredation of the habitats in which indigenous peoples live.

30- MOSOP. "Ogoni Bill of Rights." Dec. 1991, p. 6.
http://www.mosop.org/ogoni_bill_of_rights.html

31- Blauner, R. "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt." *Social Problems* 16. 4 (1969): 393-408, p. 396.

32- See Alfred W. Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

33- Amnesty International. Nigeria: Military Government Clampdown on Opposition. International Secretariat. 11 Nov. 1994.

34- Qtd. in Mapanje, J. *Gathering Seaweed: African Prison Writing*. London: Heinemann African Writers' Series, 2002, p. 121.

35- Ibid, p. 124.

36- Saro-Wiwa qtd. in Soyinka, W. *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996, p. 149.
37- Wood, N. "Nigeria Faces Expulsion for Hanging Nine." *The Times*, 11 November 1995, p. 2.
38- Saro-Wiwa, K. *A Month and a Day*: *A Detention Diary*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995, p. xv.
39- Ibid, p. 19.
40- Ibid, p. 81.
41- Saro-Wiwa qtd. in Mapanje, J. *Gathering Seaweed*, p. 124.
42- See Kwame Nkrumah's *The Struggle Continues: Six Panaf Pamphlets*. London: Panaf, cop. 1973.