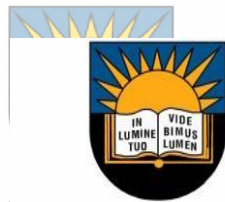


**“Culture” as an Agent of Societal Regeneration: A Study of Selected Dramatic
Literature by Soyinka, Osofisan and Rotimi**

by

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Thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
English and Comparative Literature



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Declaration

I, Megbowon Funmilola Kemi, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is entirely mine with the exception of such quotations or references which have been attributed to their authors or sources.

Megbowon F.K.



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Dedication

To the true God who makes everything beautiful in His own time.



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Acknowledgement

My heartfelt gratitude goes to God who moulded me wonderfully and bequeathed to me the profound grace to pass through the rigour of the postgraduate academic drillings. Indeed, I can boldly say that God has been all in all to me and has shown me great favour in a strange city.

I asked God for a fatherly supervisor and he gave me one in the person of Prof. Uwah. His academic guidance was undiluted and he displayed a passion and unwavering support that kept me going. It has been pleasant working with him. In fact, his painstaking effort has made this essay a masterpiece. May his silent wishes be turned into a command as he journeys through life.

This world would have been an undesirable desert without the support of my loved ones and friends who lavished on me the greatest care within their capacity. Now I think I'm just so blessed with the most loving people on earth. My husband, Megbowon Ebenezer, has been of immense help to my educational pursuit and has spared no effort to spur me on, even when I least expected it. My lovely daughter Michelle Megbowon, my much admired in-laws (the Megbowons), who have been so kind to me. I appreciate my cute brothers, Olatunji, Niyi and Ayomide. I am so happy threading the path of destiny with you. I am so lucky to have this indomitable crew.

Lastly, I want to show acknowledgement to the body of Christ, the Deeper Life Campus Fellowship at the University of Fort Hare. I must confess that I saw nothing short of agape love in full expression among the brethren. The story of my life is that of God's mercy. I can say for sure that my effort has been crowned with good success because He has said yes to my dream. My long essay is finally a dream come true.

Abstract

Contemporary Yoruba society is laden with the burden of diverse societal misconducts and perversions which are seen to be entrenched in the fabric of the individuals' daily lives and the society. These misconducts have alarming patterns and worrisome future implications. In this study, it is argued that while all-round forward progress is essential in a society, a simultaneous disconnect with some conventional and traditional element stimulates these aforementioned delinquencies. This therefore calls for societal regeneration of the contemporary Yoruba society in view of achieving a sustainable future. The study further argued that societal regeneration could only be achieved by looking backward into some indigenous cultural elements that made the traditional society a relatively non-perverted society. This argument is presented by examining contemporary dramatic works by Nigerian playwrights whose writings are done in the light of the past. Their works are imperatives because literature is viewed as one of the means of preserving and educating the society of their history, culture and beliefs, and also mirroring the present and projecting into the future.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are: 1) To evaluate the levels of cultural and moral values in contemporary Yoruba Society; 2) To examine the key moral and cultural paradigms of the traditional Yoruba tribe of Nigeria; 3) To examine the position of the writers as vanguard of moral and cultural values in contemporary and future Nigerian Society; 4) To examine challenges that arise against their efforts to resuscitate traditional morals and culture among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. These objectives were achieved using textual and interpretative analytical procedures in the texts written by Soyinka, Osofisan and Rotimi. These texts which include *The Swamp Dwellers*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Trials of Brother*

Jero, The Women of Owu, Kurunmi and The Gods are not to Blame, are all examined within the context of postcolonial theory.

The historical endowment of examined playwrights motivated their desire to assert their cultural identity and to preserve their traditional values. The playwrights reflect common concern of the need to appreciate and where necessary to retain traditional cultural values as well as the need to rid society of those traditions that hinder human and society's growth. Each author approaches these concerns from a cultural perspective, they emphasise the rationality and need of establishing their national identity, thereby stressing the importance of traditional values in the process. In a society like the Yoruba where each segment has been affected by extended agents of colonisation, the hope of restoration also lies in the hand of the playwrights who have constantly emphasised through their writings the role of the essentials of Yoruba culture in societal development.



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The examination of the key moral and cultural paradigms of the traditional Yoruba people of Nigeria, which is objective two of this thesis, is presented within the context of each of the six selected texts. They are discussed in Chapters three to five of the study with respect to each of the authors of the play and the identified relevant sociocultural issues. From the examined literary texts, it is seen that the traditional Yoruba moral and cultural paradigms are distinctive and diverse. Some of these key paradigms represented in the texts include religious practices, language, clothing, respect for elders, chastity before marriage, marriage, justice, marital fidelity, hard work, and leadership accountability. All these key paradigms centre on interpersonal relationships and communal interaction together with the irreplaceable position of the

gods which are observed to have been imperative in the workings of the traditional Yoruba society, making it a less perverse one.

In Chapter six, inferences on the inferred pivotal position of playwright as vanguard of indigenous culture and the conflicts that arise against playwrights' efforts to resuscitate a moral culture in the Yoruba society of Nigeria which are the objectives three and four of the study are explored. It is identified in the chapter that the battle for lost identity and cultural values is being fought on numerous fronts. Some of the key issues identified as confronting and silencing playwrights' influences in the society include evolving diversities in ideologies, education, technology, the entertainment industry, and urbanisation. This study recommends the necessity of looking into the economic, social, and cultural development of the Yoruba people in the process of cultural recovery via dramatic literary writings and presentations. The playwrights should use their knowledge to spur the people into action, and foster through his writings the hope of a better future. The playwrights are not only responsible to their national culture, but to the nation as a whole, whose culture is, after all, but one aspect. This is also believed to be relevant in the fight against several social anomalies in the African community, thereby aiding the continent's development.

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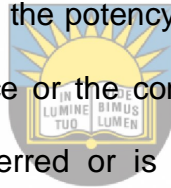
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Background of Study

Diverse social, economic and environmental challenges are still facing every countries of the world today. These have necessitated the pursuit of various development goals in the past and recently. The recently adopted 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) shows the commitment of government of countries to make the world a better place for their citizens. Various components and indicators were captured as necessary in meeting these development goals and targets. However, it is observed that the place of indigenous cultures especially in geographical regions including Africa where these challenges are prevalent are missing. The complete neglect of the potency of culture in tackling social challenges could be as a result of ignorance or the consequences of continual but disguised colonization which could be inferred or is still reflected from western countries' control and dictates of development proceedings.



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African nations experienced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual conquest and colonisation between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite the resistance put up by these African societies against these invasion and foreign domination, yet by the early twentieth century much of Africa, except Ethiopia and Liberia had been colonised by European powers (James 2002) with records of several lasting impacts which continue to raise argument among scholars which is perceived to be either positive or negative depending on whether it is viewed from the Eurocentric or the Afrocentric aspect.

According to the Eurocentric perspective colonialism was an unavoidable and necessary historical course that was geared towards helping Africa to realise 'development'. This so-called 'development' is visible in the introduction of democratic governance, industrialisation and international trade among other things. This in summation is considered as 'westernising' Africa. In opposing this view, Diop (1990) pointed out that Africa prior to colonialism was not economically isolated from the rest of the world. Indeed, African states had engaged in international trade from the time of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt. The empires and kings of West Africa specifically had developed extensive international trading systems during the eras of the Kingdoms of Mali, Songhai and Ashante of Ghana. On the other hand, the Afrocentric perspective considered European colonisation of Africa to be damaging in that it has been characterised by the introduction of technicalities and models that only 'impoverish and create dependency" of Africa on the European nation (the modern-day neo-colonialism). Walter Rodney (1972), posits that all that Europeans did in Africa was for the benefit of European colonialists. To the Afrocentric, colonialism was an imposition of western ways of life on African culture which has no doubt led to disruption and erosion of the traditional mechanism of moral homogeneity and practice, abandonment of traditional norms and values through a systematic paganisation of its values. Without doubt Africa's colonialism experience brought a major divide in the history and the present of majority of Africa countries, mostly in areas including literary writings.

The term contemporary or modern in the sense intended in this study is essentially concerned with plays written particularly on colonial and postcolonial African experience. Modern African drama as a whole whose topicality and motif is largely

informed by neo-colonialism and postcolonialism has experienced rapid growth after the independence of most African states. For example, the colonial effort at stifling and banning indigenous African culture, tradition and belief systems is among other things captured in a number of African literary texts, which include Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Ene Henshaw's *This is our Chance*, Efua Sutherland's *Marriage of Anansewa*, Sekyi Kobina's *The Blinkards*, Ngugi wa Thiongo's *I will Marry when I want*, Athol Fugard's *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Maishe Maponya's *Hungry Earth* and Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*. These plays take cognisance of the significance of the whole scope of the African identity. Thus, African literature has taken upon itself the burden of helping the society reverse the aftermaths of colonialism in the African space as well as regain belief in itself.



In essence, most of post-independence writings have been involved in affirming, preserving and teaching on African culture and identity such that after centuries of oppression, there was much to gain from producing a new narrative and voice for Africa. According to Achebe (1965), African writers are teachers of African history. He (Achebe) believes that he has taken on the role of an educator and arguing that all societies share different needs and that Africa needs literary teachers who can re-educate and regenerate the community through retelling of history that is more complex than one long night of savagery from which Europeans are perceived to be acting on God's behalf.

Culture which is one of the component of African history occupies a crucial position in Africa societies, and it is one of the two main fibres sustaining the continued existence of any community. Biggs and Moore (1993) defined it as the sum total of the ways of life of a people, which are learned or informally

transmitted from one generation to another (Biggs and Moore, 1993). According to Guma (2016), culture is an integral part of every human society and it is by it all social groups are characterized. Culture is important and its imperativeness cannot be overemphasized because it distinguishes a group of people from another (that is, without a peculiar culture a people has no identity and without identity a people do not exist), it performs a social function, it helps people to understand how to behave in the society and foster cooperation, unity and progress. It reflects the people's creativity, their adaptation to environments and the impact of the external world has had on them (Falola and Akinyemi, 2016).

Culture in African literature defines and determines civilisation generally, and the dramatic aspect of African literature serves as a veritable means by which it (culture) is either reflected or refracted. When an African drama expressly shows concern about dislocated social values or cultural decadence, it does so through a cultural lens of morality. Similarly, where an African play is concerned with political struggle of an ideological persuasion, the basic and informing vision is nationalism. In either cultural or nationalist plays there is a possibility of an overlap, of both cultural and nationalist topicality. Never the less, most African plays with cultural motif constantly probe the newly acquired western values which emanated as a result of colonialism. It can thus be inferred that drama in Africa has served a purpose beyond entertainment, to being a repository of the cultural life of the people and a major source of education for the young and those who have lost touch with their roots.

Hence, as alluded by Ojaide (1992), writers in contemporary African society are seen to assume the role of conscience of the society, reminding readers and society of the high cultural tenets that must be maintained in several aspects of life. For instance, almost all the works of Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe are criticisms of negative social and political practices which are contrary to indigenous moral principles and ethics. It is further observed that the writings of these African writers reflect almost similar themes and concepts which are distinctive and peculiar cultural identities of the indigenous African people. These writers use these peculiar cultural markers to inform and educate their readers on the need to uphold and preserve these African culture.

1.1 Cultural Markers in African Literature

Cultural markers which inform the thematic focus of many African literary writers are discussed below. Some of the identified markers discussed include; land, universality, law and order, clothing and communality.

Land

Land epitomises the socio-political and economic well-being of individuals and communities. Brueggemann (1978) posits that land is normally a place with historical meaning and provides continuity and identity across generations. It has much to do with human affairs and whatever human beings do on the land affects the land positively or negatively, whether it is to grow food, cash crops, extract mineral resources or housing for its inhabitants. The importance of land is reflected in several cases of conflicts over land and security experienced in some African societies including Nigeria. For instance, crises and disputes about ownership of

land, land boundaries, use and administration of land were the major causes of inter-village conflict, eventual war and genocide that bedevilled some Nigerian communities like Ife/Modakeke, Tiv/Jukun, Itsekiri/Ijaw/Urhobo, Aguleri/Umuleri, Yelwa/Tarok, according to Ikejiani (2009). In a situation where the land in question was a fertile ground for farming and for growing economically valuable trees such as raffia palm, palm trees, Iroko, and oil bean, the disputes were intensified.

African writers have emphasised the importance of land in their various works. Land sustains the communal existence of Africans, and families' disputes over a piece of land sometimes result in casualties. Shrines and religious artefacts are built on land and when communities are dispossessed of the land their religious artefacts are also taken away and this is reflected in many plays/novels by Nigerian authors. Ola Rotimi's adaptation of Sophocle's Oedipus Rex, titled *The Gods are not to Blame* is crafted so perfectly to reflect how society has contributed to both heroic stature as well as the fall of the King Odewale. For example, the issue of land dispute which has sacked any communities in Africa, the problem of ethnicity and tribalism and the problem of land dispute and land fraudsters all which most African communities still have to contend with today. They are social problems, envy makes Odewale's drunken uncle, who sees the possibility of the former inheriting the great wealth of the hunter Ogundele and his wife Mobike, Odewale's foster parents, to refer to Odewale as a "son of butterfly", the statement which sends him on a quest of his true identity. Also greed makes Kakalu, the son of Atiki, defrauds Odewale by selling to him a parcel of land which belongs to King Adetusa, he would not been clash between Odewale and the King Adetusa who later turns out to be his biological father. The misunderstanding arising from the true ownership of the land could have

been resolved amicably but for the tribalistic tendency in both King Adetusa and Odewale. King Adetusa pokes fun at the twisted tongue of King Odewale and for Odewale, it is the last thing he hardly could bear, to see his tribe insulted. He vows "I'll die first" (Rotimi, 1971:108). He kills the elderly man, his father and thus fulfils the first assignment of the gods.

Furthermore, Achebe depicts the issue of land ownership in his *Arrow of God*. In his book, the land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi is a clear illustration and confirmation of the fact that land is a major source of unrest and crises in most societies. African writers have expressed the relationship between the people and their land, for example, Ngugi showcases this in his *Weep Not Child*. Land is very important to the point that:

Any man who had land was considered rich, if a man had plenty of money, many motor cars but has no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money (Ngugi, 2012:17).

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Ownership of land means prosperity while lack of it means poverty. Ngugi, as a Gikuyu-born Kenyan understands that land defines a society. This he expresses in his *Petals of blood* and also in his *I will Marry when I Want*. To the people of Gikuyu, land was so important to them to the extent that they have high aspiration on the restoration of their land during the post-independence period. However, rather than realization of their expectation, they experience betrayal from their supposed leaders who are in alliance with their colonisers. The exploitation of the people's land by the group of Mzigo, Chui, and Kimeria is highly reviled and eventually leads to their deaths. Also, the Gikuyu people's loss of their land to Colonialism was resented. Kamau and Ngotho work as shamba boys on land which belongs to their families.

The struggle for land was enough motivation to cause the Mau Mau revolution against British colonialism which led to Kenyan political independence.

Similarly, the kind of struggle Ngugi depicted in his plays is also replicated in Ugandan playwright Mukotani Ruyendo's *The Barbed Wire and Other Plays* which was first performed at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1972. The playwright dedicated the play to the struggling peasants and workers who can no longer be bewildered that things have always been as they are and shall forever be (Ruyendo, 1977: 1). The rich class in the play is represented by Rwambura who forcefully usurps communal land, meanwhile, the oppressed characters and co-owners of the land resist his action:

BIRAKWATE: In matters like these, a man can't just keep quiet while his own is being taken. Are we to eat the slimy vegetable without salt while other people are driving cars? They are always saying that they worked for their money while we slept. But I know that most of them stole it. We can't allow them to cheat us while we just look on... (Ruyendo, 1977: 5).

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As the persecution increases the people fight collectively and eventually reclaim their land. In the play, collective heroism is exemplified by the people who upon reclaiming their land, subsequently set up a cooperative society that will ensure their economic survival in addition to dealing with other problems. Literary writers throughout Africa share the same problems and commonly held views about their solution.

Land features widely in African literature. Mbiti (1969) notes that detachment from the land to which Africans are mystically bound, and the thrust into situations where corporate existence has no meaning, have produced dehumanised individuals in the mines, industry and cities. Isolation from the land is a major theme in African literature more than in Western literature.

Universality

The whole concept of universality has to do with the sense within a play in which characters, whether individualised and recognisable as persons, or presented as types or symbols, reach beyond their circumstances to wider implications. What is happening to these characters happens or might happen to anybody outside the world of the play. The means by which a play established this sense of universality varies from play to play. In addition, universality is seeing beyond the immediate events of the drama, that it achieves a lasting philosophical significance.

For example, Henshaw's *A Man of Character* (1956), characters be related to the way of life people exhibit in the contemporary society. The play is set in the African community Koloro. All the characters are city dwellers and are live a sophisticated lifestyle. The quest for materialism and the rush for money and wealth by any means show the greed, bribery and corruption of those in high government offices and industries. Sekyi is an upright middle-aged civil servant caught in the web of greed and corruption that has gripped many developing countries. City wives, like Serinya, avoid their traditional matrimonial duties but delight in trips abroad and are crazy about western fashions. All the characters in the play are seen not only as individuals but also in their relationship with other individuals. Seboh and his brother belong to the semi-illiterate transitional masses who have partially escaped the socializing influence of traditional society without having undergone full modernization. They serve in cities either as house-boys or labourers. Those with no jobs pick pockets, rob and forge keys. These types get along with the officials who are corrupt by robbing them. The hero of *A Man of Character* is an honest man struggling to survive in a society of corrupt officials. The hero's honesty is finally

rewarded almost miraculously in spite of blackmail. Serinya is another character in the play, she is the type of Nigerian women who buys the European feminist movement wholesale without examining it by applying its principles to her own situation. For this type of woman, being educated means pretending to be European in fashion. Fashions and trips to Europe are more important to these type than their roles as wives and mothers in the traditional family setting. Serinya's materialistic outlook on life contrasts the traditional virtues of honesty, cooperation, courage and devotion to duty. She becomes a type of women in the growing middle class society of Nigeria.

Moreover, Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* and *The Midnight Blackout* are among the series of Osofisan's Midnight plays. The former is a criticism of a society lost in the pursuit of wealth, a society lost, morally, physically and spiritually. Again, is similar to Soyinka's thematic concern in *The Jero Plays* on the commercialisation of religious institutions. *Midnight Hotel* and *Midnight Blackout* are direct attacks on the moral atrophy of the intellectuals in the field of politics, business academics or the clerics. For example, in *Midnight Hotel*, Pastor Suuru is not only engaged in extra-marital affairs, he is also a business contractor, no longer the shepherd of the Lord's sheep. Similarly, Professor Juokwu in *The Midnight Blackout* is involved in extra-marital affairs. In both plays the comedic and satiric interweave through characterisation situations and events. In *Midnight Hotel*, we have characters like Jimoh, Bicycle a stark illiterate, Asibong the half-deaf businessman. We also found Awero the parliamentarian, who always insists on defiling the three daughters of chief Alatishe and chief Alatishe's speech mannerism. In *The Midnight Blackout*, similar characters abound; Professor Juokwu and his queer behaviour, his blackout formula through hypnotism as well as his affairs with Akubundu's wife, Iberibe a

highly placed diplomat, making amorous advances to his host's wife, Obioma. These plays reflect the socio-cultural issues in Nigerian society.

The writers of African literature make frantic efforts to universalise their unique culture. The thematic preoccupation of African literature is more than the settings and traditions of Africa. African writers are also concerned about how these social differences are best communicated to relate the rich experience of Africa to readers. This is exhibited in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat*. Writers such as Jared Angira of Kenya and Peters Lenrie of the Gambia make use of timeless human experiences, classical allusions, archetypal and cross-cultural images and symbols in their poems to validate and universalise African experience and to relate African literature to other literatures of the world. Also Kofi Awoonor and John Pepper Clark make references to the belief that is similarly expressed in Greek classical literature; they display their experiences far beyond themselves. So also Soyinka has shown this cultural experience in his writings for instance, in *Myth, Literature and African World*, the Yoruba gods are parallel to Greek while Ogun is likened to Dionysus and Apollo. Soyinka makes reference to the Orpheus myth in his *Season of Anomy*. In Ofeyi's searches for *Iriyise* in the convoluted bowels of Temoko a mythological transparent layer is added to the Kaduna prison as Temoko's "cover". Ofeyi's quest recalls that of Orpheus's search for Euridice in the underworld. The omniscient narrator in the novel can be likened to an ancient Egyptian myth, or biblical mythology so also the then event going on in cross-river as explained below:

The moth caress of Iriyise's scented room had not stopped the dreams of Anubis, the jackal headed one, once he had absorbed the scope of the cross-river event. He had fallen asleep thinking, this is the fifth face of the Apocalypse, the eighth plague that the Judaic sorcerer had omitted to include the plague of rabid dogs (Soyinka, 1973:34).

The plague of rabid dogs can be compared with the carnage perpetrated throughout cross-river, also Zaki Amuri, the ruler of cross-river that orders the carnage controls the affairs of the state just like the ancient Egyptian god of the dead, Anubis, the jackal headed one. This appeal to different myths shows the universality of African literature. African writers usually borrow the important traditions and lessons from other traditions of the world which are typically woven into well-crafted and engaging stories. African literature is entirely unique, which displaces the monopoly of the Western literary canon over universality and presents the African continent as inclusive of standard human experiences. African writers address in their writing, the unique problems that affect the continent. African writers are not ignorant of the immense abuse which Africans have been forced to endure, hence their keen sensitivities and ability to detect injustices and sharply correct them.



Law, Justice and Conflict Resolution

Law, order and justice are necessary for the promotion of communal peace, prevention of crime, conflict management and resolution, and upholding of morals in the community. Oguntomisin (2004) and Zartman (2009) noted that various communities in precolonial Africa had diverse conventions that are aimed at mitigating intra and inter human and intercommunal conflicts which are embedded in religion, customs and tradition before the destructive activities of colonisation. The African literary writers showcase these in their works.

In Osofisan's *Women of Owu*, the playwright dramatizes the interpersonal conflict between the men and women of Erhuwaren. Clark uses the character Koko to represent the voice of the women and Okoro her husband to represent that of the men in the play. *Women of Owu* is a brilliant piece as it espouses some approaches

to conflict resolution which is of tremendous benefit in sustaining peace and development in Nigerian society. The conflict arises from the compensation money paid by the oil company operating in the town. The town crier reveals this:

It is the matter of the money sent by the oil company operating on our land. This sum after due debate in the town hall has been shared out in three equal parts, one going to the elders of the town, the second to the men... and the third to the women... (Osofisan, 2006:1)

The money is shared into three; one part goes to the elders, another part for the men and the third part for the women. The women reject the sharing formula insisting that the money should have been shared into two equal halves, one half for women and the other half for the men. Their action is viewed as an abomination in the customary laws of the land. Furthermore, the men accuse the women of keeping destructive domestic animals at home, accused of practising witchcraft by taking the shape of these animals to terrorize innocent people in the community. The women see this as a denial of their rights to empowerment. Hence they embark on a protest in the form of self-exile. This leads to a dialogue with the other community, after the dialogue, a compromise is reached. The men agree to repeal the law banning the domestication of animals by women. They also agree to invite a team of doctors and nurses from Warri to treat the women of their ailments. The women are compensated and a trust fund is set up with part of the oil money, and peace is restored to the community. In spite of the oppressive policies of the Erhuwaren men, the women did not resort to violence, kidnapping and looting of property. Instead they see the need to negotiate their way out of the relegation and dehumanization. The women did not adopt violence rather they create an avenue for peaceful dialogue and self-impose exile which consequently leads to a lasting solution to the conflict. They make initiations for a peaceful dialogue between them and the men.

In addition, Alagoa (2001), notes that the management of conflicts amongst precolonial Igbo as in other African societies revolve round the principles of impartiality, fairness, accommodation, reciprocity and separation. Achebe (1958) attempts to elucidate on the African pattern of justice which is revealed to be very much contrary to the Western/colonial approach. For example, the justices of Umuofia-masquerades in *Things Fall Apart* are good examples of traditional African dispensation of justice. In addition, in contrast to the technical rules in Western courts, designed for punishment which could lead to long term hatred between or among affected parties, justice in traditional Igbo community promotes reconciliation between or among the affected parties, and not to set them on parallel paths for the rest of their lives. Reparations, restitutions, and settlements are made to the offended party, but the community or family makes sure that the parties involved are reconciled. Buttressing this, the study of Nhlapo (2005) contrasts the Western concept of retribution in criminal cases, with the African concept of restorative justice. The study argues that traditional tribunals promote reconciliatory processes and social healing rather than in opposition to the technical rules in Western courts, designed for punishment and not social healing.

Conflict is an indispensable occurrence among human beings, which is almost completely impossible to separate from interrelationships that exist among individuals and communities. Also, considering the place of religion in daily life in precolonial Africa, a break from indigenous conventions is considered a crime against deities and ancestral spirits and a disturbance of individual and community

equilibrium, whereas in postcolonial Africa, it is considered as a crime against the state or government.

A good example is the principle of Ubuntu, a humanistic and holistic conception of peace-making which states a human is what he/she is because of another. It is a widely accepted concept applied in conflict resolution among the people of East-central and Southern Africa. Similarly, in Nigeria, the precolonial Igbo societies are known to have well-defined social political institutions that facilitate conflict resolution among the people. The basic political organisation that existed throughout precolonial Igbo societies is what Isichei (1981) called village democracy. The strategies for conflict resolution in precolonial Igbo society were entrenched in the tradition and culture of the people. Thus, conflicts and disputes were resolved mainly by mediation.



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According to Alagoa (2001), the management of conflicts amongst precolonial Igbo as in other African societies revolve round the principles of impartiality, fairness, accommodation, reciprocity and separation. The first principle, which is the principle of impartiality of the manager of conflict, explains that rulers in all Nigerian communities were expected to behave impartially in their office. The second principle is the principle of fairness. That is, the poor and weak should receive a fair deal as well as the rich and powerful. Also, the principle of accommodation, compromise and a disposition for reconciliation, as opposed to the principle of “winner takes all” or the “zero sum game”. In addition to the above is the principle of reciprocity. The spirit of accommodation must be mutual and reciprocal to be effective, so also the principle of moderation and of measured action and response. These principles informed the

deliberate limitation of the level of violence in conflicts within Nigerian communities in the past. Finally, there is the principle of incompatibility or separation. That is where the parties to a conflict cannot be reconciled, the best policy would be to separate them.

Achebe portrayed all the principles mentioned above in his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Ameh (2002) argues that the inability of the government to restore enduring peace largely through Western models of conflict resolution could necessitate a revisit to traditional models, with emphasis on the involvement of native gods. The imposition of sanctions on individuals and groups of deviants was a justifiable means of restoring the pre-existing balance in the society and it is a traditional device for crime prevention or discouragement of abnormal behaviour. These sanctions which will be explained briefly could be moral sanctions, ritual sanctions and legal sanctions and they are well expressed in contemporary African literature, pointing to the fact that precolonial African period style of crime control and conflict resolution is relevant for the present postcolonial African communities. Unlike the precolonial African, the postcolonial African mode of law, order and justice has the embodiment of bias, insincerity, oppression of opposition, and it sets affected groups on a path of hatred and not reconciliation.

In precolonial African society, a good example of a Nigerian society where moral sanctions are taken seriously is the Esan people. In traditional Esan society, an authority such as the compound head, the village head, the chief-priest or the king may express this type of sanction verbally. In a more serious way and consonant with the severity of the offence, moral sanctions were mostly expressed in mass

action achieved through public disgrace, ostracism (*Amuolen, Obiro*), banishment, (*Anolen ubi kua*), purification of the earth, *Ikpotoa* and absolute banishment, *Isunfia*. Some of these crimes which attract mass action through public disgrace included: adultery, *Ughelemi*, rape, *Okahi*, incest and others (Egbefo, 2012).

Also, in traditional Esan society, disgrace as a punishment was carried out through the judicial process. The culprit would be recommended for discipline after being found guilty. For instance, an adulterous woman, who, by action had caused a breach of the peace in her home would be recommended to the head of the married women, *Ilchuo Idumu* and the delinquent woman was sent for. She was then shaved (in this case to humiliate her), stripped of all her clothes and stinging nettle leaves were wrapped round her waist and body, a heavy load made so cumbersome that it would require both hands to balance on the head, was put on her and with her hands already employed for this purpose, she could not scratch her intensely itchy body. She was to sing and dance round the village with her load made heavier by the addition of rubbish which was picked up at every corner of the village. She was mocked and flogged and when her tormentors were at last tired she was returned to her husband's house, as a disgrace to herself and her husband. Meanwhile, the goat bought by her co-respondent was slaughtered at the family ancestral shrine. The elder (Egbele) in the family shared the meat (Mitchell, 1991).

A legal sanction involved the use of judicial action by recognised authorities such as the *Edionwele*, the oldest man in village, the rulers, *Onogie*, the chief priest where they existed and the council of chiefs, *Ekhaemon*. These classes of elite made laws to keep peace and maintain intra- and inter-group relations in their domain. Capital offences included murder, stealing the seed yams already planted; kneading mud to

build over a site owned by another person; climbing an oil palm when someone is already on the oil palm; one hunter driving another from his hunting place, tying palm fronds around a farmland or a house; abuses with the genitals; cutting of kolanut trees and robbing of strangers, visitors and refuge seekers, etc. For instance, murder charges were tried by the *Igene* and the *Enogbonule*, sometimes in the presence of the *Onojie*, and sometimes in the village of the accused. Any suspected person would be arrested by these spies and police. When the hue and cry was raised it was the duty of *Igene* to organise a search, news being sent to the peer group in the neighbouring villages, and reported to the *Onogie* and his council of titled chiefs in the state capital. The punishment for murder was death; the execution as in *Uromi* was carried out by *Igie* in Ewoyomon village. If the killing was found to be manslaughter or even accidental killing a heavy fine was imposed. In some Esan communities, the judicial council including the king, chief, village heads sitting as the judicial council with the *Igene* as observers, or as investigating police officers and reminders of the crime. Each village had its own *Okogele* where trials took place and in *Egware* was one which housed the joint meeting of the executives. Only serious or capital offences or civil matters which came before the village that were tried in the *Okogele* would be addressed (Egbefo, 2012).

In addition, ritual sanctions are another instrument of achieving peace and in the prevention of conflict among Esan people which fostered much cooperation in the precolonial period. This was deeply rooted in the religious beliefs of the people described as “the engine of the law” (Oshodi, 1973:1-9). It gives the king and the chief priest divine authority and were ipso facto the pontifex maximus, they could impose ritual sanctions. The *Onojie*, king has divine sanctions on crime that

demands ostracism, banishment, earth purification, and application of trial by ordeal i.e. the use of *Sassword* in dealing with a suspect accused of witchcraft, stealing, murder or use of magic on innocent people.

The above practice and all other measures taken are to maintain peace in the society, Nwolise (2005:112) buttresses this:

The essences of dispute settlement and conflict resolution in indigenous societies were to remove the root causes of conflict; reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely; preserve and ensure enduring peace in society; restore peace, remove fear, restore social harmony, and make everybody involved in the resolved conflict happy and be at peace with each other again, and required getting at the truth; set the right milieu for social production and development; as well as promote good governance, law and order, security of lives and property, collective well-being and happiness, etc.

The precolonial African communities require accountability from all members of the clan. Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* illustrates accountability in three ways. The first illustration of accountability is when Okonkwo, the main protagonist, is punished for violating a sacred tradition in Umuofia, the Week of Peace. The Week of Peace was a period for people of Umuofia to spiritually and physically prepare for a season of planting crops. More importantly, the Week of Peace symbolised a period for the clansmen to promote compassion and prohibit any form of harm. Okonkwo, a titled village elder, broke this sacred tradition when he brutally abuses one of his many wives. Okonkwo's actions offended the values of the community and "Ani", goddess of the earth. The misdeeds of Okonkwo summoned Ezeani, an enforcer and priest for the earth goddess. Ezeani explained to Okonkwo that the purpose of the sacred week was to respect one's neighbours despite their faults. Violating the sacred traditions risked insulting the goddess, whose blessings helped secure successful harvests. Okonkwo's misdeeds therefore put the entire community at risk of being punished by the goddess. By the laws governing Umuofia, Okonkwo needed to be

punished so as to restore order and balance in the community. The law enforced by Ezeani was also supplemented by the strength of the community. The People of Umuofia shunned Okonkwo, and openly criticised his actions within the public domain. Open discussion allowed for the community to reinforce the importance of sacred traditions and keep traditional elders accountable for their mischievous actions.

Another illustration of accountability in precolonial Africa was through the depiction of the dispute resolution system. The traditional court system in precolonial cultures was another avenue for clansmen to hold fellow clansmen accountable for their actions. For the community of Umuofia, the court system took the form of the “egwugu”. The egwugu were nine masked men representing the different villages of Umuofia. The egwugu also symbolised the physical manifestations of Umuofia’s nine founding sons, called upon by the village to help resolve disputes.



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Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria as well, the gods are used to maintain peace in the society as depicted in the works of the playwright Soyinka. In his *The Lion and the Jewel*, gods like Ogun and Sango are believed to always influence the lives of the people such that people make oath on the Yoruba pantheon of gods to confirm them right or wrong. Yoruba people believe that Ogun, being the god of iron, is a very fearful god. Sango, on the other hand, is the god of thunder and lightning. This is seen when Sadiku praises Sango when she mocks Baroka for the loss of his manhood:

SADIKU: Ask no questions my girl. Just join my victory dance.
Oh Sango my lord, who of us possessed your lightning
And ran like fire through that lion’s tail... (Soyinka, 1962: 33)

Ogun punishes the offender and takes vengeance against the erring one. In Yoruba courts, instead of swearing to speak the truth and nothing but the truth by holding the Bible or Quran, people swear to give truthful testimony by kissing a machete consecrated to Ogun whose judgment is immediate.

According to Ojaide (1992), order is a necessity for unity without which there will be calamity in the society. Soyinka expresses the notion of law and order in *Death and the King's Horseman* where African law and order required the sacrifice of a man for the stability of the society. The colonialists interfered with the law which eventually leads to the loss of two lives with the attendant consequences. Soyinka uses culture in the contemporary African literature to question Western ignorance of Africans' way of life and to criticise the interference in African culture which causes tragedy for the community.



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Clothing

Clothing remains an indispensable and undeniable cultural identity of Africans despite their inherent diversities. Clothes are cultural symbols. They are used to make cultural statements in the same manner as language. In contemporary society, clothes have not lost their traditional savour, although there has been a lot of improvement in their production, design and use. Oyetade (2004) unveils the idea that human beings would have been ridiculously exposed without clothes, Soyinka, through the character portrayal of Elesin, shows that a man that is about to perform an important communal assignment deserves nothing but the best attire as a matter of urgency.

In the contemporary society, clothes have not entirely lost their traditional savour, although there has been a lot of improvement in their production, design and use. Some of the works of African writers have unveiled the idea that human beings would have been ridiculously exposed without cloths.

Traditional African clothing is an all-encompassing fashion fabric in the cultural context. Though there are foreign influences in the use of traditional clothing like *aso-oke*, (traditional wear) the Yoruba nevertheless, have succeeded in adapting the traditions of other cultures to meet their needs, while still upholding their cultural identity (Smith & Eicher, 1982). This is most vividly expressed in the use of Yoruba traditional clothing. The fabrics are made from either natural or man-made fibres, cellulose or non-cellulosic fibres. Most of these traditional fabrics are very expensive; as such, they were restricted in use. In the traditional past, they were mainly used by Kings, Chiefs, Princes, Princesses and *Oloris* (King's wives), and other prominent persons that could afford them (Akinbileje, 2010). This is exemplified in *Death and the King's Horseman* thus: *Together in Excellence*

ELESIN: *Words are cheap. 'We know you for
A man of honour'. Well tell me, is this how
A man of honour should be seen?
Are these not the same clothes in which
I came among you a full half-hour ago.
(He roars with laughter and the women, relieved, rise and rush into stalls to
fetch rich cloths.)*

IYALOJA: *Richly, richly, robe him richly
The cloth of honour is alari
Sanyan is the band of friendship
Boa-skin makes slippers of esteem.... (Soyinka, 1975:15 & 16).
(Elesin stands resplendent in rich clothes in rich clothes, cap, shawl, etc. His
sash is of a bright red alari cloth. The women dance round him.*

A rapid look at the conversation throws more light on the importance of dressing in the Yoruba society and a signifier for the Africans. Clothing communicates more about a personality just as language does. Diyaolu (2010) submits that the Yoruba

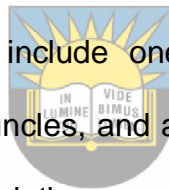
people, among other tribes, attach considerable importance to their appearance in public. To them, it is socially necessary for both men and women to be well attired on ceremonial occasions, and the dress must be appropriate to the occasion. This is perhaps the reason why the Yoruba say *aso la nki, ki a to ki eniyan*, meaning (It is the cloth we should acknowledge before greeting the wearer), and *eniyan lasoo mi*, that is (people are my cloth)".

The fact that Yoruba people attach so much importance to clothing is represented in Yoruba proverbs. Yoruba proverbs illustrate the importance and the value which the Yoruba, like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, attach to issues in different contexts. However, in this context, Yoruba proverbs will be discussed as related to traditional clothing. It is pertinent to note that the use of clothing-related proverbs is not out of place because Yoruba people perceive proverbs as walking sticks of the language, *bi oro ba sonu owe la fin wa a* (proverbs are used to decipher the meaning of metaphors). Proverbs play crucial roles in imparting meaning and understanding to a given situation. It is a formidable factor in discussions in order to build up an argument or to support a cause. James (2002), in his study, defines proverbs as 'a rich source of imagery and succinct expression, encapsulating abstract ideas and allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form'. Sheba (2000) defines proverbs as words of wisdom meant for only the wise to unfold, thus revealing the lost ideas (Akinbileje, 2010).

Communality

Communality refers to the awareness which identifies an individual not as an isolated ego, but as an entity whose being and survival are consequent upon its union with

other human beings within an identified locality. An individual's life revolves around his/her community. Ogbujah (2006) states that a man's achievements depend primarily on how much of his community's standards he accommodates: he sees as his community sees, and acts as his community acts. The communal ownership and relationships result in the prosperity of a community which, in the African sense, concurrently results in the prosperity of the individual (Okafor, 1974). Biko (1978) admits that it was never unacceptable to ask one's neighbours for help if one was struggling. In most situations, there was help between individuals, tribes, chiefs, etc. This sense of communality is reflected in living together which is the basis of the extended family system. For the African, the family, unlike the European family, is not an atomized enclave of father, mother and child(ren). There is much elasticity in the application of the term to include one's direct parents, grand- and great-grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews; in fact, to all one's traceable blood relations.



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African tradition for example stress the concept of togetherness as opposed to a society of competing individuals. Precolonial African society is generally described as being communal rather than individualistic in its outlook, social solidarity and the continued existence of the community was of prime importance.

The African conception of human is such that they are not a collection of isolated individuals but are integral members of a group animated by a spirit of solidarity (Weeramantry, 2004). Africans place high value on communal living. Communal values express the worth and appreciation of the community; the values which guide the social interaction of the people towards a common goal. Interpersonal bonds go

beyond biological affinity in expressing the values of communality. Social integration is very important to Africans. Kunene (1980) explains that the earliest act of civilization was the establishment of a cooperative, interactive human community. Whatever happens to one happens to the community as a whole. The willingness to help others for development of the community is reciprocal “I am because we are and because we are, therefore I am” Mbiti (1969).

While the ethos of community has been exaggerated and romanticised in many writings, its importance is unquestionable. To live in a society, social cohesion and intimate relations between individuals are imperative. This ethos is in sharp contrast with today’s individualism as the community fulfilled an integrative function during the precolonial era (Bamiro, 2014). Bodunrin (1985) points out that precolonial communalism prevailed in small societies with non-money economics in which members were bonded together by common blood and feelings of extended familyhood. Such societies were also characterised by substantial agreement regarding customs, morality and religious beliefs which combined to provide a sense of solidarity and indeed, shared destiny amongst the people.

This communal identity is well reflected in contemporary African literature. This literature focuses on community rather than on the individual. This communal spirit informs the characters and thematic preoccupation of their writing. The choice of social commitment as an imperative of the African writers by a majority of leading writers, after their independence, might well indicate that the old traditional tie to the community has taken a different form. In Soyinka’s *the Strong Breed*, the playwright dramatizes the need for sacrifice. It is one of Soyinka's most symbolic plays. It avoids clustering details and so succeeds in presenting its themes in an archetypal form.

Sacrifice, which Eman represents, is treated symbolically. The carrier, the effigy and Eman as carrier is a symbol for the moral force required to save society. In *the Strong Breed*, one sees the conflict of new and old in a religious context. Similarly, In Ene Henshaw *Children of the Goddess*, Asari Amansa's sacrifice to Ndemeyo, the goddess of Labana, illustrates the unity of these two aspects which ensures harmony and ordered progress in traditional society. Communal spirit is also demonstrated in the play of Rugsyendo's *the Barbed Wired and Other Plays*, where the people jointly oppose Rwambura-influenced security forces who forcefully usurps communal land. More examples abound in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, and Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. Communal spirit is well portrayed in Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman*. In the text, the necessity attached to the ritual self-sacrifice of Elesin Oba after the death of the Oba is in the interest of his community and not a personal interest. Elesin Oba is not meant to suggest the destruction of an individual soul rather it is an implicit confirmation of a communal order. Elesin Oba's self-sacrifice is in the interest and well-being of his community which supersede that of any individual.

In addition, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, communality is emphasised. The community is the hero struggling against alien encroachment to preserve their native culture. It is a story about Igbo culture on the verge of abandonment to Western values and how the prospects of change affect the various characters. For instance, Okonkwo resists the Western idea of change for the preservation of his Igbo cultural values. The villagers as well are caught between resisting and embracing change. In the text, every character is involved in communal rituals, village meetings and communal ancestral feasts. Every deviant behaviour in the Umuofia community is

viewed as a disrespect on the referenced spiritual being and the whole community as well. Hence, the sardonic claim by Achebe that the communal cord that binds the community together has been broken. So also Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat*, depict the anti-imperialist struggle of the people of Kenya in the light of communal feeling of oneness and cohesion towards one another.

In Nigeria, the place of culture in the precolonial era cannot be overemphasised. According to Kehinde (2010), the precolonial era is the era of cultural nationalism whereby the Nigerian culture and traditions were glorified and eulogised. It was the era of paradise on earth. However, the paradise has been distorted and eventually lost. Among other things, the contemporary Nigerian playwrights are saddled with the responsibility of regaining the "lost paradise". This study tackles cultural distinctiveness of the contemporary dramatic literature in Nigeria with a focus on the theme which shows concern about the dislocated social values or cultural decadence.



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1.2 The Yoruba in Context: Cultural and Philosophical Outlook

The Yoruba constitute one of the major ethnic groups of modern Nigeria and they occupy the whole of Ogun State, Ondo State, Oyo State, Ekiti State, Lagos State and a substantial part of Kwara State (Atanda 1980: 1). Besides Nigeria, the Yoruba are also found in the South-eastern part of the Republic of Benin, Togo and Dahomey in West Africa, the West-India and South Africa. There is also a thriving Yoruba culture in South America and the Caribbean, especially Brazil and Cuba where the descendants of the unwilling immigrants to the new world have been able to keep their identities and guard their cultural heritage (Gbadegesin 1983: 174). The Yoruba, in general (that is, those that have their ancestral home in Nigeria and those

in the Diaspora) have a rich cultural heritage rooted in their traditional modes of thought (Fayemi and Macaulay-Adeyelure, 2009).

World view presents an explanation and interpretation of the World and their applications to life (Ajoke et al., 2014). According to Heylighen (2000) philosophical outlook is defined as a mental model of reality- a framework of ideas, beliefs and attitudes about the world, ourselves and life through which an individual interprets the world, its happening and interacts with and response to it. Yoruba philosophy is best understood as a folk philosophy, a set of narratives and cultural practices that attempt to explain the causes and the nature of things affecting the physical and the spiritual universe (Gbadegesin, 1983). Yoruba philosophy is rich in aphorism and proverbs, it is also committed to a search for love and wisdom. Yoruba philosophy is a folk philosophy that valorises the Yoruba people's cardinal virtues-namely, love, morality, temperance, honesty, honour, bravery, justice, prudence, and fortitude. According to Olanipekun (2017), these philosophies can be said to be reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles which are being used to organize experiences in morals, religion, in social and political life, in law, in history and the natural sciences. The traditional Yoruba are associated with various beliefs that cut across different strata of human existence. Like every other race across the world, the Yoruba people also have rich philosophical ideas and worldviews that influence their cultural practices and social relationship. The past, present and future are intricately woven into the Yoruba worldview (Abodunrin, 2016). Some of these philosophies are discussed below:

Life and Destiny

The Yoruba philosophy of life is in two perspectives; life on earth and life hereafter. Life on earth is expected to be enjoyed in good health, prosperity, longevity, peace and happiness. If these are not enjoyed by anyone, such person is considered to have escorted those enjoying it to the world as shown in the Yoruba adage that (*o sin awon alaiye wa jaiye ni*). It is also believed that fulfilment and enjoyment in life can be altered due to wrath of the divinities, anger of the ancestors, observance of ritual prohibition and avoidance of ritual proceedings where necessary. Accordingly, Ajoke et al., (2014), notes further that the Yoruba perceived life to be a very unusual and tasking undertaking, which is full of mysteries and uncertainties. This view is reflected in the Yoruba proverb which states that, *aiimasiko lo n daamu eda* (inability to know the exact time of achievement is a human worry).

Likewise, it is a belief among the Yoruba that whatever happens to a man in life now or in the future has been preordained according to a divine master plan by mysterious power believed to control human events (Balogun, 2007). This also imply that anything one does is not something done out of free will but something done in fulfilment of preordained history (Olanipekun, 2017: 36). Thus, it can be said that destiny is unalterable, unavoidable and must be accepted whatever the case as inferred from a Yoruba adage pointed out by Babatunde (2017) that *ayanmo o se e pe lejo* (human destiny cannot be taking to court for questioning). According to Salami (2009), this ideology of the Yoruba helps them to take with ease, the daily ups and downs of life and to appreciate and live with the differences in the structure of human existence. The life perspective is said to relief them of the agony of the inequality in the society while also working hard get their destiny realised.

Virtuous Character (Iwa Omoluabi)

Issues of virtue, the way human beings comport themselves, think and relate among themselves are fundamental ethical concerns that define and determines social and society sustainability. Irrespective of generation and circumstances one find his or herself, the Yoruba people have serious concern on how one should or ought to live and the kind of person one should strive to be at all times. This is captured and entrenched in the Yoruba word *iwa omoluabi* (virtuous character). The Yoruba belief and moral system encourages everyone to live or strive to live a virtuous life or be a virtuous person. In essence, an *omoluabi* is an individual that exhibit morally approved behaviours like; *iwa rere* (good character), *iwa pele* or *iwa tutu* (gentleness), *iwa irele* or *iteriba* (respect) (Olanipekun 2017). The character of an *omoluabi* is also reflected in *oro siso* (Spoken word), *inu rere* (having a good mind towards others), *otito* (Truth), *iwa* (character or behaviour), *akinkanju* (bravery), *ise* (work), *opolo pipe* (intelligence), *iwa rere* (good character or behaviour) and *aso wi wo* (good dress presentation). According to Oyeniyi (2015), the Yoruba people of western Nigeria, these *iwa omoluabi* are taken to be a set of institutional ideals, which guide and direct the patterns of life, and indispensable for a well ordered society.

Ayanleke (2013) embodiment of the best character traits.

Marriage and Family

To the Yoruba, the family is considered to be the most sacred and significant institution. It is an agent of socialization and social control. As an agent of socialization, the family is the first point where new born learn interaction, preferences and prejudices. As an agent of social control as well, it is where anyone is thought affection, thankfulness, discipline and correction, truthfulness, honour and

shame. Likewise, though the traditional Yoruba family setup is composed of a very large family, the family according to Abodunrin (2016) is viewed to be a tripartite world in which the ancestor, the living and the unborn are united in one continuous existence of divided responsibilities. To them, earthly family life has been extended into the life beyond in consequence of the departure of the ancestors into that place feared by the living. The ancestors who are part of the family are considered to be having greater potentialities than they enjoyed when on earth. So, because of this they are regarded as presiding spiritually over the welfare of the family.

The philosophy of the Yoruba is also reflected in the subject of marriage and family which signifies the end and the beginning of a new era between two different individuals, who agreed to live together, and through their union creates everlasting friendship between homes of their birth (Dada 2014). Hence, it occupies an important position in the affairs of Africans and Yoruba as well, in that without marriage, there is no family, and without a family, one could not bear children. The philosophy of the Yoruba regarding marriage are quite numerous, which among others include the following: 1) marriage is a family and community affair, 2) child or children born in the marriage are recognized as legitimate off-spring of both partners, if otherwise, they are considered as bastards. 3) marriage can be dissolved on the ground of childlessness, 4) virginity or premarital chastity, 4) marriage is for sustenance of Yoruba race and the continuity of a lineage through responsible procreation, 5) sex outside marriage is forbidden, 6) the man is the head of the family (Agbaje 2002).

Communalism

According to Odimegwu (2007), communalism is the ideology that upholds the priority of the community over the individual and that no man is an island of his own. Like other traditional African societies, the sense of community and harmonious living are highly cherished values among the Yoruba people (Fatunmbi,1992). This communalism is reflected in the responsibility of protecting the community against the wrath of the gods, child training. It is also manifested in period of celebration or mourning. As explained by Akande (2017), once somebody dies, the relatives and not just the biological children of the deceased will supply materials needed and contribute money to ensure that the burial is successful. This means that even if the children of the deceased cannot finance the burial, they do not have to borrow much money. Carolyn (1982) as cited by Fazoranti and Olusola (2012) opines that, when the family strengthens, networking, and when the individual has a problem, not only the family but, also the whole community, is often involved in finding the necessary solution(s). This is deduced from the Yoruba adage that *eniya laso mi* that is (people are my cloth), which supported the importance of communalism among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Likewise, the training and development of the child within the prism of the community influence the child to understand the role of collectivism rather than individualism. This is buttressed in the Yoruba adage as pointed out by Ajiboye et al., (2012) that *eniyan kan lo ma nbi omo, sugbon gbogbo ara ilu lo ma nto ju won*, meaning that, it is only one person who is a biological father or mother, but the entire society becomes a social parent when it comes to child training and rearing. Such that any noticeable maladjusted behaviour in a child is quickly caution, checked or nipped on the bud.

Existence of Supernatural Beings

The Yoruba people believe in the existence of Supernatural Being like other African societies. Idowu (1973), described these beliefs to include: belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and belief in mysterious powers” which are all central to the traditional Africa religion. To the Yoruba, God is referred to as the Olodumare and is the highest divinity in whom they believe and worship. “He is supreme over all on earth and in heaven, acknowledged by all the divinities as the Head to whom all authority belongs and all allegiance is due; His status of supremacy is absolute. Things happen when He approves, and things do not come to pass if He disapproves. In worship, the Yoruba holds Him ultimately as the beginning and the very end, in man's daily life. He has the ultimate pre-eminence” (Omobola, 2014). The divinities are called Orisa. They are the creation of Olodumare (God) and are assigned definite duties. They are the mediators between God and man. Generally, the Yoruba people believe that the divinities and the god have similar attributes. “They were brought forth by Olodumare to serve as ministers and functionaries in the theocratic government of the universe” (Idowu, 1973). He added that “there are more than four hundred and one (401) deities or divinities in Yoruba land”. Some of these divine beings are *Orunmila* -the guardian of wisdom, who the people refer to as *Ifa* while *Babalawos* (herbalists) are the human being mediators who disclose *Orunmila* message to human beings. *Obatala* is the god who structures the human bodies; *Ogun* is the god of warfare and iron, and he is well known and holy in all Yoruba communities. *Yemoja* is the deity of river who lives on the coast. There are other divinities that are heroes and are given cosmic characteristics. In addition, there are human deities such as: *Sango*, *Osun*, *Oya*. These personalities, according to history, turned out to be idolized because of unusual roles they played when they were alive and also as a result of the power they exercised and sacrifices

made on behalf of their people. Sango, the human god, is the god of thunder. The Yoruba have several of these deified individuals in town, community and even at regional levels. This belief and consciousness in the existence of spiritual beings (God, divinities, spirits, ancestors, and mysterious powers) make the Yoruba go about their daily activities with care, thereby conducting their activities and affairs with one another and the environment with mutual respect, selflessness and respect of human dignity. The gods are the guardians and custodians of the Yoruba traditions; they do not spare those who violate the societal rule.

1.3 Problem Statement

The beginning of the second half of the 19th century and towards the middle of the 20th century, rapid and radical changes have been taking place across Africa societies, including Nigeria. These changes are due to the cultural collisions arising from colonization experiences specifically from the British in the case of Nigeria. This changes are wholesome and multidimensional involving culture, social, religious, economic, political aspects of life of every tribe in the country. Yoruba people of Nigeria are one of the people caught up in the world revolution which is so dynamic, unfortunately the revolution comes without warning and without physical or psychological preparation. With advancement in the various agents of this revolution, the Yoruba people cultural and philosophical world view appear to have been greatly affected mostly negatively and there appear to be no reverse in the ravaging impacts.

For instance, In Yoruba traditional life, the family is the nucleus of both individual and corporate existence, it is an area where a person really experiences personal

consciousness of himself and of other members of society. Contemporarily, the traditional family world view of the Yoruba is being ripped off a result of so called money economy and education thereby creating totally different worlds within a family co-existing which is reflected in increasing infidelity, divorce, family separation. Likewise, the Yoruba traditional world view of commonality in which the individual says, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" is as well being constantly crushed, undermined and in some respects destroyed. Contemporarily, emphasis is shifting from the 'we' of traditional corporate life to the 'I' of modern individualism. Schools, churches, economic competition and the future dimension of time with all its real and imaginary promises, are the main factors which, jointly are working to produce an orientation towards individualism. Similarly, social vices, like juvenile delinquency, premarital sex, advanced fee (419) which are prominent in the contemporary Yoruba society are some of the fallouts of the modern society which are very much contrary to the Yoruba cultural and philosophical worldview. Without doubt, the Yoruba society feels the change. However, the paradox of the scenario is the need for the Yoruba people to be involved in the future as the world is advancing, yet the need to protect the traditional life of the Yoruba people from the cultural eroding impact of modernity becomes imperatives. As well as the problem of how to mediate the oppositions between traditional systems of Yoruba belief and the modern critical spirit fostered by Western analytical thought. This is the tragedy of a transitional era.

The collapse of indigenous culture and values within Nigeria and among the Yoruba which this study views as critical to Nigerian identity in a postcolonial, global community specifically informs this study. As such, there is the need to revisit some of them in order to bring about the regeneration of Nigerian society and the Yoruba

especially and keep pace with the history and identity in the face of current global challenges. Since literature in Africa is one of the repository of culture and an affirmation of faith in one's cultural ideals, literary writers have approached the problem in their writings. They have sought to know themselves, to acknowledge their roots and appreciate themselves as Africans/Nigerians. They acquired Western education and use the tools to appropriate the values of their societal history, culture and religion, hence the documentary character of the early works in Nigeria, and the writers' concern with culture.

Some of these literary writers steeped in both cultures, while some take sides with traditions, others try to bring about a synthesis on both cultures, examples of such writers are Wole Soyinka, Kobina Sekyi and Ene Henshaw. They regard themselves as functional in the line of traditional artists. Like the spokesmen of old, the artists seek to educate the public to their duties and bring about a spiritual healing to the country through the use of traditional cultural elements. Considering the aforementioned, this study aims to examine the response of some of the Nigerian playwrights, through their literary works to the growing incidences of moral degeneration. It also aims to interrogate the role of culture as an avenue to correct the moral ineptitude in Yoruba society.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions to be addressed in this study include;

1. How much of these moral paradigms are missing in contemporary Yoruba society?

2. What are the key moral standards of behaviour in traditional Yoruba society?
3. How has the writers serve as vanguards of cultural moral and values in contemporary Nigerian society?
4. What are the challenges that arise against contemporary writers in their efforts to resuscitate moral culture in the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria?

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

The main objective of the study is to appraise the relevance of Nigerian culture and assess whether Nigerian culture is still relevant as an agent of societal regeneration as portrayed in the contemporary dramatic literature in Nigeria. The following are the specific objectives of the research work:




1. To evaluate the levels of cultural and moral values in contemporary Yoruba Society.
2. To examine the key moral and cultural paradigms of traditional Yoruba tribe of Nigeria.
3. To examine the position of the writers as vanguard of moral and cultural values in contemporary and future Nigerian Society.
4. To examine the challenges that arise against contemporary writers in their efforts to resuscitate moral culture in the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria.

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1.6 Significance of the Study

Considering the current state of moral degeneration in a postcolonial society like Nigeria, a study that captures and documents the dynamics of morals in the precolonial era is necessary. Hence,

1. This study is significant in that it addresses the essence of recuperating high moral standards in the society.
2. The significance of the study is further seen in the exploration of the role of the Nigerian playwrights in societal regeneration, as well as the fight against increasing incidences of societal delinquency and moral degeneration using dramatic literary texts as a tool for correction, it documents relevant and specific morals in the precolonial period.
3. In addition, this study is significant because it brings to light issues that are reoccurring and are integral to the society, and re-emphasises the recognition of the right, positive and socially acceptable and healthy Yoruba cultural values.
4. Furthermore, the study is an exploration and documentation of the relevance (Yoruba) of culture in contemporary Nigerian society. Also, the study established in-depth how traditional culture can be a reference point for societal regeneration.  *Together in Excellence*
5. The study provides an analysis of how the contemporary Nigerian playwrights have been the vanguard of morals and cultural values which are imperative for cultural preservation.
6. Finally, the study provides a benchmark for further research on the role of literature in societal regeneration.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with multidimensional cultural practices, this study however only focuses on the Yoruba and the cultural and moral values they hold in high esteem, and how playwrights use their works to address the need for

societal renewal in the light of the benefits inherent in indigenous culture. Furthermore, this study understands the dynamic and diverse possible approaches to interpretations of literature which include: readers-oriented approach, author-oriented approach, and context-oriented approach. This study adopts readers-oriented approach where readers' interpretation is guided reader's perception in order to dig meaning from the texts.



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Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an in-depth literature review on issues of interest in this study. First it discusses African literature vis-a-vis colonisation, furthermore it explores the place and potency of African literature in African society regeneration and cultural identity propagation. It then discussed the levels of cultural and moral in the contemporary Nigerian society. It further presented the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the study. Two postcolonial theory paradigms were examined likewise.

2.1 Colonisation and African Literature



Contemporary African writers are writers of African origins whose self-conscious, imaginative writings have been influenced by their indigenous African culture and that of the Europeans as a result of colonialism. By literature, we mean any piece of writing that expresses human experience and feelings through the imagination. Defining African literature appears to be complex considering the nationalities, language and ideological positionality of different writers. Nevertheless, African literature can be defined as any oral or written material of an artistic value produced by Africans about Africa and for Africans in the first place regardless of both the colour of the writer and the linguistic tool in which it is produced. That is, such writing addresses aspects of African life, society, philosophy and experience, regardless of the language in which it is written. It is the output of the contact of Africa with the West as well as her encounter with Arabs. The term 'Contemporary era' arguably began in the 1960s or 70s and continues to the present.

Contemporary African literature is classified into three categories, which reflect the movement through time of the socio-historical experiences of the African continent. The first category centres on the novels of cultural nationalism, and it focused on the task of educating the African people that they had a culture of which they could be proud of (Kehinde 2004). This phenomenon, which dominated the writings of the 1960s had writers like Camara Laye, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene, Ferdinand Oyono, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, and a host of others who wrote to correct the distorted image of Africa. These writers and a few others produced the works of the second category, which protested against the policies of colonial rule through their anti-colonialist novels. The second category of the African writing is the contemporary one, which is national experience, neo-colonialism and postcolonial disillusionment.



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This third category or phase of African literature which is the concern of this work, has given birth to a mass of literature that goes by the general appellation of 'Literature of Disillusionment', because of the mood and tone of the works. These works according to Kehinde (2004: 90) give "expression to a profound rejection of the contemporary African continent as it is presently constituted especially in terms of its human dimension". Most of the works of literature that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in Africa were simply illuminations of disillusionments of the African people in various ways. Literature produced by Africans were primarily oral, but with the advent of writing on the continent through formal education, African literature got divided into two: oral and written African literature. This division points to the fact that contemporary African literature cannot be discussed outside the issue of colonialism.

The deceptive misinformation or disparaging distortion of African culture and identity by external forces contributes to the emergence of written African literature. It is seen that most anti-colonial African literature writers have been writing anti-colonial novels as a reaction to the ugly perception and presentation of Africa by Europeans and European writers. This is buttressed by Adedimeji (2008) who expresses the burden of African literature, as championed by Achebe, noting that it is not mainly to entertain but to school the world with emphasis on the richness of African cultural values. Ojaide (1992) also clearly states that every literary work has a social function.



Though African oral traditions have completely given way to written literature, and the eroding away of traditional beliefs which are well rooted in oral traditions –such as folktales, masquerades and festivals which are often passed across through oral literature, it is seen that contemporary African writers are endeavouring to promote the cultural values of their people, and making sure that these values do not disappear completely even while using the colonial language. Self-knowledge and consciousness of one's cultural pattern and identity are two major factors in the process of affirmation of one's personality. To share these values with the other continents of the globe is essential for the Africans whose culture and civilisation have been denied or rejected over many centuries. Thus it can be said that contemporary African literature is indispensable to help Africans and African societies regain belief in itself and put away the complexities of the years of degeneration and self-abasement.

2.2 African Literature: A Tool for Societal Regeneration and Cultural Propagation

African literature rises against imperialist oppression by rejecting their negative perception of the nuances of African culture. The imperialist suppressed those aspects of African culture which were different from Western culture. Thus, African culture was adversely affected by the imperialist experience because everything was judged by Western cultural standards during the imperialist rule. Considering the damage done by the imperialist, it seems absurd to a number of African writers that even after liberation African culture continues to be dominated by Western standards. This seems to be a form of cultural neo-imperialism to them. With the development of written and printed literature, most African countries experience having works in print which is new and exciting and thus a source of national pride which enables them to propagate the ideas of African culture. As a result, African literary writers have taken their place alongside other nations who boast of written literature and are thus placed in a position to be the vanguard of African culture and way of life. That is why most African literary writers have themes of resistance to the imperialist in their works which describes their patriotic defence of national cultures and democratic struggle against imperialism.

In Africa literature, the effort of reversing the effect of colonisation and propagation of cultural identity starts with the decolonisation of the subject itself. In the post-independence period, English language was accorded an official position, a higher status than the indigenous languages. The production of literature in indigenous languages was considered irrelevant to the notion of modern society the colonisers were keen to impose on the African people (Dasyuva, 2004). A good instance is the

historic meeting of African writers at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda in 1962 titled 'A Conference of African Writers of English Expression'. The lists of participants were limited to those who write in European languages. The conference inevitably excluded those who wrote in African languages. Ngugi, a student at the time, qualified for the meeting on the basis of only two published short stories, 'The Fig Tree' and 'The Return' in a new journal, *Transition*. Neither Shabaan Robert, the then greatest living East African poet with several works of poetry and prose to his credit in Kiswahili, nor Chief Fagunwa, the great Nigerian writer with several published titles in Yoruba, was qualified. The discussions at this conference were mainly based on the novel, the short story, poetry, and drama in English and hence they excluded the main body of work in Swahili, Zulu, Yoruba, Arabic, Amharic and other African languages. Wali (1997) believes that the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture and until these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration.

This situation gave rise to nativism in Africa, in Ngugi's book *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), in which he compares the writer with a surgeon. He says that a writer and a surgeon have something in common, a passion for truth. Prescription of the correct cure is dependent on a rigorous analysis of the reality. Writers are surgeons of the heart and souls of a community. Ngugi's comparison is appropriate, by comparing a writer with a surgeon he tries to show the relationship between the writer and the society. No literary work exists in a vacuum; no writer exists in a void. The

relationship between literature and society is very significant. Balogun (1982: 59), while commenting on the experimental styles of Tutuola, Omotoso and Osofisan says, “Our oral literature sees the artist not as an alienated individual but as an integrated, balanced, communal being who creates purposeful art in clear, understandable terms”. These writers constantly draw materials and inspirations from the rich African philosophical hermeneutics and loric tradition to serve mankind. The cultural icons that constitute largely the raw materials for the writers are deliberately explained and made to perform new functions. Culture no longer functions at the level of mundane values but is put at the service of the nationalistic quest for political salvation. Gugelberger (1986) in the introduction to his Anthology “Marxism and African Literature” states that in Africa prior to colonisation, art functioned and communicated well to the people.



In a lecture Achebe gave at Harvard titled “Africa and Her Writers,” he says that “our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose; they made their sculptures in wood and terra cotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society” (1989: 19). Similarly, Achebe (1989) in his convocation lecture at the University of Ife titled “The Truth of Fiction” concentrated more on philosophical language, the general problems of cultural restoration, the appropriation of indigenous traditions, and the creation of regional identity within global languages.

African literature of all genres is mostly preoccupied with the negative impact of colonialism in Africa and on African people. Africans have come to realise that

colonialism affected almost every aspect of African life and culture. African literature has been at the forefront of helping the educated Africans who embraced European values and attitudes to retract their colonial mind-set by exposing the evils associated with colonialism. Literary works have often exposed the evils of colonialism and have strongly proved that the African cultural norms can address the contemporary problems in African societies.

These works concentrate clearly on the social rupture caused by early contact with the colonialists. They explore what life was like before the imperialists arrived, and dignify indigenous African culture from the first stage to the present. African literature from the second stage is more concerned with resistance to colonialism, often combined with the protagonist's alienation from more traditional society. The third and most diverse stage grapples with disillusionment at the experience of postcolonial society, often faced through satire. All these confirm that literature by Africans from its beginning to the present have always reflected different aspects of the continent's realities and vicarious experiences of its people.

Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* was written as part of the Nigerian Independence celebrations in October 1960. The playwright combines elements of history, myth and metaphysics in its attempt to define man's relationship with the forces of nature with the use of his Yoruba cosmology, Soyinka turns the play into a drama of the gods and spirits and also it becomes a mirror in which man sees himself in perspective. Soyinka depends on such ritual sources as Egungun, a Yoruba belief like *Abiku*. To the Yoruba people, *Abiku* is a child that is born with a desire for death in its soul, a child that decides its own death. In the play, *Abiku* is a

symbol of death and life linking man to his past coupled with an all-pervading atmosphere of fantasy, which makes it basically Nigerian drama.

Also, Zulu Sofola's *King Emene*, rooted in her Igbo culture use indigenous motifs especially, traditional materials in his plays. *King Emene* centres on a festival subject, the celebration of the Peace Week, an important social and religious event in the life of community. The setting is a courtyard, and the tragic action of the play lies in the king's insistence on celebrating the Peace Week which is an important tradition in the community. Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe presented the typical Igbo society before the advent of colonialism. He created a clear picture of the cultural values, laws and mores of the Igbo people. Umuofia is presented as a society with its own laws and governance principles based on traditional norms. They had a working system of administration until the invasion of the whites that disrupted their values. The Igbo society in the novel is presented as pure and full of life. It was the western values that destroyed African values and relegated African laws as primitive and unrefined. African society is presented as a barbaric society in European novels and African writers have been struggling to correct this ugly representation. That was why Achebe (1981: 202) states in his creed that his mission is to espouse and correct the years of denigration and self-abasement which "the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them".

In Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Omokachi community is presented in her natural state where the natural and spiritual things are treated differently. There are natural justice and spiritual essence. Madume died because he violated the laws of the gods. A greedy fellow dies in his greed. Ekwueme died because he wanted to twist

the hands of the gods. There is a belief among the people that whoever challenges the gods to a fight always fails. The community believes that the gods have superior power. These instil fear of the gods in the mind of the people, hence making them refrain from any act that could jeopardise the good of the community. For instance, for a moral society, actions like greed are frowned at, but the fear of the gods prevents such, hence making the inhabitants to be law abiding.

As Elechi Amadi dramatizes the influence of gods in the affairs of human, Soyinka and Henshaw also portray this. For instance, in Henshaw's *Children of the Goddess*, the playwright shows that the world of traditional Nigerian life depends on the constant interplay of two forces namely: the physically seen world and the unseen world of the gods, ancestors, spirits, witches and magicians. Asari Amansa's sacrifice to Ndemeyo, the goddess of Labana, illustrates the unity of these two forces which ensures harmony and ordered progress in traditional society.



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In Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*, we see a writer presenting the South African society in the grips of Apartheid and how the black South Africans have been subjugated to live as animals and turned to slaves in their own land. In Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*, the author presented the problem of disinheritance of land from the blacks. The East African society was engulfed with the politics of land as a result of colonialism.

African literature became concerned about correcting these anomalies. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is presented as a perfect man who acted according to the dictates of his society. At the age of 18, he has three titles, three wives and three yam barns which are the indices of growth in his society. It is the arrival of western

values that destroyed a great personality like Okonkwo who committed suicide on discovering that the values of his society have been thrown into the abyss. However, in *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe presents the consequences of cultural confusion. Obi Okonkwo, caught in the labyrinth of his cultural responsibilities and desire to live the Western lifestyle in an independent Nigeria, finds himself accepting bribes which leads to his downfall. Achebe's argument in this text is that the African cultural practice of thanking your benefactor with a gift has suddenly become unlawful according to the law of the colonialist and shows how this anomaly has destroyed the best of African people represented by Obi Okonkwo. Achebe tries to present the fact that European values are distorted and worse than African values. In *Jagua Nana*, by Cyprian Ekwensi, we see an urban city filled with prostitution and other forms of vices. The urban city is synonymous with western values. Many African writers have been trying in their various works to present the African personality in a positive light.



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African literature represents the cultural life of the people. Apart from Chinua Achebe who presents African culture as a way of telling the whites that Africans did not hear of culture first from them, there are salient aspects of African culture in most novels. In Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Woods*, the cultural displacements of women in Senegal are revealed. We see women struggling to make a better place for their society. Also in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, we see the African culture in a Moslem society where the culture of the people and their religion are mixed. The novel is a long letter narrating the ill treatment of women according to Moslem rules. Here, a woman's attempts at reforming this odd were met with stringent measures that left her desolate. Going back to Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, we see the Igbo

culture concerning marriage, hunting, widowhood, belief in the supernatural, respect for elders and natural medicine represented fully in the novel. African writing thus fulfils its role as agents for the societal change whether it is about women's empowerment or the societal upliftment of what is positive about the continent.

2.3 Levels of Cultural and Moral Values in Contemporary Nigerian Society

Nigeria like many other African countries is a heterogeneous state with diverse cultures and the moral values they uphold. Though the country has three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), it however has more than two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups each having various distinctiveness in cultural practices and values which include language, dressing, greetings, marriage, ceremony, trade, food cooking and eating styles, religious practices, etiquette and architecture (Ezedike, 2009). For instance, morally, age is greatly respected in Nigeria. Across all ethnic groups in the country elders are given special rights of respect and honour. Also, shaking of hands, eating, or giving out things with the left hand is unacceptable. The left hand is reserved for personal toiletries and is considered dirty (Ajayi, 1998). Additionally, some cultural issues with respect to marriage are still upheld among cultural groups despite western influences. Here, traditional ways are still being followed like requesting for the young woman's hand in marriage by the groom's family (called introduction) and payment of bride price.

Despite some moral and cultural practices these diverse groups share in common, there are however differences in these practices. Some of these differences are seen in dressing, greeting, and ceremonies. The Yorubas usually wear "Agbada", an

oversized cloth which is worn like a jacket over lace or wrapper-based clothes. Edo people's use of beads is common in Benin. This symbolises royalty and freedom. Hausa people usually dress with a "Kaftan" or "Jalabiya". In all these dressing styles, covering of one's nakedness is held in high esteem. In terms of greeting, as noted earlier, the elders are paid respect which is seen in the manner of greeting of elders. Among the Yorubas, young people greet their elders by prostrating or kneeling on one or two knees. Igbo non-elders, on the other hand, use honorifics to address those that are significantly older than them.

Other Nigerian cultural values constitute, according to Ezedike (2009: 455), "the sum total of shared attitudinal inclinations and capabilities, art, beliefs, moral codes and practices which characterize Africans". This contains both material and non-material elements that are socially transmitted from one generation to another. As a result, Ndubuisi (2009: 189) states that "punishment for crime in African culture, is necessary for continuous existence of the society, to correct the culprits and to deter further criminal activities. In the case of Nigeria, many tribes believe that the fates of individuals in a community have a spiritual link which is why one man's troubles or successes become indirectly, the troubles and successes of the entire clan. Among the Igbo, there are aphorisms which explain this:

- I. Otu Mkpuru aka ruta mmanu, ozu oha onu (when a finger is dipped in red oil, it spreads to the rest).
- II. Ofeke nyuchie nsi uzo, osie onye obula (when one miscreant defecates at an improper place, it fouls the air everyone breathes).

The precolonial traditional societies were peaceful irrespective of the differences in their culture and social values. Also, in these societies crime control mechanisms were effective as a result of strong adherence to social and cultural values in place. The Yoruba believe that every criminal act committed in the society makes the gods of the land angry. If the offender is not quickly detected and punished, the gods may punish the entire community with pestilence or death.

Colonisation has destroyed most of the important core values of most ethnic groups in Nigerian, norms and traditions even in the area of criminal justice systems of the people. Despite the fact that modern policing, court systems and penal system have replaced the traditional legal system among Nigerians, the modern societies are experiencing more heinous crimes and offences that were not part of the precolonial Nigerian societies. The reason is not far-fetched: The traditional justice systems of the precolonial era which were feared and respected have been eroded. Such erosion had created a continuous rise in crime statistics and high rate of re-offence among the offenders, for the great fear of punishment from the gods and the societies is no longer in operation (Okunola and Ojo, 2016).

Before colonisation indigenous communities which make up what is now known as Nigeria had their ways, laws, and lifestyle which came from their culture. They created their own customs, fashioned their own tools and told their own story. As a collective people they had their own culture which was characterised with both peace and strife, ceremonies and rituals; this was their own history until, with the introduction of western culture, everything changed. The world today talks about the rich African cultural heritage but Africans know that the cultural shows on television

and written in books and newspapers are all theatrics. In practice and in the reality of everyday living those cultures have been eroded.

For example, in Igbo culture, the famous Nzen'ozo institution in Igboland with its original credibility, the *ofo*, struck on the earth with its full powers and effect, the holiness of traditional institutions. The sanctity of life, or the integrity of elders, or the moral regard for traditional values in traditional settings like Akan, or Zulu, or Bantu or Efik and Ibibio are now a thing of the past. The elders in the precolonial Nigeria society were assumed to have communal wisdom and were saddled with leadership in the affairs of the people. Respect is one major principle that guides the behaviour of all African societies. Respect for those old cultural beliefs which ensured peace and remarkable communal living, all those cultural values are now symbols which point to nothing beyond the surface decorations and are used as tourism.



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The present generation of the Yoruba people do not understand the meaning and essentiality of Yoruba cultural practices. This is because Yoruba cultural values were different from those of the west, its ideas of justice, of right and wrong, beliefs in life and afterlife, belief in God, language, views about society, about other humans, about human behaviour, about nature, these were entirely replaced to those of the west. If Yoruba cultural values had been properly integrated by those of the west, that society would have been the best place to live in. And because the western cultural backgrounds are different and are incompatible with Yoruba culture, Yoruba people have been at conflict and confusion trying to live by them in language, dressing, politics, education, economy, leadership and so on. This explains John Mbiti's assertion when referring to the African before colonisation when he said:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony. Whereas, the latter part of this assertion refers to the colonized African when he says: and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament (Mbiti, 1989: 2).

Nearly all the precolonial Nigerian ethnic societies were influenced by religion; almost every aspect of life was seen and interpreted in the supernatural. There is the belief that the ancestors play prominent roles in the maintenance of morality in the community. However, with the increasingly globalising world, the decline of moral value is appalling, new values have been adopted, sexual perversion is pervading in Nigerian society, and the dignity of labour as a cherished value has been infested with the corrupt virus of quick and urgent ways to success without hard work: all these are taking over age-long cherished values.



In Yoruba society today there is rapid moral decadence cutting across adults, youths and kids in all sectors of the society. Delinquent behaviours have degenerated the minds of people in the society, in schools and government institutions; there are increases in instances of immoral behaviour such as robbery, tricks, begging, touting and all sorts of misfit behaviours in our societies. Moral decadence in the Yoruba society has engendered a lot of problems in all sectors of the society resulting in the slow pace of development in the country.

The level of moral decadence in Yoruba society has become repugnant. The previous priceless moral values and norms have regrettably been ruined, while immorality now reigns, especially among the youth. Yakubu (2015) has noted that “gone are the days when morality and discipline used to be virtues. Today it is the

exact opposite. We now live in a decadent society where morality and discipline are gone into extinction. This is evident in the current level of sexual promiscuity among the youths in the country. Ani (2002), observed that sexual immorality has become the talk of the day in the country as one is regarded as the greatest by the number of sexual partners he/she has in the name of lovers. As a result, premarital sex, homosexuality and lesbianism are no more vices among the youth. The phenomenon of social media has remorsefully aggravated the matter as one can easily reach out to friends of the opposite sex, make new ones and even invite them over (Nche, 2012). Hence, social ills that are erstwhile strange and alien to the indigenous norms and values, are becoming increasingly common in the country.

The problem of indecent dressing and the consequent sexual harassment in the country, especially in tertiary institutions, is on the increase. Nakedness is now directly proportional to your fame and acceptance, skimpy dresses are now tickets to 'classy' events, songs that have sexual talk in them sell faster than the meaningful ones, when your trousers are around your waist then you are seen as a "learner", big girls are now identified by level of exposure of their private parts. Even the world's religions and academic institutions have failed in eradicating this dangerous way of life (Nche, 2012).

Social vices have completely replaced core moral values in present times. This ravaging phenomenon is the cause of some of the major problems Nigeria is facing as a nation. It is a society where the youths no longer think of how tomorrow would be better than today or how to be instrumental to the development of the country. This societal menace is just too prevalent and has reduced the present youth to

mediocrity. The deterioration of values is so pervading that Ewelu (1999) states satirically that “in Nigeria, a blind person can be given a driving license if he is able to put on table the “required amount”. Mbon (1990) did a crisp compendium of the devaluation of our value when he says new values have been adopted and canonised. Graft and corruption have become endemic and insidious in the Nigerian society that governance and leadership have continued to lack integrity and legitimacy (Ajidahun, 2013). Dishonesty and cheating, fraud and getting away with it have now replaced ancestral moral uprightness and probity. Omobola (2013), explains that the reappraisal and, of course, the rediscovery of the place of Yoruba cultural values have the potential of promoting the kind of self-understanding that would provide some basis for determining the kind of sociocultural reconstructions that would enable the Yoruba people to come to terms with the challenges of contemporary life.



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African writers defend their native culture against alien intrusion. They focus their themes on preserving the elements of their culture that still exist. Okot p'Bitek of Uganda in *Song of Lawino* imbues Lawino, the symbol of African cultural independence, with dignity, humility, respect and authenticity. She is opposed to Clementine and Ocol who indiscriminately copy European culture. Lawino is representative of the royalty and courage of the bull and the beauty and gracefulness of the giraffe; but repulsive animals such as the hyena, monkey, ostrich and python signify the copied alien ways of life. African playwrights revile Western interference through colonisation as a hindrance to the growth and development of African culture and the cause of the social vices rampant in contemporary society. The African cultural habits and practices that are not socially acceptable change with

time: after all, culture is not static. Kobina Sekyi portrays such habits in *The Blinkards*. Practices such as the killing of twins, human sacrifice in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* have faded away among other practices. Mazizi Kunene (1982), the South African poet, in his poem "The Ancestors" and "The Sacred Mountain" warns against any ethical and moral superiority over others because of its material and technological advantages because they do not go together. Contemporary literary writers use literature to assert cultural autonomy. Postcolonial writers reassign new ethnic and cultural meanings to the groups of people that are treated as insignificant by their society. They focus their writings on how to preserve the elements of their culture that still exist.



2.4 Theoretical Framework: The Postcolonial Theory

This study is hinged on the pillars of postcolonial theory which include models such as metropolitan, eclectic and nativist traditions as it attempts to highlight the virtues of Yoruba culture in an era where African culture is considered primitive and inappropriate to modern standards of living. Postcolonial studies encompass all that is colonial and the effects that colonialism had and continues to have on the colonized. According to Boehmer (1995), colonialism is the consolidation of imperial power, and it is manifested in the settlement of territory, the exploitation the colonized resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands. Postcolonialism therefore can be understood as socioeconomic, cultural, philosophical and political responses to European colonialism from its inauguration, its fall to the present day (McEwan, 2009; Hiddleston, 2014). Although it covers all regions, it is mostly now associated with the aftermath of British and

French colonialism. In essence, it is largely a study of the consequences of colonialism on cultures and societies and has to do with both how European nations dominated and controlled "Third World" cultures and how these groups have since reacted to and refused to accept those infringements. The postcolonial theory therefore as defined by Gail (1999), refers to a way of reading, theorising, interpreting and investigating colonial oppression and its legacy that is informed by an opposing ethical agenda. This theory as pointed out by Ashcroft et al. (2007) is used to re-examine and re-evaluate the colonial legacies in pre- and post-independence nations and communities.

From the late 1970s, postcolonialism has been used by literary writers' scholars, and critics to discuss the various effects of colonisation (Ashcroft et al., 2008) with critics extending their frontiers to the various cultural effects of colonisation. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a major book which can be said to inaugurate postcolonial criticism. Likewise, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), which in its anti-colonial quest, advocates for decolonisation through violence and voicing what might be called 'cultural resistance' to France's African empire. This field of study became popular with the publication of Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (2013). Furthermore, although scholars like Ogunjipe Leslie (1987), Chinweizu (1978), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1981 and 1986), Ogunjina (1995), Ashcroft et al., (1995) and Adéyemi (2003) generally view colonialism as a deadly virus that has destroyed many traditional values, and has brutally disrupted indigenous African ways of life and also emphasise the need for a reorientation of the African psyche from their state of hybridism yet they hold diverse reactions in tackling colonialism.

Consequently, this leads to different models of postcolonial theory which include the Metropolitan, Eclectic and Nativist models (Adeyemi 2003: 103–104).

The first theory, Metropolitan, claims that the native is historically mute, that they lack the language to speak, and are therefore incapable of speaking back against the master. Consequently, English, which is the language of the ‘master’ is used to utter confrontational words against the “master”. To Adeyemi (2003), this model is interested in promoting the inherited language of the master as well as creating a national identity for the literature of the periphery. It celebrates hybridism by encouraging the marriage of traditional and European cultural and artistic features to reassert the periphery’s pride of place. He adds that his model cannot work for local masses whose language is the indigenous one. To him, the crusade of enlightenment about the struggle for cultural, intellectual, political and economic identity is better done in the indigenous language for a better effect on the local masses, hence the choice of indigenous culture and language play-text in this study.

The second theory, Nativism, refers to reifying cultural self-perception, self-orientalisation, the construction of indigenous identity at the expense of indigenous difference, and the suppression of indigenous cultural plurality. This model calls for a confrontation with the facts of history, an artistic celebration of cultural and political nationalism, and the promotion of traditional civilisation as a way of subverting foreign cultural, textual and epistemological dominance. Nativist theory is used to challenge internal and external oppression and it promotes the use of indigenous language in literary production. The extent to which the playwrights have gone in answering these calls will form the analysis of the selected texts. Postcolonial

metacritics reject nativism because it renders critical work unreflexively and morally untenable. A work tainted by nativism deteriorates into a cultural resistance at the expense of suppressing indigenous minority ones, or the making of new nativist myths to counter Eurocentric myths. According to Adejumo (2010), nativism rejects cultural imperialisms and advocates a rebirth of indigenous culture through the use of indigenous languages and literature. The third theory, the Eclectic model, is used to compare the indigenous culture with the alien culture, thereby probing into the advantages and disadvantages of the two cultures.

Postcolonial theory as a critical venture can be regarded as a counter-discourse that deliberately set out to revisit history from the perspective of the suppressed. Bassey (2012) posits that postcolonialism from the point of view of literary studies, could be identified as both “a subject matter and a theoretical framework”. In the light of this, any analysis of a postcolonial literary work, regardless of the theoretical framework used, might be called postcolonial criticism. Bassey (2012) further mentioned that postcolonialism, as both a body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, has gone and continues to go through the stages of an initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonised state, having to struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy and a growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity.

As a theory, it involves the discussion of the experiences of various kinds, namely, migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, culture, place and response to the influential master discourse of imperial cultures. It encloses much as it concerns all the societies which the imperial forces of Europe

have touched, even if it is not felt in the formal guise of theoretical texts. The theory sets out to deconstruct what master discourses have laid down as parameters, values and writings of the colonised. As a theoretical framework, it enquires about the social, cultural, political and psychological operations of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies and, regardless of the focus of any postcolonial analysis, such analysis would emphasise the text as either colonialist or anti-colonialist or a combination of the two (Tyson, 1999).

Ogu (1986) identifies the transition inherent in all postcolonial literatures. The first phase was said to be marked by “an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models and with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces entirely in this tradition. This can be called the ‘Adopt’ phase of colonial literature, since the writer’s ambition is to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity”. The second phase is tagged the “Adapt” phase since it aims to adapt the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre. In the final phase, there is a declaration of cultural independence whereby African writers remake the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. This can be tagged the “Adept” phase, since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is quite independent. Summarily, postcolonial theory is a response to Western domination and an attempt to undermine the notion of Western superiority over the third world’s inferiority. Emerging from multi-disciplinary studies, the central task of post-colonial theory is to advocate a process of artistic and literary decolonisation that involves the dismantling of European cultural assumptions.


Oyegoke (2006) critically observed that literary theories do not grow in a vacuum. Considering this fact, it will not be an assumption to declare that postcolonial theory developed out of the experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism in the worlds that have witnessed cultural imposition in its old state and are still going through its hurdles in its new form. Klages (2006) states that “the field of postcolonialism examines the effect that colonialism has had on the development of literature and literary studies – on the novels, poems, and ‘English’ departments within the context of the history and politics of regions under the influence, but outside the geographical boundaries of England and Britain”.

Although all the definitions given above are vivid pictures of postcolonial theory and its engagement, this study tilts toward an inward search of myriads of postcolonial dysfunction, tracing it to postcolonial African leaders and not the colonial masters. The varying definitions pinpoint the fact that postcolonial critics interpret postcolonial literature via a number of connecting factors which range from the earlier “encounter with the colonizer and the disruption of indigenous culture, glorification of European adventures, bothering on colonial oppression in all magnitude, mimicry, exile, post-independence exuberance followed by disillusionment; the struggle for individual and collective cultural identity and the related themes of alienation, un-homeliness, double consciousness and hybridity. The need for continuity with a precolonial past and self-definition of a political future also forms a critical yardstick” (Gail, 1999).

Ashcroft et al. (1995) rightly tread this path by affirming that postcolonialism, as a term, encompasses the totality of practices which characterise postcolonial societies from the inception of colonialism to the present. One significant effect of colonial

criticism is to further undermine the Universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics. Barry (2002) submits that the claim regarding great literature as of timeless and universal significance is tantamount to disregarding cultural, social, regional and national differences in experience and outlook, preferring instead to judge all literature by a single, supposedly 'universal' standard.

The development of postcolonial studies started with the development of colonialism. According to Seldan and Widdowson (1993), analysis of the cultural dimension of colonialism/imperialism is as old as the struggle against it. In Ashcroft et al.'s (1995: 112) perspective:



Postcolonial literatures are as a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. As a consequence, postcolonial theory has existed for a long time before this particular name was used to describe it. Once colonized people had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued then from these problematic contests, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, postcolonial theory came into being.

This implies that postcolonialism has been reacting against imperialism before its conscious formulation as a theoretical field of study. This is noted by the pioneer of postcolonial criticism Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in French in 1961, and voicing what might be called 'cultural resistance' to France's African empire. Fanon, who is also a psychiatrist from Martinique, argued that the first step for colonised people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. Since for centuries, the European colonising power would have devalued the nation's past, seeing its precolonial era as a precivilised limbo, or even as a historical void. Barry strongly asserts that if the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is

to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued (Ashcroft et al., 2007).

To Fanon, decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon. Decolonisation, which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously a programme of complete disorder (Ashcroft et al, 2007). Another most important book, which can be said to inaugurate postcolonial disapproval is Said's *Orientalism* (1978). This can be tagged a precise representation of the Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the dominance of what is Western, and the inferiority of what is not. Added to this is Barry's immense contribution to the theory as noted earlier. Said's (1978) view on orientalism serves as the foundation for the postcolonial theory. The book probes the effect of colonialism on Asia. Said affirms that Europe successfully perpetuated "hegemony" over others with the power and knowledge they possess about them, creating a dichotomy between themselves as "masters" who occupy the centre of the world and "others" who are on the periphery. The West has always spread the gospel of superiority over others with the civilisation mission. He argues that the colonialists used this ploy to disregard the culture of "others", a "feat" they achieved through Western education and religious teachings. It can be deduced from Said's argument that colonialism has a negative influence on the psyche of the colonised such that the colonised accepted the way they are being portrayed.

Frantz Fanon's, *The Wretched of the Earth* is a more overtly committed text. Fanon opens quite starkly with a clear call to arms: "national liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, Commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent process" (Fanon, 1967: 27). One of the central tenets of the collection will

therefore be that the overthrow of colonial violence must itself be a violent process. Given the intransigence of colonial force, decolonisation can occur only when that force is met with equal antagonism. The colonised should not wait to try to subvert the system from within. Bhabha's invocations of colonial ambivalence, of representational uncertainties on both sides, have little resonance here. Rather, the colonised can only mimic the techniques of the coloniser, who from 1830 onwards subjugated native Algerians with the use of force. Furthermore, Fanon's description of the underlying structure of colonial thinking is equally stark. Coloniser and colonised are pitted against one another in the form of a rigid binary opposition, and there is no possible communication or mediation between them.

The conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* forms a powerful statement of Fanon's revolutionary vision and brings together some of the fundamental precepts of his thought. Most important is his unconditional demand for change. Fanon rejects every aspect of the present colonial order and summons the colonised people to action. His tone is apocalyptic, advocating the participation of all citizens in the anticolonial struggle. Using the metaphor of awakening, he jolts the people into a realisation of their acquiescence and calls for the overthrow of entrenched ideology and familiar patterns of behaviour: "We must leave our dreams and abandon our beliefs and friendships of the time before life began, let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry" (Fanon, 1967: 251). This opposition between old and new is coupled with further recollection of the contrast between Europe and the ex-colony.

Again using black-and-white rhetoric, Fanon categorically associates Europe with the systematic enslavement of its Third World other. European culture also connotes a

demand for stasis, immobility and resistance to change. Europeans restrict and weaken the cultural dynamism of their colonised people, and they resist the free invention of new structures. Even more, European thinking maims and kills the people it wants to govern and denies colonised men their humanity. It sweeps away individual creativity in favour of the relentless working of the colonial power machine. In response to this destruction, Fanon advocates a return to the body, and the release of physical power and movement within those who have become divorced from themselves: “Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try and create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth” (Fanon, 1967: 252). Reintegrating mind and body, Fanon wants to restore man in his totality and to reconnect the colonized with those parts of himself that have been denied freedom of expression.



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Thus it can be said that postcolonial literature emerges as a result of colonial experience, and through literature, we get to know the focus of Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* and *The Lion and the Jewel* as a response to the effect of colonialism on his Yoruba culture. Postcolonial writers recount their experiences in their writing on “how their rich native cultures were destroyed under the power of imperialism” (Palmer, 1990). According to Kenalemang (2013), postcolonial writers usually try to modify new ethnic and cultural meanings to the groups of people that are treated as irrelevant by their society. He maintains that the literature also aims at inviting the colonised to work together collectively. If they work together and put their differences aside, they are surely bound to overcome the pain of losing their culture.

This will enable them to focus on ways that will help preserve the elements of their culture that still exist.

This study focuses on two paradigms, the coloniser/ colonised paradigm and the national culture and liberation struggle paradigm.

2.4.1 The Coloniser/ Colonised paradigm

The organized process of colonization of the colonizer is characterised by observed economic advantage, intense and continuous racialization and racial supremacy in favour of the whites, deceptive presentation of benefits of colonization, dehumanization of the colonized ideologies. These were subtly carried through the colonizers enforced language, education and religion. This is captured by Fanon (1963) who argues that colonization is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. But went further through perverted logic turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and completely destroys it. According to Memmi (1967), the economic motives explain why so many Europeans choose to relocate to the colonies. The change involved in moving to a colony ensured that these settlers could make a substantial profit. In a racialized hierarchy where being white guaranteed all possible privileges, moving to a colony entailed: better jobs, higher wages, rapid social mobility, and profitable businesses. In short, the colonizer becomes aware of his status of white settler as he arrives in the colony and "discovers his own privilege" (Memmi, 1967:7). He becomes keenly aware the lucrative and privileged position he occupies is in direct relation to the colonized.

Education is also a weapon which the colonizers used to control their colonies. To create a channel of communication between the colonizer and the colonized, the colonized learn how to speak the colonizer's language, and eventually find themselves mixing their native language with that of the colonizer which was introduced education. The propaganda medium of colonial invasion has always been a highly strategic educational system which brought in a new medium of communication. In the Nigeria context, the medium was English and this present a message of the supremacy of the White man's race, rationality and culture. This resulted in a multiplicity of comparative supremacy of all forms of intellectual discourses that have been imported from the West, whether they be literary, jurisprudential or socio political. This supremacy perspective furthered to the cultural scene reflecting a well-nurtured inferiority complex in the psyche of the colonized. Consequently, due to the unequal power relations, culturally specific values and practices of the colonized are endangered along with their feeling of cultural belonging. Thus, cherished indigenous values, such as honour, pride, shame, myths, sacrifices, sacred symbols and other elements that are exposed to a shift, becomes distorted and eventually result in disorientation in the process of interaction with a more dominant and alleged supreme culture.

Colonialism thus destroyed colonized culture, values and practices. This destruction and captivated glittering and glamorous colonizer's style and fashions resulted in non-remembrance or complete loss of the colonized culture, tradition, language, food habits, behaviour and thought patterns which sums up their identity.

2.4.2. The National Culture and Liberation Struggle Paradigm

National culture is a part and parcel of a cultural life; it is the ultimate manifestation of a nation's being which is inter-connected with the nation's subsistence. It is also seen in dual form as the fruit of a people's history (the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies) and a determinant of history. Culture is a vital part of a people's identity in its struggle for freedom from colonialism. A national culture encompasses all the efforts made by a people to describe, and justify the process through which the common identity holding them together as one people is produced. In the case of colonized nations, national culture should take centre stage in the struggle against colonialism (Parry, 1994).



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The experience of colonial domination shows that in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizers not only creates a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people; he also provokes and develops the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by so-called assimilation of indigenous people, or by creating a social division, that is a social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses. It also shown that efforts were made by the colonizers disrupts and destroys the cultural life of the conquered people by turning to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures, and destroyed it. However, Cabral (1974) emphasized that to dominate a nation by force of arms is, above all, to take up arms to destroy or at least, to neutralize and paralyze its culture. For as long as a section of the populace is able to have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its

perpetuation. Cabral, like Frantz Fanon before him pointed out that in certain circumstances, it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his domination on a people. But it also teaches us that, whatever may be the material aspects of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned, but with a strong indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation. This indicates that the unsuccessful annihilation of the colonized culture is part of the fall of colonialism.

The need for Africa's rebirth, necessitated the uprising of liberation struggles and movements. The basis for national liberation is on the unchallengeable right of every people to have their own history, and the subsequent aim to reclaim the right which was taken by imperialist domination. The study of the history of national liberation struggles shows that generally these struggles are preceded by an increase in expression of culture so as to assert the cultural personality of the oppressed people in an act of rejection of that of the oppressor. According to Cabral (1974), the value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated. It is in culture that the seed of protest, leading to the emergence and development of the liberation movement, is found. Cabral further explained that African rebirth is premised on a return to importance of material interest of the people, and that the colonized people's culture contains in their struggle which could be effective only if the people involved have conviction and self-confidence. In essence, preservation and survival of the cultural values of the people warrants and it is embedded in the liberation struggle.

The influence of national culture is not deniable in the liberation. In order for culture to play the important role which falls to it in the framework of the liberation movement, the movement must be able to preserve the positive cultural values of every well-defined social group, of every category, and to achieve the confluence of these values in the service of the struggle, giving it a new dimension, the national dimension. Summarily according to Fanon, cultural nationalism is a prerequisite to national liberation and the liberation of the nation is necessary for the renewal of culture. This suggests that the struggle for national liberation is a manifestation of national culture.

The economic, cultural, and political damage caused by colonial occupation does not simply disappear with the first signs of national independence rather it appears to remain indelible. This is supported by Memmi (1968) who opined that the idea that the colonial aftermath will lead to the emergence of a new society rising from the ashes of what was previously a colony is nothing but a false impression. This false impression according to Memmi (1968) is a result of underestimation of “the effect of the psychologically tenacious grip of the events of the colonial past over the postcolonial present. Said (1989:207) also noted that the status of the colonized remains affixed into a zone of dependency and periphery. Such that the colonized are being stigmatized and continually described as underdeveloped or less-developed (Said, 1989:207). Hence, the struggle for national liberation and complete independence from imperialist grip in all its forms has become a driving force which is considered necessary for the progress of the colonized. It undoubtedly constitutes one of the essential characteristics and realities of the present.

2.5 Conceptualizing the Interaction between Culture and Drama

Culture is a way of life owned or chosen by a group of individuals, it characterizes and defined this group of people. As noted by Tylor (1958) and Zimmermann (2012), this way of life is a complex whole which incorporate everything from language, religion and beliefs, cooking, social habits, music and arts, knowledge, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society and which are learnt, shared and passed from one generation to another. Leddy and Pepper (1993) assert that these components of culture are systematically-integrated-whole which closely connected and comprehensible in practice, and as buttressed by Lasisi (1989) a pattern of human interaction in the form of socio-political institutions, thoughts and ideas as well as artefacts emanating from them. Culture is built of social organization of life, it is universal in that there is no society without its own culture, it can be material or immaterial that hold people together and it can as well be dynamic in the sense of being adaptable. Culture is an important element imperative for sustaining a community and for tackling external interferences which is aimed at overriding the community (Moore, 1997). The nature of repository of culture collection, retention and remembrance further influences the sustainability and reminiscence of it.

Nigerian literature is one of the repository of the cultural life of a group of people and is a major source of education for the young generation and the urban people who have lost their roots. Literature in Nigeria is socialized, reflecting a communal tone which informs its' representations and social analysis (Ojaide, 1992). Aside, these literatures are seen as response of writers such as Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Sonny Oti, Femi Osofisan, Tess Onwueme, Esiaba Irobi, and Ahmed Yerimah to several aspects and situations in the Nigerian space which could be cultural, religion,

sociological, political and economic. These playwrights often write to defend and affirm their native culture against alien infringement. In condemning Western intervention as disruptive of the growth and development of Nigerian culture through colonialism.

Drama on the other hand is one of the three genres of literature (poetry and prose being the others). It is described as one of the oldest literary forms. According to the Encyclopaedia Americana, it is a form of literature intended for performance by actors where the subject matter is narrative in character and in the type of story traditionally considered suitable for presentation on the stage (2003, p. 360). In the words of Ogbujah (2006), drama depicts actions and things that happen in true life situations and as rightly presented by dramatic literatures. It represents life in a more distinctive way because it educates, entertains, orientates and satirizes in a conventional or non-conventional manner. It also has a set of generic subsets that include ritual, history, tragedy, comedy and among other which allows for theatrical representation of human experience.

In Africa, the origin of drama bears close similarity with that of Greece, though the experience of each remains completely indigenous to it. One cannot, however, identify a single source of African drama, unlike the European experience, which evolved from the Greek worship of Dionysius and Apollo. This is due to the fact that there are several ethnic dramas in Africa, sometimes sharing common features and at times, displaying divergent artistic impulses. He emphasizes that the various dramas are collectively referred to as African drama for easy academic reference and also because they share common or related worldviews and are located in the

same environment. A critical look at the submission of these worthy scholars foregrounds the opinion that African drama remains an offshoot of traditional religious ceremonies of African people, regardless of the ethnic division. It is generally believed that drama originated from ritual (Sapo & Miller, 2007). This is because ritual is, typically, an enactment which contains magical significance and dramatic elements such as costuming, impersonation, songs and music, dialogue, spectacle and so on (Dasylva, 2007).

African drama experienced growth after independence of most African states. Its topicality and motifs is largely informed by colonial and postcolonial experiences. Dasylva (1997), classified contemporary African drama into main category: cultural plays, nationalist plays, rational plays and neo-rational plays. When an African drama expressly shows concern about dislocated social values or culture decadence or implies the approval of the cross-fertilisation of cultures that is cultural integrations, its central pre-occupation is culture. Most of the African plays in this category constantly probe the newly acquired Western values due to predictably constant conflict between the between African culture and the Western values. Sometimes the playwrights satirised the old and the new in a way that ridicule the latter in order to justify the ideals of African culture. This is the case in Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*, where Mrs Brofusen by virtue of her short stay in England, takes delight in showing off her newly acquired social status by expressing her preference for English mannerisms over native custom in both action and utterances. This gets to a climax when she arranges to make English style engagement a reality for Mr Okadu and Miss Tsiba. But then there are oppositions leading to a clash of principles between Mrs Brofusem and her group, who are representing half-baked English

culture and the African traditionalist including the father of Miss Tsiba, Mr Tsiba and his wife. A similar case is dramatized by Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, where the playwright exposes the badly digested western values using the character of Lakunle. There are also plays like Ene Henshaw's *This is our Chance*, Efua Sutherland's *Marriage of Anasewa* as well as the Athol Fugard's *Blood Knot* that represent the cultural integrationist vision. Also, Joe de Graft's *Sons and Daughters* examines the predicaments of the new culture under the brutal oppression of the old values. In essence contemporary plays that can be located in the culture play category varied, however, they take cognisance of the significance of traditional culture.

The nationalist drama is preoccupied with political struggles, with nationalist objectives either in colonial era as represented by the highlights of the Mau Mau and Maji Maji arm struggles in the colonial Kenya and in the colonial Tanzania respectively as consciously represented in Ngugi's *The Black Hermit*, Ngugi and Mugo's *Trials of Dedan Kimathi* and Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile*. In addition, nationalist plays express the people's disaffection and consciously awaken their level of awareness with the sole aim of making them reject and resist colonial and postcolonial disillusionment and general oppression. They are represented by plays like Ngugi wa Thiong'o *I will Marry when I Want*. It was an experimental play commissioned for performance in Gikiyu at the village theatre of the people of Kaminiitu, Kenya. The play focuses on exploitation and resistance. In South Africa, besides Athol Fugard's *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* a new form of protest drama had evolved, including Maishe Maponye's *Hungry Earth*, *Woza Albert*, a collaborative work by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. These

plays capture the essence of the anguish of the African and his struggle for survival in the former apartheid South Africa. More examples abound in Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and *Opera Wonyonsi*, Kole Omotoso's *The Curse* and Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*. In this category of plays, the level of commitment varies from playwright to playwright.

The third group of African plays is the rational plays which fuses together both cultural and nationalist objectives. For example, rites-of- passage which are integral to Yoruba culture is essentially the focal point in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. Similarly, in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest*, the playwright quests into what might be the future of the young independent Nigeria state (the Half-Child). Notable deities in the Yoruba pantheon are actively involved in the dramatic discourse. Neo-rational drama is made up of plays that draws their materials from African loric tradition to pursue nationalist objectives. This category of play does not follow the usual conventions associated with Wole Soyinka or John Pepper Clark's syntax of cultural beliefs. The playwrights embark on a programmatic replacement of the orthodox myths, legends, tales and the supernatural forces that peopled the present world with a new order of reality and new myths that are capable of serving mankind, not just a privileged class. Although cultural icons constitute largely the raw materials for neo rational plays they are deliberately ruptured and made to perform new functions. Culture here is put at the service of the nationalistic quest for political salvation. Femi Osofisan represents this group of playwrights.

African playwrights constantly draw their materials and inspirations from the rich African philosophical hermeneutics and tradition. Contemporary playwrights usually benefit from the influences of the western dramatic forms and traditions. The dual exposure of the playwright has immensely contributed to the rich and unique hybrid form of what has now come to be known as contemporary African drama. In Africa, especially in Yoruba culture, drama has been particularly traced to the Egungun ancestor festivals which are prevalent in many African communities such as harvest festivals *Osun Osogbo, Eyo, and Sango* festivals, among others. Festivals are celebrations of vital events in all human culture which bring together people from all spheres of life. Traditional festivals are observed to mark important social and cultural events in the lives of the people, and these are culminated in a series of performances, entertainments, rites and rituals. Through these festivals, the values and beliefs of the people are demonstrated; they give meaning to the social, political and religious lives of the people celebrating them (Akintan, 2013, p. 34). Most festivals are associated with specific divinities, spirits or ancestors, and they are, therefore, religious in outlook. Among the Yoruba, for example, each divinity has an annual festival associated with him or her, and this is called *Odun* (festival). *Odun* also means 'year', and when used in relation to festival, it means an "annual festival". This means that major festivals among the Yoruba come up every season or year (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). Festival rites are an important part of Yoruba religion based on the fact that they are the chief media of the religious expression of the people. They added that the institution of the festival is in itself a giant cultural establishment which can accommodate virtually every experience of the community and mould it into its own special idiom. In practice, therefore, "the festival often achieves more than mere religious expression and has materials that can be an

important source for the reconstruction of Yoruba history once the idiom is understood” (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). The significance of *Egungun* festival is the visit of the ancestor spirit and calls for reverence and adoration. The *Egungun* festival is performed in honour of the ancestors, which includes ceremonies such as drumming, songs, dancing, acrobatic display, pouring of libations, exchange of gifts and prayers, and so on. The relevance of the masquerade is best appreciated in the totality of its dramatic import. For example, the masquerades and the worshippers are engaged in a game of make believe. Behind the mask is a human being who impersonates the visiting spirit of the ancestor. His gestures, costume and a long cane, together with the worshippers, position him as an ancestral spirit. The performance of the ritual sacrifices, accompanied with a song to the deity, dancing, drumming, spectacle and so on are all absolute aesthetics for stage effects in the course of the unfolding action which is associated with drama. In the indigenous Yoruba society, festivals are performed in honour of their pantheon of gods. For example, the *Egungun* festival honours the ancestors; Sango festival celebrates the god of thunder, so also other traditional festivals are performed in honour of other divinities. The masquerade spirit of the ancestor is regarded as a divinity. Other divinities include: *Osun*, *Sango*, *Obatala*, *Ori Olooku*, *Moremi*, *Yemoji*, *Ogun*, *Osanyin*, *Oya*, and so on, all of which are associated with their respective festivals characterized by different enactments. Worshippers in the course of the festivals introduce the kind of music, songs and drums that the divinity or deity is associated with, as well as cultivate specific movements or dance patterns of worship. When the songs, the drums and dances are harmoniously engaged, the effect is predictably evocative, and the spirit of the worshipped deity manifests in some of the



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worshippers who are possessed only in the process of active participation in the religious enactments (DasyIva, 2007).

The playwrights recast materials using African dramatic culture in order to present a dramatic form that is essentially African.

Without doubt, drama has continued to play a significant role in history as an agent of self and societal development. From the pre-literary period, through the classical period to the post-modern era, drama has functioned effectively as the signature of civilization, identity and character formation. Drama utilizes diverse mediums to reflect and transform society by acting a medium for information dissemination, communication, education and entertainment. Cultural elements in Nigerian drama is used to portray the enrichment of plays through the utilisation of diverse cultural features that widen the communal vision and the creative horizon of the writers. Such works create the African essence of drama since culture constitutes a people's way of life.



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2.6 Conclusion

African literature has been in the vanguard of projecting African culture, drawing its themes and subject matter from their environment. They reflect the desires and wishes of the society to which they belong. According to Ngugi (1986) the African writer is like a “sensible needle who records with varying degrees of accuracy and success the conflicts and tensions in his changing society”. This means that African writers see themselves as custodians of the people’s history, culture, aspiration and development. This is why they project the culture of the people and mobilise African cultural norms to address contemporary problems.



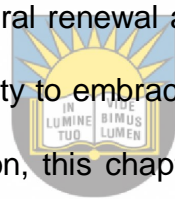
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Chapter Three

Three Plays of Wole Soyinka

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an analyses and discussion of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1976), and *The Swamp Dwellers* (1986). It is structured closely around tackling the specific objectives of this study. The centrality of Soyinka's plays has always been the relevance of the culture of his own people, thus this chapter looks at the traditional life of the Yoruba people and further draws on postcolonial theory in order to discover the extent to which Soyinka displays the preservation of his Yoruba culture in opposition to external influences. The playwright emphasises cultural renewal and the relevance of his native culture, thereby emboldens Yoruba society to embrace its own culture in order to regenerate the society. Following this section, this chapter presents a brief biography of Wole Soyinka, then the synopsis and analysis of the three plays.



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3.1 Brief Biography of Wole Soyinka

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka is known as one of the most decorated African playwrights in the twentieth century. He can be regarded as one of the Africa's pungent literary artists who has written profusely to sustain the African cultural norms and values. This outstanding Nobel prize winner was born on 13th July, 1934 in Abeokuta, Nigeria Protectorate, now Ogun State, Nigeria.

He was a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife, Nigeria, now Obafemi Awolowo University. *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) is one of his notable plays. He is also considered a distinguished poet, critic, novelist and theatre director. Soyinka has strong feelings and roots in Yoruba culture, an element of life

that has filled much of his works. Hence he seeks to make the worldview of his native Yoruba relevant to his work as an artist who uses Western forms (George, 1992). Soyinka can be considered a victim of colonialism, as he witnessed Europeans trying to change his Yoruba culture to fit their own, thus, he acknowledged the dangers and evils of colonialism in every life that has been hurt from its effect (Wilson, 2008). One can quickly perceive that Soyinka is greatly rooted in his indigenous Yoruba territory and is a citizen of the world at the same time.

Soyinka's plays have been noted for proficiency in the combination of African dramatic traditions with Western structural elements. In his plays under study, *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Swamp Dwellers* he made use of these dramatic elements (songs, dance, ritual, storytelling, masque and mimicry) all through the actions of the plays. This study, therefore, views Wole Soyinka as a playwright who takes advantage of his Yoruba traditions and religion by satirizing both African and Western culture in a way that reduces the latter to a satiric butt in order to justify the ideals of his culture.

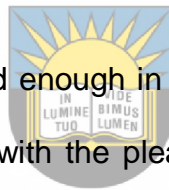
3.2 Play 1: *Death and the King's Horseman*

3.2.1. Plot of the Play

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) is based on the traditional life of the Yoruba people with respect to the objectives of the study which are, to explore the key moral and cultural standard guiding the society and the contemporary situation of the society as well as the role of the contemporary playwright as a commentator on Yoruba cultural issues in Nigeria. Soyinka established an unbroken

continuity of his cultural identity when he demonstrated individuals who stood against the colonial intrusion of European powers, thereby ascertaining the legitimacy and relevance of the culture of the Yoruba people.

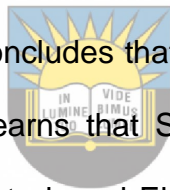
When the play opens, Alafin, a Yoruba king, has just died, and Elesin Oba (the king's horseman), according to tradition, must follow his king to the great beyond. The king is not a commoner and should not be treated as such in the afterworld. His royal status must be maintained in the world of the dead. As Elesin enters the market to prepare for his death, he appears pretty ready but the praise-singer who accompanies him is doubtful that he will be able to go all the way. Elesin reassures him and the market women after falling out with them over his casual treatment.



Elesin, however, is still interested enough in life on this side of the eternal divide to demand that Iyaloja satisfy him with the pleasure of a pretty girl passing by. Even though the girl is betrothed to Iyaloja's own son, she could not resist the demands of the chief as they have made it their duty to fully please him ahead of the celestial duty.

Meanwhile, the district officer, Simon Pilkings and his wife, Jane, are preparing for a masquerade party later that evening. While they're dancing around in their costumes and getting ready, a local policeman by the name of Amusa arrives to alert them about Elesin's plans. After some deliberation, Pilkings sends word to Amusa to have Elesin arrested as he cannot afford missing the masquerade ball which will also be graced by the visiting British Prince.

Amusa goes to the market to try to prevent Elesin's ritual from taking place, but the daughters of the market women drive him away in a mocking and disgraceful manner. The ritual starts, and Elesin gets drawn into what appears to be a deep trance. Pilkings receives word at the ball that against his orders, the ritual is still continuing, so he heads out to intervene. Olunde, Elesin's eldest son, is a medical student who is studying abroad. He was able to gain admission into an English medical school with the help of the Pilkings, much to the dismay of his father. He holds a long conversation with Jane Pilkings. Despite the estrangement between Elesin and his first son, Olunde returns when he hears about the death of Alafin. Olunde, despite his education and Western exposure, returns to fulfil the duties to his father and his community, as expected in such circumstances. By listening to the drums in the distance, Olunde concludes that the ritual has ended, and his father is now dead. However, he soon learns that Simon and his accomplices intervened before the ritual could be completed, and Elesin ends up in a cell, handcuffed and furious.



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Later, Iyaloja visits Elesin in prison and taunts him for his weakness in not getting to the other side quickly enough, implying that his will is not strong enough. Iyaloja then mentions that someone else has had to intervene to complete the ritual off and prevent total cosmic chaos after Elesin's failure. As the first son of Elesin, it is Olunde's duty to take over from his father. He duly ensures that the custom is continued and prevents total cosmic chaos which could have followed his father's epic failure, saving his family's name in the process. A large bolt of cloth which is Olunde's body is brought in. At the revelation, Elesin strangles himself with the chains binding him before anyone can stop him.

3.2.2 Traditional Yoruba Culture in *Death and the King's Horseman*

Death and the King's Horseman is a reflection of the ancient Oyo Empire in the course of cultural enforcement and continuity in the face of colonial invasion and contamination. Elesin is part of the ritual processes to conclude the final burial rites of the late Alafin. However, Elesin fails, tragically and spectacularly in the sacred duty that his lineage is the sole custodian of. In a sudden twist of fate, his educated son Olunde takes his place in sacrificing his life to accompany the late king to the world beyond. Olunde's action reflects his decision to uphold his cultural heritage, despite having learnt the new ways. This is Soyinka's way of saying that indigenous cultural rites will survive in spite of the attempts by the west to subvert them. However, this practice is already being eradicated, Ojaide (1992) notes that the practice of the king's horseman accompanying him to the spirit world by ritual suicide was already fading and needed no colonial intervention to stop it. The colonial officer's intervention resulted in a greater tragedy for the society in the loss of two lives instead of one.

Elesin cannot fulfil his duty, in part due to the captivating pleasures of the world and he eventually takes his own life after seeing his son and heir, the supposed pride of his manhood, take his place in performing the obligation. While he cannot bear to live in the world of shame he created for himself, the intervention of Simon Pilkings, the district officer, proves futile. Soyinka shows that the death of Olunde, the son of Elesin, only serves to prove the potency and rootedness of the Yoruba culture. Despite his journeys, exposure and education, he never second guesses the essence of his origin and traditional way of life. The market women play a vital role in

the reverence and preservation of the pillars of culture. They give virtually their all to ensure Elesin leaves a happy and fulfilled man while not neglecting his celestial duty.

Respect and Reverence

An important aspect of Yoruba culture is its emphasis on respect for elders, tradition and authority. In the Yoruba setting, respect is accorded to elders in the community. While the people of the same age group address each other casually, the younger people acknowledge the age of older people, hence they relate to them with the utmost sense of respect. Linguistically, 'o' is used to address someone within one's age bracket while 'e' is used to address an elderly person. Popular figures are treated with utmost respect, likewise kings and royalty are extended the same reverence. This reverence for kings and royalty is best typified by Elesin and the late Alafin. Starting with the latter, according to the beliefs of the Yoruba tribe, he is not allowed to be alone in the world beyond. Rather, his status of royalty and majesty is not left out in the transition. As a king, he must not be seen or treated as a common man, in this life or the afterlife. Therefore, he must be surrounded with aides, subjects and loyal, domestic animals like dogs and his horse. As soon as the Alafin dies, his dog, horse and horseman must be killed to join him in the afterlife and ensure he is treated as a royalty. Soyinka portrays Elesin as a man of honour. This is seen in the way the market women reverence him:

ELESIN: Words are cheap. 'We know you for a man of honour'. Well tell me, is this how a man of honour should be seen? Are these not the same clothes in which I came among you a full half-hour ago. (He roars with laughter and the women, relieved, rise and rush into stalls to fetch rich cloths.)

IYALOJA: Richly, richly, robe him richly. The cloth of honour is *alari* *Sanyan* is the band of friendship. Boa-skin makes slippers of esteem. (Elesin stands resplendent in rich clothes in rich clothes, cap, shawl. Etc. His sash is of a bright red *alari* cloth. The women dance round him... (Soyinka, 1975:15 & 16).

Elesin is a chief, the manager of the king's horses and leader of the king's entourage. His title is not just bestowed on anybody, it is hereditary. A particular lineage is saddled with the responsibility and the first son takes over from the father, ensuring continuity. The fact that the Elesin title belongs to a particular family is a testament to their long history of loyalty and unreserved service. Such a family is held in high esteem in the society. As an important family, they cannot afford to be immoral and debauched. Therefore, their sense of morality and cultural devotion is always preserved and probably heightened. Naturally, they are loyalists to the throne and their sole devotion is to the king. They cannot afford to be caught in an act of treason or slander. However, this does not apply to the Elesin family alone; other chieftain families are not left out.



Hence, family names are treated with utmost regard and respect. The saying that a 'good name is better than silver and gold' best summarises the way family names are seen. A name once soiled may never be restored. It's like a broken pitcher; the smoothness can never be recovered. Each family in a particular village is known and renowned. A poor man with a good name is more likely to be respected than a rich man with a bad reputation. Before a child is given in marriage, research is usually carried out into what kind of family the prospective in-law comes from and what evils or goodness they attract. In other words, names and reputations are the banner of every family. They cannot afford to be stained. Due to the compactness of the Yoruba villages and kingdoms, a bad act often resounds through generations, as do heroic deeds. An indicator of the traditional African society is reputation.

Furthermore, Soyinka's intends to demonstrate the familial connections and deep loyalties and reputational integrity expected of people in traditional Yoruba society. This he portrays in the way the market women revered and valued Elesin as being royalty (Soyinka, 1975:14). The people can give their all in the name of culture and celestial duty as is the case of Elesin. Immediately the Alafin dies, countdown begins for Elesin. Every culturally inclined person knew sooner or later he was bound to join the deceased emperor. As a leader and popular figure among the market women and probably the voice of the king in the market place, he is satisfied with every pleasure imaginable. The height of this is represented by the Iyalaja giving out a beautiful bride to Elesin to ensure he fulfils his obligation in the best possible mood, preventing the heaven-bound chief using his last breath to curse them (Soyinka, 1975:52). Likewise, such a union would be unique, the intercourse of the living and the supposed 'dead'. Such an offspring would be nothing short of divine. The respect and reverence for leadership was a paradigm of the traditional Yoruba society. A decree of a king is as strong as life itself and one would find it impossible to disrupt customs and traditions as Simon Pilkings finds out, much to his dismay. Similarly, Soyinka's intention to present Yoruba culture as a means of societal regeneration was further revealed as he underscores the relevance of gender inequality in the Yoruba setting as demonstrated in his *Death and the King's Horseman*. This speaks against gender equality which is one of the banes of contemporary society. In the play, there is an almost invisible gender inequality pattern which is a model of the traditional Yoruba society. Most of the women characters in the play are anonymous. Sexism characterised the traditional Yoruba society where women usually play a secondary role. Elesin tells Jane Pilkings to shut up when she tries to interfere in his discussion Pilkings (Soyinka, 1975:56). Her

attitude is strange, as such is not common in Elesin's culture. The submissiveness of the market women also underpins this. Despite the gender inequality in Yoruba society the family system was strong. As a result, contemporary family challenges such as divorce, youth delinquencies and single parenting were very limited.

Poetry, Riddles and Proverbs

Another cultural paradigm that Soyinka uses to show the authenticity of Yoruba tradition and morality is Poetry. Unlike the usual genreless, common and plain language in vogue nowadays, a typical traditional Yoruba society was incomplete without praise singers, minstrels, eulogies and poetic interactions. Before any conversation is initiated with an influential figure, such as Elesin, praise-poetry is rendered to acknowledge his affluence and social stratification. A family's lineage is known through rendition of panegyrics. Their deeds, family occupation and descent often reflect in this kind of poetry. Whether to pacify a crying baby, a moody king or praise the warriors of a victorious battle, poetry is unavoidable. It is a key component of communication.

The character of the praise-singer particularly embodies this in Elesin's words:

“my fame, my honour are legacies to the living;
stay behind and let the world sip its honey from your lips”. (Soyinka, 1975: 10).

In other words, man may be mortal but poetry is not, and the world will never run out of it to lick from. The market women led by the Iyalaja are not left out in the use of poetry in their speech. It can be inferred that Soyinka's intention here is to expose the extent to which proverbial sauce and poetic spice that characterised the traditional Yoruba's speech pattern is lost in the contemporary society and therefore

proposes a return to the values of the traditional Yoruba speech pattern where meanings are deeply embedded in speech to give more knowledge.

Following up closely on poetry are riddles and proverbs. Virtually every indigenous character speaks in riddles or proverbs at a point in the play. The rather complex use of language cannot be shadowed by the translation to English language. Simon Pilkings and Jane Pilkings, native speakers of English, find the indigenous characters' language so connotative that comprehension is difficult. The significance of proverbs in Yoruba traditional societies cannot be understated as well. Both are cultural markers that tell in brief on so much about the history and psychology of the people and community. Soyinka portrays this through the character of Elesin whose use of language becomes too complicated for the market women and he is eventually implored to bring it down to their level of understanding (Soyinka, 1975:46). It is a thing of gratification and display of pride in the showy expression of one's grasp of riddles and proverbs. The language of traditional Yoruba society is not as watery and full of slang as the language of the present society. Yoruba proverbs, among many others, illustrate the importance and the value which the Yoruba, like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, attach to issues in different contexts. For instance, there are Yoruba proverbs related to traditional clothing. It is pertinent to note that the use of clothing-related proverbs is not out of place because Yoruba people perceive proverbs as walking sticks of the language, *bi oro ba sonu owe la fin wa a* (proverbs are used to search for words that are missing). Proverbs play crucial roles in imparting meaning and understanding to a given situation. It is a formidable factor in discussions in order to build up an argument or to support a cause. James (2002), in his study, defines proverbs as 'a rich source of imagery and succinct expression,

encapsulating abstract ideas and allusive wording, usually in metaphorical form'. Sheba (2000) defines proverbs as words of wisdom meant for only the wise to unfold, thus revealing the lost ideas (Akinbileje, 2010). According to Diyaolu (2010), a proverb is a condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people. Soyinka uses the characters of Elesin and Iyaloja to emphasise the importance of proverbs in the speech pattern of the traditional Yoruba people especially the elders to convey wisdom, truth and life lessons (Soyinka, 1975:12,13 &18).

Soyinka's intention is to educate the readers about the value of his Yoruba culture as a postcolonial writer, he rejects cultural imperialisms and advocates a rebirth of indigenous culture through the use of indigenous language that has components of poetry, riddles and proverbs as reflected in the play.



A traditional Yoruba society is much more than just the language, it has her own set of beliefs, customs, peculiar proverbs, poetry and traditions. If language is removed from the Yoruba culture, as in the case study in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, what is left might just be a couple of peculiar traditional outfits. According to the traditions and customs of the traditional Yoruba society, death is a duty for the Elesin, a badge of honour. However, the British administrators see death as something to be feared and prevented. Pilkings sees it as his duty to prevent it, labelling it as barbaric and savagery in the process. This seemingly 'suicide mission' is a cultural paradigm, a core tradition that the people see as sacrosanct. Pilkings condemns this act of dying but as Olunde rightly points out, the death of one man cannot be compared to the multitude of lives being wasted on battlefronts in the western world.

You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you (Soyinka, 1975: 53), Olunde tells Jane Pilkings. He ingeniously shows Jane that self-sacrifice is an inspiring human value. In western culture, ways of survival are different as Olunde puts it:

OLUNDE: You white race know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws this war should end with the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilization for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realized that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way (Soyinka, 1975:58).

Soyinka reveals that Olunde is a man whose experience of the western world gives him profound understanding of his heritage. He does not throw away his old ways but rather complements it with the new ways. Olunde, a medical doctor in training, defies all odds to return home and participate in the ritual suicide. Showing how deeply rooted these traditions are in the minds of the Yorubas, Olunde does not expect to meet his father alive. He had been brought up in those values and he knew what to do next should his father fail to live up to expectations. Contrary to his father's opinion when Olunde makes known his plans to study abroad, he does not lose his sense of culture. Rather, he critically juxtaposes and appraises both cultures, sees that neither is more superior. In fact, both cultures maintain weird but different stances on a lot of universal issues, including death. Olunde, just like Baroka in *The Lion and the Jewel*, proves that one can still learn the European ways and not necessarily compromise one's values. The daughters of the market women also exemplify this. They are learned but make a show of mockery of everything they learn, from the accent of the foreigners to salutations.

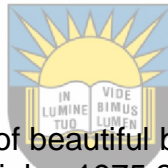
The hypocrisy of the western ways gives room for thought whether Yoruba culture is as barbaric as they say it is. By showing the richness of Yoruba traditions while simultaneously failing to show the British characters actively engaged in any kind of religion, Soyinka suggests the emptiness of British customs and religion. Oluinde does not find himself lost in the confluence of cultures. With clarity, he embraces his culture and points out why his culture is not even close to being savage as opposed to the imagination of the colonial masters. This idea is supported by Frantz (1961), who indicates that the first step for colonised people in finding a voice and identity is to retain their past.

The host of human beings to join the Alafin in death signifies Yoruba tradition, nevertheless, it is a part representing a whole. So many kingdoms in Nigeria perform rites before and after the coronation of a king, and after the death and burial of a king. The contents of these rites are not usually disclosed but one may guess their similarities to the Elesin's scenario. These are what make every traditional African society unique and spectacular.

Chastity

Another cultural paradigm in the play is chastity and betrothal. Women, especially, are expected to maintain chastity before marriage. The bride should be exclusively reserved for the groom on the night of the wedding, till their initial consummation of love. Betrothal was a common practice then. It is still being practised on a much lesser scale today. One of the advantages of betrothal is that it helps to seal an alliance or improve relations between two families. Chastity before marriage is an

essential aspect of the Yoruba culture. A woman who is not virtuous at marriage is a disgrace not only to herself, but also to members of her family. It follows that virginity is a cherished virtue in Yoruba society. In the present society, this practice has become outdated due to the influence of western culture as virginity is no longer publicly celebrated, and its loss has ceased to be a thing of disgrace. Soyinka portrays this through the character of Elesin who requests the hand of a beautiful lady in marriage as his last action in the world. Also in showing the importance of chastity before marriage, Soyinka uses the character of Elesin to explain that it is a vital aspect of Yoruba culture. That is why Elesin comes out proudly with the blemished cloth of the marriage bed to show Iyaloja as evidence of the consummation of the marriage, he explains the meaning according to Yoruba tradition:



ELESIN: Oh you mothers of beautiful brides! Take it. It is no mere virgin stain, but the union of life... (Soyinka, 1975:20)

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In order to balance out the argument, Soyinka presents the excesses of Yoruba culture. Every culture has its excesses and the Yoruba society is not left out. Elesin is satisfied with the betrothed of the son of Iyaloja, the very leader of the women trying to appease him. Elesin proudly comes out with the blemished cloth of the marriage bed to Iyaloja as evidence of the consummation of the marriage:

“what a powerful thing it is when
The voyager sets forth
But a curse remains behind”. (Soyinka, 1975: 16)

A potential marriage is crushed and the bride is set to become the mother of a child from a disgraced father. A culture without excesses is not propelled by people and the greatest tragedy of the play is not Elesin’s failure, it is the fact that the British and the Yoruba make absolutely zero progress in understanding each other’s cultures.

3.3 Play 2: *The Trials of Brother Jero*

3.3.1 Synopsis of the Play

The play opens with the eponymous character, Brother Jero himself, giving us some background information on how he comes to prophethood through his characteristic features of having thick and long hair. He reveals how he becomes fond of trading. He further makes known how trading has become fashionable and how professionals in trading try to outsmart one another in acquiring lands on the beach and attracting ignorant and believing members. He goes on to expose the scheme he employs in acquiring land on the beach for his master, the Old Prophet, who ignorantly thinks Jeroboam schemes all other competitors out solely for him – not knowing that Brother Jero helps no one but himself. For this singular reason, his master places a curse on him that daughters of Discord will be his ruin and downfall. Therefore, the play is based on the near-fulfilment of the curse placed on Brother Jero by his master.

The play further reveals a couple Chume and Amope. Amope, a petty trader, sells a velvet cape to Brother Jero who promises to pay three months earlier but defaults. Her husband, Chume, a Chief Messenger at the Local Government office, serves as Brother Jero's apprentice on the beach in his church. Jero is able to explore and exploit the ignorance, stupidity and materialistic tendencies of his followers as he deceives them with visions of a better life and promotion in their various quests. Due to the nagging nature of his wife, Chume has long wanted to beat Amope, hoping that this will make her behave well. However, Brother Jero prevents him from beating

her; not for Chume's benefit but for himself to keep Chume in perpetual enslavement.

Interestingly, the cat is let out of the bag when Chume realises that Brother Jero has been fooling him all the while having invalidated all Jero's claims that keep him in bondage after it dawns on him that Brother Jero finally allows him to beat his wife, Amope, in order to rid himself (Jero) of his creditor (Amope). Being a comical and satirical play, as Chume's sense of reasonableness later dawns and seeks revenge from Brother Jero, Soyinka introduces the reader to a Member of Parliament who has been worked on by Brother Jero wearing the cloak of unreasonableness and ignorance prepared by no other person but Brother Jero himself.

3.3.2 Moral Paradigms of Traditional Yoruba society in *The Trials of Brother Jero*



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The Trial of Brother Jero is set in postcolonial Nigeria. The government of the nation is totally in indigenous hands. However, the country reeks from the effects of colonialism and its legacies. Capitalism is the order of the day, kleptocracy has usurped democracy. A dominant mood of the play is unemployment. The Jero plays depict the height of the loss of moral and cultural values in the Yoruba culture of Nigeria society. Values that characterised the traditional Yoruba society are missing from the plays, save for one or two reminders of the past traditional way of life.

The main character in the play, Brother Jero is a crafty self-made prophet. Obviously, he has no divine call on his life but he sees an opportunity by exploiting rich and innocent souls of their resources, in a bid to cater for his own living. He is

not alone in the business. So many other people are involved and it has become something that everyone engages in. Religion has been turned into a monotonous moneymaking venture that any craftsman with complying garb could start. With the assured space on the Lagos island beach, starting capital is hardly needed.

Religion used to be a sacred phenomenon for the traditional Yoruba society. Nobody could take up a religious mantle without undergoing some consecration or sanctification for what used to be perceived as a daunting task. Nor was anybody able to volunteer to be a priest, rather the custodian of the god(s) was chosen by the god(s). Religious leaders were seen as immaculate people, with a righteous mindset and spotless integrity. More so, their words were never taken lightly. Any utterance from a priest, prophet or spiritualist is regarded as divine and prophetic. The reputation of a religious figure is not one that is easily tainted because people believe they are immune to the lusts of the flesh. Soyinka proposes that the same level of integrity exhibited among the traditional Yoruba leaders and worshippers should be emulated among the contemporary religious leaders and worshippers.

However, when such a figure commits an atrocity, he is not treated in the same way a common villager is. Morally, they are pacesetters. They constantly remind the people of the lifestyle expected of them and this is expressed in their actions, not only in words. However, the reverse is the case in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. During the precolonial era, the traditional Yoruba society had strong religious and moral values. Respect was the highest moral value indicator. Respect came in so many forms; respect for elders, respect between comrades, respect between married couples, respect between master and apprentice, and respect between siblings.

According to Yoruba tradition, an apprentice does not go against the commands of his master. Jeroboam, on the other hand disregards and disgraces his mentor and trainer, the old prophet. He even dislodges him from the space he is using for his church. The old prophet, in turn, places a curse on him for the 'daughters of Eve', 'daughters of discord' to be his downfall. Jeroboam is haunted by this curse throughout the play. As he is about to open business for the day, a young girl passes by. Jeroboam calls the girl 'dirty-looking thing'. On her way back, she has just had her swim and she looks different. After witnessing the 'divine transformation', Jeroboam admits to being tempted.

Transparency and straightforwardness characterised the traditional Yoruba society. Anybody who wanted to indulge in corrupt practices risked doing so at the expense of his integrity and family name. Leaders were accountable, there were occasions of tyranny but only the paramount rulers could do such. A moral and cultural paradigm in traditional Yoruba society is unity across the tribes exemplified in the plays *The Trials of Brother Jero*. There is no tribalism or ethnic enmity. Chume, by nomenclature not a Yoruba person, is the husband of Amope, who is by default a Yoruba woman. This intertribal marriage shows the kind of unity that exists among the ethnic groups of the diverse nation.

Shadrach, the prophet, stands out in the play. He strikes the audience as a true prophet, one probably and truly called to the profession. In the face of corruption and oppression, he maintains his stance on being incorruptible. His flock is the biggest and does not seem to practise the scheming of the other prophets. His non-compromise would cost him his church and flock but people like him are what the

society needs to go back to the days of moral values. His rigidity and sternness are needed in a government that is run by manipulation and manoeuvrings. Soyinka uses the character of Shadrach to show the archetype of the traditional spiritual leader and the qualities they used to possess. It is a reminder that the present society needs to go back to that level of integrity.

Brother Jero is able to manipulate his fellows in the calling by exploiting their criminal past and diabolical tendencies. Ananias is the chief perpetrator in the plays. Shadrach does not fall into this category but is simply overrun by sheer majority. In a satirical form, Soyinka pokes fun at religion, Christianity especially. Christianity is a religion of the west. It was introduced to Nigeria by British missionaries. It is this religion that has become a tool of exploitation and deceit. People's ignorance is played upon through the Christian religion. In traditional Nigerian society, the traditional religions were never spoilt in this manner. People's trust was justified as the religious leaders were worthy people. In *Homecoming*, Ngugi says that to gain:

“acceptability and perpetuation, the colonialists enlist the services of Christianity and Christian oriented education... To capture the soul and the mind...” (1982: 114)

In *I will marry when I want*, Ngugi, through the character of Gicaamba indicates that:

Religion is not the same thing as God
When the British imperialists came here...
All the missionaries of all the churches
Held the Bible in the left hand
And the gun in the right hand
The white man wanted us
To be drunk with religion
While he,
In the meantime,
Was mapping and grabbing our land
And starting factories and businesses
On our sweat. (Ngugi, 1982: 56-57).

I will marry when I want is also a postcolonial play just like *the Trials of Brother Jero*, and the leaders of the church are Africans just like Brother Jero. Ngugi's condemnation therefore is aimed at the Africans who are using the religion for their selfish ends just like Brother Jero.

This is exactly what happened throughout the British colonies. The template they have laid is what is in vogue in contemporary times. People hold the Bible with one hand and a sack in the other. The Bible is to draw the people to themselves and the sack is to pack in whatever resources that can be gotten from them. It is no surprise that Soyinka lampoons the clergymen heavily in the play. Christianity is one of the legacies of colonialism and that it has failed spectacularly and become an object of scorn shows that their culture and religion is not the way out. The colonised culture and moral values have given them order before, upheld their identity and defined their living. Soyinka and other writers mentioned above see the need to preserve the cultural ways as the solution to the universal problem faced by indigenous communities in Nigeria.

3.3.3 Cultural and Moral Values in Contemporary Yoruba Society

Post-independence Yoruba society was a society in a frequent and perpetual quest for freedom from many problems the society is facing on a daily basis. The society is always in search of Saviours who will come and deliver her from the bondage and enslavement into which she has plunged herself through different leaders that have reigned and ruled the land and the followers also cannot be exempted from this. The overwhelming problems and challenges have made the people in the society seek any means available to reduce the burdens of the contemporary society on

themselves. Unfortunately, the quest for solutions to the vicissitudes of life problems has further plunged the society into deeper immorality and cultural decay. Below is an evaluation the cultural and moral values in contemporary Yoruba society as evident in the text being analysed.

Misrepresentation of Alien Religion

The intrusion of the west to African brought many things that are alien and strange to the African people. The White, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o avers, came with the Bible in his left hand and a gun on his right hand. The White, not only introduces his culture and tongue but also his religion to the African people who succumb to him and all he stands. Africans, being religious themselves, sheepishly fall for the White man and his religion which they, Africans, hardly understand fully like his tongue. This, hence, makes misconceptions, misrepresentations and misinterpretations abound in practising the alien religion. Exploring Christian superstitions and beliefs, Soyinka portrays this un-African and alien religion and its adherents through the character of Brother Jero with his followers and other prophets, though unheard, in the play. Brother Jero's introduction is revealing and it will be illuminated more as the same is being seen in the contemporary Yoruba society below.

JERO: I am a prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination... I was born a prophet. I think my parents found that I was born with rather thick and long hair. It was said to come right down to my eyes and down to my neck. For them, this was a certain sign that I was born a natural prophet (Soyinka, 1976: 11).

Furthermore, from the above, misinterpretation and misrepresentation is vivid. Jero's parents ignorantly assume that since their son is born with thick and long hair that automatically qualifies and validates him to be a prophet. It can be said that this is an

allusion to Samson whom the Bible records to be a Nazarite to God in Judges 13: 4. Samson was born with long and thick hair which the angel forewarned his mother and father never to let any razor touch. This religious trait is thus transferred to Jero because of his long and thick hair. The contemporary Nigerian society is full of many false prophets who assume outlandish religious connotations for the purpose of deceiving gullible followers.

Merchandising of Religion

Due to unfavourable and debilitating economic realities, some of the Yoruba people have taken to making a living through religion. Religion sells like premium motor spirit (PMS) in Nigeria. Because of unemployment, some individuals in the society have turned themselves into so-called servants of God suddenly. They turned religion, especially Christianity and Islam, to a trade. As Jero puts it:

And I grew to love the trade. It used to be a very respectable one in those days and competition was dignified, but in the last few years, the beach has become fashionable, and the struggle for land has turned the profession into a thing of ridicule. (Soyinka, 1976: 9)

From the above, it is seen that the contemporary Yoruba society is laden with many social maladies and religion has not been able to proffer solutions to the problems. As evident in a capitalist market, competition amongst religious leaders, churches and mosques has become the order of the day with morality finding itself at the lowest ebb of the society and cultural values being lost on a daily basis. These religious professionals, in getting *customers* take to various means and schemes in outsmarting one another (Soyinka, 1976: 20). With fake, rehearsed, prepared and choreographed miracles, they now easily hoodwink ignorant and miracle-seeking members of the public irrespective of their social standing and class.

Soyinka uses Brother Jero to push this contemporary nature of the religious professionals forward. First, he employs *six dancing girls from the French territory, all dressed as Jehovah's Witnesses* (p.10). Secondly, he affirms:

I am glad I got here before any customers – I mean worshippers – well, customers if you like. I always get that feeling every morning that I am a shop-keeper waiting for customers (Soyinka, 1976: 20).

Deception and Materialistic Centred Religion

The contemporary Yoruba society is a society that is being run on deception, falsehood and hypocrisy from the leadership to the followers. Honesty, faithfulness and truth have become increasingly scarce day by day. Everybody is now involved in the game of deception, falsehood and hypocrisy – from the family being a microcosm of society to the religious space and political arena – deception is enthroned. The hunger for wealth and material things in the present day Yoruba society cannot be compared in its magnitude to what the traditional society stood for where there were constant checks and corrections and where family members are known to reject one who has committed atrocious criminal acts. The present Yoruba society can safely be said to be on the brink of moral collapse. As it stands in Nigeria, kidnapping is now the order of the day. Although kidnapping has always been in the traditional Yoruba society most especially during the *oro* festivals, the Yoruba cult is being done and its victims are always consequently killed to appease the gods of the land. But the present-day kidnappings are mainly for money and acquisition of material things. Bribery and corruption have become clogs in the wheel of progress of the land. In the play, virtually all the characters are materialistic and in their quest to satisfy their material lust, they get deceived, schemed and exploited. Jero reveals this:

JERO: My Master, the same one who brought me up in prophetic ways staked his claim and won a grant of land... I helped him, with a campaign led by six dancing girls from the French territory, all dressed as Jehovah's Witnesses. What my old Master did not realise was that I was really helping myself (Soyinka, 1976: 10).

In Scene Two, Chume and his wife Amope are involved in a funny confrontation. Amope has come to sit at the doorstep of her intractable debtor and is bent on taking her money from that cunning debtor who is none but the prophet, Jero. Chume does not know the identity of the wife's debtor and the occupant of the house where his wife sits as he complains to him (Jero) about Amope's constant nagging. This is because he believes Jero is very holy. Amope confronts Jero at his first attempt to escape. Jero's attempt to outsmart her does not work as she belittles him something disgraceful for an African man, this we see from their dialogue:

AMOPE: (without looking back). Where do you think you're going?

BROTHER JERO: Practically flings himself back into the house.

AMOPE: One pound, eight shillings and nine pence for three months. And he calls himself a man of God. (She puts the notebook away, unwraps the brazier and proceeds to light it preparatory to getting breakfast. The door opens another foot). *Together in Excellence*

Soyinka reveals the real Brother Jero, the false prophet in his encounter with Amope, he is not only a debtor but also a liar cum deceiver:

JERO: Yes, thanks be to God. I-er-I hope you have not come to stand in the way of Christ and his work.

AMOPE: If Christ doesn't stand in the way of me and my work.

JERO: Beware of pride, sister. That was a sinful way to talk.

AMOPE: Listen, you bearded debtor. You owe me one pound, eight and nine. You promised you would pay me three months ago but of course you have been too busy doing the work of God. Well, let me tell you that you are not going anywhere until you do a bit of my own work.

JERO: But the money is not in the house. I must get it from the post office before I can pay you (Soyinka, 1976: 16).

He devises a means to perpetually keep his followers within his imposed-confinement and to make them constantly dependent on him, as he declares boldly

“strange, dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full, they won’t come again” (Soyinka, 1976: 20). Chume, Jero’s prophetic apprentice, is not left out of his schemes and manipulations as Brother Jero continuously restrains him from beating his nagging wife, Amope. It is part of Jero’s selfish plan to keep his flock under servitude because if his flock is satisfied, he will therefore not need him again. This has become the way of religious professionals and politicians in the land who keep promising a better life and standard of living to their followers but their promises have never come to reality. Jero explores greatly the materialistic nature of humanity to bring them into his prepared slavery. Also, Amope is seen as a nagging wife who insults her husband frequently and is always pushing him to do more for her. Although she claims that it is for her husband’s good, her intent, however, is revealed as her latter words betray her former claim. She said:



He doesn’t realize it is all for his own good. He’s no worse than other men, but he won’t make the effort to become something in life. A Chief Messenger. Am I to go to my grave as the wife of a Chief Messenger? (Soyinka, 1976: 15)

More so, it is clear that the prayer of the contemporary Nigerian society is always directed towards materialistic cravings and better life. Nobody seems to care about moral uprightness and righteousness but material-led prayers in reducing the insatiable wants of humans. This is portrayed in Chume’s prayer. He prays:

...Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. Make you no forget those of us who dey struggle daily. Those who be clerk today, make them Chief Clerk tomorrow. Those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow. Yes Father, those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow. Those who are petty trader today, make them big contractor tomorrow. Those who dey sweep street today, give them their own big office tomorrow. I say those who dey walka today, give them their own bicycle tomorrow. Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow. I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give

them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow (Soyinka, 1976: 29).

Chume is praying seriously for the congregation, but the repetition of those lines of prayer reveals, at a deeper level, where he belongs and in essence he is only praying for himself. Brother Jero is also able to deceive the Member of the Parliament even though he occupies an exalted and privileged position in the society because he fuels and befriends his (Members') materialistic and positional quest. Members fall so cheap to Jero's schemes and tricks. As the play ends, he ignorantly declares his allegiance to Brother Jero calling him *Master* (Soyinka, 1976: 44). All these are consequently pointing to the contemporary society as materialistic, deceptive and selfish.



Superstitious beliefs and curses

The traditional Yoruba society was highly superstitious and greatly believed in the destructive power of curses and this makes the people adopt good behaviour. The contemporary society also shares the same beliefs even though with modern touches and modifications. It has been established that the Yoruba people do not place a curse on someone without the person doing anything worth being cursed. Curses are mostly employed when the victim cannot directly fight his/her oppressor. Thus, curses are critically linked with superstition. One of the Yoruba proverbs is *eni da eeru ni eeru nto* (whosoever pours ashes away will the ashes follow). So when someone who genuinely offends another person is cursed, the curse placed on the offender will definitely come to fulfilment. In traditional Yoruba society, People adopt good behaviour in order to avoid curses and their potency. This is significantly

different in modern Yoruba society where people do not respect the sanctity of curses and act without control.

The play, as hinted in the summary, is based on the near-fulfilment of the curse placed on Brother Jeroboam for cheating his master, the Old Prophet, to believe that the piece of land got from the Town council through six disguised ladies from the French territory as Jehovah's witnesses:

OLD PROPHET: Ungrateful wretch! Is this how you repay the long years of training I have given you? To drive me, your old Tutor, off my piece of land...telling me I have lived beyond my time. Ha! May you be rewarded in the same manner. May the wheel come right round and find you just as helpless as you make me now... (Soyinka, 1976: 10).

OLD PROPHET: Ingrate! Monster! I curse you with the curse of Daughters of Discord. May they be your downfall. May the Daughters of Eve bring ruin down on your head! (Soyinka, 1976: 11).

Furthermore, curse and superstition are intertwined. Yoruba traders are always conscious of the first customer of the day because it is believed that the way the first customer deals with them in negotiating the prices of their commodities will determine how the day will go for them whether positively or negatively. That is, if the first customer sets a wrong pace, superstitiously, other customers of the day will follow suit and vice versa. This is vivid in the encounter of Amope and Trader:

TRADER: All right, help me to set it down. But I don't usually stop on the way.

AMOPE: Isn't it money you are going to the market for, and isn't it money I'm going to pay you?

TRADER: Well, just remember it is early in the morning. Don't start me off wrong by haggling (Soyinka, 1976: 16).

Even though Trader hesitates in answering Amope's call and Amope is warned initially not to insult Trader's goods afterwards, she (Amope) still goes on to insult her:

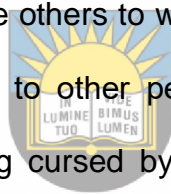
AMOPE: It is last week's, isn't it?

TRADER: I've told you, you're my first customer, so don't ruin my trade with the ill-luck of the morning.

AMOPE: Well, it does smell a bit, doesn't it?

TRADER: Maybe it is you who haven't had a bath for a week (Soyinka, 1976: 17).

The stage direction reads that Amope *holding one up to her nose*; while a Yoruba proverb says "*ohun ti a kiije, a kii fi run 'mu*" (whatever one will not eat, one must not smell). Amope is portrayed in the excerpt above as a very bad customer who does not care about the feeling, benefit and even gain of Trader. Through this behaviour of hers, she can be said to be a very bad person. This is a typical example of the contemporary society where some people are only at their best when insulting others, and the goods and services other people are rendering. However, like a sword wielder, who would not like others to wield a sword around him – they cannot take what they always dish out to other people. Amope's immoral behaviour as shown above leads to her being cursed by Trader since she (Amope) insult the Trader and her goods:



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AMOPE: Yeh! All right, go on. Abuse me. Go on and abuse me when all I wanted was a few of your miserable fish. I deserve it for trying to be neighbourly with a cross-eyed wretch, pauper that you are...

TRADER: It is early in the morning. I am not going to let you infect my luck with your foul tongue by answering you back. And just you keep your cursed fingers from my goods because that is where you'll meet the father of all devils if you don't.

AMOPE: Yes, go on. Carry the burden of your crimes and take your beggar's rags out of my sight...

TRADER: I leave you in the hands of your flatulent belly, you barren sinner. May you never do good in all your life (Soyinka, 1976: 17).

The contemporary society is not different from what the playwright exemplifies through the character of Amope, hence the need to preserve the traditional good behaviour which can promote peaceful coexistence. Superstitious beliefs are moral conditions or codes intended to create harmony and the order of the existence of the

universe (Magesa, 1997). They clarify which attitudes and behaviours are not acceptable because they do not assure the continuation of life in its fullness, do not enhance the quality of life of the community and do not preserve the social code of behaviour. Hence, breaking of a taboo endangers life and is seen as bad and wrong because it interrupts peace and harmony (Andemariam, 2001).

3.4 Play 3: *The Swamp Dwellers*

3.4.1 Synopsis of the Play

The setting of the swamp is suggestive of dirt, or mire in the literal sense as well as the figurative. Literally, it implies a natural disorder found in the villages where the ground is always sinking beneath one's feet leaving one without a foothold thus sucking village people in. Figuratively, it is living with the age-old meaningless traditions of the village or in the corrupted heartless city. Similarly, swampy city is considered as an artificial disorder where ethical principle or structure which are footholds for one's actions are replaced by the shifting contingencies of economy, and social morality undermined by impulse, by pride or envy or greed. This is considered to be death of the spirit in modern times. Specifically, the play deals with issues superficially and in depth. On the superficial, it is about the typical life of a poor family in the African society. In depth, it reveals the collision of old and new values, the confrontation between the urban and the rural, and the modern and the ancient ways of life. Likewise, it can be viewed that the play investigates the breakdown of family and society as a result of people moving from agrarian environment and culture to suddenly become city folks.

When the play opens we find Makuri and Alu waiting for their beloved younger son Igwezu. They fear that Igwezu should not go missing like their elder son Awuchike who had gone to the city some ten years before. Both the brothers had left the village to seek their fortune in the city.

Soyinka's description of the village in *The Swamp Dwellers* depicts an atmosphere of discomfort and suffering. He further exposes the migration of the younger generation to the city where eventually they lost their virtues and values which were eroded due to the new ways of life in the city. The description of the village at the beginning of the play depicts an atmosphere of discomfort and suffering.

Alu appears to suffer more than the normal viciousness of the swamp flies. She has a flick by her side which she uses frequently, yelling whenever a bite has caught her unawares (Soyinka, 1986:3).

Makuri 's other son left for the city because life was not comfortable in the village:

MAKURI: Awuchike got sick of this place and went into the city (Soyinka, 1986:3).

Soyinka exposes the attitude of the village youths through the character of Awuchike; he criticises the village youth for getting lost in the sparkling world of the city. Awuchike breaks all familial and human ties with the village. The present youths are turning their back on the responsibilities and moralities of the society. Soyinka presents the degeneration of human relationships in the form of Awuchike.

Soyinka comments on the rural to urban migration syndrome which has negatively affected the people's adherence to their cultural norms and values. He explains why men desert the village and leave for the city:

MAKURI: All the young men go into the big town to try their hand at making money ... only some of them remember their folk and send word once in a while (Soyinka, 1986:6).

He remembers periods when life was not too difficult. Makuri voices this memory:

MAKURI: ...those days were really good. Even when times were harsh and the swamp overran the land, we were able to laugh ... but these young people... They are no sooner born than they want to get out of the village as if it carried a plague... (Soyinka, 1986:10).

Soyinka's intention is to point out the older generation's endurance and patience despite the state of things, but the contemporary youth are not. It seems quite reasonable for these young people to be going to try their hand at moneymaking in the city. Soyinka reveals that contemporary society is always in search of where the grass is greener. There is nothing apparently wrong with this spirit of adventure but the major problem is the fate of the youths once they are in the city. There, they lose their humanity. The reason is that cities offered a bewilderment of distractions and entertainments, drinking long into the night. That is why some people suffered nervous exhaustion. Soyinka comments on the effect of city life on the youth:

MAKURI: It ruins them. The city ruins them. What do they seek except money? (Soyinka, 1986:10).

Soyinka uses Gonushi's son to depict the dehumanising effect of city life on the contemporary youths. Gonushi's son left his wife and children and has not been heard of since he left (Soyinka, 1969:11). Another example of a person whose life has been ruined by the city is Awuchike, Igwezu's twin brother. Awuchike deceptively did everything possible to frustrate his own brother's progress, he even went to the extent of stealing his wife. Then Igwezu talks of meeting the harshness of the city

and the nakedness of its hostility. He later saw its knife sever the ties and the love of kinship, and turn brother against brother... (Soyinka, 1986:30).

Igwezu realises that his brother's action is as a result of the negative influence of city life. The past is so painful for him that he feels it is even better not to talk about what happened.

IGWEZU: The wound heals quicker if it is left unopened. What took place is not worth the memory... (Soyinka, 1986:32).

The contemporary youths are attracted to the city life, but the city "kills" them. That is why Igwezu says of his brother: "He is dead" (Soyinka, 1986:33).

Soyinka presents the dilemma of contemporary society. The village, which is supposed to be a place of rest and humanity has become a place of poverty and suffering. It is therefore understandable that the youths migrate into the city because of the uncomfortable life in the village, but the city dehumanises these youths. In the end, the better course of action is unclear. Perhaps it could be hoped that when Igwezu returns to the city, he will now be a wiser person, through his contact with the Beggar. He will probably avoid the mistakes that have been made by the other youths. Interpreted in this way, Igwezu's leaving, on the advice of the Beggar, is therefore a positive move. Soyinka portrays the beggar as the older generation full of wisdom to instruct and direct the youths. Soyinka proposes that the contemporary society should learn from the elders who are holding on to the Yoruba culture of integrity to seek counsel.

Soyinka portrays the Beggar as the blind man who "sees" that Kadiye is a false prophet. The Beggar infuses a new spirit into Igwezu, a spirit of rebellion and

inquisitiveness, and through this spirit, the traditional conservatism of the village is challenged. It is for this reason that Jones says *The Swamp Dwellers* is "an examination of a society in a state of change" (1988: 39). Kadiye, a priest, who is supposed to be a holy man is referred to as "a big voluminous creature ..., smooth-faced" (Soyinka, 1986: 19). This is in contrast with the description of the Beggar: "the blind man is tall and straight" (Soyinka, 1986: 12). While the Kadiye is called "a creature", the Beggar is called a "man". Kadiye has a tender and well-preserved skin simply because he cheats the villagers. In times of dearth Kadiye lives well and is well kept and nourished by the food that he squeezes from the suffering peasants. Soyinka suggests that the priest is to be held in contempt while the Beggar is to be respected. Through the Beggar the villagers offer sacrifices that should ensure prosperity and good fortune for their village. But it is gradually revealed that the Kadiye is nothing but a corrupt and greedy leader. Soyinka exposes the extent to which contemporary society is full of corrupt people, including the priest.



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Soyinka addresses the familiar themes of greed and corruption, which are part of the plague of contemporary society. The playwright exposes some of the evil practices of the village priest, the conflict between the old and the new ways as well as some of the unpleasant effects of the city on people, such as brother turning against brother. The play which has demonstrated Soyinka's social awareness is divided between the traditional and the contemporary Nigerian societies. Since no society is perfect, the traditional Nigerian society also has its high and low points. But the focus here is to examine the key moral and cultural paradigms of traditional Nigerian society as revealed in the play.

3.4.2 Identifiable Cultural Markers for Societal Renewal in *The Swamp Dwellers*

Family Loyalty

In all societies in history, institution building began with the family. Family system is an institutionalized means whereby the human society organizes and carries several important activities. However, prevalent changes, alteration and strains in the family values and structure is being observed. This changes in family structure which is being observed is manifesting in alteration of tradition and cultural values and philosophies (Wahab et al., 2012). Noted that, this changes are due to fact that the new structure with its “fence phobia”, “individualism”, “dual-occupation” which are peculiar to western culture have been substituted for the Yoruba traditional virtue of openness, communalism and being one’s brother’s keeper and consequently hindering family loyalty and commitment (Olusanya, 1970). Specifically experiences of divorce, gender equality, betrayal and family disintegration are pronounced in the current modern Yoruba community. This without doubt is one of the evils of the modern life. This is buttressed in various scenarios in the play, the Swamp Dwellers which represents the good countryside and evil city:

MAKURI: Makuri begins to discuss the city: "It ruins them. The city ruins them. What do they seek there except money? ... There was Gonushi's son for one ... left his wife and children ... not a word to anyone." Alu responds.
"It was the swamp ... He went the same way as my son" (Soyinka, 1986: 87)
Igwezu’s wife had left him for his rich brother.
Makuri says, “There wasn't a woman anywhere more faithful than you, Alu; I never had a moment of worry in the whole of my life” (Soyinka, 1986: 90)

The idea is represented in the characters of the two women characters Desala, unfaithful wife and Alu, the mother. It is clear that even outside of Yoruba belief - the city is a swamp, a place of moral degradation, which "kills" those who go there. City life which portrays the modern society destroy family loyalty and structure in that Awuchike was found to be alive and wealthy, but ‘dead’ to his parents and to any sense of family responsibility, severing all family and human ties, this is a social

death. Likewise, Awuchike's taking over of his brother's wife and Desala who leaves her husband for material comforts where relation is against all the traditional and cultural values of the swamps. Both Awuchike and Desala are considered to be dead culturally. These are the characteristics of the modern Yoruba society.

In *the Swamp Dwellers*, we find the spiritual death of character like Desala who leaves her husband for material comforts where relation and doesn't matter and practical way of living is much indeed. Awuchike who just for the money leaves his family, brother and village and started living with his brother's wife. Practicality of life is shown very well through both the characters and similarly these characters are considered as spiritually dead.



Hospitality

In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka comments on the hospitable nature of the Yorubas. One can infer from the presentation that the playwright ascribes this element to major characters as a yearning for contemporary Yoruba society to go back to this aspect of their culture. Olikenyi (2001) explains that the Yoruba people's hospitality is a vital aspect of existence in the society in general. Hospitality is one of the few facets of ancient Yoruba culture that is still intact and strongly practised today by most Yoruba people in spite of the forces of recent external influence or even internal pressure. This is one of the major cultural and moral values in the traditional Yoruba society which contemporary society is fast losing because of some calamities that are bedevilling the society today.

Okunola and Ojo (2016) disclose that in the traditional Yoruba society, when a stranger came to a village, he would be taken to the house of an elderly person for questioning so that his motives will be understood by the rest of the community. When this is done to the satisfaction of the villagers, the visitor is given drinks, food and shelter by the community members. There is a close-knit relationship amongst the members of the community who care for one another. The society believes that an injury to one is an injury to all. There are situations whereby the father of the house gives up his meal for the satisfaction of the strangers. Hospitality in traditional Yoruba society is second to none. Okafor (1974) avers that in traditional Yoruba culture, the weak and aged, the incurable, the helpless and the sick were affectionately taken care of in the comforting family atmosphere.

Soyinka presents this explicitly in the play as Makuri and Alu warmly welcome and accommodate the Beggar into their house without being suspicious of anything. Even in their lack, they still try as much as possible to cater for the immediate needs of the Beggar:

MAKURI: Have you met anyone in the village? Were you directed here?

BEGGAR: No. This happened to be the first house on my way... Are you the head of this house?

MAKURI: Y-yes, yes I am.

BEGGAR: Then it is with you I must speak.

MAKURI: We haven't much, but you can have shelter for the night and food for.... (Soyinka, 1986: 88-89)

The society is ordered. That is, the place of the head of the family is unquestionably recognised by all and sundry. Little wonder, the Beggar seeks an audience with Makuri who is the man of the house. It would have been impossible for the woman of the house, in a traditional Yoruba society, to bring a stranger home and accommodate them without the consent of the husband who is traditionally,

religiously and socially believed to be the head of the family. It is worthy of note also that despite the obvious lack in the lives of Makuri and Alu as revealed in their apartment, they are still ready to share with a stranger – the Beggar. Further, hospitality is shown when Kadiye, the Priest, visits the family. They not only welcome him reverently; they also share with him a drink – a cane brew.

From this, it can be said that the traditional society is so open-handed and generous. In the Igbo society, whenever a friend or group of elders visit a person, palm wine would necessarily be served, and kola nuts shared. However, it is very important to pinpoint the fact that the host must first be the partaker of whatsoever he/she serves. Soyinka skilfully hints this important aspect of the traditional society in the stage direction when Kadiye awaits Makuri to taste the drink he serves first:

(Everyone now has a drink, except the Beggar; who, in spite of a dumb persuasive attempt by Alu, refuses a cup. The Kadiye waits for Makuri to come and taste his drink).

MAKURI: [takes the cup from the Kadiye.]: If my face belies my thoughts, may the venom grip at once. [Drinks a mouthful and hands it back] (Soyinka, 1986: 96).

This is important because an envious member of the community may want to poison the visitors but when he first partakes of the drink, the visitor's mind is assured. This is one of the traits of the traditional Nigerian society that made the society live in peace and harmony with one another and even strangers who come visiting.

Marital fidelity

Even though the traditional Nigerian society is polygamous in nature, once a woman is married and all the necessary obligations satisfied, she is expected to be faithful till death. She belongs completely to her husband. Aside from being virtuous and pure

before marriage, she must remain faithful to her husband even after being deflowered. Failure to be faithful to the man brings untold calamities upon her and by extension, her family. Unlike now, when the paternity of a child can be easily determined through the DNA test, the traditional Yoruba society used some parameters (oath-taking, family rites, etc.) in determining the paternity of a child where a woman's faithfulness and fidelity is in question.

While Makuri is being told by his wife to go out in search of their newly returned son from the city and he (Makuri), remains unyielding, Alu, his wife, says: *If you felt for him like a father, you'd know he was dead. But you haven't any feelings at all. Anyone would think they weren't your own flesh and blood* (Soyinka, 1986: 84).

Makuri, however, teasingly declares: *Well, I have only your own word for that.*

Makuri's statement is therefore questioning Alu's fidelity and faithfulness to him; as it is clear that he cannot determine whether the children are his. But Alu understands the intent and deeper meaning of that statement which makes her to respond that: *Ugh! You (Makuri) always have a dirty tongue* (Soyinka, 1986: 84).

Interestingly, Makuri himself testifies to his wife's faithfulness and fidelity. He gives an elaborate narration of her faithfulness especially when they were young and newly married. This is done so as to placate her for spiting and teasing her of unfaithfulness:

MAKURI: Now, now, Alu. You know I didn't mean a word of that. [Alu tightens her lips and resumes her work.] [In a hurriedly placating tone.] There wasn't a woman anywhere more faithful than you, Alu; I never had a moment of worry in the whole of my life... [His tone grows more sincere] Not every man can look his wife in the face and make that boast, Alu. Not every man can do it. [Alu remains inflexible.] And the chances you could have taken. Those traders – every one of them wanted you to go back with him; promised he'd make you like a lady, cloth you in silks and have servants to wait on your smallest wants... You don't belong here, they used to tell you. Come back with us to

the city where men know the value of women ... No, there was no doubt about it. You could have had your choice of them. You turned their heads like a pot of cane brew. [Alu begins to smile in spite of herself.]

MAKURI: And the way I would go walking with you, and I could hear their heads turning around, and one tongue hanging out and saying to the other, Now I wonder what she sees in him... Poor fools... (Soyinka, 1986: 84-85).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the traditional Yoruba society cherishes and expects spouses to be faithful to their partner, especially the wives. However, foregrounding the wives' faithfulness/fidelity does not mean that the men are free to commit adultery with other women outside because it is better for a man who is responsible to either marry a second or third wife than to be promiscuous and commit adultery in the community. Yoruba people use oath-taking as a way of preventing infidelity in marriage. The couples are made to take oaths at the bank of the river or in front of a shrine not to commit infidelity while in the marriage. The oath is normally administered on newly married couples with the consent of the chief priest. This presents an alternative means of ensuring fidelity based on an existing format which can be used in contemporary Yoruba society where fidelity is dying a slow death (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1976).

Axioms

In Yoruba culture great importance is attached to the spoken word and speech generally. Believing that it carries great psychic properties, the Yoruba approach speech with deliberate care, taking great pains to avoid careless, casual, or thoughtless statements whose damage might outlast lifetimes. Yoruba culture is rich in proverbs. According to Atanda (1996), Yoruba proverbs mirror the culture; they afford members of the society a means of psychological and emotional release through the venting of otherwise prohibited expressions; aiding in education and

socialisation; and maintaining conformity to accepted patterns, while also validating institutions, attitudes and beliefs. It is nearly impossible for a conversation to start and end without tons of proverbial words used in spicing up the conversation. Traditional Yoruba societies do not speak for the sake of speaking: conversations are laden and loaded with riddles and proverbs. According to Olatunji (1984) when the truth is elusive, it is proverbs that we use to discover it. Therefore, the Yoruba society, particularly the traditional society, is extremely rich in proverbs and words of wisdom:

MAKURI: Wait. You are very hasty. Did you never learn that the blind man does not hurry for fear he out-walks his guide? (Soyinka, 1986: 90)

This is a proverb used to caution anybody who is quick and hasty in decision-making. One is always enjoined to exhaust all the available options before making a decision on any matter so as not to later regret the decision made.

KADIYE: ...This nest is beginning to attract the swamp flies. I must get it off tonight. (Soyinka, 1986: 90)

It is interesting to note that the nest which Kadiye refers to is his beard which has been left unshaved for long because of his vow to the Serpent of the Swamps. An ordinary reader would have thought it is a nest of birds.

MAKURI: What a day! What a day! The whole world seems to have picked the same day to drop into my house... (Soyinka, 1986: 97)

This hyperbolic statement is used to show the status and number of the visitors that Makuri and his wife have received – Igwezu, their son, the Beggar, and the Kadiye. Resorting to proverbs is the most important and most effective strategy the Yoruba have devised to optimise the efficaciousness of speech. In presenting these

examples of the indigenous speech pattern, Soyinka makes the point that contemporary society needs to return to the use of proverbs which would contribute to the speech pattern hence Soyinka's emphasis on proverbs in his work.

Detest for Insatiable Quest for Materialism

In the contemporary Yoruba society, the motto of many people in the society is money, which to them comes before issues of morality. These days, when unemployment is a major problem in Nigeria, we see qualified, competent and certified graduates being rejected and relegated to the background because they have no money to bribe their way through different powers and principalities in organisations. Starting from the security persons manning the gate to the directors in their air-conditioned offices, kickbacks are almost always demanded from applicants.



Corrupt people occupy and are given exalted and powerful positions in the society. Corruption, according to Ajidahun (2013), "is an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of personal motives such as wealth, power or status." In the same vein, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines materialism as "a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things". These definitions aptly capture the state of things in the present-day Yoruba society. Although one cannot take away the presence and effort of culturally sensitive people in the society, they are, however, minute in number compared with their greatly corrupt counterparts.

In the text, evidence of corruption through money-consciousness is revealed in the characters of Awuchike and the wife of Igwezu. Igwezu loses his wife to his own twin

brother, he is cheated and stabbed by members of his own immediate family because of materialism. This is captured in the conversation below:

IGWEZU: Don't you want news of my wife? Have you no interest in the simple and unspoilt child whom you wooed on my behalf?

IGWEZU: Father. Tell me, father, is my brother a better man than I?

MAKURI: No, son. His heart is only more suited to the city.

IGWEZU: And yet we are twins. And in spite of that, he looked at my wife, and she went to him of her own accord... Tell me father, are women so easily swayed by wealth? Are all women the same? (Soyinka, 1986: 107-108)

From this excerpt, it is clear that family ties and kinship are being severed through various immoral and uncultural acts and behaviours in the contemporary Yoruba society.

More so, on the quest and insatiable thirst for material things and wealth, Makuri succinctly expresses the consequence of this. In his words, he declares:

It ruins them. The city ruins them. What do they seek there except money? They talk to the traders, and then they cannot sit still... There was Gonushi's son for one ... left his wife and children ... not a word to anyone. (Soyinka, 1986: 87).

The logo of the University of Fort Hare, featuring a sun rising over an open book with the motto 'IN VIDE VERUM' written on it.
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Soyinka exposes the extent of monetary lust in this play and proposes a return to the values of traditional Yoruba society where the lust for materialism is considered an act fit only for fools and outcasts in society.

Hard work

The traditional Yoruba society cherishes hard work and sees it as an antidote to poverty. Laziness is seen as an aberration and a lazy man is looked down upon with disregard and contempt. Even though the reality of the standard of living of the contemporary Yoruba society has fallen terribly due to numerous problems

bedevilling the society, some able-bodied young men and women have taken to corporate begging and turned themselves into corporate beggars.

Kanu (2010:77), opines explicitly:

Parasitism is not tolerated; whoever is capable of working but refuses to, or is lazy, will be allowed to starve there and then. The philosophy behind the African communalism, therefore guaranteed individual responsibility within the communal ownership and relationship. The prosperity of a single person, says an African adage, does not make a town rich. In other words, a person can only be truly safe in a community.

Soyinka employs the character of the Beggar to hint and show a contrast with this culture of laziness in the contemporary Yoruba society. The Beggar, even though conspicuously handicapped, is ready to work and till the land with his hands. He is even offended when Makuri magnifies his inability and disability. There is a sharp contrast between the Beggar and visibly able-bodied men and women in the present-day Nigerian society who derive joy in begging for alms from other persons rather than putting their hands to work and eking out a living for themselves. One can therefore say that disability is definitely a thing of the mind. See the interaction below:

MAKURI: What do you want?

BEGGAR: Work.

MAKURI: Work?

BEGGAR: Yes, work. I wish to work on the soil. I wish to knead it between my fingers.

MAKURI: But you're blind. Why don't you beg like others? There is no true worshippers who would deny you this charity.

BEGGAR: I want a home, and I wish to work with my hands.

MAKURI: [in utter bewilderment.]: You ...the affected of the gods! Do you really desire to work, when even the least devout lives under the strict injunction of hospitality towards you?

BEGGAR: [getting up.]: No more, no more. All the way down the river the natives read me the code of the afflicted, according to their various faiths. Some fed and clothed me. Others put money in my hands, food and drink in my bag. With some, it was the children and their stones, and sometimes the

dogs followed me and whetted their teeth on my ankles... Good-bye. I shall follow the river to the end. (Soyinka, 1986: 89-90).

What is obtainable in the contemporary Yoruba society is against this firmness of mind which Soyinka portrays in the character of the Beggar. There are cases of well-dressed young men and women on the street approaching other road users or travellers to ask for alms. They usually come up with interesting but deceitful stories to appeal to the emotions of their benefactors. They have skilfully mastered their arts so that they can easily sway anybody who is ignorant of their deeds and deception.

The Beggar further reveals the contradiction in the blessings that he showers and pours upon his helpers and alms-givers. This also uncovers the psyche and disposition of those involved in begging as a profession. It can be inferred that beggars, as the Beggar in the text explains, care less about the fulfilment of the blessings they pour and shower upon their benefactors – it is not in the beggars' power to bring the reality of the showered blessings. No wonder, Soyinka's Beggar character in the play is tired of begging as a profession. In his own words, he discloses: *...pouring out blessings upon them which were not mine to give...* but Makuri claims that the blessings are his (Beggar's) but which the Beggar disagrees and illuminates further:

Ah, but did I bless them from the heart? Were they not so many that I blessed without thought, and took from whatever hand was willing, however vile it was? Did I know if the alms came from a pure heart or from a robber and taker of lives, from the devout or the profane...? I thanked and blessed them equally, even before I had the time to discover the size of their bounty... (Soyinka, 1986: 91)

Respect

Respect is central to Yoruba culture. Culturally and morally, the traditional Yoruba society places high premium on respect. Respect is always given to whom it is due and honour is bestowed on those who are worthy. As the young respects the old, so must the old respect the young. Inter-dependability and reciprocity in the traditional Yoruba society made the society run smoothly prior to the coming of the colonial powers. The traditional society believes that no one is an island and each member of the society needs others in the society to achieve personal and communal goals. Surprisingly, the contemporary Yoruba society has become disrespectful and individualistic. The philosophy of the contemporary society is closely tied up with the root of western culture: every man for himself. Kanu (2010) observes that the sense of respect for authority and elders helps to solder and smoothen social relations in African society. Before the advent of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism, there was stability, peace and harmony in many African settings.



In the play, we see Igwezu being disrespectful to the Kadiye, the Priest. This symbol of immorality and culture of this contemporary Yoruba society is captured in the text below:

MAKURI: Yes. Now that the rains have ceased, his vow is come to an end. He wanted me to do it, but I said, No, Kadiye; I am still strong and healthy, but my fingers shake a little now and then, and your skin is tender.

IGWEZU: Yes. Is it not strange that his skin is tender? Is it not strange that he is smooth and well-preserved?

BEGGAR: [eagerly.]: Is he fat, master? When he spoke, I detected a certain bulk in his voice.

IGWEZU: Ay, he is fat. He rolls himself like a fat and greasy porpoise.

ALU: Son, you must speak better of the holy man.

MAKURI: [tut-tutting]: The city has done him no good. No good at all. (Soyinka, 1986:101)

Soyinka also highlights the disease of individualism and self-centredness in the following dialogue between Igwezu and Makuri:

IGWEZU: ...when I saw its knife sever the ties and love of kinship, and turn brother against brother... (Soyinka, 1986:103)

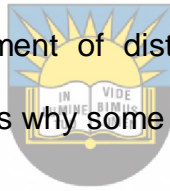
MAKURI: Did he ever talk of his father? Does he remember his own home?

IGWEZU: Awuchike is dead to you and to this house. Let us not raise his ghost.

MAKURI: What did he do son? What happened in the city?

IGWEZU: Nothing but what happens to a newcomer to the race. The city reared itself in the air, and with the strength of its legs of brass kicked the adventurer in the small of his back. (Soyinka, 1986:104)

Soyinka mirrors the degenerated state of the contemporary society as against what Yoruba society is known for. In the traditional society, the young people give honour to elders including the family, so it is very strange to look upon the wife of an elderly person hence making betrayal an uncommon thing. He also points out the fact that the contemporary youths are always in search of greener pastures. There is nothing apparently wrong with this spirit of adventure but the major problem is the fate of the youths once they are in the city. There, they lose their humanity. The reason for this is that cities offers a bewilderment of distractions and entertainments such as drinking long into the night. That is why some people suffered nervous exhaustion.



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3.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In presenting the societal ills so blatantly in *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka unintentionally calls attention to ways of life before the colonial era. Traditional Yoruba people taught their young ones to be morally upright by devising effective ways of imparting certain ideals and virtues in them. They use myths and proverbs to give their young ones' moral education. Myths and proverbs were designed to teach the young minds why they should emulate certain characters as well as why they should shun certain actions and characters. Soul-searching questions were often asked at the end of each story, such as, 'What lesson can be derived from the story?' etc., were meant to prick the conscience of the listeners to enable them

discern what was believed to be good from what was evil. Soyinka shows that the traditional Yoruba mode of teaching morals, with little modification, may go a long way in stemming the tide of moral decadence in any contemporary society of the world.

Similarly, in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, it can be deduced that the play belongs to the national culture and liberation paradigm of postcolonial theory, in that it shows the importance of culture in the struggle for freedom. The playwright demonstrated the act of cultural manifestation undertaken by a colonized people in their conscious and organized struggle to restore national autonomy since the ideals of traditional Yoruba society can only be traced back to its culture. Here, Soyinka creates awareness of the positive aspects of culture in the drive towards greater morality in the Yoruba society. The playwright fictionally documents colonial Nigerian society to educate the people about the importance of his Yoruba culture. He (Soyinka) brought into the light what has been permeating through the pores of the contemporary society-loss of ideals and values, thus, man yearns for a return to lost cultural and moral heritage. He uses the character of Elesin who fails to perform his duty because of the pleasure of the world to speak to the contemporary leaders who are power conscious and hence, have no regard for culture and morality. Elesin requested for a bride that was already betrothed to Iyaloja's son and he is honoured yet he fails in performing his communal duty.

The playwright points the attention of contemporary youths to Elesin's son, Olunde who studies medicine in England but never lost his identity and never undermined his cultural values. Soyinka uses the character of Olunde to call on the contemporary

youths to uphold their cultural heritage even when the elders like Elesin are failing in their duty to defend the cultural values. Like Olunde, the contemporary youths should believe in Yoruba culture and also admire the western ways of life. His ability to acknowledge other people's culture without necessarily suppressing his own culture makes him stable and balanced in his conscience and way of life, thus eliminating the confusion that arises from doing otherwise, unlike the contemporary youths. Soyinka shows the extent to which colonialism, civilisation, western education and technology have redefined Yoruba culture for contemporary society. The culture of contemporary society is that of an alienated culture, which has absorbed all of the foreign values but still finds itself on native soil. The traditional setting in *Death and the King's Horseman* is impossible to be recalled. Soyinka also portrays Amusa and Joseph as examples of the contemporary youths who have lost their cultural identity having imbibed the western culture. Soyinka also shows that language is the pillar of any culture, and that the traditional Yoruba society had a grasp of indigenous language like never before. Language today has become watery and mundane, lacking proverbial sauce, poetic spice and deeply embedded meanings. Poetic forms like eulogies and panegyrics are fast becoming forgotten. Yoruba people, for instance, hardly know beyond their immediate extended family, not to talk of rendering family panegyrics. Some proverbs are becoming lost in the wave of 'civilisation'. English language, the Nigerian lingua franca, is what everyone is proud to speak, not native language. Blunders and grammatical errors are abhorred while native language blunders are rarely noticed or discarded all the same. The "long-winded, roundabout way of making conversation" has become narrow and shallow. The contemporary youths cannot speak their native language in a straightforward manner without mixing it up with the English language.

The playwright made effort to rebuild a shattered community, to restore the sense of community against all the pressures of the colonial system. This he proposes by embracing their native culture and rejecting the values and cultural modes imposed upon them, such as speaking European languages or wearing Western clothes, and actively elaborating the ideological basis for the greater unity essential to the eradicating the anomalies that pervaded the contemporary Yoruba society.

In The Trials of Brother Jero as well, Soyinka shows that cultural values are fundamental in all human societies which should be displayed in all human actions and activities. It is very important for these values to flow into religion and be imbibed by the religious leaders. With the above highlighted current delinquency trend, the place of culture in the future of religion cannot be underplayed. This is so because indigenous cultural values place much emphasis on uprightness, truthfulness and contentment which are needed in making contemporary religion worthy to practice, religious leaders more respected and people's trust in their leaders justifiable.



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Chapter Four

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of Osofisan's *Women of Owu* (2006) with focus on how the playwright presents culture as a means of addressing societal regeneration in the Yoruba Society. In this case, cultural features, awareness and consciousness is indispensable in the liberation struggle and the process of societal regeneration, and this is what Osofisan takes acquaintance with. The chapter first presents a brief biography of Osofisan, followed by a synopsis of the play and goes further to identify and discuss objectives of this study. The identified relevant themes related to this cultural features are discussed and these include; taboo, respect, virginity, witty sayings and communalism.



4.1 Brief Biography of Femi Osofisan

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Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan was born in 1946 in Erunwon, a Yoruba farming village in Ogun State, Nigeria. Femi Osofisan is an Emeritus Professor of Drama, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He is a Theatre Director, Actor, Critic, Poet, Novelist, Editor and Newspaper Columnist. Osofisan has written and produced more than sixty plays, five volumes of poetry, four novels and several collections of essays which include; *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* (1978), *The Oriki of a Grasshopper and Other Plays* (1995) and *Women of Owu* (2006). Osofisan has won several other awards, including the 2016 winner of the IATC's prestigious Thalia Prize. Femi Osofisan as one of Nigeria's playwrights is usually categorized among the second generation of Nigerian playwrights, after the likes of Wole Soyinka and J.P. Clark Bekederemo

who are usually considered as the forerunners of Nigerian drama (Nnanna, 2016). As a critic and social crusader and a member of the society, he extends his creative tentacles to explore, reflect and depict various social vices that are plaguing the Nigerian society.

4.2 Play 1: *Women of Owu*

4.2.1 Synopsis of *Women of Owu*

The play begins with Anlugbua, the deified god and former leader of Owu, seeing the smouldering city of Owu reduced to ashes by the Allied Forces of Oyo, Ife and Ijebu and meeting two women who tell him how their city is raided and destroyed and how all the males in the city are slaughtered and accuse their gods of irresponsibility and neglect. Having been held off for seven years, the invaders finally gained entry into the city because a terrible fire engulfed the city. The play chronicles the suffering and dehumanisation faced by the spared women of the city in the hands of their conquerors who claim to have come to liberate them from their despotic king. Maye, the Commanding General of the Allied Forces, leads the war in order to reclaim his adulterous wife, Iyunloye, who is captured at Apomu market which is raided by the Owu's soldiers and is given to Prince Adejumo as a wife.

Lawunmi, the deified goddess and Anlugbua's mother, reveals that it is the pride and arrogance of Owu for sacking and raiding Ife that leads to its fall. She, Lawunmi, then promises to deal with the Allied Forces for desecrating her shrine by killing some people of Owu who run into it for safety. The women of Owu recount their loss and ordeal lengthily and by singing dirges including Erelu Afin, the wife of Oba

Akinjobi. Erelu is accused by Adumaadan, her daughter-in-law, for obstinacy in keeping Dejumoo who is supposed to be killed at birth in order to avert the destruction awaiting the city but Erelu decides to keep the baby. However, the women of Owu look up to Erelu, who is referred to as their mother, to rise up to the challenge of charting a new course for their city by communion with the gods and for their dead people to have a peaceful rest in the afterlife.

4.2.2 Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* and Possible Cultural Components for Societal Regeneration

Taboo as moral check

Taboos in the traditional Yoruba society were a means of social control and without them there would be chaos: The motivation for abiding by the normative principles are provided and reinforced by the religious sanctions from the gods and the ancestors or directly from the Supreme Being. According to Osei (2006) every moral system requires the existence of guiding principles, source(s) of motivation, and some grounds for objectivity. Even though formulated as negative principles, taboos teach people about what was not acceptable in the society. By implication, they were also pointing out the actions that were supposed to be done. By preventing people from doing wrong things, they were helping them to focus on what was encouraged in the society. In the traditional society where there were no police; taboos served as a guardian of moral values.

The use of taboos is something the modern Yoruba culture has ignored but it is a practice that needs to be brought back into the Yoruba cultural mainstream. In the

Yoruba traditional society, members of the society are conscious of social prohibitions guiding their behaviours either vertically with their pantheon of gods or horizontally amongst human beings (Steiner, 1990). Taboos are checks in order to have peaceful and harmonious relationships in the traditional society and anybody caught flouting and violating such taboos, although unwritten, whether a stranger or native is made to pay the full price for committing an abominable offence. The punishment depends on the gravity of the offence.

According to Odejobi (2013: 223) the following are the roles of taboo in Yoruba society:

- (a) They helped in the upbringing of children and provided rules for marriage;
- (b) They were a means of social control and without them there would be chaos;
- (c) Keeping of taboos ensured good harmony between the visible and the invisible world;
- (d) People seemed to be aware that behind prohibitions lay the true meaning of taboos – preserving harmony and well-being in and of the community.

It is a taboo in the traditional Yoruba society for humans to see gods face to face. Osofisan reflects this Yoruba culture in his play through the interaction between the women sent to fetch water and their transformed deified god, Anlugbua:

ANLUGBUA: Three times, I said! Call my name/Three times, and I shall be back,/Sword in hand, to defend you!

WOMAN: Sword! That would have served little purpose/This time, I tell you! Because – eh! Yeh!... Yeh!/What did you say? You... you... Mo gbe!.../Is it you....? Have I stumbled upon.../Impossible! My eyes have not seen a.../No! Impossible! (Osofisan 2006: 4).

When they realise that they have been talking with the god, fear grips the women. The Yoruba expression *Mo gbe* which means “I am doomed” shows that the women know the implication of seeing the gods face to face which is death. Further, when

the Erelu's surviving grandson and Adumaadan's son is to be killed as ordered by the Allied Forces' General, Gesinde reveals that it is a taboo *to shoot him* (the boy)/*Or cut his skin with a blade* (Osofisan, 2006: 45). Even though it is the logic of war to kill an enemy whether young or old, the manner in which some persons are killed is important as shown above in Gesinde's utterance.

According to Odejebi (2013), traditional African society especially in Yoruba society, taboos play significant and positive roles. They provided a set of rules serving as a moral guidance or a law in the community to ensure that peace and security were present in the community; they helped in the upbringing of children and provided rules for marriage; they could be described as 'teaching aids' when explaining some moral principles to children; they were a means of social control and without them there would be chaos. The foregoing exposition and analysis of various types of taboos have demonstrated that most Yoruba traditional taboos enhance development in the society. Taboos have played important roles in the traditional African Yoruba society and also exercise great influence on the modern society as well. They helped people to preserve moral rules that help them as individuals and as communities to live peaceful and harmonious lives. Though formulated in forms of 'don'ts' and sometimes being ambiguous, they enabled people to maintain the moral order and hierarchy in the society. In the contemporary society, which in a number of aspects is quite different from the traditional one, there is a need to enforce taboos or to come up with an alternative way that will promote traditional values. Osei (2006), states that every moral system requires the existence of guiding principles, and some grounds for objectivity, even though formulated as negative principles stressing 'do not do this or that' and teaching people about what was not acceptable

in the society and thereby pointing out the actions that were supposed to be done. By preventing people from doing wrong things, they were helping them to focus on what was encouraged in the society. In a traditional Yoruba society where there were no police, taboos served as a guardian of moral values. Adedeji (2015) asserts that to some extent, they were better than modern law-enforcing agencies, because, in most cases, breaking of a taboo was associated with an automatic punishment. One did not have to be caught to be punished.

Virginity

Marriage is believed to be sacred and respected in the traditional Yoruba society. It is not just a frivolous engagement between a man and a woman but what brings all their families together because the relationship transcends between the man and his bride. Virginity is highly respected and all maidens and wives-to-be are expected to be virtuous, pure, and undefiled. Under no circumstance should a lady lose her virginity before she marries. She will be disgraced along with her family till she dies if she does so. While recounting her ordeal in the hands of their conquerors, Erelu laments:

And my daughters, dear women! These same eyes saw my daughters/Seized by their hair, their clothes ripped off their bodies/By brutal men, and their innocence shredded forever/In an orgy of senseless rapine (Osofisan 2006: 10).

Erelu goes on with her speech:

My daughters – remember, they were all/Engaged already to be married to kings! Already. /Remember, the palace was bustling with their bridal songs, /Chants of dancers and drummers/Rehearsing for the day – (Osofisan 2006: 11).

Also, Princess Orisaye, having been given to join Balogun Kusa's house as one of his wives, comments, sings and dances a bridal song/dance:

No! Leave me alone! Get your own light, /Don't steal my own!/I am going to be married to a king, don't you know?/This torch is for our bridal night! See, how the flame dances/Prettily, gracefully/To the waves of our passion! Ah, /All the gods are awake with us! Their watchful eyes/Follow us with blessings/As I go to the bed of my king! (Osofisan 2006: 13).

According to Familusi (2012), chastity before marriage, on the part of the woman, is essential. A woman who is not virtuous at marriage is a disgrace not only to herself, but also to members of her family. It follows that virginity is a cherished virtue in Yoruba society. In the contemporary society, this practice has become outdated due to the influence of western culture as virginity is no longer publicly celebrated, and its loss has ceased to be a thing of disgrace.

Respect

Yoruba traditional society greatly cherishes respect. This is encoded in virtually all they do. Respect, which can also be called honour, must be shown to whom it is due such as: title holders (kings and chiefs), elders, parents, including strangers and the dead whether young or old. Respect is very important and it is conspicuously foregrounded in the elaborate greeting system of the traditional Yoruba society. Anybody who does not know how to greet or show respect is labelled as an outcast and uncultured. Unlike the contemporary society where respect of elders is lacking, the traditional Yoruba society places high regard on respect no matter the situation. As portrayed in the play, despite a war-torn environment it is seen that different characters show respect to some set of people. This is seen in the following dialogue:

ERELU: Yes, I remember you Gesinde. As I remember how/Your appearance always meant some doom to our people. /Go on, talk. What further misfortune/Do you have for us this time?

GESINDE: Your majesty, I wish you'd understand, /I am only a messenger, just a borrowed mouth. It's the Generals/Who take the decisions.... (Osofisan 2006: 23).

From the above excerpt, although Gesinde has the power to silence and abuse Erelu yet he shows her respect by being gentle in his words to the extent of referring to her as *Your majesty*. This reveals that even an enemy is expected to be courteous and polite to his or her victim particularly an older/title-holding victim like Erelu. Also, the women of Owu refer to Erelu as *iya wa* (Osofisan 2006: 33).

This is in recognition of her position, status and age in the society. Being the queen mother, she commands respect even in defeat and loss and since her husband, the king, and her sons, have been killed (Osofisan 2006: 44), the onus lies on her to lead the spared women and commune with the gods for the rite of passage of their slain husbands, brothers, and sons.



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Moreover, respect for the dead is shown by Adumaadan to Adeoti, one of Erelu's daughters:

ADUMAADAN: I closed her eyes and poured some sand on her. /In the situation, it was all I could.

ERELU: Thank you! Ah Deoti, you too! .../Adumaadan, wife to my slaughtered son,/Thank you again. I wish I knew/What deity to pray to now to reward you/For the kindness you showed to my daughter... /So all I can say is, please accept/These hands of gratitude from a broken mother's heart. (Osofisan 2006: 41)

The playwright reinforces this show of appreciation and respect for the dead through italics (*She offers her hands, joined together into an 'osu' of respect, to Adumaadan.*). Even though what Adumaadan does may seem insignificant, it is greatly appreciated by her mother-in-law.

Witty sayings (proverbs)

Yoruba culture is extremely rich in witty sayings. According to Adejumo (2009) proverbs is a form of literary genre in Yoruba settings. Ojoade (2004) explains that proverbs are an international phenomenon and bearer of philosophical insight through which man describes and understands the world in which he lives. Osofisan criticises the present-day speech pattern which is vulgar and vague in nature unlike the traditional Yoruba speech pattern which is full of wisdom. The importance of proverbs in Yoruba speech is seen in the words of Olatunji (1984: 170) *Owe lesin oro. Bi oro ba sonu, owe la a fi wa a* that is proverbs are used to solve a problem. When the truth is elusive, it is proverbs that we use to discover it.

The playwrights, like Osofisan, know the importance of proverbs and witty sayings and employ them greatly in their writings. Osofisan employs the use of proverbs in his play:



IYUNLOYE: ...When/Mother Goat nods at the sonorous sound of the drum, /She is not dancing! It is because, each time it sounds, /She recognizes the wailing of the leather...(Osofisan, 2006: 55)

Iyunloye uses the above proverb in order to vindicate herself by diverting the line of argument between herself and Erelu before Maye, the Allied Forces' General, for him to be lenient or even forgive her flight and infidelity by appealing to pity.

Furthermore, Chorus Leaders employ proverbs as a persuasive means in conversing with the invoked spirit of their god, Anlugbua who possesses Erelu to help them in their suffering and impending slavery. However, their god is as helpless and hopeless as they are. Osofisan seems to be suggesting that humanity should be responsible for whatever happens to them. Humanity should make right and decisive decisions and let the gods alone who cannot do anything to help humans. This is captured in the excerpt below:

ERELU: (Her voice changed now, in the god's possession). Yes, I have come, I, Anlugbua. Why do you call me? (Osofisan 2006: 65).

CHORUS LEADER 2: Home is where every traveller returns after a journey, /However long. When night falls, the visitor must take his leave/Of his hosts. (Osofisan 2006: 65).

CHORUS LEADER 1:No swimmer, however good, /Can swim beyond the rim of the world.... (Osofisan 2006: 65).

The playwright's position is that the use of proverbs which was the dominant conversational style in traditional Yoruba culture should make a return to mainstream Yoruba linguistic discourse because it promotes knowledge, wisdom and helps shape society's conversational technique for the better.

Communalism

The contemporary Yoruba society is characterised by individualism which pitches itself against the traditional society which was maintained and sustained by communalism. The advent of colonisation that brought about cultural contact breaks the communal system of the traditional system. Thus, nobody seeks the welfare of others anymore and everybody now fights for their individual benefits and gains, to the detriment of the society.

In the traditional Yoruba society, anything against the well-being of the society was jettisoned and sacrificed for societal benefits but the contemporary society has become every man for himself.

Surprisingly, although some people still have respect for human life in contemporary society and such people having taken it upon themselves to rescue accident victims, they end up being maltreated and at times incarcerated by the security officers (the police) in the country. This alone has made many people to be less concerned with whatever happens to others in the society. Individualism, in contemporary society, is

seriously wreaking havoc on the lives, properties and even territorial integrity of the polity.

Osofisan exemplifies this through the character of Erelu who is accused of sparing and keeping Dejumò who is destined to be killed in order to avert the foretold disaster which keeping him would cause for communal well-being. With her personal interest clashing with the community's, she decides to keep the boy. This brings untold destruction to the city of Owu. Osofisan projects this, though whimsically, through Iyunloye who reveals this in order to save her and mitigate the punishment awaiting her in the hands of her husband, Maye:

IYUNLOYE: Since you are looking for blame, why not start with this woman here? She it was after all who mothered the man who captured me. Ask her, and she herself will confess that at his birth, the priests ordered his immediate execution. They warned that he was evil, that if he was left to grow up, he would bring disaster to Owu. They said he would seduce a woman, and through that act cause the death of many. But she chose instead to hide him and nurse him to manhood... (Osofisan 2006: 51).

4.3 Conclusion

This section of this research evaluates textually and extrapolates contextually issues of using culture as a means of societal regeneration as presented in *The Women of Owu*. The foregoing exposition and analysis of various themes have demonstrated that Yoruba traditional cultural values could enhance societal regeneration and social development in the society. These themes have a central point of morality. According to Ushe (2011), morality deals with the principles of human behaviours to ascertain whether an act is good or bad, right or wrong and all what not, for the well-being of man and harmonious living with one another. African traditional culture, especially the traditional Yoruba culture is morality-driven. In the contemporary

society, which in a number of aspects is quite different from the traditional one, there is a need to promote these themes or to come up with alternatives that will lead to a better society.



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Chapter Five

Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *The Gods are not to Blame*

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *The Gods are not to Blame* which are written in 1971 respectively and have been classified as postcolonial texts. Though focusing on the examination of the precolonial and the colonial past, *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971) is an adaptation of Sophocles' king Oedipus, which is considered as the touchstone of Greek tragedy. Notwithstanding Rotimi's defence of it, the experiment is in line with the needs of the Nigerians. The study adopts postcolonial theory to explore the extent to which the playwright expresses a nostalgic embrace of precolonial attractions and naturalness to react to issues in the Yoruba society as well as his desire to preserve good aspect of indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in precolonial society. As done in the previous chapters, the plays are analysed with respect to the objectives of critically exploring and examining the key moral and cultural paradigms of the traditional Yoruba society and the levels of cultural and moral values in the contemporary society. As earlier mentioned in the limitation of this study that there are several inferable thematic areas which the playwright addresses, this chapter however examines the role of the major characters of the plays in order to produce resounding themes of socio-cultural relevance.

5.1 Brief Biography of Ola Rotimi (1938-2002)

Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi was born on 3rd April, 1938 in Sapele in the defunct Bendel State now Delta State to Yoruba and Ijo parents (a parentage factor

that reinforced his committed stance against the destructive elements of tribalism). He was educated at the prestigious Methodist Boys High School in Lagos, and then in the USA, with degrees from Boston University and Yale University, where between 1963 and 1966 he was Rockefeller Foundation Scholar in Playwriting and Dramatic Literature having had interest and introduced at an early age of four introduced into acting by his father and acquired interest in playwriting, short stories, and poetry later in secondary school. His exposure to western and indigenous writers such as Shakespeare, Gorky, O’Neil, Miller, Pinter and Brecht shaped his creative ingenuity (Fanyam and Gbilekaa, 2013). Fanyam and Gbilekaa stress further that from the indigenous playwrights and theatre practitioners, Ola Rotimi “has learnt from that indomitable versatile man of the theater, Wole Soyinka, his compatriots, J.P Clark-Bekederemo, Ogunde, Ogunmola and Ladipo” (Fanyam and Gbilekaa, 2013: 149). The influence of these indigenous playwrights particularly, Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo is in the consciousness of utilizing traditional aesthetic features. Rotimi’s plays are pervaded with indigenous and foreign echoes. He also employs indigenous aesthetic devices such as proverbs, the rituals of divination, incantations invocations, songs, praise chants, to embellish indigenous thematic portraiture. Ola Rotimi plays include: *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971), *Kurunmi* (1971), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), *Holding Talks* (1983), and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1983). Ola Rotimi spent the second half of his last creative decade working on several unpublished plays before his eventual demise in 2002.

5.2 Play 1: *Kurunmi* (1971)

5.2.1 Plot of play of *Kurunmi*

The play begins with Abogunrin, the aide-de-camp of Kurunmi, the Are-Ona-Kakanfo of Yoruba Empire and lord of Ijaye, drinking palm wine, praying and pouring libation to Ogun, the god of iron, that whosoever plots evil against Kurunmi, the earth should burst open and swallow the person. Other characters soon join in singing praises of Kurunmi who is reverently welcomed with his five sons. Kurunmi cherishes the tradition of his forebears which he claims makes a man what he is (that is, his orientation, emotion and intellectual being). He explains to his people that the Alafin Atiba, the King of Oyo Empire, wants his son, Aremo or Crown Prince (Adelu) to ascend the throne after him. This is against the constitution of Oyo for Aremo is expected to commit suicide once his father is dead. Rejecting this perversion, Kurunmi storms out of the meeting place. The duo of Timi Ede and Basorun Oluyole come to warn Kurunmi against any attempt to wage a war against the kingdom he is meant to defend. Kurunmi, with his people, treats them disrespectfully. They try to persuade him that time changes tradition but he disagrees: they promise that Adelu will be made king and Kurunmi can do nothing but bow to him.

In preparation for the brewing war, Kurunmi begins to send words to his allies when royal messengers from Oyo come with gifts for him from the new king, Adelu. The messengers enquire the reason Kurunmi failed to attend to Adelu's coronation; he responsively, gives them a coded message – an okro-soiled white linen – for the king. He is presented with two bowls, to choose between gunpowder and bullets, and the sacred twins of the Ogboni Cult – the symbols of peace. Kurunmi chooses the former. They leave solemnly as Kurunmi continues preparing for the war. He informs Areagoro and Balogun Ogunkoroju, his brothers-at-war, that war has come – Adelu has been crowned – he wants them to prepare for the war. While presenting

his body to Ogun for fortification, Reverend Mann shows up with a complaint of irresponsiveness of the people of Ijaye to the message of the Gospel. Kurunmi queries him as to whether he has a father and questions how reasonable it would be if he were to embrace the *strange* way of life and abandon his tradition. He makes Mann understand that life's philosophy is *give and take* unlike the Christian philosophy that solely focuses on giving. Interestingly, however, Kurunmi is subjected to questioning by his subjects demanding the rationale for preparing the town for a war which he does not discuss with the elders of the town. He admits his fault and promises to consult the people before making any town-bound decision.


An Ibadan council of Elders and Warriors meeting is convened to deliberate the right course of action against Kurunmi's threat of war. As Ibikunle, Ibadan war General and Osundina, his third-in-command are advocating for peaceful resolution of the unfolding conflict, Ogunmola, his second-in-command, insults them, calling them cowards and storms out of the gathering. He goes on to send a dead black crow to Ibikunle – showing how weak and aged the latter has become.

War eventually breaks out. Kurunmi strategizes and sends his sons to defend other towns under his control. Ibikunle later joins Ogunmola in fighting the Ijaye. Through the divination and sacrifice of his native doctor, dissension crops up between Kurunmi and his Egba allies. Kurunmi is forced to cross the River Ose which leads to the death of his people. His five sons are killed by Ogunmola and his men while guarding other Ijaye-controlled towns. Having seen his waterloo, Kurunmi commits suicide by drinking poison.

5.2.2 Traditional Yoruba life in *Kurunmi*: Lesson for Contemporary Society

Rotimi's play is largely traditional; however, it retells the historical events in the Oyo Empire of the mid-nineteenth century in the light of modern realities. This section focuses on examining the key moral and cultural paradigms of the traditional Yoruba society as evident in the play. Rotimi presents the following lessons as pointer to the contemporary Yoruba society.

Collective Political and Military Leadership



Leadership is very important in any society. A society without leaders is a visionless, purposeless and anarchic society. Leadership is the ability to guide, direct or influence people. Leadership is a service and responsible leadership animates responsible followers. However, a powerless and incompetent leader is a disaster and calamity to the people he leads. Political and military powers are necessary for leadership especially in the society in order to safeguard and protect the society from any incursion or aggression from both internal and external enemies. In the traditional society, the king is expected to be a warlord because the society thrived on waging wars against other territories to expand their kingdoms. A coward and chicken-hearted king is easily dethroned by a stronger opponent.

Adebite (2009) avers that scholars agree that the term “politics” varies according to the situation and purposes of its usage. Adebite observes two broad standpoints in

which it (politics) is viewed as: (i) a struggle for power between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it; and (ii) as cooperation in the sense of practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty and the like. It is the second standpoint that the play, *Kurunmi*, concentrates on but the interest here which brings on the conflict that pervades the textual universe is the continuance or discontinuance of tradition.

Historically, the Old Oyo Empire, which was by the eighteenth century the most important power among the Yoruba and Aja-speaking people of modern south-western Nigeria and Dahomey, was weakened by internal dissensions and pressure from the newly founded and expanding Caliphate of Sokoto. The Caliphate sacked and destroyed Old Oyo and the Alafin moved his capital southwards to the present-day Oyo. The kingdom, in the mid-nineteenth century succeeded in re-establishing itself while the Alafin remained the ruler of the Empire but for defence, he depended on two major Yoruba towns: Ibadan and Ijaiye.

Rotimi portrays the collective political and military leadership just as it is threatened internally. The first instance of this collective leadership is portrayed in *Kurunmi*'s recount of the meeting with the Alafin Atiba:

KURUNMI: ...we, my sons here and I, we have just come back from a meeting with Alafin Atiba in Oyo. Oni Ife was present, Timi Ede was sitting next to him, Bashorun Oluyole of Ibadan, on my left. We were all seated. Oba Atiba came down from his high throne. In his right hand, the sword of Ogun; in his left hand, the bolt of Sango. He came towards us: "Swear, my people," said he, "swear to Ogun and to my forebear, Sango, that my son, Adelu, will be king after me... (Rotimi, 1971: 16-17)

The calibre of the leaders that attend the meeting reveals that there is indeed a collective political and military leadership. However, Alafin Atiba's proposition is what precipitates the war in the kingdom. Kurunmi disagrees and rejects this request aimed at raping the revered, age-long, tested and trusted tradition of their fathers which requires that the Aremo or Crown Prince who enjoys great power while his father rules, commit suicide on the Alafin's death.

Furthermore, to quench the fire of the brewing war in the kingdom, Timi Ede and Bashorun Oluyole pay Kurunmi a visit in Ijaiye after the latter storms out of the meeting. But shockingly, Kurunmi, with his subjects, treats the chiefs with contempt. This becomes a major threat to the kingdom. Bashorun Oluyole warns and reminds Kurunmi of the sacred duty that he is supposed to carry out without reneging it:

OLUYOLE [hotly]: We have come to warn that as Are Ona Kakanfo, chief warrior of our Kingdom. Yours is the sacred duty to protect and fight for our people, not to confound and rip them apart.

KURUNMI: Rip the kingdom apart? Tell that to yourself. Go tell Oni Ife. And then go plead with Alafin Atiba.

TIMI: You are the only important chief in the kingdom who opposes the Alafin's wish. (Rotimi, 1971: 19)

Rotimi shows representation of the theme of collective political and military leadership through the characters of Ibadan council of Elders and Warriors. Ogunmola, the second-in-command to Balogun Ibikunle, wants war, having suffered imprisonment, humiliation and being fed with white dry ashes for fourteen days by Kurunmi and his servants. Nonetheless, Ibikunle calls for peaceful resolution of the conflict. This is for the purpose of maintaining and sustaining the collective political and military leadership in the kingdom:

IBIKUNLE: Caution, my brothers. Ijaiye and Oyo and Ibadan, my brothers, are one. A man cannot be so angry with his own head that he seizes the cap from that head and dons his buttocks with it. (Rotimi, 1971: 46)

Rotimi proposes a return to the values that characterised the traditional leaders of the Yoruba society. Kurunmi, the council of elders and warriors possess leadership qualities such as honesty, bonds of love, hope, determination and sacrifice, unlike the contemporary powerful and overambitious leaders who sacrifice their people on the altar of self and thirst for power and influence. The beauty of Rotimi's Kurunmi lies in his selflessness, result-oriented, committed leadership complemented by a followership that believes in the good of the generality of its members which are essential for the current generation of Yoruba leaders.



Kurunmi a Custodian/Defender of Yoruba Tradition

Rotimi presents a traditional Yoruba society that stands close to a modernised society in which the leaders experienced, or see themselves as having experienced, a decisive separation from the past and thus perceive themselves as no longer traditional. As a result, traditions are no longer relevant. In order to preserve such traditions, the roles of traditionalists are very important. Rotimi presents Kurunmi as a defender of Yoruba tradition. His quest to save a dying tradition is the central theme that brings about war in the play. Kurunmi, from the exposition to the resolution of the play, is determined in his struggle to avoid interfering with his Yoruba traditional beliefs. In the first scene of the play, Rotimi discloses the bond of love that Kurunmi has for his traditional belief system:

KURUNMI: The gaboon viper dies,
its children take up its habits
poison and all.
The plantain dies,
Its saplings take its place

broad leaves and all.
 The fire dies its ashes
 bear its memory with a shroud
 of white fluff
 That is the meaning of tradition...
 My people, we too have tradition
 This is what makes us men.
 This is what makes us ... people,
 distinct...
 the day the tall Iroko loses its roofs
 is the day the baby ants shit on its head
 the day a people lose their tradition
 is the day their death begins
 -weeds, they become, climbers,
 sea-weeds
 floating
 they know not
 where to
 doomed (Rotimi 1971: 16)

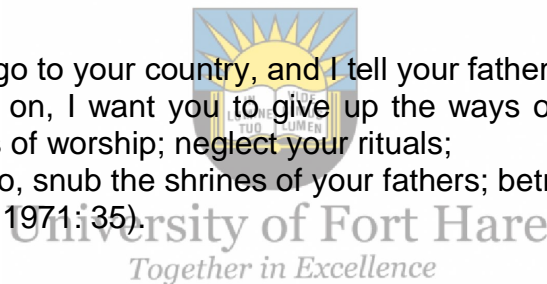
The above expression is evidence of the fact that Kurunmi is a defender of Yoruba culture and tradition. He subdues the colonial administrators and even gains their respects in his fight against European influences. Rev. Mann and Mrs. Mann both fight hard to introduce Christian influences in the land of Ijaiye where Kurunmi leads as a vibrant courageous chief:

A band of Ijaiye Christian converts appears,
 led in a procession by Rev and Mrs. Mann.
 Suddenly from the distance the sound
 of 'Egungun' drumming breaks forth and
 the converts begin to react very uneasily...
 Screams, yells, hoots of wild excitement
 as a weirdly clad masquerade rushes
 into full view, accompanied by a frenzied
 mob of Ijaiye old men and youths...
 the mob converges on the Rev Mann,
 then moves away, leaving him bleeding
 from a slash on his forehead (Rotimi 1971: 22).

Kurunmi shows boldness and determination in his struggle to avoid interfering with his Yoruba traditional beliefs. He believes that tradition is a symbol for the Yoruba

people which is being ruined by colonial forces as a result of greed and selfishness of Alafin Atiba's and the chiefs who did nothing to prevent it. In a dialogue between Kurunmi and Rev. Mann one notices how steadfast Kurunmi is in his projection of the people's tradition. This same consciousness is established in the mind of his people as experienced in the dramatic clash above. Even the converts find it very uneasy when they hear the rhythm of their traditional religion and they begin to respond uneasily and unconsciously. After this event, Rev. Mann meets Kurunmi to get his people "to respond better to the scriptures" (Rotimi 1971:33), stressing further that "it seems certain that the gospel is doomed to failure in this land" (Rotimi 1971:33). Kurunmi does not help Rev. Mann as requested, but instead attacks him ironically, letting him know that he (Mann) has come to insult their tradition:

KURUNMI: I go to your country, and I tell your father: 'Mr. So-and-So, from this day on, I want you to give up the ways of your fathers; cast away your manners of worship; neglect your rituals; Mr. So-and-So, snub the shrines of your fathers; betray your gods' (Rotimi 1971: 35).



Kurunmi's response to Rev. Mann above depicts a vision of cultural values. He tells his son, Arawole that "the boldness of the white man is the "tragedy of our race and the victory of his own" (Rotimi 1971:36). As a brave man, he speaks out firmly in the protection of the Yoruba tradition while other chiefs watch. "Tradition is tradition. Time may pass but the laws of our father, tested and hallowed by the ways of men, live on. That is tradition" (Rotimi 1971: 20). The mission of Kurunmi as the symbolic embodiment of the traditional Yoruba people is to regain his kingdom, which has been lost to the ethics of greed and avarice, and to restore it to its traditional philosophy of communal sharing. He voices his disagreement, "I shall be no party to perversion and disgrace. I picked up my staff and walked out" (Rotimi 1971: 17).

Rotimi is not saying that Kurumi's traditions or traditional society are perfect. According to Graham (1993), traditionalism or being a traditionalist does not necessarily involve conservatism or opposition to change in political, social, or religious life, although it may oppose modernism where the latter is perceived as destructive of important traditions in a society. Kurunmi sees the king and the chiefs' action as a Eurocentric view of syncretising Yoruba traditional belief and replacing it with that of the European. He, therefore, ridicules their actions which he relates to a cow "about to be shipped to white man's land and is happy... When she gets to white man's land, what will she become? Co-r-n-e-d b-e-ef!" (Rotimi 1971:22). Rotimi uses this metaphor to portray colonial experiences and how it has affected Yoruba traditional values. Kurunmi does not support the enthronement of Adelu as the next king after Alafin Atiba's death and it is this quest to retain the traditional belief system that brings about the conflict in the play. Like Olunde in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, his defence of Yoruba tradition makes him go into avoidable battle with the enemy of his tradition. He is not ready for deliberation and is determined to face the consequences.

Social Change and Development in Traditional Yoruba Society

Every society is bound to experience changes which accompany development. An unchanging society is another-world society. Change is one of the major features of every living thing, which in the case of humans, moves from womb to tomb. Social change is therefore a part and parcel of the society and development takes place as a result of change which is expected to be positive. The traditional Yoruba society, just like any other society, did not become what it became by being unyielding and resistant to change. It developed to the extent of having kingdoms and empires.

These are not what one achieves within a limited space of time. It takes ages before kingdoms and empires can be configured and sustained. Development is the practice of changing and becoming bigger, stronger or more impressive, successful, or advanced, or causing somebody or something to change in this way.

Development can be seen as a positive change in all areas of human life such as culture, language, politics, morality, economic and technology. From the foregoing one can say that change and development may be synonymous in some sense because societal degeneration and degradation are also end products of change which will not bring about any positive development but corruption and calamities to the society. As depicted by Rotimi, Kurunmi, an arch-conservative, opposes any change or modification and rejects progress in his effort to preserve his Yoruba tradition. His justification for his actions though is mistaken:



KURUNMI: When the gaboon viper dies, its Children take up its habits, poison and all. The plantain dies, its Saplings take its place, broad Leaves and all. The fire dies, its Ashes bear its memory... (Rotimi, 1971: 15)

However, the good part of western culture can be blended with the tradition of the people. He continues:

KURUNMI: We have tradition, and Tradition is tradition. Time may pass but the laws of our fathers... Live on. This is tradition. (Rotimi, 1971: 20)

This is Kurunmi's version of reality and it is what instructs his tragic vision – tradition must be protected and preserved. No change can be tolerated. In the opinion of Olu and Jegede (2014) the Western world which is always a point of reference for us in measuring development and underdevelopment did not abandon their cultural

heritage totally but rather danced to the rhythm of change by modernising their old traditions to stand the test of time.

Social change and development are an integral part of the traditional Nigerian society textually and historically. As mentioned earlier the newly founded Sokoto Caliphate led by Uthman Dan Fodio weakened the Old Oyo Kingdom in 1831. The change was what led to the reconstitution of the Oyo Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. Re-establishment of the Empire brought about decentralisation of the political and military power of the Alafin who depended on Ibadan and Ijaiye for the defence of the kingdom against any internal or external aggression. If there were no decentralisation of power, Alafin Atiba would not have called a meeting seeking the allegiance of other chiefs for the purpose of enthroning his son, Adelu, after his demise. The decentralisation can, therefore, be said to bring about an advanced form of government in the traditional society which required even the King to seek permission before making a major kingdom-bound decision.

On the other hand, Kurunmi, the lord of Ijaiye rejects change and development in order to preserve the tradition of his people. This leads to his tragic fall and the death of his people. This is seen in his conversation below:

KURUNMI: That is all. Atiba dies this evening, his first son Adelu dies by midnight. We bury them both everybody is happy.

TIMI: But Kurunmi our brother, you seem to forget that –

KURUNMI: There has been no exception to the rule, and wealthy Atiba can't now corrupt us to grant him a special favour. Atiba dies, Adelu – wo!

TIMI: You forget that time passes and the ways of man must change with time.

KURUNMI: We have tradition, and tradition is tradition. Time may pass but the laws of our fathers, tested and hallowed by the ways of men, live on. That is tradition. (Rotimi, 1971: 19-20)

Rotimi presents another instance of social change and development in the traditional society through the interaction of Kurunmi and Rev. Mann, a white man. Although Ola Rotimi does not focus on the language of communication between the Rev. and Kurunmi, it can be inferred that the interaction takes place in English – a strange tongue as it were as at that time. This means that at one point or the other Kurunmi and his son, Arawole have actually learnt the tongue of the white man which shows that he has not reject change totally but only seek to protect the culture of his land just like Baroka in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*.

Furthermore, Christianity, which the white man, Rev. Mann brings, is alien to the traditional society. Even though the Ijaiye populace do not accept the teachings of Christ, as Rev. Mann complains to Kurunmi, the presence of the same is very significant. The white man while complaining about the attitude of the people of Ijaiye reveals the *success* of the other white missionaries in different parts of the Yoruba traditional society. Rev. Mann explains this:

REV. MANN: The people of Oyo have accepted the Faith, and in Ibadan, the Reverend Hinderer is doing very well, not to mention the Reverend Townsend in Abeokuta, and other – (Rotimi, 1971: 35).

Nonetheless, Kurunmi, being a traditionalist, can be seen to be implicitly against the presence of the Reverend. For when Arawole, his son, opines that the white man has become too bold in Ijaiye to the extent of coming to the lord of Ijaiye for help in making his subjects responsive to the message of Christ, Kurunmi declares:

It is the tragedy of our race, and the victory of his own. The day we let them into our midst, was the day we let them dig our graves. The day we shall let them bury us in them, will be the day we shall all – let rats shoot arrows at each other! (Rotimi, 1971: 36).

However, the contemporary Yoruba society is changing radically, not significantly for the purpose of positive development and progress, but for negative reasons. The society has rendered what is theirs as inferior compared to imported concepts and materials. The encroachment of cultural and moral killers is the order of the day in the present-day Yoruba society. One of the major problems of this social change is that the Yoruba language has become endangered by European languages especially English which some scholars like Bamgbose, has described as a killer language. It is unfortunate that children are no longer exposed to their mother tongue but to Western languages. This makes the society replete with incipient bilinguals who are neither competent in their mother tongue nor in the new language they are exposed to.



Also, the atrocities which the so-called men of God – Christian leaders and Muslim leaders – commit are unparalleled all in the name of serving and worshiping God. Like Soyinka's Brother Jero, in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, they deceive their followers, swindle and dupe them with the promise of a better life which is not within their capacity to give. Like Brother Jero in Soyinka's *Jero Plays*, they promise deliverance and blessings when they, themselves, are not yet delivered nor blessed. The followers are as Jeroboam calls them *costumers* who are perpetually kept in their mediocrity for continued preying.

Rotimi suggests the balancing the Yoruba cultural and moral system with some input from other cultures to interact with – for the good of Western culture can be blended with Yoruba tradition, thus, not abandoning Yoruba culture and tradition in order to

embrace the cultures of other people. Even an arch-conservative like Kurunmi who says – *we have tradition, and tradition is tradition. Time may pass but the laws of our fathers, tested and hallowed by the ways of men, live on. That is tradition* (Rotimi, 1971: 20), learnt to speak in the tongue of the white man. There is no culture that is immaculate, therefore, the relevant aspects missing in a particular culture but evident in other cultures can be incorporated into it.

Responsible Leadership

According to Munroe (2005) leadership is the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by a passion, generated by a vision, produced by a conviction, ignited by a purpose. It has been established that leadership is service and it comes with various responsibilities which demand a leader to be selflessly and adequately responsible to their followers. Societies cannot do without having leaders for the survival, progress and development of such societies is intertwined with the destiny, competence and virtues of their leaders. A society with irresponsible leadership is a society replete with various kinds of social, political, religious, economic problems and difficulties, while a society with responsible leadership is the exact converse of this.

Responsible leaders are not expected to be feeding on fat while the followers wallow in abject poverty. No matter the amount of natural resources embedded in a society for its sustenance, growth, and development amongst other societies of the world; if the society is led by corrupt and incompetent leadership, the people of such a society will continue to be in perpetual pauperisation and poverty. This is succinctly captured in the cliché: *better is a group of sheep led by a lion than a group of lions led by a sheep*. Most of the problems being faced by different societies in the world

today are as a result of bad, corrupt, incompetent, visionless, purposeless and irresponsible leadership.

Kurunmi is adored by his subjects for being a responsible leader. The needed respect and honour is bestowed on him for fighting the cause of his people. From his second-in-command to the ordinary citizens of Ijaiye, Kurunmi stands tall as a leader. This is seen in the first scene of the play:

OGUNKOROJU [*unrushed*]: Ehn...

I know nothing
about the mother of the gorilla,
but I can tell you something
about the father of ape.
Those born to lead are few;
those born to follow, many.

Kai!

Who says we have no leader?

CROWD: Kai! We have a leader!

OGUNKOROJU: I say: 'Who says we have no leader?'

CROWD: Kai! We have a leader!

OGUNKOROJU: Who then is our leader?

CROWD: Kurunmi is our leader!

OGUNKOROJU: Drum! [Drum strikes, dancing resumes.] Tani l'awa o ni baba?

CROWD: Kai! A ni baba!

OGUNKOROJU: Kurunmi ni baba wa!

CROWD: Kai! A ni baba! (Rotimi, 1971: 13)

Although the duo of Timi Ede and Bashorun Oluyole are spitefully welcomed by Kurunmi and his subjects, the lord of Ijaiye emphasises that everyone in Ijaiye is his child when Oluyole frowns at their cold reception and calls some of Kurunmi's subjects, slaves. See the exchanges between:

OLUYOLE: Awu... Kurunmi, have we fallen so low in the eyes of your subjects that even slaves among them now feel too noble to prostrate themselves in respect for our presence.

KURUNMI: I will have no one call my slaves, slaves. There are no slaves in Ijaiye. Every man, every woman, every child in Ijaiye is Kurunmi's child (Rotimi, 1971: 18).

It is worthy of note that if there were no acrimonious disagreement between the forces of Kurunmi and that of Alafin Atiba in wanting his son, Adelu to be crowned, Kurunmi would not have replied to Oluyole in an unwelcoming and bitter manner. However, on one hand, it can be argued that Kurunmi is a responsible leader in respect of this scenario but on the other hand, this is a schematic way of venting his anger on the visitors – a potent weapon in fighting his opponent – even though he appears on the surface to be defending the interest of his people.

Rotimi focuses on the Ibadan council in the text, using the character of Balogun Ibikunle together with Osi Osundina. As a responsible leader, Ibikunle makes the council understand the likely consequences of warring against one's own blood or brother. He represents reasoning and wants the council to embrace peace and to peacefully resolve the conflict between the forces at loggerheads. He is not a thoughtless leader who leads his people to war at a slight provocation or disagreement – obviously, he is a war veteran and general, who cannot be said to be afraid of war:

IBIKUNLE: My people. May peace reign in our hearts, and may reason be the sister to that peace. Ehn. We must remember that no matter how high the swallow flies it must at last come down on earth. The same is the present manner of Kurunmi. His anger is high now. Very high. We must do nothing to keep it higher. A stick already touched by fire not hard to set ablaze. We must deal softly with our brother Kurunmi. Softly. We must try to win him over not by violence, not through battle songs. A roaring lion kills no prey. Softly. (Rotimi, 1971: 47-48).

Moreover, Kurunmi, on Ijaiye's part, shows a great deal of leadership responsibility as the war begins. This is displayed when he sends his sons and soldiers to defend the town that Ijaiye's supply of food and water come from. He is unlike present-day

leaders who always hide behind their high towers when there are crises in the society or preferably send their children overseas for safety. Kurunmi deploys his five sons to man and secure different parts of Iwawun where they unfortunately meet their death. This sense of responsible leadership as exemplified by Kurunmi is below:

KURUNMI: That is all, my brother. War has begun. Like conversation started casually, it has begun. And like conversation, no one knows how it will end. One thing leads on to another. Fight we must, but our soldiers must not starve because of our fighting. Nor must wives and children thirst because we are fighting. Therefore, to the land of Iwawun, where food and water come to Ijaiye shall we give full defence. Amodu, you will lead my five sons to Iwawun. Arawole, Ogunlade, Sangodele, Fataki, Efunlabi. [They all come forward.] You will take five thousand soldiers with you to Iwawun. And you will defend Iwawun or there die (Rotimi, 1971: 61).

The contemporary society is characterised by selfishness, corruption, and irresponsibility being glorified by those saddled with the responsibilities of bettering the lots of the ordinary citizens of the society. They want to always perpetuate their inglorious acts of selfishness and immorality and continue to impoverish the populace. It is disheartening that since the country gained independence in 1960 the continuum of leadership has been mesmerising itself with ignobility, moral decadence and many more social atrocities in the society. Scholars have identified that the major problem facing the society is that of bad, incompetent and inept leaders.

Control and Accountability

Closely related to the above theme of responsible leadership are control and accountability. Responsible leaders are expected to control their followers and the

leaders must be accountable to the followers in order to avoid arbitrary and absolute use of power which is said to corrupt absolutely. An accountable leader is invariably a responsible leader who knows that the society will demand their report of stewardship. Ironically, accountability is a word that has been deleted from the vocabulary of many political and military leaders in the world today.

Kurunmi, while he is controlling and leading his subjects and people to war for the cause of sustaining the traditions of their fathers, thinks that he is carrying everybody along with his line of action. Until he is made to be accountable by his subjects, he does not understand that he has left the path of accountability because of his proud and egomaniacal self. His second and third in command, with the help of strong, brave and courageous warriors, hold him accountable to the people of Ijaiye – for a leader cannot lead them to death while they blindly and unquestionably follow.

Instances of control and accountability abound in the text, some of them are drawn out for the purpose of substantiating this theme. Exchanges below are some instances of control in the text because they are all giving some instructions or commands which are always given by someone in a place/position of authority to their subordinates – from top to bottom.

KURUNMI: Hurry to town! Tell Balogun Ogunkoroju and Areagoro Ajayi that I want them here now. [Abogunrin runs off.]

Mosadiwin!

[A female voice answers within] My lord!

KURUNMI: Bring me the stew you cooked this morning....

[Enter Mosadiwin, bearing a platter of food]

KURUNMI: No, no – just the stew. Nothing else. [*Takes bowl of stew.*] The ladle. [*Mosadiwin hands him a ladle*] I thank you. [*Looks for a place to put them, then decides.*] No, you take them back. When I call you again, bring them (Rotimi, 1971: 25).

Conversely, accountability is from bottom to top. The subordinates or subjects of someone occupying a position of authority demand answers to certain probing

questions. Unlike Kurunmi, the contemporary leaders do not usually give an accountability report to their subjects until such is demanded. Little wonder, Kurunmi is confined, pinioned and threatened to be accountable. This is captured in the following excerpt:

KURUNMI: I lead wrongly?

AMODU: You have become too powerful my lord.

FANYAKA: You lord it over everybody, over everything.

EPO: You are even Chief Priest to all the gods; look at them, Sango, Ogun, Oya, Orunmila. All of them, the gods of our father are now your personal property.

AKIOLA: Like clothing, you use them to your taste; tired of one, you pass it to your brother Popoola, who now owns the Egungun cult.

AMODU: You have grown too powerful, my lord.

FANYAKA: Landed property, Kurunmi. The farms, Kurunmi. The air we breathe, Kurunmi. The gods of our fathers, Kurunmi.

WARRIORS: Kurunmi, Kurunmi, Kurunmi! Abah!

AMODU: Your power chokes us, my lord. (Rotimi, 1971: 39-40)



Kurunmi finally succumbs to the demand of the people by being accountable to them and giving them the assurance of seeking their permission before making any decision that binds on them. Having asked his son, Arawole, to bring gifts for the warriors and his second and third in command, Kurunmi says:

Give them, give them all. Bring more. [Hands two bags to Epo.] Give these to Balogun Ogunkoroju. [Two more.] And these to Areagoro Ajayi. Tell them that Kurunmi almost shed tears when he saw sons of Ijaiye prove that Ijaiye, small though she is, will never be stepped upon. Never. He who despises smallness let him step on a needle! [Hands warriors each a bag.] He who dreams to trample us of Ijaiye; he who aims to erase our pride and dignity of breed, may he bleed under the weight of our might. You take this, Akiola...for you and your men.

MEN [prostrating themselves in gratitude]: We thank our lord.

KURUNMI: It is nothing. Only the beginning of greater trust between us. The cow...the cow steps calves – that does not mean hates them. [Serving them drinks.] My brothers, I go to Abeokuta at dawn. I go to win the Egbas to our side. With your permission that is. With your permission, I shall go. Myself and Oje. (Rotimi, 1971: 41-42).

Like Kurunmi, the contemporary leadership will rather concentrate on controlling and accumulating wealth and playing gods without being accountable to the people who elected them into office. Rotimi portrays Kurunmi as an example of a good leader which should be emulated by the contemporary Yoruba society.

In the country's National Assembly, we see the power play which has become the trademark of the House. Dishearteningly, if a chairman of an anti-corruption commission exposes shady and dirty deals and dealings of the so-called *honourable* and *distinguished* members of the Assembly, such will not be passed by the National Assembly. The playwright uses this to voice the people's agony and experience of bad leaders. He depicts the conscience of the society by being like the five brave and courageous warriors, that is, Fanyaka, Epo, Amodu, Akiola and Asegbe in the play, who make the almighty Generalissimo, Kurunmi, to be accountable to the people of Ijaiye. Rotimi uses this play to call on the leaders in Yoruba society to lead responsibly. His effort is to snatch the society's destiny from the hands of the perverse and selfish leaders by always keeping the leadership on its toes.

Coded Message

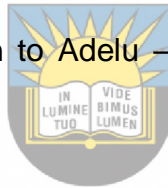
In the traditional society, messages are coded to be sent to another person. The mode of sending messages is through servants who are heralds to kings. Aside from putting words in the mouth of a servant to deliver to a king, the sender may decide to send some coded messages which the receiver will understand. It is very important to note that an in-depth understanding of the cultural context of the coded message is needed in order to correctly decode the message sent.

One of the Yoruba proverbs which are very relevant to this theme is *bi a ba ran eni n'ise eru, a fi t'omo je*. This means that if one is sent a message as a slave, one must deliver the message as a son (if one is sent a foolish message, one must

convey it with wisdom). For instance, it is impossible for a servant of a king to go and deliver a message to another king that the latter is mad, foolish, stupid, and will soon be killed by the former – for such a servant will not live to give the reply to his king. This is one of the main reasons that coded messages, which carry grave significant meanings, are sent. Since the persons involved in communication understand the contextual meanings of the messages sent and received react appropriately to the messages, the live(s) of the herald(s)/messenger(s) is (are) preserved.

There are three significant instances of such messages in the play: (i) Kurunmi's okro-soiled linen to Adelu; (ii) Adelu's bowls of choice to Kurunmi; and (iii) Ogunmola's dead black crow to Ibikunle. The following excerpts reveal the potency of coded messages in the traditional Nigerian society.

First, Kurunmi's okro-soiled linen to Adelu – symbolises contempt and rejection of the new king:



KURUNMI: Supreme Lord of the kingdom? The Supreme Lord is dead. How can a dead king expect me to come to his crowning?

KUTENLO: We meant the new king, Alafin Adelu, son of the dead Alafin Atiba.

KURUNMI: Oh, I see. It is well. I shall explain. Mosadiwin! [Mosadiwin appears with the stew and ladle. Kurunmi receives the bowl of stew and ladle, then turns to the messengers]: Take this message to your new king, Adelu. [He leans back relaxedly in his chair, dips the ladle into the bowl of stew, scoops the contents: okro stew. He lifts the spoonful towards his mouth, repeatedly, letting much of the sauce slaver sloppily from his mouth down on to the white cloth, smirching it. The messengers are shocked.]

KUTENLO: Contempt!

[Kurunmi ends the act by wiping his mouth clean with the unsoiled parts of the cloth, then casually he undoes the knot behind his neck, folds up the cloth in a crude bundle, and holds it out to the messengers]

KURUNMI: Salute your king for me.

OBAGBORI [*pulling back*]: The gods forbid!

KURUNMI: Take it.

OBAGBORI [*frightened, takes cloth*]: It is well (Rotimi, 1971: 26–27).

Second, Alafin Adelu's bowls of choice – gunpowder and bullets, a symbol of war, and the sacred twins the Ogboni Cult, a symbol of peace, to Kurunmi:

KUTENLO: You should not have gone to all that trouble, my lord. Alafin Adelu himself knew you would stain his honour, hence he too has sent you... [Holds out a bowl] this bowl. In here is gunpowder.

OBAGBORI [holds out his bowl]: In here are bullets.

KUTENLO [proffers the second bowl he is carrying]: And here are the sacred twins of the Ogboni Cult – the symbols of peace.

OBAGBORI: The Alafin asks you to choose between peace and war.

KURUNMI [Grabs the bowls containing gunpowder and bullets]: Now return those twins to that squit. On his back he may carry them and dance about, if he wishes. Out! (Rotimi, 1971: 27).

Third, Ogunmola's dead black crow to Ibikunle – symbolises cowardice:

[Enter Ogunmola, hiding a dead black crow behind his back.]

OGUNMOLA: Where is he?

ELDERS: Who?

OGUNMOLA: He, that warrior of yester-years, now turned weakling with the bearing of too many children. Where is Ibikunle? I have brought him a present... [Holds out the dead crow.] Where is he hiding? [Calls.] Latosisa!

LATOSISA [bursts in]: My lord.

OGUNMOLA: Ajayi!

AJAIYI [enters]: My lord.

OGUNMOLA: The old man is not here. Ibikunle has run home to hide among his many wives. Here... [Hands Latosisa the crow.] Lead the warriors to Ibikunle's home and tell the old warrior I send him this present.

LATOSISA: It is well, my lord.

AJAIYI: But what if he refuses to come out?

OGUNMOLA: Tie it to his door-post, stupid.

LATOSISA AND AJAIYI: We go, my lord. [They exit.] (Rotimi, 1971: 51).

Disobedience and Consequence

Disobedience is simply going against the laid-down rules, regulations, and principles by some authority. Laws are given for the purpose of keeping order in the society to protect the weak from being preyed on by the strong. Behind every disobedience is self-centredness which invariably comes with some consequences. Disobedience is as old as humanity itself. The human nature likes freedom and hates being forced to

obey any rule against its will. This always runs counter to the purpose of making the laws in the first instance. Also, humans are inquisitive and it is interesting that what they are asked or told not to do usually becomes the object of adoration and worship. This has been a recurring motif in many religious, secular and literary texts. In the text under examination, a case of disobedience is foregrounded with its attendant consequence as the Ijaiye troop, panting while pursuing their enemy. Balogun Ogunkoroju, while leaving to inform Kurunmi how they have fared in the battle, instructs the warriors not to cross River Ose in chasing the Ibadan troop but disobediently, one of the warriors says that it is *old men, old tactics* (Rotimi, 1971: 63) and one leads the troop to cross and chase their enemy. The following conversation explains the consequence of their disobedience:

Three Ijaiye warriors scamper in, wet, bloody and frantic with panic.

1ST WARRIOR: It was a trick! It was all a devil's trick!

2ND WARRIOR: Those Ibadan bastards!

[They confront Kurunmi and Balogun Ogunkoroju approaching from the opposite direction.]

OGUNKOROJU: What happened? Calm down and speak.

3RD WARRIOR: They tempted us into a trap, my lord.

1ST WARRIOR: The bushmen started running back after our first fight, so we... gave chase.

3RD WARRIOR: As we reached mid-stream –

2ND WARRIOR: They cut us off from the rear.

OGUNKOROJU: So out of a whole army of five hundred, only three of you came back!

KURUNMI: Who ordered the chase?

OGUNKOROJU: I warned you not to pursue, did I not?

1ST WARRIOR: My lord, we thought –

KURUNMI: Who ordered the chase, I asked!

3RD WARRIOR: I did, my lord. They were running back –

KURUNMI: Your leader warned you not to pursue but you did! My boy, it is a foolish daughter who thinks she knows so much that she can teach her own mother how to bear children. [*He turns about, flips the back of his hand downwards. Instantly, his bodyguards pounce on 3rd Warrior and whisk him off.*]

3RD WARRIOR: I deserve death, my lord... I deserve [*Exit*] (Rotimi, 1971: 63).

From the above, the warrior not only loses his own life at Kurunmi's signal but also wastes the lives of four hundred and ninety-seven warriors which demoralises the Ijaiye troop and boosts the morale of the Ibadan troop. Ola Rotimi seems to be advocating obedience to higher authority by injecting this scene into the play. This is a typical example of the precolonial Yoruba society where a traditional social control mechanism was put in place. The people were able to effectively control social menace in the traditional institutions with the presence of norms and values that were characterised by their cultural heritage, for instance the 'shame culture' among the Yoruba which was rooted in the fact that Yoruba society condemns shameful behaviour and, therefore, people are expected to avoid things which might put them and the members of their lineage into shame (Adejumo, 2010).



As vivid in the contemporary society, disobedience is enthroned right from the home to the larger society. We see children disobeying their parents; citizens disobeying the laws of the land and even the makers, enforcers and interpreters of the same laws breaking them. The consequences of this are untold for they have been crippling and hindering the development and progress of the society.

5.3 Play 2: *The Gods are not to Blame*

5.3.1 Synopsis of the Play

The play opens with the narrator giving background knowledge on the birth of King Adetusa's first son whom Ojuola, his wife, bears in the land of Kutuje. As custom demands, the destiny of the baby is made known through divination. The baby is to

kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid this terrible fate, the diviner advises the king with his wife to kill the baby – turning their joy to sorrow. But the couple, after two years, give birth to another son, named, Aderopo.

The king, however, meets a *rough death*. This makes the people of Ikolu take advantage of the death in the palace by waging a war against the people of Kutuje – killing, seizing and enslaving them. Odewale, an Ijekun man, comes to their rescue by consoling, organising and motivating them in warring against their enemies – the people of Ikolu who take advantage of them. Having become victorious in the Odewale-led war against their enemies, the people enthrone him as their king who customarily marries Ojuola, the wife of the dead king.



Nevertheless, the peace that accompanies Odewale's enthronement is short-lived as various diseases and sicknesses become the order of the day in the community. The people, thus, protest the nonchalant attitude of their king and chiefs. They are, however, surprised that the king's palace is also bedevilled with diseases and sicknesses. The king encourages them to get involved in their problems in finding solutions instead of crying to him – a lone man. The people heed his advice and collectively go into the forest to get herbs for their families.

Aderopo, the son of the former king and present queen, is sent to Ile-Ife, the land of *Orunmila*, to seeking solutions to the problems Kutuje and her people face. On his return, he finds the land is in pain because the former King was murdered by someone who lives in the community. He suggests inviting Baba Fakunle, a

soothsayer, to come and demystify the mystery brought from Ile-Ife. Odewale, the present king, vows that he will bring the culprit to justice before the feast of Ogun.

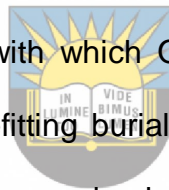
Surprisingly, Baba Fakunle, instead of unknitting the intertwined knots of problems facing the land, complicates it. He calls Odewale, the king, a murderer and bed-sharer. This enrages the king, who threatens to kill the soothsayer, gets suspicious of his stepson and chiefs – thinking Aderopo wants the throne and that the chiefs are plotting some evil against him. He banishes Aderopo and vows never to see him again. He becomes troubled and begins enquiring about the death of the former king who is said to have been killed at a place where three roads meet.

As the play climaxes, Alaka, who has been Odewale's friend from birth, is introduced. He desires to see the king and after some attempts, he is salvaged from the hands of the king's bodyguards by Ojuola. He is warmly welcomed and served with food and drink. Ojuola, however, pleads with him to talk with the king who is gravely troubled. He tells Odewale that his father has died and his mother is at the verge of dying too. Upon asking what troubles Odewale, he – having confirmed Alaka's faithfulness – reveals that he killed someone on his farm near Ede because the person abused his people (tongue). He, therefore, runs away from the place leaving his farm and its produce.

Having sent his bodyguards to go and bring Gbonka, one of the bodyguards of the dead king and who is also present where king Adetusa, is killed, Odewale clears himself of the surging conviction that he killed the former king. He asks Alaka to tell his chiefs that his supposed father, Ogundele, has died a natural death. Unexpectedly, Alaka claims that Ogundele, the great hunter, whom Odewale thinks

is his father is not. This makes Odewale to pinion Alaka so as to *give him back his honour* – for he wants to know who his parents are. Gbonka's coming therefore reveals all that happened. He explains that the former king was killed by a man not a gang of robbers as previously reported. Also, he informs the king and chiefs that when he was asked to kill King Adetusa's first son, he had pity on the child and gave him life by giving him to Ogundele, Alaka's master.

As the revelation is being made, Ojuola leaves for her bedroom where she commits suicide by stabbing herself. Odewale finally knows that King Adetusa, whom he murders, is his father and Ojuola, whom he marries and has four children with, is his mother. Being bartered and shattered by this revelation and Ojuola's suicide, Odewale, with the same knife with which Ojuola killed herself, removes his own eyes. Afterwards, he prays a befitting burial for Ojuola – his mother and wife. He reconciles with his brother Aderopo and asks his eldest son to lead them out of the land.



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5.3.2 Socio-religious Identity Needed for Cultural Rebirth in *The Gods are not to Blame*

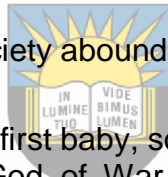
Respect and Fear of the Gods

Polytheism is the belief and worship of several deities, gods and goddesses. The Yoruba traditional societies are polytheistic in nature, they believe that the Almighty God who created the heaven and the earth is too powerful and great to be reached by mortals. Yoruba scholars, diviners and traditionalists have revealed that there are 401 gods and goddesses (Arowosegbe, 2013) in Yoruba land. It is thus through this multiplicity of gods that they reach the Almighty God who is believed to have

empowered the lesser gods and deities to grant the requests and answer human supplications and prayers.

It is interesting to note that most of the Yoruba lesser gods are believed to have lived on the earth. Their significant and heroic actions and inactions in influencing the community while on the earth caused them to be deified and worshipped by the society. It is also believed that the gods are all-knowing and no mortal can question or query them. They are, therefore, appeased and paid homage to for them to protect, guide and provide for the needs of the adherents and worshippers.

The relevance of the gods is inferred from the dedication of babies and some period of the years to the worship, celebrating and praise of these gods. Examples of the gods of the traditional Yoruba society abound in the text:



NARRATOR: It is their first baby, so they bring him for blessing to the shrine of Ogun, the God of War, of Iron, and doctor of all male children... (The Gods Are Not to Blame, p. 2).

NARRATOR: But Obatala, God of Creation, has a way of consoling the distressed... (Rotimi, 1971: 4).

FIRST CITIZEN: Let us sacrifice rams to the gods.

ODEWALE: Sacrifice, did you say? To what gods have we not made sacrifice, my chiefs and I? Soponna, the gods of the poxes? Ela, the god of Deliverance? What god? Sango the god of thunder and rainfall, whose showers can help wash away the evil in the soil on which we stand? What god have we not called upon to help us? (Rotimi, 1971: 11).

PRIEST: *We have sent Aderopo to Ile-Ife, the land of Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain* (Rotimi, 1971: 12).

BABA FAKUNLE: *Hand him back nine. All I am taking is one cowry for Esu the messenger of Ifa and Olodumare. No more.* (Rotimi, 1971: 28).

From the above, the narrator declares that *Ogun* is the god of war, of iron and doctor of all male children. King Adetusa and Ojuola, his wife, brought their first baby to the shrine of *Ogun* for blessing and to know what the future held for the baby boy. In the second conversation, having known the fate of their son and the injunction of the

diviner, King Adetusa and his wife became saddened but Obatala, who is the god of creation who consoles the distressed consoles them with the birth of another son after two years; in the third conversation, Odewale, in trying to explain the futility of sacrifice in their diseased and sickened situation, reveals different gods in the traditional society, such as: *Soponna*, the god of the poxes; *Ela*, the god of deliverance; and *Sango*, the god of thunder and rainfall. In the same vein, the Priest in informing where Aderopo, the Prince goes, reveals to the citizens of Kutuje another god, that is, *Orunmila*, the all-knowing god. Lastly, from the excerpts, *Baba Fakunle*, the soothsayer, makes known some gods, such as: *Esu*, the messenger of *Ifa* and *Olodumare*.



The Yoruba gods are known as supernatural agents of crime and punishment among the Yoruba natives. An offence against man is an offence against the gods and in like manner an offence against the gods is an offence against man (Adeoti 1994). The Yoruba believe that every unlawful act committed in the society makes the gods of the land angry. If the offender is not detected and punished, the gods may punish the entire community with pestilence or death. Oluwabamide (2004) maintains that prior to the influence of Western culture; the Yoruba mostly avoided unlawful acts because of the fear of being punished by the gods. Such fear prevented most of them from engaging in unlawful acts. Sometimes the gods strike offenders with madness, death or any other evil, even before such offender is brought before the traditional court. In carrying out punishment against offenders in Yoruba society, *Sango* (god of thunder) and *Ogun* (god of Iron) are known to be prominent gods. Both gods are well equipped with emission of fear to the hearts of every Yoruba man or woman. However, it is noticed that in the contemporary Yoruba society, the

worship of and reverence for the gods is not as prominent as it was in the traditional Yoruba society. Rather than an absolute call to a return to the worship of these gods by all Yoruba, this study argues that as Rotimi discloses that the traditional Yoruba society displayed a high level of fear of and obedience to the gods, the present society must exhibit the same irrespective of their conviction about the existence of Supreme Being in daily activities in order to create a better and just society.

Search for Truth and Guide about Destiny

Fatalism and predestination are words that are largely synonymous. Predestination is the belief that people have no control over events because these things are controlled by God or by fate, while fatalism is the belief that people cannot change the way events will happen and that events, especially bad ones, cannot be avoided. The two concepts, which are synonymous, are sustained as a belief system of a particular set of people. Some schools of thought subscribe to this belief system also. Since many things are mysterious and unknown to humanity and with the fact that humans can only predict what may happen in the future based on the past and present realities, human life is still being controlled, led and ordered by some invisible forces. For instance, most of the decisions and choices that are critical to the life of human beings are not made by them. The decisions and choices are made by forces invisible -God, gods, goddesses, deities and so on for human. Nobody caused their parents to give birth to them; the country to be born in; the time to be born; and the time to die. Some people even believe that human decisions and choices are invariably in line with their predestined and fated life. Because critical issues in human life are controlled and determined for them, the concepts of fatalism and predestination are sustained. As a result of this people are more accepting of

some difficult outcomes in their lives and therefore cope better with life, unlike these days where the rate of suicides and heart attacks are on the increase indicating that Yorubas have deviated from this norm and think they can alter their destinies themselves. No thanks to westernisation.

Likewise, the belief in fate and predestination is one of the major reasons in the traditional society that made people consult a diviner or soothsayer on the birth of a baby boy in order to know what a baby is meant to do in the world prior to christening the baby. Whatsoever the oracle reveals through the diviner, the parents would act accordingly. There are certain benefits of this practice to the parents and the community at large. Through the divination, the parents would be aware of the life pattern that is most appropriate for the baby to lead in which the baby would be able to fulfil his destiny and the parents being able to cater sufficiently for their child. Also, if the future is revealed as bleak by the oracle, the parents always ask the diviner if such a bleak future could be averted through sacrifice to the gods. In case of a bleak and terrible future which cannot be changed through sacrifice, the diviner/soothsayer did suggest one way out of the situation which is killing the baby.

The foregoing is captured in the text where king Adetusa and his wife give birth to their first son but before naming him, they take him to the oracle to check what the future holds for him. They find out that the baby is to kill his father and marry his mother. Birth that signifies joy suddenly turns to sorrow. In order to avoid this terrible fate ahead, since no sacrifice can be made to the gods to change this, they decide to terminate the life of the baby. See the excerpt below:

NARRATOR: It is their first baby, so they bring him for blessing to the shrine of Ogun, the God of War, of Iron, and doctor of all male children. Then they

call a Priest of Ifa, as is the custom, to divine the future that this boy has brought with him. (Rotimi, 1971: 2)

BABA FAKUNLE: This boy, he will kill his own father and then marry his own mother!

NARRATOR: Bad word! Mother weeps. Father weeps. The future is not happy, but to resign oneself to it is to be crippled fast. Man must struggle. The bad future must not happen. The only way to stop it is to kill, kill the unlucky messenger of the gods, kill the boy... Priest of Ogun ties boy's feet with a string of cowries meaning sacrifice to the gods who have sent boy down to the Earth. (Rotimi, 1971: 3)

But as fate and predestination will have it, the boy, who has been thought to have been killed by Gbonka, the king's messenger, finds his way back to the land of his birth. Odewale, as the baby is later named by his adopter, becomes a hero in the land of Kutuje. This is captured below:

ODEWALE: ...Crossing seven waters I, a son of the tribe of Ijekun Yemoja, found my way to this strange land of Kutuje. I came to see suffering. 'Get up, get up,' I said to them; 'not to do something is to be crippled fast. Up, up, all of you; to lie down resigned to fate is madness. Up, up, struggle: the world is struggle.' ...I gathered the people of Kutuje under my power and under my power we attacked the people of Ikolu, freed our people, seized the lands of Ikolu, and prospered from their sweat. So it is - he who pelts another with pebbles asks for rocks in return. Ikolu is now no more, but Kutuje prospered. In their joy, the people made me KING, me, of Ijekun tribe. They broke tradition and made me, unasked, King of Kutuje. (Rotimi, 1971: 6-7)

Odewale, being ignorant of his fate and thinking that his adopter, Ogundele, the hunter, is his biological father, runs away from Ijekun, his supposed *home*, to Ede where he succeeded in killing his biological father, King Adetusa, on his farm. He runs away from Ede to the strange land of Kutuje, his real but unknown home. Having being made king, the custom demands he marries the wife of the former king – Ojuola, his own mother – he marries her and she gives birth to his four children. Thus, he fulfils his destiny. As the play ends, Odewale, realising his fate and choices in bringing his fate to pass, declares:

No, no! Do not blame the Gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defence of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I thought was my own tribe. The man laughed, and laughing, he called me a 'man from the bush tribe of Ijekun'. And I lost my reason. Now I find out that that very man was my...own father, the king who ruled this land before me. It was my run from the blood I spilled to calm the hurt of my tribe that brought me to this land to do more horrors. Pray, my people – Baba Ogunsomo – (Rotimi, 1971: 71).

The birth of a child is the most significant stage of life among the Yoruba. A lot of precautions are taken to insure and protect the newborn through life. Awolalu and Dopamu (2005: 196) explain:

Arrangements are made by the parents to find out which ancestor has reincarnated. The oracle is consulted on the third day to confirm this. This is known as *ese-ne-taye-* (the first step of the child into the world). The oracle declares the divinity that will protect the child during his life, what the child will be, what taboos he should observe, and what should be done by the parents in order that the child may have a happy destiny.

The oracle is consulted to reveal the future and also prescribe and recommend actions to take in order to keep the destiny of the child. Also to prevent any complications, solutions are prescribed beforehand. It is observed that the consultation of the oracle (*ifa*) is due to the perceived notion in Yoruba cosmology that *ifa* oracle was present when individuals were choosing their destiny. Base on the revelatory knowledge of *ifa* oracle, and the notion that the gods are truthful according Abodunrin (2016), an individual can be assisted in being reminded of the kind of destiny he or she or baby chooses. The inference from this is that since destiny is important, individuals in contemporary society should be able to take decision and choices that contributes to their supposed destiny. This decision should not be taking in isolation of necessary information about the past and where necessary the

consultations of elders will be of advantage since elders have more knowledge and experience about life.

Integrity and Truth

According to Okeke (2015), the traditional education for instance laid a premium on discipline, moral integrity, family and community solidarity, social responsibility, industry and integration. The contemporary Yoruba society has lost some moral and cultural values. The most difficult moral values to be found in society today are integrity and truth. Having integrity and telling the truth have become so uncommon in the present-day Yoruba society. People want to get wealth, money, promotion and position they do not deserve without caring for whose horse is gored. The pursuit of material things and materialism pervades the societal consciousness. Those who are saddled with different responsibilities in the society are always ready to demand and receive money before rendering their statutory services.



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A man of integrity is relegated while a dishonest man is foregrounded. Selfish gains are glorified while common benefits are inconsequential. This has been a norm in various companies, government parastatals and organisations. Someone, who will sustain the loopholes, is mostly employed or selected because those who employ/select them will be expecting their *profits* and *gains* so long as their persons are occupying positions of authority. The society has made it nearly impossible to engage in any trade or service without being dishonest and untruthful. Although, claiming that there is no honest person in the society will have been dishonest and untruthful itself, but that they are a few honest and people of integrity in the society is

a fact. It can be said that members of the society acquire and learn deceit, untruthfulness and deception as they grow up in the society.

Rotimi uses the characters of Baba Fakunle and Ojuola to depict integrity and truth. For Baba Fakunle, he is fearless and bold to stand up for the truth at all times even when his life is threatened. When being wrongly accused by Odewale, the king, for colluding with some persons in killing the former king, he is resolute enough to tell the king to his face that he, Odewale, is the murderer he, himself, seeks:

BABA FAKUNLE: Don't come near me! I smelled it. I smelled the truth as I came to this land. The truth smelled stronger and still stronger as I came into this place. Now it is choking me...choking me. I say. Boy! Lead on home away from here....

ODEWALE: I shall count three... Baba, feel this... [Lets him feel his sword.] I have sworn by Ogun to expose the murderer before the eyes of all at the feast of Ogun that ends tonight. I brought you all the way from Oyo to help us: and you are headstrong. My people ail and die; you are headstrong and silent.

BABA FAKUNLE: Rage all you can, King, I will speak no more.

THIRD CHIEF: Pray you, Old One, to be silent is to be –

ODEWALE: Don't beg him. He will not talk. The murderers have sealed his lips with money. Hmm, our race is falling fast, my people. When the elders we esteem so highly can sell their honour for devil's money, then let pigs eat shame and men eat dung.

BABA FAKUNLE: You called me pig! You are the murderer... No, let them... let them attack me. Is it not ignorance that makes the rat attack the cat? Ten thousand of them – let them...attack me. They have the arms, they have the swords. But me... I have only one weapon and I have used, and mine is the victory. Ifa be praised.

SECOND CHIEF: What weapon is it you have used?

BABA FAKUNLE: Truth. The weapon of Truth. (Rotimi, 1971: 27-28)

Rotimi uses the character of Baba Fakunle to propose to the contemporary playwrights to be fearless and bold to tell both the leadership and the followers where they have erred without fear or favour. They must be the conscience of the society and always be on guard to write against the immoralities and degradation with corruption in the society. As said above, it is the followers that give birth to the

leadership. If the followers do not sell their birth-right like the biblical Esau during electioneering campaigns in the society but vote for persons of integrity and truth, with the communal gains and development in focus, out of the available options, the society will be whole again.

As for Ojuola, she is an exact opposite of her second husband who is also unknowingly her son. As Odewale becomes suspicious of his chiefs and Aderopo in which the latter is prohibited from coming before the king anymore, Ojuola, the mother and wife is caught in the middle – either supporting her son against her husband or the husband against the son. She exemplifies a perfect example of a loving, wise and patient woman. See the excerpt below:

OJUOLA: My lord, will you eat something now?

ODEWALE: I thought you were leaving with your son, Aderopo.

OJUOLA: [Kneeling.] It is you I married, your highness, not my son.

ODEWALE: [moved.] Hm! Great woman. Indeed. Who says women have no heads? She is a foolish wife who sides with her son against her own husband.... (Rotimi, 1971: 38).

ODEWALE: Gods! What a woman! [Kneels before the household shrine, arms raised.] Give me some of her patience, I pray you. Some... some of her cool heart... let her cool spirit enter my body, and cool the hot, hot, hotness in my blood – the hot blood of a gorilla! [Cleansing himself in the sacred water.] Cool me, Ogun, cool me. The blood is hot. The blood is hot because fear now grips the heart of Odewale, son of Ogundele, a stranger in this land. Fear now grips my heart as I discover how King Adetusa, who ruled this land before me, was killed... (Rotimi, 1971: 39).

Ojuola can be compared with women in the contemporary Yoruba society. There are cases of some women whose husbands are still alive saying, “My children are my husbands”. This statement always brings about some schisms between the husbands and the wives. She is hospitable, caring, loving and patient. She understands the mood of her husband and warns her children not to get their father angry. Although she commits suicide when she discovers that her husband is her

son, Odewale prays his chiefs to give her a befitting burial because she is a great and faithful woman:

OGUN PRIEST: My lord –

ODEWALE: Balogun.

FIRST CHIEF: I stand with you, my lord.

ODEWALE: Otun.

SECOND CHIEF: My lord.

ODEWALE: Osi.

THIRD CHIEF: I am here, my lord.

ODEWALE: Pray, give her ...my wife – my mother ...pray give her a burial of honour.

PRIEST AND CHIEFS: No more shall life make a mockery of her womanhood. (Rotimi, 1971: 71)

This brings some questions to a critical mind in understanding the psyche of the society itself. It has been established that the problems facing the contemporary Yoruba society are the result of bad leadership. However, leadership does not birth itself but comes from the followers. The political system is democracy which Abraham Lincoln defines as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. This definition concentrates on people-controlled government, that is, the needs of the people will be the focus of the government. But it is the same people who elect dishonest and corrupt persons into political offices leaving the honest and persons of integrity unelected because of momentary gains. Having paid off the people while campaigning for political offices, the leadership, upon gaining power, becomes irresponsible and unresponsive to the people.

In the same vein, in the religious setting, the majority of worshipers' flock to where they will be sweet-talked and deceived rather than going to religious leaders who will tell them the truth by rebuking them on their immoral way of life. Okeke (2015), posits that the only bad thing about colonisation was the washing away of native

culture. There are very few places in Akan, or Zulu, or Bantu or Efik, Ibibio and Yoruba land where one still see the holiness of traditional institutions or the sanctity of life, the integrity of elders, the moral regard for traditional values, respect for those old cultural beliefs which ensured peace and remarkable communal living. All those cultural values are now symbols which point to nothing beyond the surface decorations.

Oath-taking

Long before colonisation and the introduction of the oath of office being taken by elected or appointed political personages in the contemporary time, oath-taking has been with the traditional Yoruba society. Oath-taking, according to Oviasuyi *et al* (2011: 34), in the traditional sense is seen:



As a situation where absolute loyalty or adherence to certain agreement and conditionality is prescribed and administered in the beneficiaries of the agreement, and the exercise is usually fetish. It is expected that whoever has taken such an oath will not escape the punishment or sanction of a certain supernatural force or deity if the oath is flouted.

The definition aptly captures the traditional conceptual understanding of oath-taking. Oath-taking is a serious ritual in the traditional Yoruba society. Once an oath is taken on any issue whatsoever, it is expected that those who take oaths adhere strictly, without wavering, to the course of action in which the oath has been taken. Failing to abide by the pros and cons of the oath will spell doom for the breaker of such oath. As evident in the definition, absolute loyalty and unquestionable commitment is expected of oath takers. This is the main reason why oath-taking is usually fetish in the traditional setting.

According to Odumakin (2009), oath-taking is a distortion of values in politics to the extent that it transfers allegiance from the system to an individual, who for raw ambition or depravity, decides to take the place of God in the life of the oathtakers. From this perspective, it can be inferred that all that the oathtakers will do, being political office holders, will be to the satisfaction and self-centredness of the individual who has taken the place of God in the life of the oathtakers. This, in turn, will not be for the public good which is statutorily demanded to be the core concern and concentration of anybody occupying public positions.

Over the years, the Bible and the Qur'an are being used as the tool while administering the oath of office to the elected and appointed political leaders in the country. One of the major reasons for this is the belief that the God of the Christians and Muslims represented by the Bible and Qur'an is merciful and may not punish any political leader who goes against the provisions of the oath they take. Unlike the traditional Yoruba society which use the traditional symbols, especially a gun or machete which represents Ogun, the god of iron and war, while taking an oath. Ogun, in the traditional religions, is a serious punisher of an offender who reneges in committing to a particular course, having vowed to do the same. This ensures that political office holders live up to the expectation and are people-oriented rather than being selfish and self-centred.

Further, an oath is also taken where there is lack of trust and people are suspicious of one another. In the traditional setting and in some places in the contemporary Nigerian society, whenever any important valuable is lost or missing, the people involved may decide to take one another to some herbalist to swear in order to

exonerate themselves from the guilt or blame. However, if the culprit swears dishonestly, the right punishment will be meted on him by the gods in whose shrine the oath is taken.

In the text under study, there are instances of oath-taking for the purpose of accountability, secrecy and commitment amongst others:

[ODEWALE pulls out machete from the shrine, raises it and swears.]

ODEWALE: Before Ogun the god of Iron, I stand on oath. Witness now all you present that before the feast of Ogun, which starts at sunrise, I, Odewale, the son of Ogundele, shall search and fully lay open before your very eyes the murderer of King Adetusa. And having seized the murderer, I swear by this sacred arm of Ogun, that I shall straightway bring him to the agony of slow death. First he shall be exposed to the eyes of the world and put to shame – the beginning of living death. Next, he shall be put into lasting darkness, his eyes tortured in their living sockets until their blood and rheum swell forth to fill the hollow of crushed eyeballs. And then, the final agony: we shall cut him from his roots. Expelled from this land of his birth, he shall roam in darkness in the land of nowhere, and there die unmourned by men who know him, and buried by vultures who know him not. [Solemnly] – May the gods of our fathers – Obatala, Orunmila, Sango, Soponna, Esu-Elegbara, Agemo, Ogun – stand by me. (Rotimi, 1971: 24)

From the above, Odewale swears an oath to fish out and punish the murderer of the former: unknowingly, he is the murderer he seeks. He is the tool in the hands of the gods who predestined him to kill his father, King Adetusa, and marry his mother, Ojuola. As the play closes, having discovered that he is the murderer, he keeps to his oath that he swore earlier on, he removes his own eyes and leaves the town with his four children leading the way. He promises to curse anybody who tries to stop him. With this, he, finally, fulfils the oath he swears.

Also, for being suspicious and wrongly accused by Odewale, Aderopo attempts to swear in order to exonerate himself from the king's baseless accusation:

OJUOLA: What is happening?

ADEROPO: The King has sworn to get me out of this land!

OJUOLA: Out of this land?

ODEWALE: Red-handed, wife, I caught him; people of our land, I caught him working evil against ... [Thuds his chest and holds out the sword to ADEROPO.] Swear! In the presence of all. Swear!

ADEROPO: [taking it.] May Ogun crush me before the break of ...

PRIEST: [snatching sword.] Don't swear!

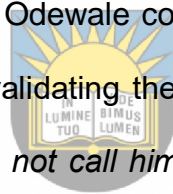
ODEWALE: Why not?

PRIEST: My Master, Ogun, is a god with fierce anger, son; one does not call him to witness so freely.... (Rotimi, 1971: 35)

However, Odewale, whose hubris is anger, goes on to swear. See below:

ODEWALE: You are all taking sides, are you? (Seizes sword from PRIEST's hand.) May my eyes not see Aderopo again till I die! [Bites, then drops sword and goes into his bedroom... (Rotimi, 1971: 35).

In fulfilment of the oath he swears, he, Odewale, never sets his eyes on Aderopo. As he finds out that he killed his father, married his mother and Aderopo is his brother, he removes his own eyes with the knife his mother uses to commit suicide. Aderopo enters the palace afterwards but Odewale could only recognise his voice for he has removed his own eyes. This is validating the Priest's assertion that *Ogun, is a god with fierce anger, son; one does not call him to witness so freely....* (Rotimi, 1971: 35).



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Rotimi like Soyinka, also reveals that gods like Ogun and Sango are believed to always influence the lives of the people such that people make oaths on the Yoruba pantheon of gods to confirm them right or wrong. *Ogun*, being the god of iron, is a very fearful god. *Ogun* punishes the offender and takes vengeance against the erring one. In Yoruba courts, people swear to give truthful testimony by kissing a machete consecrated to Ogun. Lugira (2009) confirms this point, "*Ogun* is an associate of god who ranks high in the Yoruba pantheon. He is the divinity of war and iron. He is as hard and tough as steel, and all iron and steel are his spiritual possessions. He rules over oaths, covenant-making and cementing of pacts. In local courts, instead of swearing to speak the truth and nothing but the truth by holding the Bible or Quran,

Yoruba people take oaths by kissing a piece of iron, usually a machete, in recognition of *Ogun's* spiritual authority”.

In the contemporary society, people now take oaths according to their religious inclination and no longer on the basis of their original rich cultural heritage. Little wonder that these oaths are not being abided by. This undoubtedly has provided room for moral decadence and other evils in our society (Ugwu, 1999). The emphasis here is the people should learn from the way the traditional Yoruba society reverence and fear their gods and replicate the same in the contemporary society.

Proverbs

Scholars have provided various insights into the social and relational functions of proverbs. Bamiro (2014), for example, argues that African creative writers make use of proverbs to provide a ‘grammar of values’ by which the deeds of the protagonists can be measured; to serve as thematic statements reminding us of some of the motifs in their writings, for example, the importance of status, the value of achievement, and the idea of human beings as shapers of their destinies; to add touches of local colour and to sound and reiterate themes, and finally, to comment or to warn against foolish and unworthy actions”.

Also, Egudu (1979: 108), a Nigerian literary critic, who explains that:

In the traditional society, proverbs are used primarily to clinch a point after some exposition, narration or argument. In speech making, a proverb is employed to summarize all that has been said, so that one who unravels it successfully gets the message intended. Thus proverbs essentially perform thematic functions, while their aesthetic values are often taken for granted, since they are always there. And one can hardly enjoy these values unless one can recognize their thematic relevance in a given context.

From the foregoing, it is evident that proverbs play significant roles in the Yoruba society – both traditional and contemporary – in particular. It is important to point out that proverbs in the society are within the exclusive domain of the elders. Therefore, when a young person wants to employ the use of proverbs in driving home their point, they are expected to seek permission from the elders as a kind of deference and recognition of the hierarchical relational structure in the society. Doing otherwise would reveal the young person as being disrespectful, ignorant, untrained and uncultured.

More so, Adejumo (2009), in his paper titled, *Power Perspective in Yoruba Fauna Proverbs*, concludes that power, domination and agitation for liberty, which characterise the contemporary society, are conveyed and derided through some Yoruba proverbs. He notes that animals are portrayed in certain proverbs to reveal how power is conceived and wielded in Yoruba society. In the text, the major percentage of the proverbs employed in projecting the theme of fatalism and predestination are largely faunal with some floral proverbs included. These proverbs are captured and their interpretations attempted below:

1. *...he who pelts another with pebbles asks for rocks in return. (Rotimi, 1971: 7).*
2. *...for only a madman would go to sleep with his roof on fire. (Rotimi, 1971: 11).*
3. *By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from tree to tree without falling. (Rotimi, 1971: 14).*
4. *It is said that the secrets of a home should be known first to the head of the home (Rotimi, 1971: 19).*

5. *...a cooking-pot for the chameleon is the cooking-pot for the lizard!*
(Rotimi, 1971: 19).
6. *...The horns cannot be too heavy for the head of the cow that must bear them* (Rotimi, 1971: 20).
7. *The oracle warns us that we have left our pot unwatched, and our food now burns* (Rotimi, 1971: 21).
8. *Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution*
(Rotimi, 1971: 21).
9. *...when trees fall on trees, first the topmost must be removed* (Rotimi, 1971: 22).
10. *When the frog in front falls in a pit, others behind take caution* (Rotimi, 1971: 23).
11. *All lizards lie prostrate: how can a man tell which lizard suffers from bellyache?* (Rotimi, 1971: 23).
12. *Is it not ignorance that makes the rat to attack the cat?* (Rotimi, 1971: 28).
13. *...Our elders say he who drums for a sick man is himself a sick man*
(Rotimi, 1971: 28).
14. *...because the farm-owner is slow to catch the thief, the thief calls the farm-owner thief!* (Rotimi, 1971: 46).
15. *Can the cockroach be innocent in a gathering of fowls?* (Rotimi, 1971: 53).
16. *...the butterfly thinks himself a bird* (Rotimi, 1971: 59).
17. *...my people, it is what is in the heart when there is no wine in the head, that comes out when there is wine in the head* (Rotimi, 1971: 60).
18. *...when the wood-insect gathers sticks on its own head it carries them*
(Rotimi, 1971: 72).



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In 1, Odewale employs the witty saying to support the need for a reprisal attack on the people of Ikolu who maximise the death of King Adetusa in attacking the leaderless and bereaved Kutuje. Since they, the Ikolu people, have pelted Kutuje with stones, they have asked for rocks in return. In 2 and 3, Odewale, in making his efforts with his chiefs known to the citizens of Kutuje, notes that he is neither a madman nor irresponsible to shy away from his responsibility of providing solutions to Kutuje's problems. He goes further in 3, to encounter the citizens of Kutuje that only consistency brings positive change.

However, Aderopo, in 4, thinks that since Odewale is the king, the message from *Orunmila* in Ile-Ife is meant to be delivered firstly to the king but the king disagrees by employing 5, that there is no difference between himself and his chiefs – he, the chameleon and his chiefs, the lizard. Also Ojuola, urging Aderopo to relay the message brought from *Orunmila* to the council, employs 6, which means that no matter how terrible the message is, they want to hear it. Saying 7, is a logical deduction for if a cook fails to watch his pot while cooking, it must necessarily burn. Proverb 8, means that the people, in their joy at having won the Odewale-led reprisal attack against Ikolu, crown and enthrone him without taking the necessary precautions in their decision; hence they now suffer for the hasty but joyous decision. Consequently, unless Odewale is removed, like a bad tooth, problems will be their lot in the society.

Proverbs 9, 10 and 11, are used by Odewale to foreground: the importance of doing the first thing first; and his fear and suspicion that if King Adetusa, an indigene of Kutuje, could be killed and his murderer is at large, would they not do more to him, a

stranger, in their midst? In 12, Baba Fakunle avers the foolishness and ignorance of the rat – Odewale’s bodyguards – in wanting to attack the cat – himself – with his predatory power. Dismissing and labelling Baba Fakunle, the blind soothsayer, the Second Chief uses proverb 13. And since they are not sick, they would not drum for the soothsayer who, inferentially according to the Chief, is sick.

Proverb 14, is skilfully employed by Odewale, as he flashes back to the encounter between himself and King Adetusa in Ede where he kills the latter, to call the Old man a thief. More so, still wanting validation for his suspicion of his chiefs, Odewale accusingly uses a proverbial question in 15. Fowls, his chiefs, are domestic animals that always kill any cockroach, himself, in sight. Sayings 16 and 17, raise some probing questions in Odewale’s mind. The first of these sayings means who he thinks he is he, is not in essence. Having had an answer to the sayings, he decides to run away from his destiny – not knowing that he runs to fulfil the same. Since he, Odewale, allows himself to be used by the gods in killing his own father and marrying his own mother, he has to bear the consequences himself. This makes him to liken himself to a wood-insect that gathers stick and uses its own head to carry it, as stated in proverb 18.

Yoruba proverbs, among many others, illustrate the importance and the value which the Yoruba, like any other ethnic group in Nigeria, attach to issues in different contexts. Proverbs play crucial roles in imparting meaning and understanding to a given situation. They are a formidable factor in discussions in order to build up an argument or to support a cause. In Yoruba culture a great deal of importance is attached to utterances. Since speech is the highest form of utterance, the Yoruba

people approach it with deliberate care, taking great pains to avoid careless, casual, thoughtless statements whose damage might outlast lifetimes. As a result, the playwright proposes a return to this linguistic dimension since proverbs play an important role in speech. They give substance to utterance, convey wisdom, truth and lessons of life.

5.4 Conclusion

Ola Rotimi injects the historical subject of the play into the contemporary situation. In retelling the historical events of the traditional Yoruba society, the playwright uses his creative ingenuity to bring to the fore what then constituted culture and morality in the society. At the same time, he advocates a hybridity and synchronisation of the respected traditions and the good modern realities but doing away with some of the harmful practices in the society. He also emphasises reasoning and dialoguing as a means of resolving and settling conflicts considering that both the victor and the vanquished of war are casualties of the same war. Since change is constant the society must make sure that positive and functional change which is the hallmark of development outweighs negative change. Rotimi advocates for responsible and accountable leadership with communal cooperation for the whole benefit of all and sundry.

In conclusion, this chapter attempts to investigate key moral and cultural values in the traditional Yoruba society with an examination of the contemporary society while focusing on the role and position of creative writers in righting the wrongs in the society. It is thus useful to point out that like Baba Fakunle who is fearless in making the king begin an introspective inquiry into himself, Nigerian writers should make sure that they represent and present the truth using their ingenuity to expose the

immorality and hypocrisy in the contemporary and future Yoruba society. Although the soothsayer is threatened by the king with his chiefs, he could not be cowed or silenced by their threat. Also, it is shown above how Ola Rotimi uses proverbs and witty sayings to project his thematic preoccupation. He seems to be suggesting that even though fate cannot be changed there are some inherent characteristics and weaknesses that make a person fall easily into the ditch of fate and predestination. But through self-examination and adequate reasoning before making any major decision, one can be in control of one's destiny.



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Chapter Six

Societal Regeneration and Challenges Faced by Nigerian Playwrights

6.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the inferred position of the writers as vanguard of moral and cultural values in the contemporary and future society and also examined the challenges that arise against contemporary writers in their efforts to resuscitate moral culture in the Yoruba society of Nigeria which are objectives three and four of the study respectively.

6.1 Rationale for Societal Regeneration

Societal regeneration is a necessity in the contemporary society considering the prevalent cultural decadence as exemplified in the plays of Osofisan, Soyinka and Rotimi analysed in this study. To regenerate is to improve a place or system, especially by making it more successful. Deductively, regeneration can be said to be the process of improving or re-growing a place or system for good. Thus, societal regeneration can be said to be considered to be the process of refining a society, its system and everything that makes the society. In this study it simply put as it is the process of righting the wrongs in every aspect of the Yoruba society, reclaiming her indigenous tradition and values that have been degraded and suppressed in the wake of colonialism. As analysed in previous chapters, the rationale of regenerations is seen in the position of these playwrights against contemporary issues like injustice, corruption and bribery, female oppression and subjugation, and moral decadence among other social vices in the present society.

6.2. The Position of the Writers as Vanguard of Moral and Cultural Values in Contemporary and Future Nigerian Society

Literature is a mirror of the society and it is a major responsibility of literary artists to reflect the reality of the immediate society in their artistic compositions. The cycle of life has always been embedded in literature. No better artefacts and relics reflect an era than the literature of that time. The playwrights examined in this study have designated themselves with the daunting task of recreating time, place and characters of whatever era they live in or society they find themselves. They have produced a literary works, recreating the society they found themselves and putting forth their opinions on the contemporary societal delinquency and cultural decadence. Specifically, the criticize anomalies of excesses of government, voices out on colonialists and their campaign of civilization, raises alarm on societal issues among other things. Osundare (2007) affirms that a real writer has no alternative to being in constant conflict with oppression, with their self-designation being a life-long process.

In essence, the position of the playwrights as vanguard of moral and cultural values cannot be overemphasized as they are integral part of their immediate community and the world in general and have a duty and responsibility to use their pen which is mightier than sword to represent reality or life in their fictional and imaginative productions. Deep root nature of playwrights in their culture, traditions, and customs which enable them to guide the society especially the younger generations from going astray, re-enact history, diagnose, and project the future of the society by vividly looking into the challenges of past and present times. Through their works, they become vanguard that enlightens the beautiful ones who are yet to be born. This view is buttressed by Jean-Paul Sartre which is quoted in Osundare (2007) that

the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about.

Like Williams Shakespeare's works are a mirror that reflects the thought patterns of the 16th and 17th century, T. S. Elliot for the 19th and 20th century, Chinua Achebe for the Nigerian society of the 20th century, Helon Habila of the 21st century, so is the customs and traditions of the 20th century Yoruba society are as well documented in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the traditional setting portrayed is largely impossible to be recalled. However, the characters of Amusa and Joseph are two who give a glimpse into the future of the Yoruba and the Nigerian society at large. Both characterize a group of people who might not recognize their culture, or people who will only be indigenes by descent, not in attitude, values or mentality contrary to the fact that originality lies with identifying with one's culture and embracing it. Through this, identity is ascertained, culture is identity. However, culture, given the contemporary dispensation, has become dynamic. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, common values and norms tend to become the glue that hold the society together. With the flux being experienced in modern society and the consequence of the loss of identity, writers have been saddled with the responsibility of being vanguard of restoring lost cultural values and moral.

As one of the most prominent literary artists in Nigeria, Wole Soyinka's expositions, presentations, texts and discussions on the socio-politico-religious realities have been nothing less than apt. He knows the Nigerian psyche inside-out and he has been championing the course for a better Nigerian since in the 1950s when he became prominent and vocal till date in 2017. In *The Trials of Brother Jero* examined in this study, Soyinka used satire as a powerful tool in righting the wrong in the

religious and political space of contemporary times. In the play, Soyinka does not only expose the hypocrisy of the leadership but also pokes fun at the ignorance of the followership. None of the characters is spared in his acerbic satirical play. It is such that all the people maintaining and sustaining, either consciously or otherwise, cultural and moral decay cum valuelessness are highly ridiculed. It is interesting to note that in the play the revered and adored holiest of holy is brought to the lowest ebb for it is, in reality, completely against its own profession. It is disheartening to note that both the elected and selected leaders and the “called” leaders have pervasively become thorns in the societal flesh and predators in shepherding the sheep they are elected, selected and called to nourish, nurse and nurture. On the contrary, one cannot alone focus on the leadership without examining the led which Soyinka presents in *the Trials of Brother Jero* who are gullible, ignorant, foolish and stupid. Brother Jero is able to continuously perpetrate his deceptive antics because all of his followers are gullible. While he is busy making gains of them, they ignorantly assume that he is doing all he does for their benefits. Jero knows their weaknesses and exploits them fully. For instance, when Chume keeps pestering and seeking counsel from Jero the prophet before beating his wife, Jero reveals:

JERO: I wonder what is the matter with him. Actually I knew it was he the moment he opened his mouth. Only Brother Chume reverts to that animal jabber when he gets his spiritual excitement. And that is much too often for my liking. He is too crude, but then that is to my advantage. It means he would never think of setting himself up as my equal....

JERO: Christ my Protector! It is a good job I got away from that wretched woman as soon as I did. My disciple believes that I sleep on the beach, that is, if he thinks I sleep at all. Most of them believe the same, but for myself, I prefer my bed. Much more comfortable. And it gets rather cold on the beach at nights. Still, it does them good to believe that I am something of an ascetic... (The Trials of Brother Jero p. 22)

The playwright digs deep in exposing the gullibility of the Member of the Parliament also who is expected to be at least, a bit wiser than those he is leading. Since in the kingdom of the blind, only a one-eyed man is enthroned, but in this case, Member is as blind and brainless as other Jero's followers. It can be said that Jero got to know about his Ministerial position desire through the media and decides to work on him based on that and as Jero expects/predicts, he (Jero), without stress, easily convinces him (Member) who has earlier with great pomposity looks down on Brother Jero saying, Go and practise your fraudulences on another person of greater gullibility (Soyinka 1976: 40).

It is worthy of note that, through this statement alone, Member admits and recognises his own gullibility for he compares himself with another person of greater gullibility. That comparison alone foregrounds his foolishness and stupidity in the hand of a master strategist - Jero. Member, foolishly goes on declaring Vanished. Transported. Utterly transmitted. I knew it. I knew I stood in the presence of God... (Soyinka 1976: 43). With this, Jero happily predicts: ...By tomorrow, the whole town will have heard about the miraculous disappearance of Brother Jeroboam. Testified to and witnessed by no less a person than one of the elected rulers of the country (Soyinka 1976:43). As Jero arouses his desire, he falls flat and worships his newly-found master! Jero finally puts the last nail to Brother Chume's coffin, because the latter finds out how he has been exploited and fooled for two years, when he declares:

JERO: I have already sent for the police. It is a pity about Chume. But he has given me a fright, and no prophet likes to be frightened. With the influence of that nincompoop (Member) I should succeed in getting him certified with ease. A year in the lunatic asylum would do him good anyway (Soyinka 1976: 43).

From the foregoing, it is evident that through creative ingenuity and representations for the purpose of righting the wrongs in the society by laughing at its own ignorance, gullibility, and foolishness, Soyinka advances the course of societal regeneration which will make the people in the society to reflect, review, and retrace their steps in order to reform their social system.

6.3 Challenges Faced by Nigerian playwrights

The battle for lost identity and cultural values is being fought on numerous fronts. Colonial education, indigenous governmental exploitation, irresponsibility of leaders and model celebrities to name a few are some of the battles being fought. These are captured under the following headings:



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Evolving Diversities in Definition of Ideologies

Several of the precolonial ideologies have been rationally and subjectively accessed in the contemporary society. For instance, morality, to some ideological projections is whatever suits anybody in any situation. Nonetheless, morality, in the African parlance, is the rightness or wrongness of an act. Communalism is infused in the conception of what constitutes a morally right action and otherwise (Kanu, 2010). In Nigeria, especially Yoruba society, something may be personally right if done but when checked through the moral stance of the society, such a thing may be communally wrong. As a matter of fact, the society is believed to be above any individual. So a decision that will be detrimental to the society is expected to be shunned by the members of the society. Being moral is regarded by the Yoruba as

one of the very aims of human existence. Every individual must therefore strive to be moral in order to be able to lead a good life in a belief system dominated by many supernatural powers and a social structure controlled by a hierarchy of authorities (Abimbola, 1975). But in contemporary society decisions are made based on selfish and personal reasons without any consideration of the communal benefits. Conflicts arise when there are differences in ideologies, perspectives, worldviews on what constitutes morality and immorality. Oyebode (2015) observes that the occurrence of conflict in human society seems pervasive; it is an unbidden phenomenon and is found in almost every nook and cranny of the world.

Prisoner of Conscience

It has been established that the playwrights assumed the role of the conscience of the nation. In the process of righting the wrongs of the society, many Nigerian playwrights run into serious conflicts with the powers that be in the society. While some of them were incarcerated, others went into exile, Soyinka comes to mind here. For criticising the military government and its agents and fighting for the right of the Nigerian populace, he was unjustly imprisoned by the military government and on many occasions, he had to flee outside the country to avoid arrest and junta incarceration and dehumanisation. This he narrates in his memoir *The Man Died* (1972).

Corruption

Corruption is another challenge that has lessened the influence of Nigerian playwrights in the process of their pursuit of a regenerated society. While playwrights are pursuing a just society, where no one is above the law, everyone pays for his sin.

Injustice of any form is frowned at, corruption is seen to be able to buy judgement and positions in the contemporary society. Likewise, various leadership positions are given to undeserving people because of their wealth which they accumulate through corrupt practices. Hence the efforts of the playwrights are being defeated. Equally, the pursuit of integrity plays a central role in the writings of the contemporary playwrights. However, this is defeated in the present society where corrupt individuals appear to be more prosperous and more celebrated than those that pursue integrity, therefore making people disregard the importance of honesty and integrity in the society. Without doubt, it can be said that corruption is an opposing challenge facing the contemporary playwrights.

Colonial Education

Walter (1972) in his book *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, states that education is crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the likes of its members and the maintenance of the social structure. The crucial aspect of precolonial African education is the learning of cultural and moral values. This structure was corrupted by colonial education. Culturally, education has done more harm than good. The lack of congruency between colonial education and Africa's reality created people abstracted from their reality. Furthermore, colonial education did more than corrupt the cultural thinking and moral sensibilities of the Yoruba people; it filled them with abnormal complexes which makes them insensitive to the immediate society.

Western education reinforces estrangement from traditional morality (Mwikamba, 1992). The goal of Yoruba traditional education has always been to foster strong character in the individual and to prepare each person to become a useful member of the community (Akanbi and Jekayinfa, 2016:13). Education, furthermore, often

only provided intellectual or professional training without any moral “education for life” (Kigongo, 1991). The new morality fostered by this kind of education was materialistic in outlook. The introduction of Western education in Africa brought in Western ideas of rationalism and individualism into Africa (Amuta, 1991).

Technological Advancement

The place of technological advancement with respect to the internet and social media in opposition to the ideals that playwrights promote cannot be overlooked. The tremendous development in technology has provided a free flow of information which firstly arose from the so-called advanced countries. Through it, the Western ways of

platforms of technological advancement have been responsible for promoting mind-polluting publications and information. Technology has also been seen to be reducing the reading culture of young people, while the few that read are locked into reading sensual and motivational literatures. The question comes to mind that “how would a writer achieve this sociocultural goal of correcting and righting the wrongs of the society since they only influence the very few who read their work?”

Media and the Entertainment Industry

The entertainment industry influences a society through its home videos and television shows, and it can be seen that it has dramatically changed over the years. Most of the programmes are introduced from the West. They propagate the secular moral values of the West such as materialism and free sex. Especially the young people in Nigeria become diehard worshippers of Western ideals because they are considered to be modern. The role of the media in society is to inform, educate,

entertain and serve as the watchdog of society. Unfortunately, it is no longer so. The industry has become a source of moral decadence by its promotion of immorality, nudity, indecent dressing, drinking of alcohol and other dangerous intoxicants, violence, smoking, and jamborees among other vices. Likewise, the industry has consistently promoted fake lifestyles and an inordinate quest for materialism without hard work as presented by actors, actresses, musicians, models who serve as the instruments through which Western culture is propagated. In addition, music as a form of poetry is a reservoir of lessons, cultural practices, taboos and common sense. Contemporary music's downright exaggeration of the female sexual parts and what money can and cannot do, serves no didactic purpose or cultural enlightenment. The Yoruba traditional drum music has the ability of fusing a community together. It does this by requiring, engendering, and fostering a corporate spirit of togetherness both in the fashioning of the materials for music-making and in the actual making of music (Adegbite, 1988). The consequential effect of the industry has silenced the voice of reasoning of playwrights for their call for a socially and morally regenerated contemporary society.

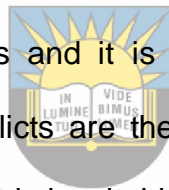
Urbanisation

The imposing dichotomy of the society into urban and rural areas has furthered a lot of cultural decay. While the rural areas are the custodian of indigenous culture, the urban areas are the custodian of diverse philosophies, ideologies and new ways of life which contradicts the ways of life in the rural areas. It is acknowledged that urbanisation which stimulates rural-urban migration is unavoidable in the development process; however, the loss of indigenous virtues and values which erode due to the new ways of life learnt in the city is visible. Likewise, urban life

comes with a so many activities and high demands of meeting several economic challenges. As a result, elders and parents who are custodians of traditional ideals have become so occupied that they have no time to teach their wards essential traditional values and morals. Hence there is a generational vacuum in the transfer of Yoruba culture.

6.4 Conclusion

Literary writers, being vanguards of moral and cultural values in the contemporary and future Nigerian society are a critical need in this present social, political and religious dispensation in order to salvage the future of the society. The course of regenerating and correcting societal wrongs with the restoration of moral culture by playwrights is a lifelong process and it is laden with several contemporary and evolving challenges. These conflicts are the major part of social interaction since everyone is fighting for survival; it is inevitable. This chapter has highlighted some of these challenges which have been silencing the solemn voice of reasoning of the playwrights.



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Chapter Seven

Summary and Conclusion

The current Yoruba society is in dire need of some form of reformation and regeneration. This is as result of realities of several social menaces and abnormalities the contemporary society is filled with. These include; declining moral values, premarital and marital sexual perversion, divorce, youth delinquencies, economic and financial corruption and eradicated dignity of labour among others which cut across generations, citizens and leadership. In this regard, the place of traditional Yoruba culture and philosophy is indispensable and cannot be understated, in that they speak against all these menace and are relevant across Nigeria and the Africa continent.



The prevailing youth delinquencies in Nigeria today are one of the fallout of the startling transformations with respect to the mode of child training and development. The formation of child behaviour, whether a child become delinquent or well behaved in the society will to a large extent be determined by the pattern of socialization process such a child is exposed to. Considering the observed contemporary pattern of child training which include, more individualistic than communal, child right elevation, poor socialization, neglect of children due to economic demand and the little or no parental teaching on ethics (*iwa omoluabi*), it can be said that the contemporary pattern negates the traditional perspective that surround child training and hence faulty. Without doubt, Yoruba philosophy on child training in this regard is indispensable to the contemporary Nigeria society.

The shameless prevalence and uncontrolled explosion of premarital and marital sexual perversion and marital breakups in the contemporary Nigeria space is never approved in the Yoruba philosophies.

Furthermore, the practise of economic and financial corruption among the Nigerian leaders is completely in contrast to the Yoruba philosophy of communalism which put the community above individuality. In this case, leaders who got to the position by fate/ destiny acquire national wealth to themselves and their family alone to the detriment of the development of the Nigerian community.

This study explored and provided a critical readings of six Nigerian plays written in English as examples of contemporary African literary drama in the Yoruba setting written by Soyinka, Osofisan and Rotimi. The playwrights reflect common concern on the need to appreciate and where necessary to retain traditional cultural values, as well as the need to rid society of those traditions that hinder human and society's growth. The playwrights emphasise the reasonableness of their concern in establishing an African identity, stressing the importance of traditional values in the process. These authors write about Yoruba culture and approach the concern from a cultural perspective. It is seen that the plays used in this study examined the contemporary events in the Yoruba society vis-a-vis the historical setting. These plays discuss the historical destruction of the Yoruba cultural environment, values and the importance of preserving them. These literary writers have burdened themselves with helping the society regain belief in itself and to put away the complex of the years of degeneration and self-abasement.

In *The Swamp Dwellers*, the call for societal regeneration using historical and cultural strategies is inferred from key moral paradigms identified in the play. Some of these paradigms include hard work, hospitality and marital fidelity. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka presents the community struggling against Western intruders to maintain its cultural practices. Looking at the diverse and contradicting characters in the play it is inferred that rather than a complete neglect of the traditional Yoruba culture, regeneration of the contemporary Yoruba society can be achieved by contemporary Yoruba people embracing the best of both traditional Yoruba culture and Western culture respectively. Hence looking backward for societal progress is inevitable. Similarly, the role of and call to imbibe traditional Yoruba cultural value in curbing religious perversions in the Yoruba society is also inferred in Soyinka's *Trials of Brother Jero*. In the play, the traditional Yoruba society and indigenous cultural values place high emphasis on uprightiness, truth, contentment and respect, which are needed in making contemporary religious leaders more respected and the trust in them justifiable. This is contrary to the covetous exploitation, materialism, falsehood and deceptive strategies exemplified by the majority of contemporary spiritual leaders.

It is also demonstrated from the analysis of three other texts used in the study that Yoruba traditional cultural values could enhance societal regeneration and the social development in the society. Despite the war setting in which Osofisan wrote his *The Women of Owu*, the place of key traditional Yoruba culture was still reserved. Cultural themes like the use of taboo, virginity, respect, witty sayings and communalism are revealed to be necessary for the working of the traditional Yoruba society. Like other playwrights, Rotimi, whose writing focuses on leadership, in his

play *Kurunmi*, uses the character of Kurunmi to project an ideal leader and to promote the idea that the better aspect of the people's culture should be maintained. From the play, an ideal leader in the contemporary Yoruba society should possess selfless, accountable, honest, and loving characteristics. These are in contrast to the character traits of the majority of leaders today, who are obsessed with power and overambitious to the extent of sacrificing their people on the altar of self and thirst for their personal gain. In addition, from his play *The Gods are not to Blame*, the traditional life which involves a belief system including the acceptance of fate (predestination), an attitude of respect for the gods and integrity, and the practice of taking of oaths are in no doubt some characteristics that made the traditional society a working one. They are therefore deduced to be needed in correcting the social anomalies of the contemporary Yoruba society.



The present study reveals the relevance of indigenous Yoruba traditions to the challenges of contemporary society. It proposes cultural renewal which assumes basically a reverential attitude toward the Yoruba cultural heritage which is the key to effectively addressing the contemporary problems in the society as well as reclaiming and revitalizing indigenous traditions that have been degraded and suppressed through colonialism and its agents. The Yoruba people must seek liberation which the playwrights portrayed as decolonisation of the mind. This study posits that cultural regeneration in Yoruba society can only be realised through the revitalisation of Yoruba cultural norms. It is important to note that although progress in any society requires adapting, changing, and in some cases abandoning inbuilt traditional ideas and behaviours, this however should not replace the traditional culture. In moral and political spheres, traditional life has much to offer as Yoruba

society continues to experience increasing incidences of criminality, societal delinquency and high levels of moral degeneration. The idea of scientific development is a great one but it should not be viewed as the ultimate standard for judging human progress and success. Scientific development that is unconstrained by moral vision clearly harbours the potential to compromise rather than promote human welfare. There is thus a need to revisit and revive our past by becoming Yorubas of yesteryears that were known for moral rectitude, more so now that the country is doing everything possible to correct the negative impressions ascribed to it by the outside world.

Furthermore, through these plays, it is seen that Soyinka, Osofisan and Rotimi have played the role of writers and historical witnesses that have been positioned to be vanguards of traditional moral and cultural values in contemporary and future Yoruba society. As it is known that there is no art for art's sake, and that art or literature is a weapon of social control, thus playwrights, who are members of the society, cannot write in isolation but for some identified reasons and purposes. Since the historical past which has inbuilt corrective mechanisms feed literature with factual events, the playwrights who are also custodians of this history are able to mirror the contemporary society in light of the past. They are constantly bringing the sociocultural brouhaha to our face. They are constant reminders of the past, who the Yorubas were, what they used to be, what they stand for, and what they ought to be in the face of the changing socio-economic environment. However, it is noted that the effort of the playwright as vanguard and restorer of lost identity and cultural values in line with the postcolonial perspective is being fought against fiercely and

craftily in the contemporary Yoruba society by various agents and situations thereby making the effort of playwright a difficult and insignificant one.

This thesis concludes that the humanist essence of Yoruba culture should be maintained and cherished in the attempt to regenerate the society. European ideas and technology alone cannot solve deep-rooted problems such as theft, murder, drug abuse and addiction and all forms of sexual perversion, poverty, exploitation, economic inequalities and oppression in Yoruba society unless it is underpinned and guided by some basic moral values. In the absence of the strict application of such values, European ideas and technology create other social problems. This study recommends the necessity of looking into the economic, social, and cultural development of the Yoruba people in the process of cultural recovery. The playwrights should use their knowledge to spur the people into action, and foster through his writings the hope of a better future. They should assist in the restoration of the intense environment from which culture can grow. This is also believed to be relevant in the fight against several social anomalies in the African community, thereby aiding the continent's development.



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Appendix A – Certificate of editing



CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

To whom this may concern

This is to certify that I have copy edited the full thesis in-progress of

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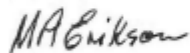
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